Welcome to Uncommon Knowledge. I'm Peter Robinson. A fellow at the Hoover Institution, former Secretary of State George Schultz has now joined former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, former Secretary of Defense William Perry, and former Senator Sam Nunn in directing the Nuclear Security Project. The aim of the Nuclear Security Project, to quote George Schultz and his fellow directors, quote, to galvanize global action ending nuclear weapons as a threat to the world. Secretary Schultz, welcome to Uncommon Knowledge. Nuclear Weapons, Then and Now, let me quote you, writing with Henry Kissinger and others in the Wall Street Journal late last year, nuclear weapons were essential to maintaining international security during the Cold War. But reliance on nuclear weapons is becoming increasingly hazardous and decreasingly effective. The world is now on the precipice of a new and dangerous nuclear era. Well, that's an arresting formulation. We've got to do something about nuclear weapons now, but back then, we needed them. What, draw the distinction for me, why were they all right, indeed necessary, during the Cold War but have become dangerous today.

During the Cold War, we had the Doctrine of Deterrence. And there were two countries, the Soviet Union and the United States and we both had massive nuclear forces. And if there were a nuclear exchange, everybody knew that it would wipe out both countries. And so, the notion was, that threat kept the peace. It was an uneasy situation. I think everybody was worried about it. And those of us who were involved, the people's names you read off, all would say there were more than enough close calls where things almost got out of control, but didn't. So that the rationale. President Reagan never subscribed to the Doctrine of Mutual Assured Destruction. He said it was immoral, that we keep the peace by being willing to wipe each other out. There's got to be a better way. And so, he advocated the elimination of nuclear weapons, publicly, right from the start. And so, he didn't agree with, I mean, he agreed with the concept of deterrence and that's what we were doing, but, he wanted to push things in a different direction.

Did you, back during the Cold War, Soviet Union, United States, and France and Britain had their own deterrence but they were so closely integrated, their military and intelligence structures with ours, that fundamentally, it's a balance between two super powers. I've Sid Drell, also your colleague in this Nuclear Security Project, say that during the Cuban Missile Crisis, he was genuinely worried that there might be a nuclear exchange but that that was really the only moment during all the Cold War when he felt things might genuinely get out of control. Would you agree with that? Or did you feel that there, you mentioned that there were more close calls. I have the feeling that you were aware of more than, perhaps, the general public was. Well, Bill Perry, if he were here, would tell you that when he was, before he was Secretary of Defense, when he was, I think, Under Secretary.

Yes.

He was awakened in the middle of the night by somebody who had warnings and was deciding they were not real but was worried. So, the problem is, you don't have much time.
Right.

And these weapons are on very short time spreads between when you get a warning and when you fire. Because, if you fire, the first strike hits, you're, among other things, trying to take out the other side's weaponry.

Right.

So you've got to fire it before they can take it out.

Before it lands, essentially, right?

So you're sitting there and you've got about thirty minutes and is this threat real or isn't it real and all kinds of things can constitute threats.

So that when you say the nuclear deterrent worked during the Cold War, but that it was uneasy, heavy emphasis on uneasy.

It was uneasy; it worked. So be it. However, this situation now is rather different. In the first place, there are more and it looks like maybe increasing numbers of countries that have nuclear weapons. It's interesting that as Iran's program is going along now, Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, Egypt, Jordan all want a nuclear power plant and willing to agree that they want to produce nuclear power. But it's also the case that if you can enrich the uranium to use in a nuclear power plant, you can enrich it to weapon's grade. And when the fuel is spent, the spent fuel can be reprocessed into plutonium and physicists tell us that it's harder to make a bomb out of plutonium but we have to remember that the Nagasaki bomb was a plutonium bomb, so it's not impossible.

Right.

And then you have the problem of terrorists who are trying to get a hold of a nuclear weapon or fissile material to make one out of. And there's a lot of fissile material around the world. So, I think, and my colleagues think, that we should take a deep breath and say, we're on the wrong track. The non-proliferation regime is kind of unraveling and we've got to get it back together. And the way to do it is to put an objective up there of having the world free of nuclear weapons.

Right.

And once you've done that, you are impelled to ask yourself, what would it take to get there? What kind of steps, if you're a serious person that wants to preserve security as you go along and so on, what are the steps you would take and what has to come first and what second, what can be consecutive, and so on.
A quarter of a century after the Cold War ended, the United States still deploys some six thousand nuclear weapons and stockpiles another four thousand. Does that strike you as appropriate given the circumstances? A sheer inertial hangover from the conflict we were fighting twenty-five years ago? How do you begin with the United States itself? If you want to live in a world free of nuclear weapons, what do you say to Americans?

Well, in the first place, I think your six thousand number's a little high.

Is it?

But.

You've been at work on this for a year so maybe it's come down.

It's well in the thousands.

Yes, it is.

So, if a modern nuclear weapon is exploded over Manhattan Island, it incinerates Manhattan Island. That's how powerful these things are.

A single warhead.

A single warhead. So what's gonna happen with two thousand warheads? What conceivable use do you have? Henry Kissinger said something very poignant on this when he and Sam Nunn and I were having a little program in Washington, DC about a year ago. And he said, the thing that gnawed at me the most when I was in office was what would I say if the President ever asked me my advise on whether to use a nuclear weapon, knowing that hundreds of thousands of people are gonna be killed? And if you have a nuclear exchange, it's way up in the millions. So, a terrorist wants to get one of these bombs to use it, not to deter.

Right.

So we have a problem.

Should the United States move first by eliminating half its arsenal, two-thirds of its arsenal? Should we begin building down right now? Should there be some unilateral component to the American effort in pursuing this goal of eliminating nuclear weapons?

I'm not a big proponent of the unilateral disarmament and I think that what we should aspire to is to put this goal forward to other countries and develop an international consensus that this is where we should go. Then, of course, between Russia and the United States, we have over 90% of the nuclear weapons in existence. So, obviously, we're gonna have to do a lot right at the beginning.
'Can you, I'm still, even if that number is high as six thousand, I'm brilliant researcher, I just Goggled around on nuclear weapons plus the United States and I come up with that we have some, whatever it is, it's thousands.

>> We have thousands.

>> But if you were making, explain to me as a layman, I am talking to George Schultz who has spent his career being tough on every threat to the United States that the United States ever faced, who is as hardheaded a diplomat as we have ever had in American history, and he is sitting across the table from me, saying in effect, I can't imagine why we still have thousands of these nuclear weapons. What is the, is it just because they're in stock piles and nobody's gotten around to unscrewing, what is the argument? There must be some rationale for these things as they exist right now.

>> Well, people are still stuck in the old concept of deterrents.

>> All right.

>> But I don't know what we're gonna, I can't imagine any dispute with Russia. We're gonna use nuclear weapons because we're mad about and disagree with them about Kosovo?

>> No.

>> No. Are we gonna use nuclear weapons because we're having an argument about the deployment of our strategic defense in Poland? No. We're not, there isn't any dispute that you can imagine. Not that there aren't hard issues to argue with them about, but, is there anything that justifies the use of a nuclear weapon? There isn't.

>> Now, if you're Vladimir Putin or this new, Putin is now Prime Minister and this new man whose name I can almost pronounce.

>> Medvedev.

>> You're better than I am. You know, you should think about diplomacy. Could be good for you, could work out. They've got thousands of them, too. It's much harder for me to find a good number for Russia but they have thousands. Can't, why should it be a hard deal to get together and say, look, by five years from now, we're both gonna take it down to one thousand apiece. We don't even know, we're not even quite sure why we need a thousand apiece but we know we don't need more than that. Why should that be hard for the United States and Russia to get together and just get started?

>> There's all kinds of things that we should be doing right now. And in the essay we wrote in the Wall Street Journal.

>> Yes.
We have, we list them and say we ought to get going on these things. For example, there is the Treaty on Strategic Arms Reductions.

Right.

That expires in December, 2009. That treaty has in it the best verification provisions of any treaty on this subject that's ever been negotiated. And we've now had some ten years or so of experience in administering those provisions so we've learned a lot about verification.

Which is bilateral between us and the Russians at this point?

Right, exactly. So, to let that expire and lose all of that, that would be insane. We should be re-negotiating that and in Moscow, 2002, there was an agreement to reduce further, include those reductions and get going on this, absolutely.

Special case, North Korea carried out a successful nuclear test in October, 2006. It is now unambiguous that North Korea possesses some, at least single digit number of nuclear weapons. We've been talk, so far, about moving toward the goal of eliminating nuclear weapons in the world through good will and talking to diplomats and so forth.

Not through good will.

No?

No, not through good will.

Should we get tough on North Korea?

Through being sensible about the threat from these weapons and about the problem of them getting out of control and adopting a tough, hardheaded program to do something about it. And when you do that, then when you address the North Korean and Iranian type problems, it's not that they're going to suddenly see the light.

Right.

Because of this. It's just that if we're really serious in going on this, then the other countries will put immense pressure on them not to wind up being a country with nuclear weapons.

so the way, again, what I'm digging at here is for some evaluation of how you think we've handled matters in North Korea under the current administration with an eye to what the successor to George W. Bush, perhaps out to do. But is it correct in your judgment that at least the impulse of the Bush administration, which was to get the Chinese to lean on the North Koreans, in concert, bring in the Japanese, there were, what was it, six countries at those talks. That impulse was correct. The right way to address
North Korea was by getting other countries to see that they shared our interests and lean on them, lean on the North Koreans. That correct or should we have engaged in war?

>> No, absolutely. The countries that have the most stroke with North Korea are China that has a big trading relationship with them, and Japan.

>> Right.

>> So, they're the countries that have the key, they have the screws they can turn if they want to turn them. So, you get them involved in your program. Now you say to China, what'll happen if North Korea winds up with a nuclear weapon on the end of a ballistic missile? They've already fired ballistic missiles across Japan. Don't you think Japan is likely to say –

>> We want missiles.

>> We're not going to sit still for this. And Japan could have a nuclear weapon on a ballistic missile like lightning. They have the know-how, they have the capability of doing it, and they could do it. So, then you say to China, is that what you really want, a re-armed Japan with nuclear weapons? So, you've got to head that off by being tough with North Korea.

>> How much patience should an administration have presumably something like the conversations that you're suggesting ought to take place, have taken place, but as far as we know, China hasn't, you know more about this than I do. Has China leaned on North Korea as much as we'd like? If not, how do we, how do we make things, is this the kind of problem you work for years? Or do you want results within some more, with months? How do you measure this stuff?

>> Well, you want results right away but you, if you're a realist, you recognize that it's gonna take a while. And you have to be patient with it. Kim Jong Il has practically an unbroken record of breaking his promises so you know that promises are not worth very much. It's actions that you want. There have been some actions taken that are positive. The big reactor that they had that was producing plutonium has been shut down now and that's done, it's shut down. But there's still plenty of issues left and we still work at it and we should keep the pressure on.

>> If you could, whoever the next President is, if you could give a sentence or two of advise regarding North Korea to him or her, what would you say? Keep working it or?

>> Oh, yeah. Keep working it but give consideration to changing the environment within which you're working by talking to the other countries that have nuclear weapons and persuading people that we'd all be better off if we could get rid of them.

>> All right.
And if we start down that road, then the pressures that go on countries that are trying to get them, or maybe have one or two, become immense.

Iran, Iran, I want to close out Iran here. Vice President Dick Cheney, quote, we will not allow Iran to have a nuclear weapon, close quote, flat statement. Retired Army General John Abizaid, former Commander-in-Chief of the Central Command, quote, there are ways to live with a nuclear Iran. Let's face it, we lived with a nuclear Soviet Union, we've lived with a nuclear China, and we're living with other nuclear powers as well. Is a nuclear, I don't mean nuclear energy, an Iran with nuclear weapons flatly unacceptable?

I would think it so. And yet, when you are the Vice President or the Secretary of State or somebody, I think you have to be very careful with your words, because if you say something is not acceptable, that means you're not gonna accept it.

Right.

So what are you gonna do?

Don't let the world see that you are bluffing, in other words.

There's nothing worse than empty threats. I remember to this day when I entered the United States Marine Corp in World War II. When you enlist, you don't become a Marine, you become a boot and you go to boot camp for about ten weeks and you get kicked around. And I remember when the Sergeant gave me my rifle and he said, take good care of this rifle. This is your best friend. And remember one thing, never point this rifle at anybody unless you're willing to pull the trigger. So no empty threats.

We've talked about good nations, the United States, bad nations, North Korea and Iran and Iraq, non-nations, terrorists. After September 11th, 2001, I think it's fair to say that among people active in politics, people in the know in foreign policy, and people who are close to intelligence, it was taken for granted that the United States would suffer another attack within some period of months, or perhaps, a couple of years. We haven't. Why not?

Well, I think we have proven to be a tough target. We've done a lot of things. People point to things in addition that we, perhaps, should have done, but anyway, we've done a lot of things. And I'm completely uninformed about this but I know from when I was in office and I did know what was going on, that my guess is that there were lots of terrorist threats that didn't happen because we found out about them and we stopped them. And you tend to do that quietly so that you don't tip off people to how it is that you found out. But anyway, I think that probably a lot was stopped. And the same is true in London. There were some that got through in London, but, from what I've read, the British authorities stopped a great many by finding out about them and taking preventative action. You've got to be willing to use preventative action, preventative force, sometimes.
Now, you've thought a lot about these problems. It strikes me there's an inherently a difficult political problem in the kind of action that you've just described. Based on your experience, you feel confident that we have snuffed out or caught or prevented some large number of potential attacks. But you have to keep quiet about it. How can an administration, the Bush administration, or again, any successor, sustain political support for activity about which the public must be kept in the dark? The current president's political problem, he'll be leaving office in less than a year, nevertheless, he has the problem that it's difficult for him to take certain actions because his public support is so low, but isn't it likely to be the case that the public would feel quite a lot of gratitude and give him more support than it does now if only they knew what they cannot know? How do you work that problem?

I don't see any problem with saying there are lots of threats that we have discovered and we've managed by taking preventive action to stop them from happening. But you don't want to talk about particulars and how we found out about this or that and precisely what it was and what we did and so on because that is giving away things to your adversary.

Do you, the terrorist threat, fissile material, the best way of addressing that problem is by talking to other countries. That's, we return now to your earlier point about the need to make common cause with other nations to address the nuclear threat. Is that correct? Or are, or do, or can we, do we have unilateral capacity?

We don't have unilateral capacity. This has got to be done on a multinational basis. And you mentioned fissile material.

Yes.

We need to negotiate a fissile material cutoff treaty and get other people to agree that nobody's gonna produce fissile material. And we need to get a hold of the, make a huge effort to get a hold of the fissile material that's lying around. There's fissile material in some forty countries, much of it –

Didn't realize that.

Is in research reactors and I'm told by, I couldn't say this myself out of my own knowledge but my friends who are physicists say they don't need weapons grade material to do the kind of experimentation that they do so we want to get that out of there and replace it with a lower grade of enriched uranium. And there're all kinds of things like that should be done.
You and Henry Kissinger and Sam Nunn and Bill Perry and others are working on this Nuclear Security Project. You mentioned that you just returned from Oslo where there was a conference at which twenty-nine countries sent representatives. Are you working in any way with the United Nations? Do you consider the UN simply to bureaucratic to take up this cause? What would, in other words, we've just talked about the need for concerted international action, one would think the UN would be a likely locus for that kind of effort. On the other hand, the UN isn't easy to deal with, perhaps.

Well, Mister Duarte, a very able man, a Brazilian who is the UN's chief person for this subject was at our conference at the Hoover Institution last October and he was at the Oslo meeting and I think once the powers that have nuclear weapons were to get going on something, it no doubt would benefit by being part of a UN process. And Duarte is a very capable, sensible person so I'd have a lot of confidence in him. You also might say, I think the new Secretary General of the UN gives me good feeling.

Good. You're supporting, I believe this is public, you're supporting John McCain for President.

Yes.

All right. Ought not John McCain to call during the campaign for an international conference to address these matters and, in particular, for the United States and Russia to reduce their arsenals by some large proportion, isn't this a moment when a dramatic gesture by a candidate who's credentials on national security are beyond question to get this, to get the world paying attention? Good idea?

Not necessarily.

I thought I had one for you there. No?

Remember that what we're doing is being supported by a great many, like two-thirds or so, of the former secretaries of State.

Of both parties.

And Defense and National Security advisors of both parties.

I see.

And people keep asking us, or saying to us, isn't this a nice thing that it's bi-partisan? Perry and Nunn are Democrats; Kissinger and I are Republicans, and we all say, it's not bi-partisan. It's non-partisan. And this is a subject of such importance that it shouldn't be dragged into the partisan divide. It ought to be considered on its merits. There's plenty to argue about. Let's just argue it just on the merits and not drag it into partisan politics. So my hope is that the candidates might say that they have some respect for us and if elected President, I'll listen to these guys and we'll see where we go from there.
All right. A couple of last questions. These are open-ended, these are to see what else might be on the mind of George Schultz. Filmmaker Ridley Scott has announced that he intends to shot a movie about the 1986 Reykjavik Summit. Had you heard that? Ridley Scott is a big time Hollywood producer and he has, this is from the Hollywood, from Variety, it's either from the Hollywood Reporter or Variety. I can't remember where I saw it. I hope you're impressed by the width, by the breadth of my reading here, quote Ridley Scott, these are fascinating historical characters, larger than life figures, but I want to show who they were and why they did what they did. Their actions helped shape history, paving the way for the end of the Cold War, close quote. Reykjavik 1986, of course, is where Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev came this close to agreements that would substantially have eliminated nuclear weapons. Here's the question, the biggest audience for movies these days is young people. Kids are not gonna remember 1986 and Reykjavik, what should Ridley Scott take special care to get right?

Well, the record of Reykjavik is open. The note takers –

Yes.

We had note takers on each side taking notes. Those notes have been published and so, nobody has to speculate about what was said. And in the press conferences afterwards, I know, I gave the one for the U.S. and I asked President Reagan as we were riding back in the car what I should say and he said, just say what happened. Don't hold anything back. So there are no leaks from Reykjavik. It's all out there. And I do think that that was something of a turning point. And since that time, the number of nuclear weapons in the U.S. and Soviet, or now Russian, arsenals have been reduced dramatically. And Ukraine and Kazakhstan are two countries that had nuclear weapons and they don't have them any more. They're zero. So, Reykjavik did achieve a lot and, but we have a long ways to go.

Another open-ended question here. During the Second World War, you served in the United States Marine Corp. During the Cold War, you served as Director of the Office of Management and Budget, Secretary of Labor, Secretary of the Treasury, and Secretary of State. You and I now live in Northern California where everything is beautiful, where life if affluent, what would you say to these very bright kids here at Stanford University and at other institutions across the country to convey to them that the world is dangerous, that threats, that there is a reality to threats to this country? How do you convey to kids a sense of what is now, what you saw with your own eyes, but what is now history?

I think you said it all, that you are very special people. You're here at one of the best universities in the world. You're getting a fabulous exposure to opportunities for learning. And with those opportunities come responsibilities. And you have to be willing to undertake some public service and help grapple with these problems. Furthermore, when people say to me, you did all this public service and we're grateful to you for all those sacrifices, I say nonsense. Those were the high point years of my life. And it is a tremendous opportunity and a tremendous privilege to serve your country.
>> Last question, in Ridley Scott's movie, who plays George Schultz?

>> Why don't you take a crack at it?

>> I think we'll leave it to Tom Cruise, how's that?

>> Okay.

>> Thank you very much.

>> Okay.

>> I'm Peter Robinson at the Hoover Institution for Uncommon Knowledge, thanks for joining us.