

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 19, 2008

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Bush,

In relieving Secretary Wynne and General Mosley, your Administration took bold action to reverse the inadequate attention that had been paid to nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons delivery systems by the Department of Defense.

The nuclear deterrent is likely to remain a key element of America's national security for the next several decades. The reasons for this are significant, but have not received the necessary attention at the highest levels of government: our nuclear deterrent prevents a cascade of proliferation from other nuclear-capable states; it provides deterrence in a world where rogue regimes continue to attempt to acquire these weapons; and, each nuclear weapons power – with the exception of the United States – is modernizing its nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons delivery systems. Referring to Russia's ongoing nuclear modernization programs Secretary Gates recently said:

“to the extent that they rely more and more on their nuclear capabilities as opposed to what historically has been a huge Russian conventional military capability, it seems to me that it underscores the importance of our sustaining a valid nuclear deterrent, a modern nuclear deterrent.”

In the memo that follows, we have put together a package of recommendations for an emergency supplemental funding package that responds to Secretary Gates' admonition by providing vital resources to halt the decline that is occurring in the nuclear deterrent, and building a foundation for the next administration, which, by past experience, will rely on existing policies and programs for at least six months to a year.

Now is the time to take steps during your Administration to reverse the dangerous decline in our strategic nuclear deterrent. We can build on the momentum created by Secretary Gates' recent decisions and comments. We stand to help in whatever way we can.

Sincerely,



JON KYL
United States Senator



PETE DOMENICI
United States Senator



JEFF SESSIONS
United States Senator

MEMORANDUM FROM SENS. JON KYL, PETE DOMENICI AND JEFF SESSIONS

By every measure, we have allowed our national labs, nuclear infrastructure and production complex, scientific base, military training and weapons delivery systems to deteriorate.

For example, from fiscal years '03 to '09, the budget request for weapons activities at the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) has increased by only 12.8 percent, not even keeping up with inflation. Nor have Congressional appropriations provided adequate resources to reflect new responsibilities added to NNSA.

To maintain even the near-term viability of our nuclear deterrent, and the security guarantees we have with dozens of friendly and allied nations that are protected by the U.S. extended deterrent, we believe we must undertake the recommendations that follow immediately.¹

Modernizing the Nuclear Weapons Complex

It is imperative that the Administration act in the coming months to lock in a nuclear weapons complex transformation initiative that, among other things, supports and enhances the science base that is at the heart of the maintenance and modernization of our nuclear deterrent. Unfortunately, at this point, the proposals of the Department of Energy appear more focused on reducing floor space than rebuilding the human capital that will be needed for as long as the United States maintains its deterrent. Each and every day, high-skilled talent is leaving our national labs or being re-assigned out of critical nuclear deterrent roles. The expertise these scientists, physicists, chemists and engineers possess in weapons design cannot easily be replaced, especially while the United States maintains its moratorium on testing.

Given the failure to obtain approval to construct the Modern Pit Facility, it is imperative that Los Alamos' Technical Area 55 (TA-55) be modernized expeditiously to produce the 50 to 80 pits per year required to maintain and modernize our weapons. A funding increase of at least \$25 million is required in FY09 alone.

Further, TA-55 will host the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement (CMRR) facility to perform laboratory-level plutonium surveillance, quality control and research and development. The Administration has requested at least \$100 million for the facility in FY09. Recently, the Senate Armed Services Committee proposed reducing by half this requested funding. This funding should be restored and the budget request should be increased by at least \$100 million to expedite construction of the facility. As of now, the Department of Energy has not protested this cut.

United States policy is to maintain readiness to resume underground nuclear testing should a problem arise in the weapons stockpile that cannot be understood or resolved through other means. However, by all evidence, this readiness has withered. In order to rebuild and enhance current readiness – namely, to get agreement on a uniform fielding study, invest in the selected method, replace obsolescent test equipment, cables, cranes and conduct needed geologic surveys – the Administration should revise its budget request, and seek reprogramming if necessary, for \$30 million in FY09.

¹ These funding recommendations represent the considered judgment and expertise of the national labs, former military leaders, and, in many cases, the Administration's own budget justifications.

Reliable Replacement Warhead

This Administration must complete the Phase 2a studies of the Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW). The Administration requested only \$10 million for these activities in FY09. To complete the Phase 2a studies, a further \$56 million is required at a minimum. The Administration must also be prepared to issue a veto threat if appropriations committees do not fund the RRW in the FY09 cycle. For FY10, the Administration should seek full funding for the RRW 2b engineering studies. These studies are important for determining the feasibility of the RRW concept, and will, if nothing else, reinvigorate our national labs and scientists.

Modernizing Delivery Systems

While ensuring the reliability of our nuclear warheads is key, we must also ensure the availability of effective and reliable delivery systems. In the past, warplanes were capable of delivering elements of our stockpile, but platforms such as the F-22 and F-35 are not. When the F-15 is retired from service, no U.S. fighter planes will be capable of delivering nuclear weapons.

In coming years, decisions will have to be made about a variety of our aging delivery systems, including our fleet of SSBNs, bombers, and ICBMs. We must initiate research and development into follow-on strategic platforms (i.e., advanced ICBM, SLBM, SSBN, manned bomber/nuclear capable, new air-launched cruise missiles) now. At least \$10 million in emergency appropriations for each activity in FY09 will be necessary to begin serious research and development and study.

Additionally, since the end of the Cold War, serious effort to verify the hardness and survivability of U.S. nuclear weapons and C4ISR systems to withstand nuclear weapons effects has not taken place. The Administration should immediately commence research and development and testing of these systems. \$20 million in FY09 would begin that process.

Further, the Administration should more aggressively address the concerns of many experts and former administration officials who have made important recommendations about the prospect of a nuclear weapon in the hands of terrorists. This could be done by dramatically ramping up the funding – through an emergency appropriation of \$55 million in FY09 – for the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA), which is making tremendous progress in developing technology that is capable of detecting and neutralizing smuggled nuclear weapons.

The Department of Defense, at the highest levels, must also be poised to promptly act on the recommendations of Secretary Schlesinger's review. I expect his recommendations will include the need to institute a dedicated focus by both the military and civilian chains of command, from the President down to the enlisted weapons technicians.

The Department must also act to implement the recommendations of the Welch Report on the Minot Air Force base weapons mishandling, as well as the previous Defense Science Board reports, which together have concluded DOD has "received authoritative and credible reports of declining focus and an eroding nuclear enterprise environment for at least a decade with little in the way of effective and lasting response."

More Effective Advocacy

In order to ensure a regular dialogue between the Administration and Congress on the status of our nuclear deterrent, the Administration should commence an annual joint appearance by the Secretary of Energy and the Secretary of Defense in order to ensure accurate and up-to-date information on the status of U.S. nuclear weapons, to ensure the nuclear competency of responsible military units, and to provide appropriate priority and resources to related policies and programs. It would also be useful for the Secretary

of State to testify annually on the importance of our nuclear deterrent in terms of U.S. security guarantees with our allies and friendly nations, as well as the benefit of our extended deterrent for U.S. non-proliferation goals.

Conclusion

The most sophisticated weapons ever built and the facilities to maintain them are not being adequately supported and managed. To bring our nuclear weapons complex, delivery systems and aging warheads to an assured state of effectiveness and readiness, the Administration should immediately request, and the Congress should immediately appropriate, the funding recommended here. The Administration should concurrently elevate the importance of strategic nuclear deterrence within the Departments of Defense and Energy.