Thank you very much, Chip. My talk today is entitled “Our Last Best Chance” I named this after a docudrama that has just been released by NTI, the Nuclear Threat Initiative. NTI was founded by Sam Nunn and Ted Turner in the belief that the gravest threat to our nation today was that of nuclear terrorism. It is dedicated to taking actions to reduce that threat.

Last year, for example, it facilitated the removal from Serbia of highly enriched uranium that was in danger of being bought or stolen by terrorists.

The docudrama, by the way, tells a story of three parallel efforts by al Qaeda to obtain a nuclear bomb, one of which is successful. The story, of course, is fiction but it is based solidly on fact. It is designed to awaken the public to this danger. If, in fact, a nuclear bomb is detonated in one of our cities, we will all be asking the question, what could we have done to prevent it?

NTI’s position is that we already know the answer to that question and, so, they ask a second question, why don’t we do it now? Now, they say, is our last, best chance. Well, my talk is directed to the first question, how to reduce the danger and I will leave it you to consider the second question, why don’t we do it now?

In 1998 Ash Carter and I published our book “Preventive Defense” which proposed a new security strategy in the wake of the Cold War. Chapter five of that book was entitled “Catastrophic Terrorism” and it forecasted United States would soon suffer a large scale terror attack with catastrophic results. We prescribed preventive measures to reduce the likelihood of such an attack but we recognized even then that those measures were expensive and inconvenient. So, we also forecast that none of them would be taken until after the attack. Unfortunately, both forecasts turned out to be correct but, after 9/11, our government did respond vigorously.
In fact, those of you who fly the friendly skies as often as I do know all too well how airport security has been transformed in the wake of 9/11. Our government also responded vigorously in Afghanistan, shutting down the terrorist training camps and dispersing the al Qaeda organization and, certainly, the war with Iraq has been a transforming event although it remains to be seen whether the results will be positive or negative.

But, I believe that the response to nuclear terrorism has been weak and it has been ill focused. The lead story in the Washington Post on Monday was that the United States was unprepared for a nuclear terror attack. The article went on to lament the absence of a plan for evacuation if a nuclear bomb were to be detonated in one of our cities. The article was correct and made several constructive suggestions but I must say it overlooked the major point, even if we had a plan for promptly evacuating citizens downwind from a nuclear blast, the outcome would still be catastrophic. This is what the heart of Washington would look like after the detonation of a small….a ‘small’ nuclear bomb. This, of course, is a picture of Hiroshima which suffered a small nuclear bomb. More than a hundred thousand people would be killed not counting the additional deaths that could result from downwind fallout. The great majority of our elected officials would be killed or incapacitated putting in question the continuing function of our government. Additionally, it would incalculable material damage. It would send international stock markets into a disastrous plunge causing the loss of hundreds of billions. It would change, forever, Americans’ view of their security and their government’s ability to protect them and it could lead to extreme security measures designed to prevent future attacks but at a considerable loss of our civil liberties.

So, it is clear, just how devastating such an attack would be and it is also clear that this scenario is not fanciful. In fact, Graham Allison in his recent book “Nuclear Terrorism” recounts a chilling story that makes this point.

He relates that one month after 9/11 the President was informed in his daily intelligence brief of a report that al Qaeda already had a 10 kiloton bomb in New York City. The report was considered credible enough that the President ordered initiation of the Continuity of Government Program. Vice-President Cheney and several hundred other government officials were sent to a secure location, prepared to take over control of the government if there were a nuclear bomb detonated in Washington. Happily, this report, though credible, was wrong but Allison offers his judgment that such an attack is inevitable, if….if we stay on our present course.

What leads him to this apocalyptic conclusion?

He notes that Osama bin Laden’s official spokesman has written that al Qaeda’s aim….their aim, is to kill four million Americans as vengeance for the wrong that Americans have inflicted on Muslims these past few decades.

I quote from his statement, “We have the right to kill four million Americans, two million of them children, and to exile twice as many and wound and cripple hundreds of
Allison also notes the only plausible way of achieving that number is by using nuclear weapons and, finally, he notes that Osama bin Laden has told his followers that obtaining weapons of mass destruction is a religious duty.

Now, I really hate to give this talk. I hate being a Cassandra but I feel like I am watching the second act of a Greek tragedy and I want to rush up to the stage and tell the actors to change course before the third act begins. However, I am a congenital optimist, in spite of what I’ve said, so, I will leave you not with this….I will leave you….I will ‘not’ leave you with this dire forecast because I believe that the tragedy is preventable and I will describe today some of the ingredients of the preventive actions.

That this tragedy is looming should not be a surprise to Americans. The only issue on which both Bush and Kerry agreed during the recent Presidential campaign was that nuclear terrorism was the major threat facing our country today. Acknowledging the seriousness of threat, which the President has clearly done, is a necessary first step but that step should be followed by thoughtful and forceful actions.

To determine what those actions should be, I refer back to the question I asked earlier, what could we have done to prevent that tragedy, and I will describe to you my answer to that question. I will start with the actions already underway by our government. Their first strategy is to go after the terrorists. I think that is a good strategy. I also think that they’ve implemented it well in Afghanistan against all odds and with considerable skill. Iraq is a different story. The military campaign against the Iraqi Army was brilliantly executed and led to a swift victory. inexplicably, the plan for defeating the Iraqi Army was not accompanied by a viable plan for dealing with the predictable insurgency that followed. As a consequence, the insurgents had a chance to get their footing and we are now engaged in a dirty, bloody, urban insurgent operations whose outcome is still uncertain.

While I have criticized the administration for not planning adequately for the second phase, I do not criticize the strategy they are now pursuing which is to stand up an Iraqi Government and an Iraqi Security Force as quickly as possible. But the way ahead is very difficult. The outcome in Iraq, still uncertain, and the intended consequences of this insurgency war loom as a major problem for the future. The insurgents seem to have an endless supply of men and women willing to be suicide bombers. They attack American military units and civilian contractors whenever they can but American soldiers and marines are formidable opponents so has the strategy has been shifting to soft targets. They’re going after the Iraqis whom they call ‘traitors’, that is, those Iraqis who are working to rebuild Iraq’s civil and governmental structure so that it becomes a decent and safe place to live.

So, while our soldiers and marines are winning skirmishes against insurgents, we should not be complacent. We should not believe that our military actions in Iraq are actually
reducing the terrorist threat to the United States. The danger is very real and for every terrorist our military kills in Iraq, another two will spring up and we should not believe that our military action in Iraq is containing terrorist actions to that country. The terrorists, already, have expanded their operations to attack soft targets in Egypt and in Lebanon and we must expect that they will soon direct some of their attacks to our own country. So, based on the history of the terrorist activity to this point, we should not count on our military operations against terrorists being sufficient to stop them from attacking targets in the United States and preventing suicide bombers from attacking malls or buses or restaurants is very, very difficult as demonstrated by the Israelis whose defense against such attacks is far superior to our own.

Even if our efforts can have only limited success in stopping conventional terror attacks, a determined effort can dramatically reduce the chance of nuclear terrorism. So, our main efforts should be directed to preventing the ultimate tragedy, a nuclear bomb being set off in one of our cities. There should be no doubt, no doubt at all, that if the al Qaeda organization can get a nuclear bomb, they will use it.

So, how do we prevent that tragedy?

The centerpiece of the administration’s strategy for dealing with a nuclear attack is the National Missile Defense System now being installed in Alaska. That system has been criticized for being technically deficient on the basis of its test firings but that is almost beside the point. Even if it worked exactly according to its specifications, it is irrelevant to the threat of nuclear terrorism. Terrorists will not use a ballistic missile to deliver their bomb. They will use a truck or a freighter. The mode of operation could be like the delivery of the truck bomb in Oklahoma City with the truck carrying a nuclear bomb instead of a few tons of explosives. My main objection to the National Missile Defense System presently being installed is that it diverts resources and effort away from nuclear terrorism which is a much greater and certainly more imminent threat. But there is some good news in this otherwise grim picture. No terror group is able to build a nuclear bomb from scratch. Only a nation state can manage to get a project of that complexity. For a terror group to get a nuclear bomb, they must buy or steal one from a nuclear power or, with more difficulty, put one together from the plutonium, say, that they acquire from a nuclear power. So, the key to success…...the key to success is to keep them from getting the bomb or plutonium in the first place and that is a goal that can be achieved if we make it our top priority and work at hard enough.

To be more specific, there are at least three actions that we can take that in combination would make it somewhere between difficult to impossible for a terror group to get a nuclear bomb.

Let’s take a moment to look at what those three actions are. First of all, we should make a dramatic reduction in the number of nuclear weapons, we should move as quickly as possible from thousands of nuclear weapons to hundreds. United States and Russia have been moving in that direction but not fast enough given the urgency of the problem and their last move, the so-called ‘Moscow Agreement’ has what I consider a fatal flaw, it only entails taking nuclear weapons off deployed status and storing them. The agreement
should be modified to require dismantlement so that there is a major decrease in the number of nuclear weapons susceptible to being bought or stolen. Having them in warehouse in Russia does not give me any great sense of security.

Secondly, we should increase the protection given to the remaining arsenal of nuclear weapons to make it much harder for a criminal team to buy or steal them. The Nunn-Lugar Program conceived by Senator Nunn and Senator Lugar was conceived to do just that. Indeed, during the time that I was Secretary of Defense I spent perhaps a third of my time using the Nunn-Lugar Program to dismantle thousands of nuclear weapons in the former Soviet Union and provide better security for the remainder.

During my tenure we dismantled four thousand nuclear weapons and made three countries, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, entirely, nuclear free. This is the good news. The bad news is the task is far from finished and the pace has slowed down.

We need to increase the priority of reducing and safeguarding nuclear weapons so that we can accelerate the effort given to the Nunn-Lugar Program and, additionally, we need to expand Nunn-Lugar as has been proposed by Senator Lugar, to cover the fissile material stored at commercial reactors.

Well, those are the first two actions I describe to you.

The third action is the most difficult, to stop the spread of nuclear weapons to other countries.

The newspapers are full of stories about how we are losing that struggle. North Korea has built up a nuclear arsenal of a half a dozen weapons this past year and threatens to build more. Iran is only a few years behind. If these two countries are not stopped, the danger of a terrorist getting a bomb markedly increases. Moreover, their ascendancy as nuclear powers will likely be followed, in rapid order, by another half a dozen countries. If this happens it will be the gravest failure of American diplomacy in our lifetime and the consequences likely will be catastrophic.

I have written several papers and op-ed pieces on specific actions I believe we should be taking to deal with this daunting problem. I will not attempt here to restate my recommendations but only to highlight what I believe are their salient features. It is clear that neither Iran nor North Korea will easily give up their aspirations for nuclear weapons. Successfully dealing with this problem without a disastrous war will require all of our diplomatic skills and it will require that we use all of the tools of diplomatic negotiations, sticks as well as carrots, that is, successful diplomacy must include a credible coercive element.

To illustrate this point, let me consider the problem with North Korea. United States has only one stick of any consequence, our military power, which neither we nor our allies want to use and we have no substantial carrots that we are willing to offer. China, on the other hand, has a major stick it could use in North Korea since if it cut off the fuel that it
supplies North Korea it could strangle them. Japan and South Korea both have major carrots in economic assistance that they are willing to give under the right conditions. Thus, we cannot deal successfully with the problem unilaterally. We will require major assistance from other nations. The good news is that the relevant nations are all parties to the six party talks, the appropriate venue for this negotiation.

The bad news is that the six power talks have broken down with no apparent prospect of restarting. The talks have been replaced by President Bush and Kim Jong Il trading insults via the media. These insults may result in applause for the two leaders in their own countries but they are not leading us to a solution to the nuclear danger. Even if we can get out of the mode of diplomacy through insult, we do not have a strategy that seems to be succeeding. In particular, the United States has been unsuccessful in getting the needed cooperation of the major players and what can we do to change that?

Well, first, we need to present a compelling case to our partners that the threat of nuclear terrorism is real and is not just an American problem. It could result in a nuclear detonation in their countries as well as ours.

Second, we need to present a clear strategy for negotiating with North Korea which spells out the role of each of the other parties in the six power talks. Specifically, it is (??) doubtful that we can get talks going again unless China is willing to threaten the cut off of its fuel to pressure North Korea back to the table. The major reason we have the nuclear crisis in North Korea, of course, is North Korea’s intransigence but the major reason we’ve been unable to cope with this intransigence is that there’s a fundamental disagreement among the parties trying to deal with it. The United States Government seems to believe that the problem can be resolved by putting pressure on the North Korean Government that, in time, will lead to a change of regime. The Chinese and South Koreans seem to believe that the problem can be resolved by engaging the North Korean in a way that, in time, will lead to a reform of the regime. Which of these is more likely to succeed is an interesting question but it is not relevant to dealing with the current crisis. Neither of them is likely to succeed in the next few years and, last year, North Korea apparently built a half dozen nuclear bombs and the reactor is already generating additional fuel for bombs this year.

Therefore, to deal with the nuclear crisis we are now facing, we do not have the luxury of awaiting the outcome of changes in the North Korean regime. We must deal with the Government of North Korea as it is, not as we would wish it to be.

Besides dealing with the immediate problem posed by North Korea, there is the longer term problem of nuclear security. We have to deal with this immediate problem first; we also have to look at the longer issues.

I would hope that the President would use the G8 as a vehicle for moving the whole world away from the danger of nuclear terrorism.
Last year, he persuaded the G8 to sign up to a truly exceptional declaration about cooperating and reducing the nuclear danger through an expanded, internationally funded, Nunn-Lugar Program with the commitment of billions of dollars. But, since then, there has been no follow-up, that is, the declaration has not been followed by money or action. The G8 declaration is a solid base for dealing with a nuclear danger. What is needed now is that political will and the political muscle to work from that base. We cannot solve this dangerous problem unilaterally but our leadership can rally the other nations to work with us to solve it.

Finally, we must understand that the threat of nuclear terrorism is qualitatively different from any other threat our nation faces. To successfully deal with it requires no less than a change of mindset.

As Einstein famously said shortly after Hiroshima, “Since the advent of the nuclear age, everything has changed except our modes of thinking and we thus drift toward unparalleled catastrophe”, Einstein, 1947.

As we work to avoid this catastrophe we should be guided by the wise words of Elie Wiesel, “Peace is not God’s gift to his children, peace is our gift to each other.” Thank you very much.