



# *Passing the* BATON

*Foreign Policy Challenges and  
Opportunities Facing the New Administration*

## **Session Two: “Proliferation, Catastrophic Terrorism, and a New Security Paradigm”**

Speaker: **William J. Perry**, Former Secretary of Defense

### **Main Issues**

Using his experiences as one who was involved in developing America’s nuclear arsenal as the source of his motivation to alert the nation and the world to the rapidly growing danger of nuclear terrorism, Dr. Perry provided a list of actions the Obama administration could take that would make the nation safer. These actions would place the United States once again in the leadership role of an effort to “dismantle the nuclear legacy of the Cold War.”

Dismayed that little has been done by the Bush administration, Dr. Perry cited the dangers of nuclear proliferation in the world today with emphasis on both North Korea and Iran. Bluntly stating that North Korea’s development of plutonium and its testing of a nuclear device signal the most dangerous development to peace since the end of the Cold War, Perry remains convinced that only with strong U.S. leadership, diplomatic efforts can resolve that crisis and halt North Korean proliferation activities.

However, Perry is less sanguine about Iran’s good intentions and programs. He believes the current efforts underway are based on weak strategies and can be easily thwarted by Iran. Absent U.S. willingness to engage with Iran, the situation can become dangerous and could provoke Israel to take unilateral action to seek an end to Iran’s nuclear programs. For this reason, he believes the Obama administration will face a crisis with Iran within the administration’s first year in office.

Secretary Perry noted that he is in full agreement with the stated Obama policy that the U.S. seeks a world free of nuclear weapons but that as long as nuclear weapons exist, the U.S. must maintain a credible, safe, secure and reliable deterrent force. The current U.S. program aimed at ensuring our stockpile reliability without the need for explosive testing has proven successful, he said. Additionally, our program designed to extend the life and safety of our nuclear weapons has also proven successful, though support for both programs appears to be waning in Congress.

Dr. Perry expressed a great concern about the diminishing source of both nuclear policy and technical experts. Those experts who devised America’s nuclear policies, researched, built, tested, and sustained the nation’s nuclear arsenal are retiring without an adequate amount of younger replacement personnel. Within five years, every American ever involved in a nuclear explosive test will have retired. While explosive testing is not a policy goal, these experts possessed a wealth of unique knowledge that will be lost, Perry said.



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Perry expressed concern that the world is at the tipping point on nuclear proliferation and that if passed, there will be no turning back. “If the world does tip,” he said, “it will be irreversible and dangerous beyond most people’s imagination.”

## **Policy Conclusions**

Dr. Perry cited several actions the Obama administration could take that would be vital to protecting the United States:

1. Use the bully pulpit of the presidency to awaken the world to the incredible danger of nuclear weapons.
2. Invite Russia to negotiate a new treaty entailing significant nuclear arms reductions.
3. Seek a return to deep cooperation between Russia and the United States in mitigating the dangers of nuclear terrorism.
4. Work with the Senate for the ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.
5. Propose a new Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty, to include verification procedures.
6. Increase support of the International Atomic Energy Agency in its efforts to strengthen the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.



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## Session Three: “Questions & Answers on Countering Proliferation”

Speakers: **Eric Edelman**, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy;  
**Bob Joseph**, former Bush administration senior director at the National Security Council;  
**Dan Poneman**, former Clinton and Bush administration senior director at the National Security Council;  
**Wendy Sherman**, former counselor to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright

### Main Issues

This session was convened as an opportunity for senior national security analysts to respond to Secretary Perry’s speech on “Proliferation, Catastrophic Terrorism and a New Security Paradigm”, which was delivered immediately prior to the session.

Panelists unanimously called for bipartisan support for dealing with the nuclear proliferation threat, especially that posed by Iran. While the Obama administration has not yet articulated its strategy, panelists called for reengagement with Russia as a key element of that strategy. Not only has Russia been cooperative in the Cooperative Threat Reduction program, also known as the Nunn-Lugar Act, it has also worked with the U.S. on countering terrorist threats.

However, several panelists pointed out that Russo-U.S. relations are currently at a relative low point for the post-Cold War period due to increasing Russian perceptions that proposed missile defense plans in Europe are not intended to counter an Iranian threat as has been stated, but rather present an emerging threat to Russia. Additionally, Russia sees the expansion of NATO has a threat.

From the U.S. perspective, Russia appears to be backsliding in its efforts to democratize and has adopted Soviet-style actions when dealing with its neighbors in the region. These facts must be considered when the Obama administration attempts to craft a nuclear nonproliferation strategy. One former Bush official cautioned against making any “grand gesture” toward Russia, as it might be misinterpreted as a sign of weakness.

Generally agreeing with Dr. Perry’s conclusion that nuclear terrorism constitutes the gravest threat facing the United States, panelists stressed that the window of opportunity is open now but that no assumptions can be made that it will remain open. Making the most of this opportunity requires a multitude of actions by the United States, some of which are domestically oriented while others require distinct international support.



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Two panelists indicated that support for ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) will require a great deal of work with the Senate and could result in the need for separate protocols with Russia on several issues. The Obama administration will need to initiate steps immediately to work with Russia on extending the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty I (START I), which is due to expire in December 2009. Two panelists also called for work to begin on a new effort to craft, negotiate and implement a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT), which would bring nuclear commercial fuel under tighter controls and reduce the chances for it to be covertly used to produce plutonium.

Panelists differed to some degree as to which tools might work best to achieve these goals. One panelist stated that economic sanctions against Iran have failed and that halting its nuclear programs will require “direct and intrusive actions” sanctioned by the UN Security Council. Another panelist disagreed and thought economic sanctions required greater use but that Russia remains reluctant to pursue that line because of its close economic ties to Iran, despite the fact that Russia does not want Iran to develop nuclear weapons.

Another panelist took a more comprehensive view and noted that world power requirements will drive the proliferation of nuclear power plants around the world. Actions by the U.S. to implement treaties with states seeking nuclear power are vital, and without such controls the threat of terrorists acquiring nuclear materials grows. The panelist also noted that climate change will increasingly force the move to nuclear power because states will seek to avoid the increased use of fossil fuels.

As with Iran, panelists also agreed with Dr. Perry’s point that the North Korean nuclear program must be dismantled.

### **Policy Conclusions\***

1. The time to act on nonproliferation is now – while bipartisan support remains available to the Obama administration. The administration should not allow the window of opportunity to become a window of vulnerability.
2. Russia must be reengaged as an equal partner in an American effort to motivate the international community to halt the threat of nuclear proliferation. Emphasis must be placed on extending START I.

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\* Policy Conclusions from Group Panel Discussions at Passing the Baton 2009 were not necessarily achieved by group consensus. In some instances, individual panel members may have been in disagreement with the larger group. For specific information on each panel’s contents, please see the comprehensive online archive at [www.usip.org/baton2009](http://www.usip.org/baton2009).



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3. The U.S. must consider Russian concerns over missile defense and NATO expansion. The Russians will link these issues to any other bilateral issue with the U.S.
4. Steps must be taken to improve the controls over fissile material and prevent its use to build nuclear weapons.
5. The U.S. must take steps to assert its international leadership role on this issue by engaging Iran, preferably in a multilateral venue, and pushing for ratification of the CTBT.
6. The U.S. must continue to work within the Six Party framework for the nuclear disarmament of North Korea.
7. The U.S. must take the lead in the development, negotiation, and implementation of a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty.
8. The new administration must begin work immediately on preparing its positions for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference in 2010. The U.S. will need as much international support as possible in advance of the conference.