

Political Requirements to Meet the Non Proliferation and Disarmament Bargain
Panel Presentation by Ambassador Robert Grey, Director, Bipartisan Security Group
The Hague, The Netherlands
March 3, 2006

Five years ago I told an audience in The Hague not to worry about the new American administration. I assured them that the United States was not going to turn back to the days of President McKinley.

Well I was wrong. Things are much worse than that. This administration ignores past history and is fecklessly threatening our nation's future security.

As one who spent 41 years serving my country, I find it painful to have to say this before a foreign audience, but alas it is the truth.

If we are to attain the non-proliferation and arms control objectives which most of us here support, we have to accept the realities of the current international environment and come up with strategies and tactics which hopefully will get our respective governments pointed in the right direction again.

For a number of reasons, at least five nations have concluded that nuclear weapons are necessary to protect their supreme national interests. Two of them are among those who signed the NPT (Non-Proliferation Treaty) as non-nuclear states. Three of them did not. We need to do all we can to bring the two NPT signatories back into the fold, while not legitimizing the actions of the two non signatories who most recently went nuclear and the one which opted for nuclear weapons long ago. We need to insure that they do not spread nuclear weapons technology to others, get them to set limits on the number of weapons and delivery systems they make for themselves, and accept all the other limits which the acknowledged NPT nuclear weapons states have accepted either explicitly or implicitly. This is admittedly a very tall order. It cannot be done unilaterally by any one state or a selective group of states acting alone. What is needed is collective multilateral action involving active diplomacy, inducement, economic pressure if necessary and yes, if all else fails, collective military action.

It is obvious to most of us that we cannot develop a consensus to move to resolve these collective threats to the NPT regime unless we are prepared to take positive steps not only in terms of non-proliferation, but also in the area of nuclear disarmament as well. The five nuclear states who signed the NPT most demonstrate by word and by deed that they take their Article VI commitments under the treaty seriously. It is essential that the non-nuclear states signatories to the treaty insist that they do so. Those who are allied to the United States, the United Kingdom, and France have a special responsibility in this regard.

But there is another aspect of today's reality which must be addressed as well. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the United States has emerged as a hyper power. Its military expenditures have not decreased – quite the contrary. It alone is the only nuclear weapons state that has an insured second strike nuclear capability. Many of these weapons are in an alert status as are a large number of Russian systems. In a crisis, the temptation for a weaker nuclear power, which feels itself threatened, would be to use its weapons rather than lose them. So, in fact, we collectively find ourselves in an environment which is arguably less stable now than it was at the height of the Cold War.

It is even more alarming that the current American administration, in a radical departure from 60 years of collective efforts to ensure the peace, has opted to pursue a decidedly imperial approach to international security issues. It is oblivious to the fact that there are no unilateral solutions to the environmental, nuclear, or economic issues facing us and that terrorism won't go away by declaring war on it. Pushing in this direction not only makes the United States less secure, it also makes the possibility of international conflict more rather than less likely.

Let me illustrate by citing a few examples. Backing off from the Kyoto Agreement, renouncing the ABM (Anti-Ballistic Missile) Treaty, blocking progress on a biological weapons negotiation, pulling the rug out from under a FMCT (Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty) negotiation, gutting the arms control professionals in the State Department, pouring billions into ABM programs, which even if successful would create more rather than less insecurity are clear

signals that this administration is headed in the wrong direction. The Moscow Treaty is not an arms control agreement that is viable, open or permanent. It simply is a non-workable, non-binding unilateral agreement.

Coupling this with the Administration's assault on the United Nations and other institutions which were created and supported by the United States for the last sixty years and their leaders and the brutal reality becomes even clearer.

You can't expect nations and institutions to work to resolve issues when you insult them, threaten them, and question their effectiveness. We all know multilateral institutions need to grow, to change, and to adapt. You cannot achieve this by belittling them or questioning the integrity of their leaders, nor can you preach respect for the rule of law when you flout the law yourself. One can only admire the spirit that led the Norwegians to award the Nobel Peace Prize to Mr. El Baradei and the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency). It was a calculated and appropriate reaction to the boorish bullying tactics of this administration's ambassador to the United Nations whose appointment was blocked by the United States Senate. His recess appointment is still another indication of this administration's contempt for our own customs and institutions.

The fruits of these policies are now apparent to all. We went to war in Iraq under false pretensions and for the wrong reasons. We did so without the full consent of the international community. False premises, misrepresentations, contempt for the Charter. Not a pretty picture.

The outcome of this folly is not going to be the dawn of democracy in the Middle East but at best an Iraqi government strongly influenced by Iran and a threat to stability throughout the region. At worst, Iraq will split apart, a divided country actively promoting chaos in neighboring states.

One is reminded of General Omar Bradley's comment during the Korean War when General MacArthur urged us to attack China: "Wrong war, in the wrong place, at the wrong time, and the wrong enemy!" And to this, one could add "and for the wrong reasons!"

Naïve utopianism is the dark side of American idealism. It has frequently been characterized as a liberal Wilsonian approach to international relations. But the naïve utopianism of this administration combined with its dogmatic, inflexible arrogance has been a moral and strategic disaster. The ramifications have domestic as well as international consequences. It is shameful that an American administration condones the use of torture, holds people without trial, and refuses to let the international community have access to them. It is contemptible that this administration authorizes electronic snooping without a court order. No President is above the law. The sense of American exceptionalism has been lost. How can we stand for the rule of law when our own leaders flout this law?

History has repeatedly demonstrated that when one nation begins to go off the rails in this fashion, new alliances and political groupings arise to rein it in. After six years of fecklessness, it is high time for the international community to begin to force a change as well.

Let me be clear that what we are facing is not Genghis Khan, or Attila, or Napoleon. It's more like dealing with the France of Louis XIV, a belligerent mediocrity which listens only to itself. This, of course, has to be pulled up short as well.

Abraham Lincoln once said that "you can fool all of the people some of the time, some of the people all of the time, but not all of the people all of the time." But the media manipulation of the Bush Administration is trying to change that; an Orwellian form of newspeak has arisen. The most notable example is that after repealing a number of environmental regulations on smokestack omissions, our president went to Michigan and announced the start of a "clean air campaign."

But don't despair. Winston Churchill once quipped that America is capable of producing noble and visionary and extraordinary leadership when it has exhausted every other possible alternative. It is clear that this administration has exhausted about all those alternatives now, and hopefully the tide is beginning to turn.

At the end of the day, the real test of a great power is its willingness to accept its limitations, to change course, and to be patient enough to stay that course. I believe this is beginning to happen back in my country. It is important that forums like this and our allies continue to politely but firmly push us in the right direction.

But let's not forget that arms controls and non-proliferation are not enough in and of themselves. They are tools in the arsenal of diplomacy but not a substitute for it, but a vital part of an active policy of multilateral cooperation. However, they can contribute to international stability. We need to do all we can to move in this direction.