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The George Washington University  
Gelman Library, Suite 701  
2130 H Street, NW  
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Phone: 202/994-7000  
Fax: 202/994-7005  
nsarchiv@gwu.edu  
<http://www.nsarchive.org>

## **GREETINGS TO PARTICIPANTS OF THE 25<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY REUNION OF THE NUNN-LUGAR PROGRAMS FROM COLONEL-GENERAL EVGENY MASLIN (RETIRED)**

Greetings to the participants of the meeting celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Nunn-Lugar Program!

The initiative named after the founding fathers—Senators Sam Nunn and Richard Lugar—is a bright example of mutually beneficial pragmatic cooperation between Russia and the United States in the cause of reducing nuclear weapons, increasing global nuclear security and strengthening peace and stability.

Implementation of joint projects within the framework of the Nunn-Lugar Program helped solve pressing tasks in the sphere of nuclear security and environmental protection in Russia and also helped develop contacts between the militaries and representatives of nuclear industries of both countries.

This year is also the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the withdrawal of the last nuclear warheads that remained in Ukraine and Belarus after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which cleared the way for these two states (as well as Kazakhstan, from which nuclear weapons were withdrawn earlier) to join the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons as non-nuclear states. The technical means of securing weapons and materials provided with help of the Nunn-Lugar Program played an important role in solving this task.

It would not be an exaggeration if I say that in terms of its importance to peace and security, the collective work within the framework of the Nunn-Lugar programs, especially in the early years of its implementation, is comparable to the military and economic cooperation between Moscow and Washington during World War II.

Let me express my gratitude and appreciation for the award, but I would like to note that I see this award as the high praise for the work of all Russian military officers, workers and servicemen who participated directly in the projects of destruction of nuclear warheads, intercontinental ballistic missiles, nuclear submarines, and chemical weapons. Of course, Russia could have carried these tasks out on its own, just like the Soviet Union created and tested the atomic bomb in 1949, only 4 years after World War II. However, it would have taken immeasurably more time, increased the danger of environmental catastrophes, and demanded colossal financial expenses. Therefore, thanks to the joint efforts of both sides we were able to complete the task of destruction of weapons with maximum safety and in a very short timeframe.

In the new year, new opportunities will open up for reviving relations between the two countries, including for regular contacts between the Russian and American military officers. In my view, one of the priority tasks in this context will be creation of a joint mechanism for prevention of accidents in the nuclear sphere, in the air and on the high seas. Let me express the hope that these opportunities will be used effectively.

In the history of our world, Russia and the United States have never fought with each other. I hope that this is how it will be in the future.

I am wishing the participants of the meeting a great discussion!