

DR. EDWARD TELLER

Science Can End the Age of Nuclear Terror

Dr. Edward Teller (1908-2003), a nuclear physicist who played a leading role in the Manhattan Project and then went on to participate in the U.S. development of the hydrogen bomb, addressed the National Press Club Oct. 27, 1982. Here are excerpts from that speech.

One of the obvious things is a point that absolutely all of us, those present and those absent, every American, I believe, shares, is our determination not to have another war, another big war like the First and the Second World War, or worse. There is no difference of opinion on that point. There is a difference of opinion what is the best way to avoid another war. Our policies for years have been on the wrong track. For a quarter of a century, we have conceived of our situation as a balance of terror, and the dreadful point is that the terror is obvious; the balance is not. . . .

We have arrived at the point where the ingenuity of several of my young colleagues has produced, to say it very cautiously, proposals for defensive weapons. I, as befits a person advanced in his 70s, was incredulous, but also obviously and greatly interested. I want to be very clear about this point. I am not talking about one proposal. I am not talking about one magic solution. I am talking about a whole trend.



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Furthermore, we have good evidence that the Soviets are familiar with the ideas on which we are working. . . .

And many scientists, many excellent scientists, who looked briefly and in some places with some prejudice, at these new ideas, have rejected them—as I did, when I looked at them the first time. But the more I looked, the more convinced I became. That is why it is difficult. It is impossible, because these ideas—not the details, but the very ideas—are classified. We call it not only secrecy, but “security.” It isn’t, because the Soviet leaders know; the American people have a need to know. But they are not told. . . .

In response to a question, Teller referred to “the common aims of mankind”:

We can, by using technology create a situation where the reasons for war will diminish and keep diminishing. If our allies and we cooperate both in making a stronger defense, and bringing about the origin of real peace, the pursuit of the common aims of mankind, at least in the free part of the world, then in the end, even in the Soviet Union where tyranny was endemic . . . I think a change of thinking may occur. . . . I am not telling you that if we can avoid war now, and I think we can, then the golden age will be here. We will have many other problems, and perhaps even greater ones. But I want to have for my children and my grandchildren the chance to confront these new problems, to struggle with them, and to do it as individuals. . . .