
Emerging Challenges to American Arms Control and Security Policy

A DISCUSSION WITH
SECRETARY WILLIAM PERRY

FLETCHER FORUM: *Along with former Secretaries of State George Shultz and Henry Kissinger and U.S. Senators Sam Nunn and Richard Lugar, you have advocated that the international community pursue complete nuclear disarmament. Given the importance of the United States to this effort, how would you assess the progress of the Obama administration toward this goal and what steps would you suggest the new administration take to pursue disarmament?*

PERRY: President Obama has taken remarkable steps in this regard, highlighted by his famous speech in Prague in April 2009 in which he specifically laid out the commitment of the United States to seeking international peace and security without nuclear weapons. That was a remarkable statement that has never been said before by any other leader. Second, President Obama negotiated and ratified the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) with Russia, which is a modest step in the direction of nuclear disarmament. Lastly, he was able to have the UN Security Council present a resolution on nuclear disarmament and get a unanimous 15-0 vote in favor. All of this has been very positive.

William Perry was the nineteenth Secretary of Defense of the United States, serving under President Bill Clinton from February 3, 1994 to January 23, 1997. Prior to his appointment, he was Deputy Secretary of Defense from 1993 to 1994 and previously served as Undersecretary of Defense for Research and Engineering during the Carter Administration. He is currently the Michael and Barbara Berberian Professor (Emeritus) at Stanford University, as well as a Senior Fellow at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies and the Hoover Institution, also at Stanford. This interview was conducted on November 7, 2012.

On the other hand, President Obama has been unable to get the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) ratified. After the very close vote on New START ratification, he decided not to submit the CTBT for ratification. I don't know whether it will be submitted this coming term, but it should be very high on the agenda. Additionally, President Obama has also not been able to get a new follow-on to New START in the last year or so. Much of the progress has essentially been stalled, due to a great extent to substantial resistance in the U.S. Congress. Likewise, Russia has not been willing to make any more moves toward nuclear disarmament.

However, there are a number of things you can do without treaties, and I would hope the new administration would work to do those things, even if they cannot get another treaty ratified.

FLETCHER FORUM: *U.S.-Russian relations, in particular, occupied a significant part of your attention as Secretary of Defense. Tracing the evolution of the U.S.-Russia relationship since the end of the Cold War, how would you suggest the new administration balance concerns about Russia's human rights record and rule of law with the strategic interests that the United States has in cooperating with Russia? Could mutual concerns about a rising China bring the United States and Russia closer together?*

PERRY: We have to separate how we deal with Russia on nuclear issues from how we deal with them on human rights, as we did in an earlier era with the Soviet Union. Even when the Soviet Union was at its worst for human rights, we were pursuing nuclear arms treaties with them. This was not only in the mutual interest of both countries, but also in the mutual interest of saving the planet. That's something we have to pursue with Russia today as well. We have little or no control over their human rights issues, which are considerably better than they were under the Soviet Union, but still leave a lot to be desired.

However, we have an existential interest in getting the nuclear program improved. The big problem in moving forward with Russia on nuclear arms is not the human rights issue, but concern over our Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) deployment in Europe. We either have to concede some on that or accept that we're not going to make any progress with Russia on nuclear arms reductions. We need to find a way to deal with the BMD problem in Europe so that it doesn't scuttle our attempts to move forward on nuclear arms.

I don't see anything we do with Russia as seriously related to the China issue. We should see China independently, and we should be working directly with China. As I see it, the fact that China is rising economically is not a

problem for the United States, and could even be a benefit. And I do not see China as a military threat to the United States for the foreseeable future.

FLETCHER FORUM: *Were you surprised that Russia expressed their reluctance to continue with the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program?*

PERRY: I'm not surprised, but I'm disappointed. More needs to be done. First, Russia can afford to do it on their own, but we have no reason to believe that they will. And second, even if they do it on their own, we're losing the "cooperative" part. That cooperation is going to disappear, which in itself is not positive.

FLETCHER FORUM: *Do you see any parallels between the U.S. "pivot" towards Asia and the policy of containment that long characterized the U.S. approach to the Soviet Union? What should the new administration do to more effectively manage the important relationship with China?*

PERRY: I support the Administration's view that Asia is our highest priority. The prosperity that Asia has enjoyed in the past few decades—including China, but not just China—has depended on the peace and stability brought about by the American military presence in the Pacific.

In the last forty years, we've had an unprecedented period of peace in that region, and that peace has allowed the region to concentrate on building their economies. If we were to pull our military forces out of Japan and Korea, those two nations would feel obliged to build their weapons, possibly nuclear weapons, and China would feel obliged to respond. We could see a regional arms race, increased military tension, and possibly even an armed conflict. So, not only is it in our interest to see that not happen, but it's certainly in the interest of those countries as well. I have argued this point with my Chinese colleagues. They don't agree with me, but there is an objective case to be made on that point.

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FLETCHER FORUM: *It has now been fifty years since the world came to the brink of nuclear war during the Cuban Missile Crisis. In reflecting on your role as a young analyst identifying U2 photographs and providing the President*

with intelligence during that crisis, could you share your experience during those tense days and what personal lessons you drew from the crisis?

PERRY: I was not in the government at the time, but I was an advisor to the government, and when the crisis arose, the deputy director of the CIA called and asked me to come and help him do the analysis. I spent ten days at the National Photo-Interpretation Center on that problem. Each night we would prepare a report that would go to President Kennedy first thing in the morning to help him assess what he would do that day.

Everything I have learned since then... has only made me more concerned. That is, I think we were very lucky to avoid a nuclear holocaust. It was even more dangerous than I had realized.

At the time, I was close enough to it to believe that we were likely moving into a nuclear war. Every day I went into that analysis center, I thought it would be my last day on earth. That's how close I thought we were.

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FLETCHER FORUM: *You are a veteran of a number of complex federal budget cycles, including dealing with acrimonious differences over the proper level of defense spending. In comparing the budget battles of the 1990s with those of today, are you optimistic about the potential for a compromise between Democrats and Republicans?*

PERRY: I don't have any reason to be optimistic. I'm hopeful, but not optimistic. We had some problems with Congress when I was Secretary, but nothing comparable to what we have today. Basically, Congress accepted the budget I submitted each year with few modifications. I felt we had a reasonably good working relationship with Congress. There are always debates and disagreements during the presentation of the budget, but when the dust had finally settled, we ended up with pretty much the budget we had submitted.

FLETCHER FORUM: *One of the big debates in recent years has been the type of military technology that the United States should invest in and procure over the coming years. Which weapons systems or categories of technological development do you think will be most important in meeting the security challenges of the years to come?*

PERRY: We have the strongest military in the world and our military technology exceeds that of any other nation. The issue is not whether to make a great leap forward like we did during the 1970s and 1980s, but rather how to sustain that advantage. Regarding the several issues we will confront, including cyber warfare, we already have considerable capabilities, but we will have to keep advancing. With cyber warfare, the big complication is that defending against cyber attack is not only a military issue, but also a private issue because our networks are run by commercial firms. Therefore, we need to work effectively with commercial telecommunications companies.

The other issue is the threat to our naval ships from cruise missile attacks. That involves developing and improving sensor capabilities to protect our ships so that we maintain the advantage we have of a strong, effective navy.

FLETCHER FORUM: *During your time as Secretary of Defense, the United States was trying to establish new guidelines for the use of force abroad. Some scholars and officials continue to express skepticism about the use of force in humanitarian crises and other interventions when there isn't a major national interest at stake. Should the next administration establish more detailed guidelines for when it will use force, or is it preferable to maintain flexibility?*

PERRY: I think every case is different, so it's hard to make a general statement on it. But I don't see any situation
today in which I would recommend we use military force to invade another country—to move in as we did in Bosnia, for example. Even in Bosnia, at least we were going in at the invitation of the Bosnian government.

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In Syria, I do not think we should be sending in our forces now. What
I recommend is to work with Turkey, assuming they agree, to enforce a no-fly zone. But that would be done from Turkey, not by actually invading Syria. That's as far as I would go in recommending any military force today.

FLETCHER FORUM: *Do you think a no-fly zone would be sufficient?*

PERRY: It's hard to say, but I do think it would tip the balance in favor of the rebels. And I think it would give a safe haven for the civilians trying to flee the killing. It's a halfway measure; it's not guaranteed to succeed. I should say, to do anything more than that and give a higher probability of success would require putting ground troops in Syria. I wouldn't be willing to do that.

FLETCHER FORUM: *You were in government at a time when South Africa had given up its nuclear weapons program and Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine had agreed to give up their nuclear weapons after they were “born nuclear” following the Soviet collapse. Based on your experience dealing with these issues and the North Korean crisis, do you believe that the United States should continue to press its stated goal of the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula?*

PERRY: I think we should continue to press for a non-nuclear North Korea, but I don't think it's realistic to think that's a near-term objective if we were to resume the Six-Party Talks. I think a more reasonable objective would be what Dr. Siegfried S. Hecker has described as “the three no's:” getting North Korea to agree to no new weapons, no more weapons, and no export of any nuclear technology. If we could get those “three no's” enforced, that would improve our security considerably. And if we were to get that done, the next phase would be working towards denuclearization.

FLETCHER FORUM: *As someone who originally came from a science and technology background, how would you compare the relationship between science and policymaking during your earlier career with some of the controversies today, particularly with respect to the role of science and interest groups in influencing debates on climate change and other security issues?*

PERRY: The one thing that surprises me today is people who do not believe in the climate change argument. They seem to be actually accusing

..... the scientists of falsifying data and of acting in their own interest. That's a new twist in the debate. The scientific arguments have not always prevailed, but I've never seen a case in the past where the scientists were being accused of being duplicitous. Other than that, I think there has always been a situation where people don't always take the argument of scientists or that scientists have different views among themselves.

But the only thing I see new in the debate is this question of whether scientists are being honest with their analysis, and I find that rather surprising.

FLETCHER FORUM: *Finally, during the Iraq War in particular, there were some concerns raised about the role of private contractors and the outsourcing of warfare to private firms. Do you share these concerns, and what should the United States' approach be towards contractors in conflict zones going forward?*

PERRY: I think the Army in the past made good use of contractors for routine tasks, like housekeeping. We used contractors in the Bosnian war, and we did so very effectively, which allowed our soldiers there to be out doing the job for which they trained—their military functions. I am in favor of using contractors non-military functions, but I am not in favor of using contractors for roles that involve them in a fighting capacity. That was the issue in the Iraq war, where contractors were hired to perform military functions. It wasn't that they weren't capable of performing that function, but they were operating without the effective control of the military. I think that was a mistake, and the mistake has been corrected; it isn't being done in the Afghan War. ■