

**ORAL HISTORY OF
PAUL C. WARNKE - SIXTH INTERVIEW**

APRIL 5, 2001

This is the sixth interview of Paul C. Warnke in the taking of his oral history as part of the oral history project of the Historical Society of the District of Columbia Circuit. The interview is being taken by William Ross on April 5, 2001. The persons present are Paul Warnke and William Ross.

Mr. Ross: We were talking about Gromyko and the Russians. Some of the more sophisticated arguments against arms control were that formal agreements for reduction were unlikely to produce any permanent valuable consequences simply because nuclear arms were here to stay, and that the quantity of nuclear arms (whether the Russians had 10,000 or 100 bombs, they could destroy the United States with 100 if they were the right kind) and that there was a danger in these agreements to the U.S. I won't go on any further. You were working intensively in this area and have thought about it for such a time. What was your feeling about that? What do you think you were trying to accomplish of value with the SALT II agreement and the things that would follow from it?

Mr. Warnke: Really try to avoid the kind of accident that would result in widespread destruction. I couldn't believe that we or the Soviets would start a nuclear war on purpose, but I thought we could blunder into it.

Mr. Ross: That would involve state safeguards.

Mr. Warnke: That's right.

Mr. Ross: And the number of nuclear weapons—how does this relate in your

mind? Reductions in nuclear weapons and in forces?

Mr. Warnke: I guess that I was never a strong believer in numbers as being the key. If you had a couple rather than several thousand, you could still destroy one another. It was really a question of not making a miscalculation ending up with a kind of imbalance that might in a crisis lead either side to feel, okay, if I go first, I win and they lose.

Mr. Ross: Is there a psychological component involving the extent to which a nation's defense psychology and posture relies on large-scale nuclear forces and the extent it doesn't, that has an effect on the danger of an inadvertent --

Mr. Warnke: Not really. See by the time I got involved in nuclear affairs, this was fairly far along. At the beginning, I think the first one who began to think seriously about this was Bob McNamara. Prior to that time, you just followed the flow. They built more, you built more. I think Bob was the first one who gave some serious thought to just policy as such, and what we could and couldn't do to prevent what would otherwise be a disastrous mistake on somebody's part.

Mr. Ross: I sometimes felt during the time when I was very active with LANAC and LAWS -- of course we were on the outside -- that we made a mistake in not answering the more cogent arguments against our pro-agreement, pro-reduction positions. I recall an article by Henry Kissinger -- very long, very convoluted, but potent -- arguing against arms control agreement, and I recall similar arguments by other people. I would talk with Ralph Earle and other people about this. "We were always writing op eds in *The New York Times* (if we can get them in) or in *The Washington Post*, but nobody answers Kissinger." Earle's comment was interesting. He's a very highly intelligent guy. One of the few in this area who can

be compared to Paul Warnke. He said something to the effect, "Well, you know, it's a very complex subject, and if you take Kissinger on, then he comes back at you and you turn the whole thing into an argument with Kissinger, and on Henry's own ground, you're not going to win that argument."

Mr. Warnke: I think that's basically very true. For one thing, he is revered by so many people. He writes these long, long articles. Op ed pieces which are three times the size of anyone else's op ed case. Everyone automatically prints it, and sometimes it's dull, repetitious, and not terribly to the point.

Mr. Ross: Well, I got a sense that events moved through that period. You were dealing with other countries, as well as the Russians?

Mr. Warnke: Yeah.

Mr. Ross: How important was that -- your sense of your job --

Mr. Warnke: In dealing with other countries?

Mr. Ross: Yeah. What the British thought, the French --

Mr. Warnke: The British and we, of course, worked very closely together. I'm trying to think of the guy that I dealt with for the most part, but there were a couple of them that I dealt with. And they were very, very good and very helpful. Oh God, I can't remember their names anymore. One was a Navy-type. We became personal friends. And I would say that they were consistently helpful. The French we tried to engage but had no success in doing it at all. They wanted to be uninvolved. And the Japanese just hated even to be asked. They'd just leave it all to the United States.

Mr. Ross: Being asked created political problems for them?

Mr. Warnke: Yeah. They were afraid they'd say something wrong.

Mr. Ross: They're not so reticent these days.

Mr. Warnke: No, they're not.

Mr. Ross: How about Germany? West Germany?

Mr. Warnke: Again, I think that they felt sort of dependent on the United States.

They wanted to be sure they didn't do anything to ruffle our feathers.

Mr. Ross: Were there any points during these 2 years which were turning points for you where things shifted or took different roads, either in your own life or in the country's activities in the arms control area?

Mr. Warnke: Let me think about that, Bill. Nothing comes to mind right away, but I'm sure there was something. No, I thought it went pretty much --

Mr. Ross: Would you consider that your time in that position was basically successful in terms of what you accomplished?

Mr. Warnke: I'd say on the whole, yes. I had very, very good support. I mean no one could have gotten better support than I got from Cy Vance. Cy Vance made sure that Carter supported me, so it worked out alright.

Mr. Ross: That was a critical relationship.

Mr. Warnke: That's right. But I took the job at Cy's request, and Cy and I were and remain good friends.

Mr. Ross: He knew who and what he was getting when you --

Mr. Warnke: I'd worked for him for a period of time, and we got along fine.

Mr. Ross: Who were the people on your administration, on the agency that you

were the head of that were most important in your work?

Mr. Warnke: Well, of course, Ralph Earle was deeply involved. Spurgeon Keeney.

Mr. Ross: Did you have a technical advisor? Engineer or scientist?

Mr. Warnke: Yeah, lots.

Mr. Ross: Who was the senior, if you recall?

Mr. Warnke: I don't. I can look it up.

Mr. Ross: Let me get into a subject that's always interested me, and that's balance of forces. I recall that Jonathan Dean, who was later with the Union of Concerned Scientists, became an expert on this and wrote big huge studies of balance of forces. Then years passed and I was in a meeting with a Russian major general who was identified by political and diplomatic people as important, who blew up at the meeting and I think genuinely, not in a nasty or mean way, but just sheer exasperation, saying to the effect that you Americans keep talking about the balance of forces. There's no balance in Europe. They keep counting Warsaw Pact soldiers and tanks. He said it should be obvious to you that for every non-Soviet or Warsaw Pact soldiers we need two Soviet soldiers to watch him night and day. When you talk about our tanks (this would have been in '89 maybe), a tank that has been sitting in a field for 2 years without maintenance is not a tank. You can't repair it. You have to send it back to a factory to re-build, and in Russia, that takes at least 2 years. He said, "We can no more invade Western Europe than the U.S., and we haven't been able to invade Western Europe for 10 years, and none of your people understand that."

Mr. Warnke: That's right.

Mr. Ross: There was silence. Then he apologized. But it was a cry from the heart. Do you have a thought about that? I told that to Jonathan Dean and he said in effect, you're saying that everything I've done for the past 10 years is worthless.

Mr. Warnke: Just the fact of doing it is important.

Mr. Ross: What is your reaction to the Russian general, who's name I cannot remember.

Mr. Warnke: Oh, he's perfectly correct.

Mr. Ross: Let me ask you before we break, in thinking back over this 2 years in this light of where the world is today and where arms control is today, the ABM Treaty, _____ Proliferation Agreements. Do you have some thoughts about where we are right now?

Mr. Warnke: Well, I think we're more realistic about it all now. I don't think there's a psychotic feeling about the Russian menace that there was for many years. I think we realize that Russia is not a first-rate power, and maybe not even a second-rate power.

Mr. Ross: Of course they've got a lot of nukes.

Mr. Warnke: They've got an awful lot of nukes, and they don't know quite what to do with them. But I think that -- I forget who it was -- but there was some Russian I dealt with at one point and he said, what you don't take into account is that we don't have any friends.

Mr. Ross: Yes, I read that too. We're encircled. Suppose your country like ours was entirely surrounded by hostile nations? I was talking with Ralph Earle not too long ago and he said, "Jesse Helms makes me very uneasy because he has been saying different things. I always knew where Jesse was. He was a reality. Now I don't know where Jesse's head is." Do you have a thought about that?

Mr. Warnke: Not really.

Mr. Ross: Well, we'll go into this question of where arms control in some length. You can be thinking about it. I think it's about time to go out. Could we go on Thursday at 10:00?

Mr. Warnke: Thursday at 10:00 would be great.

Mr. Ross: I'll try to be on time.