

# Senator Nunn's Valedictory

## Vital, Important, Secondary?

"What are America's vital interests? A bipartisan commission, of which I was a member, recently issued a report that brings needed clarity to the discussion of our national interests. The report, 'America's National Interests,' distinguished between vital, extremely important, important, and secondary interests.

"These distinctions are essential to the task of establishing national priorities and building public support for foreign and defense policy. And despite the common use of the term 'vital interests' to describe everything from soup to nuts, the report defines truly vital interests as only those conditions that are strictly necessary to safeguard and enhance the well-being of Americans in a free and secure nation.

"It should come as no surprise that preventing and deterring the threat of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons attacks on the United States is at the top of the list of vital interests.

"According to the report, other vital interests are to prevent the emergence of a hostile hegemon in Europe or Asia, to prevent the emergence of a hostile major power on US borders or in control of the seas, to prevent the catastrophic collapse of major global systems (trade, financial markets, energy supplies, environment), and to ensure the survival of US allies."

## "Not Vital"

"Other objectives, such as preventing the use of nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons outside our borders or countering proliferation are extremely important, but not vital, interests. Similarly, combating ter-



*Sen. Sam Nunn of Georgia, ranking Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, was its chairman for eight years (1987-95). He formally retires in January after twenty-four years in office, having gained a reputation as a foremost Congressional expert on military affairs. The remarks quoted here are from a September 28, 1996, speech, Senator Nunn's last in Congress.*

rorism and [preventing] major conflicts in important geographic regions are extremely important, but [those problems] do not directly threaten the American way of life.

"This hierarchy of interests does not diminish the desirability of other objectives, such as promoting democracy, human rights, and open markets. It is in no way a betrayal of our values to acknowledge that our survival takes precedence over our hopes for a better world to come. We shall have no peace, no prosperity, nor the ability to help others if our own security is threatened by successful attacks on our vital interests."

### Spread of Horror Weapons

"Possession of nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons by rogue nations or terrorist groups could pose a clear and present danger to our society. US leadership will continue to be the driving force for maintaining norms against either acquisition or use of weapons of mass destruction. . . .

"In addition to the direct threat that these weapons pose to our homeland, our abilities to project military force and forge [such] coalitions as [the one] assembled in the [Persian] Gulf War could be seriously harmed by the possession of nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons by regional adversaries. Thus, our counterproliferation efforts are another important aspect of our overall nonproliferation policy.

"Much of our previous efforts to control the spread of these weapons also benefited from the ability to deny access to the technology and materials required to make them. The effectiveness of those controls has eroded due to expanding commerce in technologies that can contribute to strategic weapons production and due to increasingly porous and unguarded borders. The materials and know-how for weapons of mass destruction are more available than ever to the highest bidder.

"A widening circle of states, non-state actors, and ideologically motivated groups may increasingly have resources and capabilities to acquire the technology and materials necessary to create weapons of mass destruction. Such groups may not need to wield battlefield-ready military weapons to wreak mass destruction.

Crude bombs and low-tech delivery systems may suffice. . . . Proliferation . . . is not a relic of the Cold War headed for the dustbin of history."

### Terrorism and Fanaticism

"While terrorism and fanaticism are hardly new, the medium of the terrorists' perverse message is expanding as lethal materials and technology become more readily available. . . .

"As a nation, we have just begun to come to terms with the full scope of the terrorism threat. For many years, terrorists were mainly interested in making a political statement or drawing attention to a cause through discrete acts of violence, such as an assassination, a taking of

a hostage, or some violent event of limited impact. These criminals were conscious of public relations and even viewed certain acts—such as use of chemical and biological weapons—as taboo.

"The 1990s, however, have seen terrorist acts that appear intended to create casualties of the highest order. These enemies are too often zealots, filled with hate for civil society, who believe their conduct is justified or divinely inspired. Despite the vivid memories of the Oklahoma City and World Trade Center [bombings], I am not sure Americans truly comprehend the devastating effect the use a weapon of mass destruction would have on a civilian population at home."

### Only the Beginning

"I depart the Senate with a sense that this mission is just beginning. These are the known dangers that are now coming into focus. Unfortunately, we are a nation of soft targets. An effective response is possible, but it requires a willingness to think anew about our security and about the way our government and our military are organized to defend against the threats of today. We should not assume that the bureaucratic structures of our foreign policy and national security apparatus, nor the force postures that were successful for waging the Cold War, are the right ones for the threats we will face in the future."

### Address Unknown

"Weapons of mass destruction are increasingly within the grasp of a growing number of developing countries, subnational groups, terrorist groups, and even individuals. . . . Although the risk of nuclear war is vastly reduced and the overall outlook for our security is greatly improved, the risk of chemical, biological, or some form of nuclear terrorism has increased. This new threat does not put our civilization at risk in the way that nuclear confrontation did, but it is much harder to deter.

"The familiar balance of nuclear terror has yielded to a much [more] unpredictable situation, where adversaries might not be dissuaded by threats of retaliation. Our massive retaliatory forces are useless against terrorists who hide among civilian populations. Our biggest threats of

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the future may well be people who do not have a return address."

### Struggles in Cyberspace

"The information age has brought us unimaginable efficiency and productivity—in effect, shrinking time and space. In military affairs, the power of computers and networks has helped make our armed forces the most powerful in the history of the world. Our forces are able to achieve battlefield dominance through use of information systems that receive, collate, and analyze data in real time. Elsewhere in government and in the private sector, every aspect of our society is realizing the great advantages offered by the computer. . . .

"Yet we are only now beginning to comprehend that the same information networks that we are relying on to run our society are vulnerable to disruption and penetration. The Defense Department estimates that their computers are probably subjected to as many as 250,000 computer attacks each year. When conducting vulnerability assessments of their own systems, the Defense Department successfully hacks into its own system more than sixty-five percent of the time. Already we have seen examples of hackers in foreign nations launching electronic info-war attacks on our Defense Department computers. Experts agree we are only detecting the least competent intruders. . . .

"Our intoxication with technological advantages has made us blind and deaf to information-age vulnerabilities. If we fail to embed a culture of information security early in this revolution, we will create scenarios where info-war could become a great equalizer for our enemies. Thus . . . has arrived a new method to cause mass disruption."

### The Dawn of Info-War

"We have already observed anecdotal evidence of this threat. Last year, two London residents penetrated the Rome Air Development Center computers at Rome, N. Y. Earlier this year, an Argentinian national attacked NASA and DoD computer systems from his living room in Buenos Aires.

"Recently, a computer gang based in Saint Petersburg, Russia, launched a computer attack against Citibank

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and was discovered only after they were able to steal millions [of dollars]. Though disturbing, these incidents involved the least competent and most immature attackers. The more sophisticated and structured attack likely occurs without detection or apprehension.

"Fortunately, we have not suffered serious breakdowns in our information infrastructure. Americans have not had to endure an unexpected, prolonged, and widespread interruption of power, the indefinite grounding of air traffic, or the loss of banking and financial services and records. We should not, however, wait for an 'electronic Pearl Harbor' to spur us into rethinking the speed and nature of our entry into some of these information technologies.

"Our intelligence agencies have already acknowledged that potential adversaries throughout the world are developing a body of knowledge

about Defense Department and other government computer networks. According to DoD officials, these potential adversaries are developing attack methods that include sophisticated computer viruses and automated attack routines that allow them to launch anonymous attacks from anywhere in the world."

### Nuclear Deemphasis

"Though the transformation of Russia and emergence of China as a global power could pose new security challenges by about 2010, in the interim, the United States faces no peer competitor and is unrivaled in conventional military superiority. I say this having devoted much of my career to the betterment of our armed forces. Our current situation offers a window of opportunity to build our qualitative edge in conventional weapons technology to strengthen deterrence for the future.

"At the same time, we can continue to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our defense strategy—if such reductions are matched by the other nuclear powers. If reductions in our own arsenal can persuade others to make comparable cuts, or not develop nuclear weapons at all, we come out ahead."

### Ballistic Missile Defense

"Our promising development of needed limited missile defenses should proceed with an awareness of the unintended consequences that could result if Russia and China respond by retaining, redeploying, and building enough warheads and missiles to overwhelm any conceivable antimissile system, as they have vowed to do. I have argued for years that it is possible to advance . . . rapidly . . . with missile defenses in a way that does not result in more nuclear weapons being pointed at us. Putting aside the issue of cost for a moment, a policy that leaves us facing more of the threat we were trying to defend against in the first place is the essence of bad strategy. The error is especially shortsighted if it is possible—as it is in this case—to have missile defense and reduce the numbers of missiles pointed at us. In my view, this can be accomplished by cooperation with Russia on limited defense for both nations and modest amendments to the ABM Treaty." ■