CARNEGIE CORPORATION OF NEW YORK ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Samuel A. Nunn, Jr.

Columbia Center for Oral History

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PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Samuel A. Nunn, Jr. conducted by Myron A. Farber on June 3, 2013. This interview is part of the Carnegie Corporation of New York Oral History Project.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that s/he is reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

3PM | Session #1

Interviewee: Samuel A. Nunn, Jr. | Location: New York, NY

Interviewer: Myron A. Farber | Date: June 3, 2013

Q: This is Myron Farber on June 3, 2013, interviewing Samuel A. Nunn, Jr., for Columbia's Oral History of the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Senator, you are now chair and CEO of the Nuclear Threat Initiative [NTI].

Nunn: Co-chair.

Q: Co-chair.

Nunn: Right.

Q: And you were a U.S. senator from Georgia for four terms ending in, I guess, technically, 1997, but serving through 1996.

Nunn: Right.

Q: On the front page of today's *New York Times*, in an article about the Senate's dealing with the sexual assaults in the military. Here in the second paragraph, they describe the Senate Armed Services Committee as "one of the Senate's most testosterone-driven panels."

[Laughter]

Is that way you would characterize it?

Nunn: It's a good thing I'm not there now because I'd bring down the average.

[Laughter]

I had more back when I was there than I do now.

Q: May I ask whether you ever seriously considered running for president?

Nunn: I seriously considered it in 1988. That was the only time it was serious. There was a lot of talk in other years—'92. But '88 was a time where, without any doubt, I felt at that time that I would have had my best shot, and looking back on it I think that would have been my best shot. Whether that would have been possible or not I don't know, but it was serious. Not to the point of hiring a staff or doing extensive polls or anything like that, but just doing the intellectual analytical side of it.

Q: Why didn't you do it?

Nunn: I concluded I didn't want it badly enough, and that I had wanted to be in the Senate very, very badly. That was my ambition. I felt that you had to want to be president very badly. Also on

the realistic side, I felt that even though that sort of was my best year, that I was more conservative than most of the active elements of the Democratic Party. And therefore, getting the nomination would've been my biggest problem. Had I gotten the nomination, I think I would have had probably a fifty-fifty chance. But that's a big if—if you can get the nomination.

Q: Well, was Carl Vinson alive at that time?

Nunn: No. He lived to be ninety-eight. He retired when he was eighty-five. He retired in 1964. So arithmetic-wise—I'm trying to think when he died. He was eighty-five in 1964. He died when he was ninety-eight. So he would have died in the late 1970s.

Q: Right. What would he have thought of you running?

Nunn: What would he have—

Q: Thought of you running for president?

Nunn: Well, he thought I was crazy when I ran for the Senate.

[Laughter]

I would suspect he would really think I was going bananas if I said I was going to run for president. Although as soon as I announced, he was one hundred percent behind me. So I wouldn't have even thought he was skeptical. So I suspect he would have been supportive.

Q: Right. Now, you can't deny that in 1956, you went with, I suppose it was the Perry High School, to the state championships of basketball. Is that correct?

Nunn: Boy, you've done—I'm getting frightened. You know too much.

[Laughter]

Q: Isn't that correct?

Nunn: Yes.

Q: Right. And isn't it true that the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* ran a headline that said "Red Hot Sam Nunn Erupted like Mount Vesuvius from All Angles."

Nunn: That is true. I remember the headline. And the only part of my career where I was ever called hot was basketball. I was never called hot in the political world.

Q: And not by the girls, either?

Nunn: [Laughs] Not by the girls, either. Maybe a few—maybe a few.

Q: Well, in any event, I quoted because you and I—you, anyway, are going to erupt from all angles today, because I want to cover some different things. This is your second shot at it. You remember David [A.] Hamburg?

Nunn: Very well.

Q: He became president of the Carnegie Corporation in 1983. And though he was a psychiatrist, he had a very keen interest in crisis prevention that went even back to his association with Pugwash [Conferences on Science and World Affairs]. Tell me a little bit about your association with him and whether it was of any consequence and what he was like.

Nunn: Well, I love David Hamburg. I still see him on a few occasions every year. He's still listed as one of our advisers on the Nuclear Threat Initiative. He's not on the board, but he's an adviser. And he's taken that role seriously. [Margaret] Peggy [A.] Hamburg, his daughter, headed up our biological effort when we started out—the whole question of health and biology in biological terrorism and the nexus between the two. So probably of anybody I've ever met, David Hamburg would have a combination of more breadth and more depth on more subjects than anybody I've ever met. Some people have breadth, some people have depth. He has both. And you name the field, and he's been in it. So psychiatry is just one field. But David and I got together probably—I don't recall exactly the date or the year, but I'm sure it had to be about 1983 when he was taking over the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Because Senator John

[W.] Warner from Virginia and I, during those early [President Ronald W.] Reagan years, had sponsored what we call a Risk Reduction Center. And we proposed it to the president, and we actually went in and gave [Robert] Bud [C.] McFarlane, who was the National Security Adviser, a sheet of paper with the idea, the concept, on one sheet of paper and—

Q: The concept being?

Nunn: Of reducing risk with the Soviet Union. Well, that was a period of great tension and we felt that there had to be much more of an effort to reach out and make sure we didn't let the tempers and the confrontations break out into nuclear war by misunderstanding and so forth. So the Risk Reduction Centers were designed to deal with things that could cause accidental unintentional miscalculation-type wars, including terrorism, way back then, and including particularly nuclear terrorism and including attacks by third countries that might be mistaken by the Soviet Union or the United States as attacked by the other. Senator Warner and I had sponsored that legislation, and we went in and it was really more—we put it in the form of a piece of legislation, but it was really something the executive branch needed to do. It wasn't a matter of law as much as it was a matter of getting together. So we proposed it to the president—

Q: To President Reagan.

Nunn: Reagan. And I remember that was a period of great tension with—[Leonid I.] Brezhnev, I believe, was in the Soviet Union, and Reagan had basically confronted the Soviets on a lot of things around the globe and vice versa. So I think David Hamburg picked up on that. I know he

did because there was a *New York Times* article back there I just reviewed in preparing for this interview, and that *New York Times* article said that Carnegie of New York was sponsoring studies on that, and that David Hamburg had announced that he was going to take Carnegie much more into the risk reduction kind of effort vis-a-vis the United States and the Soviet Union.

Q: Avoiding Nuclear War was the name he put on the commission.

Nunn: Avoiding Nuclear War. And that was generally what John Warner and I were talking about, and I remember that David sponsored two or three different analytical pieces about that that were very helpful to us. But McFarlane called us because John Warner and I were going to Moscow, among other places, and we wanted to know whether we would be able to express on the part of the United States that President Reagan was favorable to that concept. And the page was in one half—I still got the line. Bud had talked to the president, drew a line halfway. He said the top half you could say to the Russian leadership or the Soviet leadership that the president's for, the bottom half we'll have to study. So John and I went over and we presented it to—I believe it was Brezhnev. And then we presented it to the foreign minister and the other people we met with. And we said exactly that—the president's for the first half, we're for both halves, and we hope you'll study it, because he's going to be studying both halves. So it's amazing that some of that is still—

Q: What was on the first half? What kind of thing?

Nunn: It was mainly setting up a great extension of the hotline, so we started thinking about how we would deal with terrorism if that kind of thing broke out, and how we would deal with nuclear materials and so forth. I can get you a copy of it, because I've still got it in my files. But the second half was more of how we would deal with an attack by, let's say, a submarine from China that pulled off the shore and launched a weapon against Moscow, and what would they think and how would they deal with it. And that risk reduction effort never came nearly as far as our page, and it really still has not, although it's moved some. But I still worry about attribution on a submarine, and I think it's relevant to Russia and the United States today, and it's relevant to India and Pakistan. It's relevant to a lot of other places—attribution and how do you make sure that you're not reacting. And in the cyber world we're in today, you can greatly increase the—

Q: Veteran.

Nunn: —dangers because of command and control and—

Q: But you had occasion to go to Russia also with David Hamburg.

Nunn: That was about a decade later.

Q: It was in '88.

Nunn: Right.

Q: In March of ’88, I think.

Nunn: Yes. I know we went again after Nunn-Lugar was passed.

Q: You did?

Nunn: And in ’88, [Richard] Dick [C.] Clark was monitoring the Aspen [Institute Congressional Program]. But Carnegie was sponsoring Dick, and Dick was doing that. And that actually played a role in Nunn-Lugar [Cooperative Threat Reduction Program]. It went back. Because we had a series of meetings with our Soviet counterparts, and it was sponsored in an informal setting. And it was a terrific dialogue, and I got to know some of those people. And one of the people who I met at one of those conferences was a guy named Andrei [A.] Kokoshin, who was later deputy defense minister under [Boris N.] Yeltsin. And he was the one who called me to come to Moscow.

Q: Let me get to that in a minute. But in March of ’88, when you were with Hamburg and others—I think Dick Clark among them—do you remember a meeting with [Mikhail S.] Gorbachev and you and Hamburg came out of that meeting with him, and Hamburg said to you—well, Hamburg had said to Gorbachev, if you keep on the path you’re now on, the Cold War could be over by the turn of the century. That’s Hamburg to Gorbachev. And you said to him—do you recall what you said to him?

Nunn: No, I don't.

Q: He asked you, do you think I got carried away by that? [Laughs] And you said, no, you're exactly in the right direction, even though you might have been a little optimistic in your time scale. Well, actually, it wasn't. I mean, the Soviet Union was gone in—

Nunn: Two years later.

Q: That's right. But let me ask you about—at that time, was there something unique about Carnegie's interest in this subject of nuclear non-proliferation and arms control, or, at that time, were there any number of foundations that—

Nunn: I think they were unique. I think the program that Carnegie sponsored with Dick Clark was unique, and as I mentioned, it laid the foundation for the friendship I have with Andrei Kokoshin, which led me, when we were having another Dick Clark meeting in Budapest in 1991 and the Soviet Union was coming apart, he had called me on the phone urgently because he had left early—

Q: He being?

Nunn: Kokoshin. Because Gorbachev had been taken prisoner.

Q: Well, was Kokoshin in Budapest at that time?

Nunn: He was in Budapest, but left as soon as Gorbachev was taken prisoner.

Q: This is in August of ’91, I think.

Nunn: Yes. August of ’91. And he went back, and a couple of days later Gorbachev had been released. But the day Gorbachev was released, Kokoshin calls me in Budapest and says it’s urgent for you to come. And he said to me three times, Russia’s doing this, Russia’s doing that. It was still the Soviet Union. And I said, what the hell is going on in talking to Russia. And I found out pretty quickly. But he told me—he being Kokoshin—that he needed me to come over and see what was actually happening, and I said, I don’t have a visa. He said I’ll have one in your hotel in thirty minutes. Well, he was not even in government, so I said, what is going on here? I’ll believe that when I see it, Andrei. Thirty minutes later, the ambassador from Soviet Union/Russia was in the hotel lobby.

Q: The ambassador to Hungary.

Nunn: Yes. The Soviet ambassador to Hungary was in the lobby with a visa and I immediately got on the train and I flew—I don’t remember how—to Frankfurt, and was actually paged in the Frankfurt airport before flying to Moscow by the American ambassador—our ambassador to Russia or the Soviet Union—saying don’t come. It’s chaos. We can’t protect you. We can’t set up appointments. We don’t know who’s in control. It’s total bedlam. Do not come. He paged me in the airport. And I said, well, don’t worry about it, Mr. Ambassador. I’m coming because I’ve

been invited by a Russian friend. Well, the Embassy was beside themselves because a U.S. senator was coming and they didn't know how to deal with it. But nevertheless, Kokoshin took me all over and introduced me to everybody who was going to be part of the new government. It was all turning right then. He took me out and introduced me to the military hero who had stood with Yeltsin rather than fire all the people and so forth. He was out there in Red Square. There was still—

Q: On the tank I think, right?

Nunn: Yes. This was right after the confrontation. It wasn't during it. But he took me to see a guy named [Ruslan] Khasbulatov who was kind of a guy they thought was going to be one of the leaders—he didn't turn out to be, but he was there for a while. I met all the people who were part of the Yeltsin team, including some that I knew. I had known some of them, because they tended to be the ones who were more with the Americans because they were the reformers and so forth. So the point of all that is that Carnegie sponsored the conferences where I met Kokoshin, sponsored the conference we were having in Budapest, and that laid the foundation for me going to what was becoming Russia. And when I came back, on the airplane, that's when I envisioned that we had to do something, which became the Nunn-Lugar program.

Q: When you were there in August of '91 and those events were taking place, could you see it on the streets yourself?

Nunn: You could see it and feel it, and you could talk about it. They took me all over, but I sat in the people's assembly when they had the leaders of each part of the Soviet Union. It was still the Soviet Union at that time.

Q: Yes, right. And Gorbachev was still in power, technically.

Nunn: Gorbachev's still in power. I met with him during that trip. They were debating with the various leaders of the different component parts of the Soviet Union. They were all there, including Gorbachev, and they were debating how they were going to break up the Soviet Union. And I'm sitting there with Kokoshin on one side and a guy named Sergey [M.] Rogov on the other, who speaks English and Russian better than Kokoshin—he was interpreting for me. I was listening, and I knew it was changing, because Rogov—he was always pretty bold. Kokoshin was cautious, Sergey Rogov was pretty bold. But not this bold, because Gorbachev or one of the leaders would say something and he would tell me what they said, and then he'd mutter, "lying son of a bitch."

[Laughter]

He was giving me his commentary on all the stuff as we were going. And I remember walking out of that after I sat there for two or three hours. That turned out to be a very eventful day or two. I walked out of there with Susan [E.] Eisenhower's husband, who was a nuclear physicist, [Roald Z.] Sagdeev. He was one of the space program leaders in Russia, but he was married to Susan Eisenhower. I knew him because he had lived—he was teaching at the University of

Maryland and over here, later—they're divorced now. But I was walking out with him, and he was one of the members of the Supreme Soviet [of the Soviet Union]. He had his delegate badge on and we were going through a corridor. There must have been twenty-five thousand people out there. They parted to let us go through. I noticed him quietly slipping his badge off, putting it in his pocket and the crowd was chanting. I didn't know what they were talking about. I had no idea what they were talking about. But I knew he was nervous about being a Soviet delegate, so I kind of walked fast to get through there. Because you couldn't tell whether they were mad or what. But it turns out they were saying "down with the Soviet Union, break up the Soviet Union." This was all the Yeltsin people out there.

Q: You say you met with Gorbachev at that time.

Nunn: I did.

Q: Right. And you had an exchange with him about what was going to happen there?

Nunn: It was not a long meeting. It was probably a twenty, thirty minute meeting. And, of course, he was shaken. You could tell that. He'd just gotten back. He'd come back the day before from being held in captivity. The main thing I asked him about was the condition of that Soviet arsenal—whether he was in full control—and I particularly asked him if he had maintained control of the arsenal while he was in captivity. I'd known Gorbachev—I had met with him and thought highly of him. And he didn't answer that question. He looked away and just wouldn't answer it. So that was the final straw for me—that we had to move and move quickly to help

whoever was going to be in power get control of their weapons, because it was clear to me Gorbachev was in the process of losing authority over the nuclear weapons.

Q: If we step back, let's say two years, and someone said to you at that time, is the Soviet Union about to break up? What would you have thought?

Nunn: You wouldn't have had to go back two years. We had the experts at that Budapest conference. And before Kokoshin went home, as I recall it—somebody else might have to check my memory on this—we were talking about the Soviet Union, when they would break up. And all of our so-called American experts there—there were about four or five of them, plus European experts, to a person—said no. It's years away. That was at that very meeting.

Q: Years away.

Nunn: Yes. Now it may have been a meeting a year before when I said, but I remember it was probably closer to that period where it probably wasn't that Budapest meeting. It was probably closer to that period where Hamburg and I went to Russia.

Q: Earlier on. Right.

Nunn: Because I remember coming back and I think David was at this meeting, and it may have been Carnegie-sponsored—it probably was. But I remember we were in Bermuda, I believe, and we had a meeting of Soviet experts. And this was after I met with Gorbachev. It was definitely

before this ’91 meeting—probably ’88. And that was the meeting where every one of them said Gorbachev was just a more handsome face, but he was the same type of Soviet leader. And I had just met with him—I met with him twice and I was a dissenting voice—I said he is not the same. He is different. This is a different period, a different time, different challenge, and different opportunities. I said, Gorbachev is different. And he was. The first time I met with him, I knew, just like David did, that this guy was totally different from the previous Soviet leaders. So in answer to your question, would we have predicted it not happening nearly as fast as it did—I was leaning much more that way than most of the experts.

Q: In January of ’86, Gorbachev announced his desire to go to zero on nuclear weapons.

Nunn: Was it that early?

Q: Yes, it was. On July 15, 1986, he unveiled a plan to go to zero nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles by the year 2000. Now, in October of ’86, Reagan met with Gorbachev at [the] Reykjavik [Summit] in Iceland. And do you recall that there was some discussion then of going to zero?

Nunn: Oh yes. I recall that. In fact, they’re making a movie out of that right now.

Q: Oh, are they really?

Nunn: And Michael [K.] Douglas is playing Reagan. Michael's on our board, so that's the reason I know about it. But yes. I remember that very well.

Q: Do you remember what your reaction to it was?

Nunn: My reaction was skeptical because I felt we had profound conventional disparities, and I thought there was an admirable long-term vision but we needed to take care of the conventional side—the tanks, the artillery tubes, the mass formations that could threaten Berlin and Europe. And that we were getting the cart in front of the horse. But that was my reaction.

Q: Right. Right. And Reagan at that time was deeply interested in his Star Wars program [Strategic Defense Initiative], right?

Nunn: Reagan had in mind that Star Wars was going to be so perfect and that we would actually share the technology and that would eliminate the need for offensive weapons. And, of course, those of us who'd been following that program for years knew that no such thing was going to happen. Because I was in the—

Q: You mean you knew that then?

Nunn: Absolutely. It was just not in the realm. I had testimony before our committee about what it could do and couldn't do. Going back to the early 1970s one of my first experiences in the Senate was when one of my mentors, [Henry] Scoop [M.] Jackson took me in his office and

showed me the ABM [anti-ballistic missile] system, pictures of it, being built around Moscow. Believe it or not, they were going to use nuclear detonations to knock down missiles over their own territory. But anyway, Scoop was explaining to me that the defenses were a threat because a country that had offenses and defenses would knock out the other side with the offensive and be able to handle whatever remnants were left with the defensive. So he saw it as a first strike move by the Soviet Union. Well, guess what? When we started Star Wars, the Soviets saw it the same way in reverse. And so I knew that you can't separate offense and defense. They go together in missiles just as much as they do in football.

Q: Is it surprising that Reagan would have even listened to Gorbachev talk about going to zero at that time?

Nunn: Well, Reagan had the same view from a different sort of angle. He became so captivated with the defensive systems, and he always had a horror of nuclear weapons. He really had a horror of nuclear war. And he said a number of times—I don't know whether he had already said it then, but I think it was a little later—that nuclear war cannot be won and must not be fought. Well, that's a departure for a lot of the conservatives. It was a departure. I mean, what would Curtis [E.] LeMay have said about Ronald Reagan's view?

Q: Right.

Nunn: So Reagan—it wasn't just Gorbachev. Reagan and Gorbachev were on a lot of the same wavelengths.

Q: How do you think history would judge Gorbachev if the question is how was Gorbachev on nuclear non-proliferation?

Nunn: I think Gorbachev is going to get very high marks from history—not because of his management of the Soviet Union or his management of the economy or his understanding of economics—all those things, he had challenges. But he was humanitarian and a moral man in the best sense of the word. And I think any of his predecessors—we would have seen massive killing before the Soviet Union broke up. The result might have been the same, but I think it would have been ten, twenty years later because economics was what was driving it more than anything else and the system just didn't work in the age of information. Gorbachev—he was determined not to turn it into a holocaust, and he, I think, will be judged very positively in history because of that. I think he's a man of integrity and a man of high moral principle. He's not perfect, none of us are, but I give him good marks for that reason alone. If you think about what could have happened, you don't need any other reasons to give Gorbachev good marks.

Q: So you came back from the Soviet Union after that meeting in August of '91, absorbing the situation there. And you came up with some idea of what came to be known as the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program, or more commonly, Nunn-Lugar.

Nunn: Right.

Q: Was that a simple task?

Nunn: No. It was very complicated because you had two adversaries and there was still tremendous distrust. Of course there still is today. And you had a very large number of people on the right and left who wanted no part of helping the Soviet Union or Russia get control of their nuclear weapons. They felt that if we helped them on that, they would use the money for the military. Well, it was apparent that was dead wrong. The military was coming down, down, down. I felt it was a period of maximum danger. So I did not know whether we could pass it or not, but I knew we had to try.

Q: The objective here was to do what?

Nunn: To try to keep the world as secure as possible in a period of maximum chaos.

Q: By means of?

Nunn: Helping our former adversary, and the former Soviet Union countries that had their [nuclear] weapons, maintain safety and security of those weapons while they were going through this transition, and hopefully helping them get rid of as many of them as they were willing to get rid of safely. And preventing them from getting into other hands that would be dangerous hands, including other countries as well as terrorists.

Q: Well, and that involved, if I understand it correctly, the expenditure of American taxpayer dollars.

Nunn: Right.

Q: Maybe $15 billion so far.

Nunn: Right.

Q: To help Russia get control of the so-called loose nukes that were in that part of the world.

Nunn: As well as chemical and biological, of which they had huge arsenals. They always denied having biological weapons, but we knew they had a huge amount of biological material and they had worked on it a lot. These materials were not just in Russia, they were in Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Belarus, and of course the tactical [nuclear] weapons were spread over a lot of other countries and were brought back. And I give President George H. W. Bush very good marks—he and Brent Scowcroft—for making a very timely move to get rid of a lot of our tactical nuclear weapons and inviting them to do likewise. That kind of got merged. That wasn't directly Nunn-Lugar, but it was right in the same time frame.

Q: Why did Kazakhstan and Belarus and maybe it was Ukraine, give up their nuclear weapons?

Nunn: You know, that's an interesting psychology because Lugar and I met on two or three occasions with [Nursultan Ä.] Nazarbayev, who is still there. And it was very apparent when we met with him that he had a deep and abiding distaste, dislike, and indeed almost hate for nuclear

weapons and nuclear tests because he thought his country had been decimated with nuclear tests, and a huge number of people had cancer and other things coming from that.

Q: What was his position then?

Nunn: He was president of Kazakhstan. He still is—he's still president. So when we met with him, we were very encouraged because Ukraine was not, at that stage, willing to give up their nuclear weapons. Russia was, of course, not going to give up theirs, but were willing to help because they didn't want Ukraine and Kazakhstan and Belarus to have those weapons when they were separate countries. And so getting Nazarbayev to take a lead on this was one of the keys to getting those other two countries to give up their weapons. So when we were in the Ukraine, we were discouraged. When we went to meet with Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan, Lugar and I were very encouraged. This was after we'd passed Nunn-Lugar, but before it had been anywhere near fully implemented.

Q: By the way, why Lugar? Was he chairman of [U.S. Senate Committee on] Foreign Relations at that time?

Nunn: He was a ranking member, because I was chairman [of the Senate Committee on Armed Services]. He was a Republican. He would have been—

Q: Right, right.

Nunn: Because Lugar is a smart, well-informed, well-respected, credible guy, and he was at that stage very well-respected by Republicans as well as Democrats, and because we were friends. We had been together on a number of these Aspen/Carnegie deals. In fact, it wasn't just the Russians you got to know better in those. You got to know your own colleagues more. That's a hidden dimension today. People don't realize that in the Senate itself—unless you're in a committee with somebody—that's not where you really get to know people. It's going with and doing things with them, working on an international problem. So Lugar and I had done that on a number of occasions, and I felt like, at that stage, he was the most credible Republican I could enlist in this cause.

Q: And of course he's gone now from the Senate.

Nunn: That's right. But he's still on NIT board, so we still see each other.

Q: In 1997, after you retired from the Senate, you joined the Carnegie board. Why?

Nunn: Well, I have great—

Q: Was that at the urging of Hamburg or [Vartan] Gregorian, who was just coming in as president?

Nunn: It was really at the urging of Hamburg, because David and I knew each other. I didn't know Vartan at that stage. At one point in that period of time, David asked me if I was interested

in taking his place—not that he was speaking for anybody but himself, but he was kind of seeing about putting my name in the hat. And I told him I had a lot of other things I was going to do, and that wasn't on my list. I didn't think I was the right—I didn't think that was the right match with me and the responsibilities. So that was before Vartan—but Dave knew he was going to retire. So Dave said, well, how about being on the board? And I said, I'll be delighted. So of course, I'd worked so much with Carnegie and felt so highly of what they were doing, and felt so highly of David. I did not know then that Vartan was going to end up being the leader. I knew of him but I did not know him personally. I guess I was on the board maybe six months—three or four or six months while David was still there.

Q: Before we get to that, do you remember this report under the auspices of [the] Brookings [Institution], I think, that Ashton [B.] Carter did about the Soviet capacity, the Soviet weapons. Was that really of any—

Nunn: Oh yes, it was a huge help because—

Q: Carnegie supported that.

Nunn: Right. Carnegie supported that. It made a big difference. I came back and got off the airplane, had talked to my staff and other people. I said, we've got to take an initiative. We had already passed the Defense Authorization Bill, which is the responsibility of the Armed Services Committee. It was in conference. [Leslie] Les Aspin [Jr.] was my counterpart—Democrat, Wisconsin. Good guy, good friends. We were in conference on the bill. Nothing had been put in

either bill on the subject of the Soviet Union coming apart because it happened so quickly. And so I said to Les when I got back—I called him the next day and said, "We've got to do something about the loose nukes and the chemical and biological. We're working on a piece of legislation, and I want to talk to you about putting it in the conference report as an amendment." Les said to me—this was several conversations. This is the essence of it: "I think they're going to have real hunger problems over there. They're going to be in real chaos, and we need to do something on the hunger side." I said, "Well, I'm going to go to the floor and just sort of explain it, but we've got to get it in the conference report." Basically I decided not to go to the floor and explain it then, but we didn't know what it was. So we put it in the conference report, and the compromise was—it was actually a blend. I didn't want to put a lot of money in there for food because I didn't know what was going to happen. I was not as convinced as Les was about the starvation problem. I felt that the problem from a security point of view was what I wanted to do.

So we put the authorization in that conference report with what became known as the Nunn-Lugar Program. We also had a provision for emergency supplies from the Pentagon to alleviate acute suffering, including meals ready to eat or whatever they needed to do. And so both of those went in as a package. We brought them back out in the conference report. All hell broke loose on the Senate floor, because people, in this case, justifiably said—I mean, there was one bogus argument. Some people were saying that we're throwing away money, don't need it, don't help them, don't trust them, et cetera, et cetera. And that was coming from the Republican side. But the legitimate complaint was it was out of scope. It was a provision—we knew that—that was in the conference report that hadn't been in either bill. And so that, basically, is a technical violation of the Senate rules. I felt we might persuade them, because it happens—not all the time.

It happens frequently. But in fact, the technical rules were against us. So the combination of vehement opposition from the right and some from the left plus the fact we were out of scope meant we had to back off. So we backed off, took that provision out of the conference bill, brought the conference bill back, and passed it without that. That's when I said, I've got to get somebody credible on the Republican side, because the Republicans were going nuts over this—some of them were, not all of them.

And I thought about John Warner, but by that time, John had a number of people on the committee on the Republican side who felt he was working too closely with me. Some on the—I call them the hard nuts—were getting to where they didn't trust Warner, so I decided I needed to go with somebody who's got the maximum amount of support on the Republican side, and it was Dick Lugar. And I brought Dick in and told him what I'd had witnessed in the Soviet Union. Dick had been part of this Aspen group. He understood a lot that was going on—a very smart guy. Understood it and was on the same wavelength with me. So Dick and I joined together. This all happened in September, October. In December, we had the Defense Appropriations Bill—a different bill. Robert [C.] Byrd was the Chairman of the Appropriations Committee. I went to Robert and talked to him. Lugar went to the Republican counterpart. We had a series of breakfast meetings. We got Ash Carter, because we knew the work he had done, to come and join us at those breakfast meetings. We had probably four or five of them—we had probably twenty, thirty, forty senators. And the combination of the fact that, by that time, the Soviet Union really was coming apart, and Ash's great analytical work and his objectivity—it wasn't a couple of politicians talking alone. We had a real analytical guy. All of that turned around the sentiment, and we passed it as an amendment to the Appropriations Bill. So it was not on my bill and that's

why Aspen wasn't involved at that stage. He had been involved in that. I always said Les deserves some more credit than he ever got for Nunn-Lugar, because he was supportive, very supportive. But he wasn't involved because the amendment came in on the floor of the Senate, not in the committee, and it went on the Appropriations Bill and not on the Armed Services Bill. It was $400 million—I had $600 million. Byrd got it down to $400 million but supported it. It was an authorization, it wasn't a mandate. It said the Department of Defense will have the authority, but it didn't say they have to do it.

Q: But there's no question in your mind—when you consider all these elements that went into the passage of the amendment—that Carnegie made a really significant contribution.

Nunn: Oh, I look at it from every angle. Me meeting Kokoshin, Kokoshin inviting me from an Aspen meeting to come over there, David Hamburg's work on Nunn-Warner, on the Risk Reduction Centers, which established our mutual confidence in each other, was a big help. The sponsorship of Ash Carter's report—I think Carnegie sponsored Brookings or whoever did—

Q: Yes, it had paid for this. Right.

Nunn: And you know, I'd say Carnegie was incriminated in every way.

[Laughter]

Q: You served on the Carnegie board from ’97 to 2005. Candidly—because that’s what I like—was it of use to you to be on the board?

Nunn: Oh, sure. It was of use to me—it was a terrific educational effort for me because the other components, non-security components, where I learned so much about education—the early childhood emphasis, all the things that were being done—and of course having Vartan come in. I’ve always said Vartan’s one of those guys—when he asks you a question, you better think about what you’re going to say, because he’s actually going to listen.

[Laughter]

I was unaccustomed to that in Washington. And so it was a great experience for me, and learning from other members, and so forth. And then it gave me a chance to explain to the board what we were doing later on, when we formed the Nuclear Threat Initiative. And of course, Vartan, he was an adviser to me when [Robert E.] Ted Turner [III] first came to me. I went to Vartan and asked him what he thought. He helped me in terms of advice.

Q: This is 2001 now.

Nunn: Yes. I talked to David Hamburg also. I asked him if he’d be an adviser. Peggy was already [on board], in her own right—it had nothing to do with David, per se—she is an expert on public health and biological issues. She had been a New York City public health

commissioner. So being on the Carnegie board—it was a real growth experience intellectually for me.

Q: Can you compare Hamburg to Gregorian in terms of either their interest or their style or their manner or their capacity or in any way that you would find comfortable?

Nunn: One of the things I give Vartan great credit for is that most people come in, and whatever their predecessor's done, they view it with a great deal of skepticism. Vartan had a thorough review done of what were the pluses and minuses of the various programs going on in the nuclear area, which had been uniquely Hamburg in Risk Reduction. Vartan immediately got it, and I think me being on the board had maybe some effect, but I believe that Vartan understood the significance of it. He knew because of his vast foreign policy experience—where he was raised and so forth—that we had to help Russia and that we had to try to turn around the course of history in terms of the animosity that was so present during the Cold War, and even in the post-Cold War period—distrust and animosity. So he was a real ally. I've said on several occasions that Vartan was able to separate the wheat from the chaff of things that he wasn't going to continue, but in the nuclear area and in the security area, he kept almost all of it because he felt it was really wheat.

Q: He's also keenly interested, I think, in the education of the Russian intelligentsia.

Nunn: He played a huge role in that. I would say that what Carnegie did there—there were other sources of this but I think that Carnegie, they had a Nunn-Lugar Program in effect for the

intelligentsia and for the academic community and for the humanities and people who were involved in that. I think that those skills and talents and that kind of leadership would have been severely dissipated had it not been for Vartan's vision and initiative.

Q: He was president of the corporation, as you say, in 2001, when Ted Turner came to you and the Nuclear Threat Initiative was created. What did Ted Turner want? What did he want to do?

Nunn: Ted saw a program on *60 Minutes* where an American who had [been head of U.S.] strategic command and a Russian counterpart were together meeting, and they basically said, we've got far too many nuclear weapons. The Cold War's over. We ought to be getting rid of a lot of them. The politicians won't let us do it. A light bulb goes off in Ted's head, and he said, hey, I thought the Cold War was over, and we've got to do something about this. So Ted went to [Timothy] Tim [E.] Wirth, who was already working with him at the United Nations Foundation. They had already been stood up three or four years before. And [Charles] Charlie [B.] Curtis happened to be the deputy to Tim. Charlie and I had worked together a lot. He was the Department of Energy deputy secretary when I was there in the Senate, and we did what we called Nunn-Lugar-Domenici, with Charlie's great help. That was my last year in the Senate.

Q: In '96, I think.

Nunn: In '96. Nevertheless, both Tim Wirth and Charlie Curtis recommended Ted see me. I was already out practicing law, on boards repairing a severely damaged balance sheet. And—

Q: How could a man of your generous interests practice law? Could you actually focus on practicing law? [Laughs]

Nunn: It was not a normal law practice. I told anybody I interviewed going in that I wasn't going to charge by the hour, and then I didn't. So I was on retainer fees. It was more of a corporate international type thing.

Q: Okay. But in any event, so Ted Turner, did he have an interest in what came to be called, again, going to zero—getting rid of all nuclear weapons?

Nunn: He did from the very beginning. Ted, from the very beginning, wanted to get rid of all nuclear weapons. But Ted's approach was just to have a meeting to decide and get rid of them. And, of course, my feeling at that time, and still, is a step-by-step process of confidence building. You've got to get control of the materials. You've got to have verification, where people trust but verify. You've got to deal with the French problem. You've got to deal with not just the Russian problem. You've got to deal with nuclear materials. Everybody's got to know that you're not going to have a bunch of materials in a cave—as soon as you get rid of them, somebody builds another one. And you've got to deal with India, Pakistan, you've got to deal with Israel, you've got to deal with China, so it was extremely complex. Ted had much more of a simple view about how you did it. So we disagreed on that. When we started, that was one of the things I talked to Vartan about. I said we don't agree. Because I knew if I was ever going to come out towards eliminating all nuclear weapons, it had to be step-by-step. It had to be tied to steps. And so I told Ted he and I didn't agree on that, and we had a six-month scoping study, and

we came to the conclusion—both of us did—look, before we get to that glorious day, there are all these things we have to do to build the foundation for getting to that. So we came up with compromised language and we basically said that our goal in NTI was to basically help reduce risk and take steps that would eventually allow us to implement the Non-Proliferation Treaty [Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons]. And the Non-Proliferation Treaty said that one of the individual goals was the elimination of nuclear weapons. So that was the way we finessed it—

Q: The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty of—

Nunn: ’68.

Q: ’68. Right.

Nunn: So in effect, our country signed up to that. And people don’t realize that. But this business of having a goal of no nuclear weapons in the world is not—[George P.] Shultz, [Henry A.] Kissinger, Nunn, and [William J.] Perry weren’t the first ones to say that. It had been part of the treaty. But the wording of the treaty is a little bit vague and ambitious and so forth. So we basically got down to that kind of compromise with Ted, and he decided it was worth his time and I decided it was worth my time, and he decided it was worth his money. I remember saying to Ted that we had to proceed in a way that I was comfortable with. If he had his individual views, he could express them, and I didn’t have any probably with that. You make a speech of it and just distinguish that from NTI’s views. Because Ted would explain things and scare the hell

out of everybody who were realistic about this situation. And I told Ted one time that—he said, "You've got a lot of credibility and I've got a lot of money." I said, "Ted, one thing. If I don't control the message of NTI, my credibility's going run out a long time before your money does."

[Laughter]

Q: I wonder whether, if you would ask the average American, let's say in 1980 or '83—whatever, during the Cold War—does Russia have nuclear weapons that they've poised at us? I wonder what the average American would think. That what they've got here is a big nuclear weapon on a long-range missile—just that one—and it's poised at us. I don't think people understood how much weaponry there was.

Nunn: Enough to destroy God's universe. There still is.

Q: In terms of nuclear weapons then, they had like sixty thousand, didn't they?

Nunn: Yes. We have enough to just—

Q: I'm talking about the Russians.

Nunn: The Russians, yes. That's right. There's still something like thirty thousand out there of every kind and direction, but we've come way down. We've come way down—

Q: All right. I want to get to that.

Nunn: —particularly on deployed weapons.

Q: Is there a simple way to ask you—in the time frame that we've allotted and that I'm going to try to extend—NTI, which Carnegie also contributed to over time.

Nunn: Huge. Yes, tremendous support.

Q: At least from—

Nunn: Not only the dollars, but also the basic credibility that Carnegie support has given us.

Q: What NTI and its project, the Nuclear Security Project [NSP]—that emerged after the famous four, now five, op-eds—what they've accomplished. But maybe before I do that, let me ask you—in 2007, you published, with George Shultz, Henry Kissinger and Bill Perry, the first op-ed. And the last sentence of that first op-ed, I think, says something along the lines of "we endorse setting the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons." And then you identified ten steps toward getting that way, and that relates to, Sam, what you were saying before about having the steps. Given what you just now said about the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, was that really so revolutionary? I mean, it made a big impact, that op-ed, didn't it?

Nunn: I think the main revolutionary aspect of it was who said it rather than the message. There were a lot of people who had favored that for a long time. Reagan and Gorbachev did. And I also think the unique thing—and I played a pretty big role in this part of it—all four of us played a big role in it. This was a group project. Every word of it was agreed to by everybody. The part of it that I think I made my most useful contribution to was we had worked so much on the steps because that's what NTI was all about. That's what Ted had agreed on—that we would work on the steps that would get us to this point—and so basically I plugged in most of those steps. Of course George and Henry and Bill were very much supportive. And Bill Perry contributed greatly on that, because Bill and I had been into the steps part of it pretty much more than Kissinger and Shultz had. They'd been into the broad policy side of it more. I remember I was really torn as to whether to put my name on this, even after I'd done a lot of work on it. But—

Q: But why?

Nunn: Because unless it had the steps in there, I thought it was going to be viewed as pie in the sky. And there are a lot of groups out there who wanted to abolished nuclear weapons, but without understanding that if you don't get the nuclear materials under control, and if you don't get verification, and if you don't get enforcement, and if you don't stop the tests and all of that stuff, then nobody's going to go with a world without nuclear weapons. You're just not going to get there. And the American public wouldn't support it. I wanted to make sure we had something the American public could understand and support. So to me the steps were important. I remember adding one line, and I called George Shultz and read it to him. I remember that. The line was, "without the vision, the steps will not be viewed as fair or urgent, and without the steps,

the vision will not be viewed as realistic or possible." I wrote that line out in my office on the Georgia [Institute of] Tech[nology] campus. I remember I had a yellow pad. I called George and suggested that line, and he immediately bought into it. Because at that stage, there were people who didn't want the steps. I mean, that's the background. They did not want to talk about the steps. Max Kampelman—and I love Max Kampelman—but Max did not buy into the steps concept. And Max had had a huge influence on George. So I wasn't at all sure that George was going to buy into that. Reagan did not have the steps. Gorbachev did not have the steps. In my view, nothing was going to go anywhere unless people around the world understood that to get there you had to take the steps, otherwise you'd never have the confidence.

Q: Where does Sidney [D.] Drell stand?

Nunn: I think Sid saw it more like I did—steps. Yes. And I think that's part of influence on George. I wasn't sure if George was going to buy that. But he not only bought into it, he embraced it enthusiastically. But again, I'll repeat that Max inspired George. Max helped inspire this whole effort, so Max Kampelman deserves huge credit. But on the point of the steps, Max did not agree.

Q: I hear you.

Nunn: And the whole Global Zero [campaign] people—they didn't agree with the steps.

Q: Were you surprised that Henry Kissinger signed on? Henry Kissinger, I think in ’99, opposed the Comprehensive [Nuclear] Test-Ban Treaty.

Nunn: Yes. I wasn’t by the time he did it. If you had asked me six months before or before George suggested Henry—but Henry had called me and we’d talked several times. And Henry, he was like me. He was skeptical on Reykjavik. And he was like me—he didn’t see how you got to a world without nuclear weapons without steps. Henry wasn’t that familiar with what the steps ought to be, but when I proposed the steps, Henry warmed up to it.

But Henry and I had several conversations. George had suggested—because George didn’t think Henry was going to sign on, and he didn’t think I was going to sign on—we have our names listed and say that we identify with the broad goals, that we’re not co-authors. And to have the article, and just say that we identify with them. Because that was what he thought was the best. Henry talked to me about doing that and said, are you inclined to do that? And I said, well, we must think about it. And then the next conversation we had, I said, Henry, dime in for a dollar—I mean, what’s the plus side of being out here saying we identify with the goals? Let’s help shape this thing and be part of it. And so I wasn’t surprised that Henry came to that, but it’s because of all those conversations we had.

Q: Given our time constraints, is there a simple way to say what NTI and NSP have accomplished?

Nunn: Well, I think I'd divide those questions. Let me take NSP first. I think NSP's most important contribution was making the space available for real political leadership on this subject in this country and secondarily around the world. There are fourteen different "teams of four" around the world—former statesmen who have signed up. But I think NTI's contribution has been—having spent years working on the steps before NSP came into existence, before the first *Wall Street Journal* article—I think we were able to not only come in and help formulate the steps that went into that article, but also work on them. That's what we do. We work on the steps. We can't do them all, but we've gone a long way on nuclear material protection. And we've kept Nunn-Lugar together on this, too. I think that's another important thing. So I would say that NTI's been about doing things. We've got a large verification effort going on right now with experts around the world because we're not going to get anywhere unless the public is convinced you can verify this stuff. We've also got leadership networks in the Asia Pacific region. In fact, Shultz and Bill Perry and I are going to Singapore in two weeks to meet with the Asian Pacific network that we've put together and who deal with—the European network's going to be there, headed by [Desmond] Des [H.] Browne, a former [United Kingdom] defense minister. We've just formed a Latin America group, and they're going to be there. So we're pulling together these people. I'd say NTI's been down there at the step level. The Nuclear Security Project, I think, has had a big effect on Obama. He may have already been predisposed, but I think it made the political step feasible and possible.

Q: Well, how would you rate Obama, how he's done? Obama went to Prague in April 2009, and his exact words were, "So today I state clearly and with conviction America's commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons." But he did go on to say that

"U.S. defense policy still holds that a large nuclear arsenal is the best guarantee against attack." That was on April 5, 2009. Well, he promised an aggressive effort to pass the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty. I don't think anything has happened on that score. The *New York Times* criticized him last week about all these millions that he's promised to put in the budget on gravity nuclear bombs, and criticized him for cutting the Global Nuclear Reduction Initiative Program in the Department of Energy.

Nunn: Yes. He's putting a huge amount of money into modernizing nuclear weapons.

Q: So what do you make of it?

Nunn: Well, that was the way he got START [Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty] passed and I think—

Q: New START.

Nunn: New START. [laughs] I think the main guy who got bought with those promises didn't stay bought and voted against it anyway, Jon Kyl. So—

[Laughter]

Nunn: —quite a paradox. Quite a paradox. And let me say this. Very few people would have been bold enough to take the position he did during the campaign, endorsing what I call the

vision and the steps that we had outlined—very few people, Democratic or Republican. Very few people would have done nearly as much as he's done on nuclear materials protection, which is huge. You can't get this stuff under control, and nobody's going to abolish weapons if the material's still out there.

Q: All over the place.

Nunn: All over the place. And so we've gone from like forty countries that had it to twenty-seven now. We've got another summit coming up next year. My staff just got back from working on that. We're very much involved in Track II [diplomacy].

Q: In the Netherlands, isn't it?

Nunn: In the Netherlands. And Carnegie's helping support it again. So I give him overall very good marks on the nuclear arena, in spite of the difficulty of passing the New START.

We've just finished two years working on what we call "Building Mutual Security," and it's another one of the important steps, but a huge one. And that is having U.S. and Russia and European nations begin a dialogue on all the security issues that kind of pour over. You can't separate missile defense. You can't separate tactical nuclear weapons. You can't separate strategic weapons. These things all pour over conventional [borders] and we think a continuous dialogue on this [is necessary]. So we are really very busy implementing that.

Q: Yes, but finally, Senator, look. You've also got a fellow out there named [Vladimir V.] Putin.

Nunn: Yes.

Q: Putin is not Yeltsin. He's certainly not Gorbachev. Hasn't he decided that he wants to hold up Nunn-Lugar now?

Nunn: Yes. They're going to take another whole whack at the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program. I'm cautiously optimistic that it's going to be restored, but it may not be called that. Russia's going to be much more involved as a partner. You've got things like waiving liability that wounds their pride. So you've got to elevate Russia to a partnership rather than a supplicant for funds, and that's been apparent for some times.

Q: Have you had any dealings with him yourself?

Nunn: I've met with Putin several times.

Q: Is he a tough nut?

Nunn: He is. He's got a lot of chips on his shoulder. He's got a lot of chips on his shoulder, and he's macho.

Q: Realistic, though?

Nunn: I think he's a smart guy. The cards are dealt. We can destroy Russia and they can destroy us. The two of us together can still destroy mankind. So whoever's in that leadership position—it's not like Bangladesh or Syria. We've got to deal with them. A country that basically is an existential threat to Europe—survival as a nation—you deal with them, whoever they elect. You've got to. Reagan, even during the Cold War, I think, to his credit, recognized that.

So is Putin easy to deal with? No. But certainly he loves Russia, and he's not going to want to see Russia destroyed. He knows he's got mutual interests in this area, so I think we've got to deal with him. The report we just wrote, though, we're talking about fifteen to twenty years of dealing with this. This is going to take a long time to deal with—the hate and animosities of Russia are far beyond Putin. But I think if we can begin this process—I'll send you a copy of that report if you haven't seen it. Carnegie helped sponsor that. I think we've got to deal with them. I think we've got to deal with them. But Putin's not easy to deal with.

Q: As you mentioned before, you could be living the life of luxury in Perry [Georgia] practicing law. But you spent tremendous energy on this subject for years now. Has it really been worthwhile for you?

Nunn: My wife asks me that every now and then. I think the answer's yes, without any doubt. I think we've gotten a number of things done. I think we've laid the foundation for the next generation to do more. I hope we'll have these networks set up that will continue. We've got some great leaders—the former foreign minister of Australia and the former secretary of defense

in Great Britain. Malcolm [L.] Rifkind, another [UK] former secretary of defense from the conservative side, just joined our board. We've got the [former head of the U.S.] Strategic Air Command. We've got the people together now that, if something's going to get done, have to make it done. This thing can't come from the far left. It just can't. It's got to come from people who are well-grounded in security. And that's the case in every country. And the public trusts people who've been involved in security on these issues. Whether they should or not is another question. That's another debate. So I would say it's been worthwhile. I'm going to have to run, but I'll do this. We know each other now. If you want to get on the telephone, I'll be glad to—

Q: This can't be done on the phone.

Nunn: Okay.

Q: Yes. All right. Let me just close this off. Thank you, Senator.

[END OF INTERVIEW]