

“FEARFUL DILEMMA” CAN ONLY BE SOLVED BY CLOSE COOPERATION

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Almost 60 years ago, President Eisenhower called on scientists “to help solve the fearful atomic dilemma” by launching Atoms for Peace. Albeit reluctantly, the Soviets followed suit with their own Peaceful Atom program. American and Soviet scientists helped bring the benefits of the atom to millions of people around the world. But the fearful dilemma has only changed; it has not been solved. It can only be solved by close cooperation between Moscow and Washington.

Twenty-five years ago President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev directed their nuclear scientists to work together at each other’s nuclear test sites to develop verification techniques for the Threshold Test Ban Treaty. As much of a shock as it was for me (director of the Los Alamos National Laboratory at the time) to host Soviet scientists at the Nevada test site, this presidential directive not only facilitated ratification of the treaty, but it also allowed us to develop professional and personal relations that resulted in remarkable cooperation to reduce the nuclear dangers brought about by the chaos of the Soviet Union’s breakup.

At a recent Moscow conference, scientists from both countries reviewed the stunning accomplishments of that cooperation and lamented its dramatic decline during the past decade. Yet, our job is not done—we must focus more intensely on the common threats of nuclear terrorism and nuclear proliferation, deal with strategic stability issues in a new multipolar world, and, if nuclear power is to expand globally, cooperate on how it can be done safely and securely. We need presidential leadership in Moscow and Washington to overcome the political and bureaucratic obstacles that keep us from getting on with the job.

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