

Nuclear Disarmament Remarks

By Arnold Schwarzenegger

Note: Governor Schwarzenegger was scheduled to deliver this speech at the Hoover Institution on Oct. 24, 2007 but was forced to cancel due to the wildfires in Southern California. Former Secretary of State George Shultz read the remarks in his place.

Thank you, I'm delighted to be in such distinguished company. On behalf of the people of California, I welcome you to our Golden State.

George Shultz is one of the people I admire most in the world, someone for whom I feel great affection. So when George asked me to speak tonight, I was eager to say yes. But since my expertise is in weights, not throwweights . . . I didn't know what I could possibly say to an audience of such experts. Knowing that I like big issues, George slyly suggested that I just give some thought to the big issue of nuclear weapons. This has caused me to realize some things. So let me start at the beginning.

As some of you may know, I grew up in Austria. As a boy, the Red Army loomed over us from its bases in central Europe. Even as children, we all knew about the threat of nuclear war. We knew the blinding power of its flash. We knew the shape of its cloud. Like here, we had nuclear drills in our schools. When I was 18, I went into the Austrian Army for my required service. I really, really wanted to be a tank driver. This was before I had a Hummer. Although you were supposed to be 21, I talked them into letting me drive a tank. I have to say I wasn't much of a deterrent to a Soviet attack. During lunch one day on maneuvers, I forgot to put on the brakes and my tank rolled into the river. I can't tell you what a sinking feeling I had as I watched that tank heading backward down the bank and then splashing into the water.

A true, amusing story . . . but the reality of the times, of course, was quite serious. In 1956, the Soviets crushed the Hungarians. Then later, the Czechoslovakians.

We Austrians had three basic fears. One, that Soviet tanks might roll into Vienna the way they did into Budapest. Two, a Soviet invasion of Austria or nearby countries might bring a U.S./Soviet confrontation—with Austria getting caught in the nuclear crossfire. And three, we feared mistakes. Mistakes are made in every other human endeavor. Why should nuclear weapons be exempt? I still remember the tensions of those times. I think Austrians, wedged between the West and the Soviet empire, may have felt the Cold War more intensely than Americans. I think I actually felt less tension here in America.

After I became an American citizen, the thing that stands out so clearly in my mind is the Reagan/Gorbachev summit at Reykjavik. The leaders of the two most powerful nations on earth were actually discussing the elimination of nuclear weapons. Such a breathtaking possibility. I still remember the thrill of it. I'll never forget the photos of a grim President Reagan as he left the summit after the negotiations broke down. Even though the negotiations failed, I think the very talks themselves reassured the world. The world saw that both nations desired to be free of the nuclear curse. Then history began moving rapidly. The Berlin Wall fell. The Soviet Union collapsed. Russia began attending G-8

meetings. We even heard talk of it joining NATO. In spite of the nuclear differences between President Putin and President Bush, few today would believe that either nation seeks to attack the other. So, over the years, the intense, glaring threat of nuclear war faded. What also faded was the public's awareness and concern. I include myself in that public. Today . . . the nuclear threat has returned with a vengeance, the vengeance of a terrorist. The Soviets had nuclear weapons and did not use them. Today, is there any doubt whether terrorists would use them?

Even when Khrushchev pounded his shoe on the table at the UN, I don't believe people felt the Soviet Union—no matter how ruthless—was devoid of reason. Today, the enemy is both ruthless and seemingly without reason. I don't know whether it is ironic or frightening . . . but have we reached the point where we look back to Nikita Khrushchev and the Cold War as the good old days? Have the current dangers made us romantics, longing for the concepts of deterrence and mutually assured destruction? During the Cold War, the U.S. and the Soviet Union also had the time and inclination to develop a living arrangement with their nuclear arsenals.

As George and others have pointed out, the new nuclear states don't have these safeguards of the Cold War, which increases the possibility of accidents and misjudgments. Furthermore, today those who would seek them can find the makings of nuclear weapons in hundreds of buildings spread over 40 countries. As we meet, terrorists are jiggling the door knobs of these buildings trying to get in, trying to get their hands on these materials. In your discussions, I would be interested whether you would rather live under the massive nuclear threat of the Cold War . . . or under the varied, erratic nuclear threat we face in the post 9-11 age? Senator Nunn has very insightfully raised the question—after a nuclear device explodes on our soil, what will we wish we had done to prevent it? And Secretary Perry has raised the question, what will we do when it does happen? Few people are addressing those questions with the immediacy of this distinguished gathering. After all, the consequences of a nuclear detonation are so horrific that it's more comforting to put them out of mind. But I have realized some things as a result of thinking about what I should say tonight.

For example, I have advocated—and continue to advocate—action against global warming. I genuinely believe we must take steps to stop the destruction of the planet's environment. Looking at this logically, however—although we must address global warming now—its most dangerous consequences come decades down the road. The most dangerous consequences of nuclear weapons, however, are here and now. They are of this hour and time. A nuclear disaster will not hit at the speed of a glacier melting. It will hit with a blast. It will not hit with the speed of the atmosphere warming but of a city burning. Clearly, the attention focused on nuclear weapons should be as prominent as that of global climate change. After he left office, former Vice President Gore made a movie about the dangers of global warming. I have a movie idea for Vice President Cheney after he leaves—a movie about the dangers of nuclear proliferation. If you Google “global warming,” you will find 6,690,000 entries. If you Google “Britney Spears,” you will find 2,490,000. If you Google “nuclear disarmament,” you will get 116,000 entries. And if

you Google “nuclear annihilation,” you will get 17,400. Something is wrong with that picture.

The words that this audience knows so well, the words that President Kennedy spoke during the Cold War, have regained their urgency: “The world was not meant to be a prison in which man awaits his execution.” Here in California we still have levees that were built a hundred years ago. These levees are an imminent threat to the well-being of this state and its people. It would be only a matter of time before disaster strikes. But we’re not waiting until such a disaster.

We in California have taken action to protect our people and our economy from the devastation. Neither can this nation nor the world wait to act until there is a nuclear disaster. I am so thankful for the work of George, Bill Perry, Henry Kissinger, Sam Nunn, Max Kampelman, Sid Drell and so many of you at this conference. You have a big vision, a vision as big as humanity--to free the world of nuclear weapons.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have come this evening to say that I want to help. Let me know how I can use my power and influence as governor to further your vision. Because my heart is with you. My support is firm. My door is open.

On behalf of the people of California, thank you again for the work you are doing to lift the nuclear nightmare from our nation’s future.

Arnold Schwarzenegger is the Governor of California.