

# BUILDING POLITICAL WILL

## Branding the Nuclear-Free-World Movement

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*This article explores the value of effective brand messaging to achieve public policy goals. Policy makers and advocacy organizations working toward a nuclear-free world need to become more effective communicators with the general public if they wish to build broad-based political support. Effective communication includes: a specific long-range goal, an urgent time schedule, a plan to marshal time and resources, and the ability to communicate the goal in simple language. With a unique brand name and tagline for a specific nuclear-free-world proposal, policy makers and advocacy groups can better facilitate communication between citizens and their elected representatives. Well-executed branding also serves to: simplify a complex issue, influence public opinion, be memorable and emotionally appealing, and help unify diverse groups around a common platform. By developing a common language between policy makers, politicians, and the general public, a complex and seemingly insurmountable issue can be transformed into a coherent and achievable platform.*

**KEYWORDS:** Nuclear weapons; nuclear disarmament; arms control; public opinion; Reykjavik summit; United States; Russia

On an exceptionally warm May evening in 1961, a youthful and newly elected President John F. Kennedy stood before Congress and the nation to deliver a special message on the urgent needs of the nation. Late in this speech, he began a critique of the fledgling U.S. space exploration program:

I believe we have all the resources and talents necessary. But the facts of the matter are that we have never made the national decisions or marshaled the national resources required for [space] leadership. *We have never specified long-range goals on an urgent time schedule, or managed our resources and our time so as to insure their fulfillment.*<sup>1</sup> [Emphasis added.]

He was preparing Congress and the nation for one of the boldest initiatives ever proposed when a few sentences later he announced: "First, I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth."<sup>2</sup>

In one clear declarative sentence, Kennedy answered his own earlier critique. He stated an ambitious, almost outlandish goal, in common but very visual language, and he assigned a firm date for its achievement. Neil Armstrong set foot on the moon on July 20, 1969, less than six months shy of the end of the decade.

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Now imagine Kennedy delivering the same message but with this alternative wording: "First, I have commissioned a team of top American Astronomical Society scientists under the auspices of NASA, who have reported back that sometime in the future there is an opportunity for putting an astronaut on the moon and returning him safely to earth."

What is the chance that Kennedy's now famous "Man on the Moon" speech would have achieved the same result? In the realm of the Nuclear-Free-World Movement, which of these two versions comes closest to capturing the prevailing language?<sup>3</sup>

In the moments leading up to one of the boldest challenges ever attempted, Kennedy not only demonstrated the qualities required for bold leadership, but he also described what was necessary for action-inspiring messaging: "We have never specified long-range goals on an urgent time schedule, or managed our resources and our time so as to insure their fulfillment." This critique of a lagging space program from almost fifty years ago can serve as a guidepost for the Nuclear-Free-World Movement today.

### **The Importance of Messaging**

Time and time again we hear statesmen and policy experts exhort on the need for citizen action to create the political will to make a nuclear-free world happen. Critical building blocks toward a nuclear-free world, such as the U.S. Senate ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, are not getting implemented not because they lack popular support but because they lack sufficient citizen-to-legislature pressure to gain the critical mass that would sway a legislator's position.<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately, these same statesmen and policy experts, while exhorting citizens to action, do not make it easy to do so. Typical discussions, statements, papers, and editorials on nuclear disarmament often digress into a ten- or twelve-step acronym-laced explanation that is beyond the comprehension of anyone who is not already an expert or who has not invested hours of time to understand the issues. Whenever it is difficult to understand a complex position, it is less likely that concerned citizens will choose to contact their elected representatives (or become concerned in the first place). A solid understanding of a topic boosts both confidence and conviction.

### *Advocates and the Cacophony of Opinion*

If statesmen and nuclear policy experts are the premiere promulgators of policy confusion on nuclear-free issues, close behind is the cacophony of opinion generated by advocacy and issues-oriented nongovernmental organizations. A directory search under nuclear disarmament groups showed twenty-five different organizations listed by Yahoo and twenty-nine listed by Google.<sup>5</sup> When one includes broader peace organizations, which are also frequently involved in generating opinion on nuclear-free issues, the number rises to 659 organizations listed in the Yahoo directory.

If each of these organizations has a different platform or nuanced opinion on the goals or methods for best achieving a nuclear-free world, the potential for confusion for both citizens and their representatives is multiplied. For example, several advocacy organizations take both an antinuclear weapon and an antinuclear energy position. However, many policy experts and disarmament leaders, such as Sergio Duarte, the UN high representative on disarmament affairs, maintain that the world's single-most important treaty on nuclear weapons, the 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), gives all nations an inalienable right to peaceful nuclear energy.<sup>6</sup> The call by advocacy organizations to ban both nuclear energy and nuclear weapons can be read by others as incompatible with the higher-priority goals of nuclear nonproliferation and nuclear disarmament.

The inconsistencies between many advocacy and policy organizations—both in the substance and in the nuances of their messaging—make it challenging for citizens to determine the correct course without undertaking considerable research. Conflicting or inconsistent messages will therefore limit the number of people with the time or energy to get involved. Imagine also the poor legislative assistant, needing to stay abreast of scores of subjects, trying to distinguish between each group's competing twelve-point platforms for creating a nuclear-free world, notwithstanding the direct connection between nuclear energy and nuclear weapons.<sup>7</sup>

Experienced Capitol Hill staffers Lorelei Kelly and Elizabeth Turpen provide firsthand insight into the importance of messaging and of framing issues in their guide, *Policy Matters: Educating Congress on Peace and Security*.<sup>8</sup> As they put it, "What is missing, in many cases, is sufficient organization within the peace and security community to make sure the word gets out in a coherent and compelling way."<sup>9</sup>

The lesson about messaging from Kennedy's "Man on the Moon" speech is not new. Whether in government, business, sports, or politics, an effective message is critical for successful management and goal achievement. Recently, modern marketers and researchers have begun studying and quantifying the critical elements of action-inspiring messaging using a variety of new methods. Several of these researchers have written books on the subject that have influenced much of what this essay will present later. These works include Frank Luntz's *Words That Work: It's Not What You Say, It's What People Hear*, Chip and Dan Heaths' *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Die and Others Survive*, and Drew Westen's *The Political Brain: The Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation*.<sup>10</sup>

If the statesmen and policy experts are right, and the difference between success and failure of achieving a nuclear-free world comes down to creating sufficient political will, then the Nuclear-Free World Movement's messaging must improve. Both the experts and the advocates must reach common ground and follow the advice outlined in Kennedy's address. These steps include: specify a long range goal; include an urgent time schedule; have a plan to marshal time and resources to insure their fulfillment; and—implicit by example in Kennedy's speech, I would add a fourth essential element—communicate the goal in simple language.

### Branding as a Communication Shortcut

The word “brand” is most often associated with marketing, which in reputational hierarchy often ends up being ranked near or slightly below the legal profession. The use of “brand” has been broadened in recent years to go beyond its sales- and product-oriented etymology. Luntz and Westen recognize the political and public policy world is often dominated by the more effective brands. Luntz played a pivotal strategy role in developing and testing the Republican Party’s 1994 “Contract with America.” One of the planks in the Contract with America platform was the elimination of the estate tax. Sufficient popular support for this goal—which would ultimately benefit only 2 percent of the population—was garnered largely by changing the tax name or “brand name” from estate tax to death tax.<sup>11</sup> Luntz found through testing that a death tax was perceived by a larger percentage of voters to be inherently unfair. The brand of the death tax carried an emotional weight that could help change positions on the issue.

While the association of the word “brand” with politics is recent, the use of brand names in politics and public policy is not a new phenomenon. Think of Teddy Roosevelt and the Rough Riders, or Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the New Deal. The New Deal is probably the best example of effectively combining brand with public policy from the last century. The name itself promised hope for a generation of Americans who probably felt that they had been on the receiving end of an economic raw deal.

In public policy, branding serves several critical functions. First, branding a specific proposal simplifies the discussion of complex topics. How many, and what were the key elements, embedded in the Contract with America? What about President George W. Bush’s signature No Child Left Behind law? Creating and branding a specific proposal allows you to focus on the forest, not the trees. Are you for or against the English walnut tree? Does it matter if you know that you are in favor of the forest? Branding serves as the written and verbal shortcut for complex issues.

The policy brand Kennedy proposed in his speech became known as “Man on the Moon.” The public could be for or against this, without having to take subsequent positions on whether or not the United States should use nuclear-powered or rocket fuel-powered boosters. Today in the nuclear-free-world debate, there are no distinctively named or well-defined competing policy brands, and no dominant brand has yet emerged that can serve as a rallying cry for the casually informed but concerned citizen. There are far too many, and far too detailed, twelve- and thirteen-point policy positions on the subject, most of which do not even bother to carry a memorable or distinctive policy title. (See Table 1.)

The second function a policy brand serves is to subtly or not so subtly influence public opinion. This is what Luntz and others have learned, taken to new methodological heights, and practiced brilliantly.<sup>12</sup> What politician wants to go on public record voting against the No Child Left Behind Act, or the Flag Desecration Amendment? How many U.S. legislators, in the weeks after September 11, 2001, were consciously or unconsciously influenced by the title of the USA Patriot Act (formally known as the **U**niting and **S**trengthening **A**merica by **P**roviding **A**ppropriate **T**ools **R**equired to **I**ntercept and

**TABLE 1**  
Major advocacy groups and their positions.

<b>Nuclear-free advocacy groups</b>						
	Campaign for a Nuclear Weapons Free World	Nuclear Age Peace Foundation	Friends Committee on National Legislation	International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War	Mayors for Peace	FAS, NRDC, UCS
<b>Group background</b>						
	Consortium of 46 nonprofits; funded by Ploughshares	California-based peace organization; WagingPeace.org	Quaker-based, social issues policy lobby	Global physicians group; U.S. affiliate is Physicians for Social Responsibility	Works with Abolition 2000	Science-based orgs with common platform
<b>Policy positions*/campaign title (the brand)</b>						
	Campaign for a Nuclear Weapons-Free World	U.S. Leadership for a Nuclear Weapons-Free World	Policies for a World Free of Nuclear Weapons	"ican" International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons	Vision 2020 Campaign	Towards True Security
Global elimination of nuclear weapons	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Urgent time schedule for global elimination?	-	-	-	-	YES (2020)	-
<b>SECURE</b>						
Remove all weapons from hair-trigger alert status	-	YES	YES	YES	-	YES
Adopt a no-first-use policy	-	YES	YES	YES	-	YES
End all new nuclear weapons development	YES	YES	YES	YES	-	YES
Restrict nuclear fuel production to multi-national facilities	YES	YES	YES	YES	-	-
Reduce nuclear terrorism risk with global security funding	YES	-	YES	-	-	-
<b>VERIFY</b>						
Complete global monitoring system for nuclear testing	-	-	-	YES	-	-
Implement full ban on nuclear weapons testing	YES	YES	YES	YES	-	YES
Extend additional verification protocols, on-site inspections	-	-	-	YES	-	-
<b>REDUCE</b>						
Eliminate all remaining tactical nuclear warheads	-	-	YES	-	-	YES
Cap deployed warheads for the U.S. and Russia at < 2,200; complete Moscow Treaty reductions by 2012	-	-	-	-	-	-
500 per country cap on nuclear warheads by 2015	-	-	-	-	-	-
Further staged weapons reductions until elimination	YES	YES	-	YES	-	YES

\*The absence of a position in an advocacy group's platform does not mean the group opposes that position.

Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001)? Almost by definition, it was designed to make anyone who opposed it or voted against it, appear, and perhaps even feel, unpatriotic.

The third function of a public policy brand is to create a memorable and ideally lasting emotional impression. An example of this was the 1993 Handgun Violence Prevention Act, commonly known as the Brady Bill. Advocates for increased gun control laws joined with the family of White House press secretary James Brady after Brady's tragic brain injury during John Hinckley Jr.'s assassination attempt on President Ronald Reagan in 1981. Naming this bill after James Brady accomplished two goals. The bill was no longer generic, as it would have been if it were say, the Gun Control Act. And more importantly, it now carried significant emotional weight because it personalized the policy with the face and story of James Brady.

The final function of a public policy brand is that it provides common language across a wide range of groups. It allows an avenue for unity among a very diverse coalition of peace groups, religious organizations, nuclear-free policy groups, and our political representatives. Currently, each advocacy group and policy group has a slightly different and sometimes discordant message. Who is right? Who knows without spending hours diving into the details of each of their voluminous publications or websites? The Nuclear-Free-World Movement must learn to provide a simple, common, and shared brand language for framing the most pressing of issues—the security of our world.

### Building a Nuclear-Free-World Brand: An Example

What follows is an example to illustrate the value of the messaging theory I am proposing. This example is just that—a proposal. These concepts have not been vetted or tested, which is necessary to confirm a message's potential strength. Hopefully, the example will at least have enough appeal to illustrate the messaging concepts. As described above, effective public policies have a brand name that can: simplify a complex issue; influence public and legislative opinion; be memorable and emotionally appealing; and help unify diverse groups around a common platform.

Full brand example:

**“The Reykjavik Vision for a Nuclear-Free World”**

Common brand usage:

**“The Reykjavik Vision”**

A truly effective public policy brand name needs no additional explanation. The audience upon first hearing it knows if it rings true or not. In modern branding, this is usually confirmed by testing both a narrow but knowledgeable audience and a broader,

less informed audience. To influence public policy, both groups will eventually need to be persuaded.

The Reykjavik Vision for a Nuclear-Free World is specific, not generic. By associating the brand name with one of the most hopeful and promising nuclear disarmament events of our time (the 1986 superpower summit in Reykjavik, Iceland), a specific platform can be differentiated from the other platforms under discussion. (The full brand is too long, so in common usage, it would quickly become the Reykjavik Vision.) The full name also incorporates and describes positively and succinctly the long-range goal of creating a nuclear-free world. By embedding the goal or the mission of a policy into the brand name itself, there is less need to offer further explanation. The audience gets it immediately. Good examples of cause or policy branding with titles are the Nature Conservancy, Doctors Without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières), and the Right to Life movement.

### *Influence Opinion*

The United States has a history of making greater advancements in disarmament under presidents with solid conservative and strong defense credentials.<sup>13</sup> The NPT was signed into law by President Richard M. Nixon, who also announced support for the Biological Weapons Convention. Historically, many of the most significant U.S. treaty gains—the NPT, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START)—have been made by presidents with conservative track records. This has provided the assurance for many defense-minded representatives that they would not appear too soft or be voting to approve a measure that would weaken U.S. security. Branding the initiative using the memory of the Reykjavik summit also invokes Ronald Reagan's legacy, which could help encourage conservatives to support the initiative. A proposal like the one described in this article, representing the fulfillment of Reagan's vision and addressing his lifelong concern, may receive more enthusiastic Republican support.<sup>14</sup>

If the policy brand had only to appeal to a U.S. constituency, then "The Reagan Vision for a Nuclear-Free World" would be better for its brevity, familiarity, and ease of pronunciation and spelling. But one of the larger challenges for branding a nuclear-free-world policy is that it needs to work globally. A brand name especially must work in both the United States and Russia, who together possess more than 95 percent of the world's nuclear weapons. Both nations have an influential constituency that strongly opposes relinquishing nuclear weapons any time soon. Since the United States and Russia are also closely associated with the first high-level discussions of the possible total elimination of nuclear weapons begun at Reykjavik, the Reykjavik name helps emphasize that both nations are once again leading the nuclear-free initiative. It also may help assure the populations of each country that they are not adopting a policy originated and promoted by a global competitor and that it is truly a joint effort. Since both nations will be making simultaneous concessions, this will also set the example for the rest of the world to follow.

*Memorable and Emotional*

The Reykjavik Vision for a Nuclear-Free World brand name is distinctive enough from other policy proposals to be memorable. Many of the current policy positions or brands can be confused or forgotten because they are too generic, as for example, "Policies for a World Free of Nuclear Weapons."<sup>15</sup> While descriptive of the final goal, the generic and similar nature of these brands prevents "stickiness" or mnemonic attachment.<sup>16</sup> The emotional aspects of the Reykjavik naming could be further heightened by asking Nancy Reagan and former Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev to announce their support for the initiative together. Reagan's legacy has always been strong among Republicans, and as time has passed, his reputation among some Democrats has improved as well.

Finally, the word "vision" implies the ability to see a more hopeful future. Reagan was able to articulate his vision for a better world more effectively than any president in recent memory. His oft-repeated reference to the United States as "a shining city on a hill" was a wonderful use of concrete imagery for hope.<sup>17</sup> Optimism and the promise of a better future has always been a winning combination in political campaigns, as it appeals to inner hopes and dreams.

*Help Unify Diverse Groups*

Evoking the Reagan legacy could help a nuclear-free-world policy gain widespread bipartisan support in the United States. We have witnessed the languishing of the ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) in the U.S. Senate for almost a decade. Therefore, both the brand and the specific positions within the brand must represent a centrist position. If either party were to perceive a far-right or far-left agenda, it would make broad support impossible. As Luntz notes, "The broad mass of Americans really does reside in the center and is wary of colorful ideologies of all flavors. They are stubbornly centrist even as politics becomes more polarized than ever before."<sup>18</sup>

The achievement of a nuclear-free world must be actively supported by a large majority of both U.S. and Russian citizens. The Reykjavik Vision should be neither left nor right of center; just as it should be neither a predominantly U.S. nor Russian initiative. It should take the middle, global road. Additional support for this initiative could be generated by multidominational churches from around the country and world. Reagan had solid support among many evangelical church groups; imagine the tremendous power of the nuclear-free-world voice if both evangelical and progressive churches were to get actively behind the same well-branded policy.<sup>19</sup>

**Goal Setting Requires a Firm Date**

There is a world of difference between Kennedy's original "before this decade is out" and my clumsy rewording of it to "sometime in the future." It is the gulf between change and status quo, the distance between success and failure. Unfortunately, with few exceptions,

the nuclear-free movement, policy advisors, and advocacy groups have tacitly accepted the “sometime in the future” time schedule. Which is to say, they have accepted that there is no specific time schedule. (This is not a new phenomenon. Article VI of the NPT famously states, “Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a Treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.”) As Kennedy knew in 1961, and as any change leader knows today, a goal with neither a timeline nor a plan is not a goal but a wish. If there is no firm time schedule for creating a nuclear-free world, then inertia with all of its tremendous risks is the *de facto* victor.

Positions warning against changes to legacy U.S. nuclear weapons policies, made with the best intentions, are reminiscent of the sentiments that Martin Luther King Jr. battled routinely in leading the struggle for change in U.S. civil rights policies. During the tumultuous events in Birmingham, Alabama, he was often cautioned by friends and supporters to wait for “a more convenient season.”<sup>20</sup> In his extemporaneous and forceful “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” he wrote that when change is needed urgently, time becomes an ally for the forces of stagnation.<sup>21</sup>

We are today, in America and around the world, in the bloom of the most convenient season for eliminating nuclear weapons. It is the brightest and most hopeful bloom we have experienced since the end of World War II. Yet now, nearly two decades following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and with it, the rationale for maintaining thousands of ready-to-launch nuclear weapons, how have we used this gift of time? In Kennedy’s terms, how have we managed our time and marshaled our resources?

The other unlikely time schedule proposed by some advocates is to ask the nuclear weapon states to immediately give up their arsenals. This position underestimates the real power of fifty years of nuclear inertia. Nuclear weapon states, and their citizens, understand that rapid change is sometimes destabilizing, and gradual change can be preferable to rapid policy shifts.<sup>22</sup> There are many details and legitimate concerns around the execution of a global disarmament program that must be studied, understood, and resolved. The time schedule must be within the realm of the credible—on both ends of the spectrum—to be meaningful.

### **Putting a Stake in the Ground**

During one of the most hopeful moments at the 1986 Reykjavik summit, Reagan, who fully understood the power of imagery, memorably described how he and Gorbachev would return to Reykjavik ten years later so they could personally disarm the world’s last nuclear warheads.<sup>23</sup> While this original opportunity is now long lost, the vision Reagan described could still be played out by each nation’s leader in 2021 for the entire world to witness. The stark and picturesque Hofdi House would once again hold the attention of a breathless world. Few would find fault in the delay. Imagine: “The Reykjavik Vision calls for creating a Nuclear-Free World on the 35th Anniversary of the Reykjavik Summit—October 11, 2021.”

The year 2021 is far enough out for the nuclear weapon powers to execute a systematic, step-by-step nuclear weapons reduction plan. This date also carries with it the emotional reminder of the tremendous hope that was once within our grasp for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. After October 11, 2021, this date would become not the memory of an opportunity lost, but the day the world celebrates the human potential and capacity for world peace.

By setting a firm date, and describing a very specific event that would occur on this date, we begin to paint a mental image of this dramatic and momentous event. The simple visual imagery—putting a man on the moon, the simultaneous disarmament of the world’s last warheads at the Hofdi House—allows us to see what success looks like in the most tangible of ways. This type of mental imagery could help everyone work through the problems, doubts, and disappointments that are bound to occur along the difficult path of executing the plan for a nuclear-free world.

Another alternative date to consider if another nuclear-free brand were selected, would be August 6, 2020—the seventy-fifth anniversary of the first use of a nuclear weapon in a war. At 8:15 a.m., on the morning of August 6, the last remaining nuclear warheads around the world could be simultaneously and publicly disarmed. This date carries the emotional reminder of the tremendous and tragic human cost of nuclear war. It provides a fateful image that should never befall another generation.

### **Goal Achievement Requires a Plan and Resources**

In his “Man on the Moon” speech, Kennedy laid out both the goal and the timeline in a single sentence. He then took several more minutes to add substance on how this goal would be achieved. He outlined key budget expenditures that would be needed and specific actions that would need to occur, some of which came to fruition and others that did not. This minimal detail and substance adds to the credibility of the goal, though in truth, the moon mission had numerous doubters all the way up until the day Neil Armstrong proved them wrong. Any ambitious program will have its naysayers. Their voices can be minimized and their negativity diminished by providing concrete actions that lead step-by-step to the final goal.

Without access to the resources of the wealthiest nation on the planet, the Nuclear-Free-World Movement must resort to other methods to communicate these concrete transitional steps. One low-cost method businesses and nonprofits have adopted is to use a tagline to further describe the brand and its mission. A well-crafted tagline begins educating the reader or listener on details of the public policy message. Some examples of effective descriptive taglines used by successful nonprofits are:

- Red Cross: Together We Can Save a Life
- Doctors Without Borders: Providing Medical Relief Worldwide
- March of Dimes: Saving Babies, Together

Each of these well-designed taglines adds another layer of depth to the message. These taglines reinforce the mission of the organization. They serve as a reminder both to

the members and supporters of the organizations, and to the outside world, of what they do and why the organization exists.

In our example, the Reykjavik Vision for a Nuclear-Free World already states the public policy objective or final outcome—to create a “Nuclear-Free World.” Still unknown is the plan to achieve this ambitious goal. This information can be supplied with a tagline that is then used in every communication by groups that support this policy position. Ideally, the tagline is used every time the brand is used in print.

Full brand with tagline example:

## **The Reykjavik Vision for a Nuclear-Free World**

**Secure. Verify. Reduce.**

Common brand usage with tagline example:

## **The Reykjavik Vision**

**Secure. Verify. Reduce.**

These three tagline verbs describe the broad subcategory of actions that nations need to execute to create a nuclear-free world. Very few people, perhaps even the staffers that write them, can reliably recall all the elements of a ten- or twelve-point policy plan. But by grouping the policy elements into broader subcategories, and also placing these steps in the approximate order of their execution, we begin to lay out the narrative of a realistic, effective, and memorable policy strategy.

### **The Policy Positioning Statement**

With the brand, date, and tagline in place, the groundwork has been laid for clear and effective communication for most situations. These pieces can now be assembled to build what is known to marketers as the “positioning statement,” to salespeople as the “elevator pitch,” and to the media as the “sound bite.” The positioning statement allows a very complex issue to be shared with others in the brief moment that we may have each other’s attention.

“The Reykjavik Vision for a Nuclear-Free World is a three-step plan to eliminate nuclear weapons by October 11, 2021. These steps include immediate improvements in global nuclear security, enhanced verification measures, and staged warhead reductions leading to the elimination of all nuclear weapons.”

This positioning statement contains most of what a majority of citizens may ever know about the Reykjavik Vision, and possibly enough information for them to take a position on the policy. As we proceed to develop the message, we will add another layer of depth and detail to the policy position, but at this next level, we are hiking among the trees. The positioning statement is the forest, and this is where a majority of the public discourse takes place. As Luntz wrote in *Words That Work*:

If labels are important in politics because they help us categorize and remember, sound bites are essential because they can actually change minds. Americans vote on short bursts of political communication that are typically seven to ten seconds in length. . . . Out of the thousands of voters we surveyed on election night 2000, not one of them had read both party platforms that year.

Successful, effective messages—words and language that have been presented in the proper context—all have something in common. They stick to our brains and never leave, like riding a bicycle or tying a shoelace. Not only do they communicate and educate, not only do they allow us to share ideas—they also move people to action. Words that work are catalysts. They spur us to get up off the couch, to leave the house, to *do something*.<sup>24</sup>

Chip and Dan Heath share Luntz's regard for the value of a simpler message. "It's hard to make ideas stick in a noisy, unpredictable, chaotic environment. If we're to succeed, the first step is this: Be simple. . . . What we mean by 'simple' is finding the core of the idea. 'Finding the core' means stripping an idea down to its most critical essence."<sup>25</sup> This does not mean the details are unimportant. Anyone who has followed nuclear disarmament negotiations knows that the details are vitally important and make or break most treaties. But there is a tendency in public communication for policy experts to hike immediately into the thick brush of the nuclear acronym jungle. The question is not if, but when will the nuclear expert recite Article VI of the NPT, CTBT, or START—or possibly weave several into the same paragraph?

If the nuclear policy experts and advocacy groups recognize that the missing ingredient for global nuclear disarmament is a lack of political will, then they must learn to be more effective communicators to the general public on the subject. They must create hierarchies of messaging that start broad—with a brand and tagline—and gradually add content and context, leading to the positioning statement. And depending on the audience and the media, that will often be enough. Some audiences will want and need that next layer of information, but it is the responsibility of the expert to help them sort and organize this more in-depth information.

The tagline, "Secure. Verify. Reduce," is proposed for several reasons. First, each word is a verb—calls to specific actions for nations, their representatives, and their agencies. They also serve to remind, reinforce, and rally the policy platform supporters as to what needs to be done to turn the Reykjavik Vision of a Nuclear-Free World into a reality.

## **The Reykjavik Vision for a Nuclear-Free World**

“The Reykjavik Vision for a Nuclear-Free World is a three-step plan to eliminate nuclear weapons by October 11, 2021. These steps include immediate improvements in global nuclear security, enhanced verification measures, and staged warhead reductions leading to the elimination of all nuclear weapons.”

### **SECURE—To immediately improve global nuclear security, all states agree to:**

- Remove all existing nuclear weapons from hair-trigger alert status.
- Adopt a nuclear weapons policy of no-first.
- End all new nuclear weapons development.
- Restrict all production of nuclear fuel to multinational facilities.
- Reduce risk of nuclear terrorism through increased global security funding.

### **VERIFY—Nations agree to improve nuclear nonproliferation verification by:**

- Completing the Global Monitoring System for nuclear weapons testing.
- Enact the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.
- Extend additional verification protocols including on-site inspections.<sup>27</sup>

### **REDUCE—Execute staged reductions of existing and stockpiled nuclear weapons:**

- Immediately eliminate all remaining tactical nuclear weapons.
- 2,000 warheads by 2012—complete scheduled Moscow Treaty reductions.
- 500 warheads by 2015—cap each state’s total nuclear arsenal.
- 400 by 2016—begin staged annual reductions.
- 300 by 2017.
- 200 by 2018.
- 100 by 2019.
- 0 by October 11, 2021—the 35th Anniversary of the Reykjavik Summit.

Second, they serve as a mnemonic tool to help organize and recall further policy platform details. We can now organize a number of more detailed positions under a broader subcategory.

Finally, they help place the necessary actions in an approximate time sequence. First we implement improvements in our global nuclear security to halt both nuclear weapons proliferation to countries or terrorist organizations, as well as to halt the expansion or advancement of nuclear arsenals by current nuclear weapons holders. Next we verify that disarmament is proceeding and no one is violating the existing agreements. And finally, we complete staged nuclear warhead reductions until October 11, 2021, when we finally eliminate nuclear weapons. All three of these tagline groupings are also areas of public concern identified in an important international opinion survey.<sup>26</sup> By identifying these areas prominently in the tagline, there is the additional benefit of reassuring citizens that their concerns are being considered and addressed.

### **Fleshing It Out and Pulling it All Together**

What follows is an attempt at a logical organization of some of the more detailed positions under these three broader tagline subcategories, but again, this organizational division is done to illustrate the example. These details would only be communicated and discussed after first presenting the overall position statement. Too often nuclear policy discussions begin with, and dwell on, the minutiae of the supporting programs. The ongoing debate in Congress over the Reliable Replacement Warhead Program is a good example of this. Policy details are made more difficult when the long-range objectives have yet to be clearly defined and articulated. Without the long-range goal, every related sub-decision becomes a struggle and an opportunity for further division or misdirection.

As the policy details are presented, it should be understood that all these positions are integral parts of the overarching Reykjavik Vision for a Nuclear-Free World. The policy brand and long-range goal are always a higher communication priority than the details.

This example illustrates how the complex issue of global nuclear disarmament might be honed down to a single acronym and (mostly) jargon-free page suitable for mass communication. Further details and specificity could be added with hyperlinks or footnotes that cross-reference each of these positions to a pending treaty or international legislative activity.

The visual tapering of the warhead count on the bottom of the page attempts to counter the common assumption that it will be impossible for nations to give up *all* their nuclear weapons. This tapering illustrates that if there is a methodical and gradual annual reduction plan, it can be done. The layout of information can influence the impression of achievement. These comments are not meant to downplay the tremendous difficulties and obstacles there will be in executing these goals. The critical details must be worked through by the many dedicated policy makers from around the globe. But it is vital that all involved have from the start a shared visual image of what a planned and staged success looks like.

Using such a policy statement, advocacy groups could more easily build a common platform consensus across organizations. Citizens could discuss the elements and merits of the Reykjavik Vision with greater confidence. A branded nuclear-free-world policy would make frequent discussions more likely in mass media forums that thrive on brevity, such as cable news and talk radio. And most importantly, citizens could approach their elected representatives with a comprehensive, concrete, and detailed policy plan, ask them for their support of the Reykjavik Vision, and request that the goal be executed according to a specific plan and timeline. Thus, the difficult and necessary task of building political will could be accelerated through improved message construction.

It is impossible to develop the most effective message without a good understanding of the predispositions of the target audience. A well-crafted position statement first gathers knowledge of its audience's current biases and uses this knowledge to tailor the message. Fortunately for this example, WorldPublicOpinion.org published in November 2007 a useful and highly relevant survey, "Americans and Russians on Nuclear Weapons and the Future of Disarmament."<sup>28</sup> The survey included nine areas of questioning, most of them around

recommendations made in a January 4, 2007 opinion article in the *Wall Street Journal* by former secretaries of state George Shultz and Henry Kissinger, former secretary of defense William Perry, and former chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Senator Sam Nunn.<sup>29</sup> The survey also broke out some answers by party affiliation for the U.S. citizens who responded, and the researchers asked several questions with alternative wording, which is invaluable information to have when fine-tuning a message.

For example, information gleaned from this survey helped lead to the inclusion of “Verify” as the second action item in the sample tagline. The survey results showed that when a clause was added to specify that there were provisions for verification, more respondents would favor the eventual elimination of all nuclear weapons.<sup>30</sup> There was a similar more positive response when informed there would be gradual reductions leading up to complete elimination.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, more attention was given to specificity in how the final reductions would occur.

This is the value of incorporating public opinion data in the creation of a brand for a nuclear-free world. The feedback loop creates a mechanism for self-fulfilling messaging. In the world of quality control, this mechanism is called the “Plan-Do-Check-Act Cycle,” and it leads to ongoing and continuous improvements in processes.

### **The Importance of Limiting the Scope of the Platform**

It is important that the Reykjavik Vision not be tied to other unrelated causes. Currently there are dozens of nuclear-free advocacy groups, many of which also advocate and take positions on a host of unrelated issues—poverty, justice, global warming, Native American affairs—sincere and well intentioned, but distracting and potentially divisive causes.

A single-issue policy platform without nonessential ancillary causes has two benefits. First, it provides a focused and efficient use of limited resources. All organizations, especially donor-supported groups, have limited resources in staffing, time, and funding. Any time or money spent on ancillary issues is an hour or dollar not spent on the movement to create a nuclear-free world. Focus always beats breadth for resource efficiency.

Second, the broadest possible coalition must be built to influence a sufficient number of senators to gather the two-thirds vote required for treaty ratification. If a lawmaker or citizen has a strong opinion—for example, on the current war in Iraq—mixing the nuclear-free-world message with a position on the war in Iraq could alienate potential supporters for the nuclear-free-world cause.

Similarly, taking a position either for or against peaceful use of nuclear energy may limit the potential number of supporters for a nuclear-free vision. The percentage of Americans who support nuclear energy may grow as more people become aware and conscious of the risks of global climate change exacerbated by generating energy from fossil fuels. If a nuclear-free advocate group decides to also fight nuclear energy, then their pool of potential supporters may be reduced by this stance.

Being against an issue is never as inspiring or motivating as being *for* a cause. Creating a nuclear-free world is more inspiring and hopeful than being antinuclear. Being

antinuclear is a reactionary stance; someone else has set the agenda, and you are taking a contrary position. Creating a nuclear-free world is an opportunity to set and control the agenda. It is saying *yes* to a new vision, rather than *no* to an old paradigm. Reactive protests are often the actions of the powerless. True power comes from setting the agenda, not reacting to someone else's.

## Conclusion

In June 2007, Margaret Beckett, the United Kingdom's former secretary of state for foreign affairs, gave an insightful keynote address at the Carnegie International Nonproliferation Conference. Beckett said: "What we need is both vision—a scenario for a world free of nuclear weapons—and action—progressive steps to reduce warhead numbers and to limit the role of nuclear weapons in security policy. These two strands are separate, but they are mutually reinforcing. Both are necessary. Both at the moment are too weak."<sup>32</sup>

A nuclear-free vision and an action plan to achieve it are essential not only for world leaders and their duly authorized negotiators. They are also necessary to galvanize global citizens around the same shared vision. We need a common language between the policy makers, the politicians, and the general public that transforms a complex and seemingly insurmountable problem into a coherent and achievable platform.

Since this article began with a quotation from John F. Kennedy, it is only appropriate to conclude it with another. Just a year and half after his "Man on the Moon" speech, Kennedy traveled to Houston, Texas, to tour the new mission control facility. Afterward, he stopped at Rice University and in the sweltering afternoon heat of the packed campus stadium he reminded the nation of why we chose to put a man on the moon.

"We choose to go the moon. We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone."<sup>33</sup>

Creating a nuclear-free world is also a challenge we must choose to accept and be unwilling to postpone. It starts by creating a shared global vision of our long-range goal, with both an urgent timeline and a specific plan, conveyed in clear and concise language. It is now time, in the bloom of this most convenient season, to create the vision necessary to achieve the complete elimination of nuclear weapons from the Earth.

## NOTES

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4. Steven Kull, John Steinbruner, Nancy Gallagher, Clay Ramsey, Evan Lewis, "American and Russians on Nuclear Weapons and the Future of Disarmament: A Joint Study of WorldPublicOpinion.org and the Advanced Methods of Cooperative Security Program, Center for International and Security Studies at

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5. Web search conducted March 30, 2008: <[google.com/Top/Society/Issues/Warfare\\_and\\_Conflict/Weapons/Nuclear/Disarmament\\_Activism/Organizations/](http://google.com/Top/Society/Issues/Warfare_and_Conflict/Weapons/Nuclear/Disarmament_Activism/Organizations/)> and <[dir.yahoo.com/Government/Military/Weapons\\_and\\_Equipment/Weapons\\_of\\_Mass\\_Destruction/Nuclear\\_Weapons/Nuclear\\_Disarmament\\_and\\_Nonproliferation/Organizations/](http://dir.yahoo.com/Government/Military/Weapons_and_Equipment/Weapons_of_Mass_Destruction/Nuclear_Weapons/Nuclear_Disarmament_and_Nonproliferation/Organizations/)>.
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  8. Kelly and Turpen, *Policy Matters*.
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  10. Frank Luntz, *Words That Work: It's Not What You Say, It's What People Hear* (New York: Hyperion Books, 2007); Chip Heath and Dan Heath, *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die* (New York: Random House, 2007); and Drew Westen, *The Political Brain: The Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation* (New York: Public Affairs, 2007).
  11. Luntz, *Words That Work*, p. 282.
  12. Luntz, *Words That Work*, pp. 78–80.
  13. Joseph Cirincione, "Republicans Do It Better," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, September/October 2000, pp. 17–19.
  14. In Paul Lettow's 2005 book on Ronald Reagan, the author gives a fascinating account of the lifelong interest Reagan had in nuclear weapons and the importance to the world's future of their eventual elimination. Paul Lettow, *Ronald Reagan and His Quest to Abolish Nuclear Weapons* (New York: Random House, 2005).
  15. Aaron Scherb and Scott Stedjan, "Still in the Shadow of Nuclear Weapons," Friends Committee on National Legislation, 2006, <[www.fcnl.org/pdfs/shadow\\_nucs\\_bklt.pdf](http://www.fcnl.org/pdfs/shadow_nucs_bklt.pdf)>.
  16. Heath and Heath, *Made to Stick*.
  17. Ronald Reagan and D. Erik Felton, *A Shining City: The Legacy of Ronald Reagan* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998).
  18. Luntz, *Words That Work*, p. 61.
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  20. Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter From Birmingham Jail," April 16, 1963, Courtesy the King Center, Atlanta, GA, Michigan State University website, <[coursesa.matrix.msu.edu/~hst306/documents/letter.html](http://coursesa.matrix.msu.edu/~hst306/documents/letter.html)>.
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  23. Lettow, *Ronald Reagan and His Quest*, p. 223. For a detailed description of the events of the summit, see Richard Rhodes, *Arsenals of Folly: The Making of the Nuclear Arms Race* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), pp. 236–270.
  24. Luntz, *Words That Work*, pp. 125–126.
  25. Heath and Heath, *Made to Stick*, pp. 25–26.
  26. Kull et al., "American and Russians on Nuclear Weapons and the Future of Disarmament."
  27. Most of the specific policy proposals listed in this example under the headings "Secure" and "Verify" were drawn from Thomas Graham Jr.'s accessible and succinct overview of the issues surrounding nuclear weapons. See Thomas Graham Jr., *Common Sense On Weapons of Mass Destruction* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2004).
  28. Kull et al., "American and Russians on Nuclear Weapons and the Future of Disarmament."
  29. George P. Shultz, William J. Perry, Henry A. Kissinger, and Sam Nunn, "A World Free of Nuclear Weapons," *Wall Street Journal*, January 4, 2007, p. A15.
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