



## **Averting Armageddon**

**How two Eagle Scouts may well have saved the world**

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The year was 1991, and the end of the Cold War was at hand. The Berlin Wall had crumbled, the Soviet Union was disintegrating, and the United States was assuming its new role as the world's only superpower. Some scholars were even speculating that the end of history had arrived.

But not everyone was convinced that the Cold War would automatically give way to a lasting peace. In particular, U.S. Senators Richard Lugar (R-Ind.) and Sam Nunn (D.-Ga.) saw the potential for greater peril, not less, when the Soviet Union broke up.

The reason? The crumbling Soviet Union has 13,300 nuclear warheads, 1,473 ICBMs, hundreds of long-range bombers, and untold stockpiles of biological and chemical weapons. Many of these weapons were located in breakaway republics like Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus, where the political situation was tenuous. And they were guarded by men whose employment prospects were uncertain at best.

"The Soviet military was going to be dramatically reduced, and there were going to be hundreds of thousands of people in the security sector who no longer had jobs," Nunn said in a recent interview. "All that spelled grave danger to me."

It also spelled grave danger to Soviet officials who had worked with Nunn and Lugar on arms-control issues. Late in 1991, some of those officials approached the two Senators and said that the Soviet Union—and, by extension, the rest of the world—faced a severe problem. "Elements of the Red Army were rapidly disintegrating," Lugar said recently. "It wasn't that the nuclear weapons were unguarded, but the security situation was deteriorating."

Those officials' cries for help led Nunn and Lugar to form a unique partnership and to create an innovative program that may just have averted worldwide calamity. Not bad for a couple of Eagle Scouts.

### **Growing up in the Crucible of War**

Born in 1932, Richard Green Lugar came of age during World War II, and his memories of Scouting are entwined with memories of war. Lugar's troop, Troop 80, often camped at Camp Chank-Tun-Un-Gi, not far from the POW camp at Fort Benjamin Harrison.

From time to time, they'd hear the sound of gunfire coming from the direction of the POW camp, which wasn't very reassuring to the younger Scouts. "It may have been simply to frighten us, but the older Scouts indicated that the prisoners might be on the loose and might be coming up to join you in your tent," Lugar said.

The war also had a more serious connection for Lugar. When he and his fellow Scouts lined up at troop meetings each week, Lugar looked directly at a photo of Reiman Steeg, an Eagle Scout from the troop who was now fighting in the war. Steeg later died in combat, teaching the young Lugar a sobering lesson about the local impact of faraway conflicts.

After graduating from Denison University and serving in the U.S. Navy from 1956 to 1960, Lugar returned to Indianapolis and joined the family's food machinery business. He ran successfully for the school board in 1963 and for mayor four years later. The most lasting accomplishment of his two terms as mayor was facilitating the merger of city and county government, which helped revitalize the city's downtown.

Lugar said his Scout training prepared him well for service as mayor. The program taught him leadership, of course, but it also taught him about his community. To earn the Citizenship in the Community merit badge, he said, "I had to map out Indianapolis and go to places around the city and the county that I knew existed but were really not a part of my life."

Lugar was first elected to the U.S. Senate as a Republican in 1976; he won his sixth term last fall. In his last four elections, he has carried at least two-thirds of the vote, often facing only token opposition.

When Lugar first became mayor, an *Indianapolis Star* cartoonist caricatured him as a wet-behind-the-ears Boy Scout, someone perhaps not tough enough for the rigors of politics. His 30 years in the Senate and toe-to-toe negotiations with world leaders have proven that cartoonist wrong. In fact, another publication, *Time* magazine, named him one of America's 10 best Senators in April 2006.

### **Born to a Life of Service**

In 1951—five years after Richard Lugar became an Eagle Scout—Samuel Augustus Nunn of Perry, Ga., reached Scouting's highest rank. Looking back more than a half-century later, he remembers most of all the values Scouting instilled in him, values like integrity, teamwork, and leadership.

Scouting was “very meaningful to me in terms of the kind of values system that is so necessary in any phase of life—particularly I think in the political world, where there are so many challenges to your values and your overall character,” Nunn said.

Nunn also realized early on in Scouting that character alone is not enough. “Leadership depends on trust, but leadership also depends on skills,” he said. “You’re trusted if you keep your word, but you also inspire confidence by the skill level you achieve.”

Like many Scouts, Nunn was inducted into the Order of the Arrow after completing a weekend ordeal that, among other things, required him to remain silent for 24 hours. “I think that was particularly valuable in the overall political arena. There are a lot of times you speak when you shouldn’t,” he said. In fact, Nunn laughingly suggested that the only Senators who’ve *ever* been silent for 24 straight hours were probably members of the OA.

Nunn served briefly in the U.S. Coast Guard, then earned a law degree from Emory University. He practiced law for six years before entering the Georgia House of Representatives as a Democrat in 1968. (Unlike Lugar, Nunn had been born into politics. His grand-uncle, Carl Vinson, was a 26-term U.S. Representative from Georgia.)

In 1972, Nunn won a special election to the U.S. Senate, where he served until 1997. From 1987 to 1995, he chaired the Senate Armed Services Committee, a role that put him at the center of discussions about arms control and nuclear proliferation. He was also a prime mover behind the Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, which sought to prepare America’s military to deal with future conflicts.

Nunn chose not to run for reelection in 1996. Instead, he re-entered private law practice. But in 2001, he returned to the public arena by becoming co-chairman of the Nuclear Threat Initiative. The new position allowed him to continue the vital work he had begun with his colleague across the aisle a decade earlier.

### **The Nunn-Lugar Program**

After hearing from their contacts in the Soviet government late in 1991, Nunn and Lugar began devising a plan to safeguard weapons of mass destruction and help weapons scientist shift to peaceful research. Their plan evolved into the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program, but its creation was far from assured. The 1991 Congressional session was nearing its end, and lawmakers who’d come of age during the Cold War were hesitant to assist America’s biggest adversary—even if doing so would also help America.

“At first, we had to pull the bill down because there was so much opposition,” Nunn recalled. “We spent about three months working together and got the legislation passed in December.”

Their success stemmed in part from their bipartisan approach, Lugar said. “As a Democratic leader and a Republican leader, we pulled together 15 or 16 Senators for a breakfast, just to explain what we were about and what we felt was the importance of action,” he explained. “We got pretty good support in a bipartisan way.”

But the two Senators did more than just meet with fellow lawmakers. They also engaged in shoe-leather diplomacy, traveling to Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus to determine the best approach to take in each country. In Ukraine, that meant recommending that the United States quickly set up an embassy. In Belarus it meant making a specific deal. “In return for some housing assistance for displaced Soviet officers, they were willing to send their SS-19s back to Russia and get them out of Belarus,” Lugar said.

Nunn acknowledged that the two partners didn’t agree on everything. However, he said, they were always honest with each other and worked through differences. “We still have that approach,” he said. “I think that’s connected to the values and integrity and character that are taught in Scouting. We both not only had those values ourselves, but we had full trust that the other one had those values.”

So what has the Nunn-Lugar program accomplished? When the Soviet Union broke up, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus instantly became the world’s fifth, seventh, and eighth leading nuclear powers, respectively. Today, they’re free of nuclear weapons. “We’ve even pulled up cables and blown up the silos that had the missiles,” Lugar said. “In terms of nonproliferation, that’s been a remarkable victory.”

## **Tomorrow’s Challenges**

Many victories have followed, but many challenges remain—and not just on the nuclear front. In visiting one weapons lab a few years ago, Lugar spotted a refrigerator that was secured by nothing but string and sealing wax. Inside were 15 different pathogen strains, enough to destroy the livestock of an entire country. Ukraine alone continues to stockpile seven million small arms and light weapons and two million tons of conventional ammunition.

In the past decade, the Nunn-Lugar program has been expanded three times and now deals with all sorts of weapons—nuclear, chemical, biological, and chemical—both in former Soviet republics and other countries. At the same time, the rise of terrorist groups like Al Qaeda has made weapons control more important than ever.

With Nunn’s departure from the Senate, Sen. Lugar has forged partnerships with other Senators, including Pete Domenici (R.-N.M.) and Barack Obama (D.-Ill.). But the two Eagle Scouts continue to collaborate, thanks to Nunn’s role as co-chairman of the Nuclear Threat Initiative.

“We know how government works. We know where a lot of failures are in government, and we know where the outside world can be of help,” Nunn said.

Despite past successes, Nunn worries about the future. “We’re in a race between cooperation and catastrophe,” he said. “Right now, it’s not clear which is ahead.”

If cooperation wins, it will be because people of different backgrounds, ideologies, nations, and parties put aside their differences for the sake of humanity. But it will also be, in large measure, because two Eagle Scouts took seriously their promise to do their best to do their duty to God and their country.