

As Prepared for Delivery

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Constructing a 21st Century Nuclear Posture

Thank you Rudy for that kind introduction. It is a pleasure to join you here this morning at the Center for American Progress. For five years, under the able leadership of John Podesta, CAP has been a leader in providing first class research and progressive policy options for decision makers in Washington and around the world.

I appreciate the opportunity to share some thoughts with you on a subject I have been working on for many years now: How should we reshape our strategic nuclear posture?

About a year ago, the House and Senate Armed Services Committees put the finishing touches on the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008. That legislation, at my urging, established a high level, bipartisan commission to examine our strategic posture, with a special emphasis on U.S. nuclear weapons policies.

Today, the commission is hard at work under the leadership of Bill Perry and Jim Schlesinger. It features a roster of world class experts who will deliver their recommendations to Congress by April 1st of next year.

My hope is the commission will foster the vigorous national conversation necessary to realign our nuclear posture. A realignment that will reduce the nuclear danger throughout the world while maintaining a sufficient nuclear deterrent.

The 2008 defense authorization act also required that the next Administration complete a new Nuclear Posture Review by December 2009. In conjunction with the Quadrennial Defense Review, I believe this is an historic opportunity to bring U.S. nuclear weapons policies into the new century.

The last NPR, finished in late 2001, was completed after the attacks of September eleventh, and reflected an attempt to speak in twenty first century terms.

Most notably, it replaced the Cold War nuclear Triad, based on three distinct methods of delivering nuclear weapons. It offered a “new” triad where nuclear weapons regardless of platform are one element of strategic capabilities: offensive capabilities, active and passive defenses, and a responsive infrastructure.

That NPR unfortunately contained contradictory themes. It claimed to de-emphasize the role of nuclear weapons within our strategic posture, while spelling out a lower threshold for their use.

During the same period, the Bush Administration was beginning to articulate its pre-emptive war doctrine. As a result, the administration’s posture was viewed by many, including myself, as dangerous and de-stabilizing.

It argued for “greater flexibility” with respect to our nuclear forces, and asserted the United States develop “nuclear attack options that vary in scale, scope, and purpose.”

Combined as it was with proposals for advanced nuclear weapons concepts that is, mini-nukes and the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator, the NPR became viewed as another component of a misguided push for new nuclear weapons.

And while we are working on a new Nuclear Posture Review, we shouldn’t lose sight of the fact that we need not just new thinking, but a new **kind** of NPR.

The new kind of NPR should begin by answering the fundamental questions about our nuclear weapons.

Do we still need them? For what purposes? What capabilities are needed to meet those objectives?

I would like to note the current NPR did make the distinction that nuclear does not equal strategic. As Chairman of the Strategic Forces Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee, I fully understand that.

Our strategic posture should place the stewardship of our nuclear arsenal, nonproliferation programs, missile defenses, and the international arms control regime into one comprehensive strategy that protects the American people.

My focus this morning is on the nuclear component.

During the Cold War, nuclear weapons provided deterrence against the catastrophic damage Soviet nuclear weapons could inflict on the United States and

our allies. As we have moved further into the post Cold War era, and the Soviet threat has receded, legitimate questions about the function and role of nuclear weapons in the new security environment are being asked.

A consensus has emerged that our Cold War notions of deterrence need updating, because the threats to the U.S. have proliferated and changed in character.

But one tenet of Cold War deterrence prevention of catastrophic attack on the United States or its allies remains true.

Even for states like North Korea and Iran, who may not be as “rational” as we judged the Soviet Union to be, our nuclear weapons can provide a deterrent against nuclear and WMD attack.

Iran **doesn't yet** possess nuclear weapons; however they have continued to march in that direction, posing a grave threat to regional and global security.

And Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons provides a lesson in the limits of nuclear deterrence. Our arsenal has, so far, done little to deter their ambitions and may be among the factors motivating Iran's developments.

North Korea's successful pursuit of nuclear weapons technology also highlights the limits of deterrence. Our arsenal of nuclear weapons plainly had no deterrent value against their efforts.

In fairness, former Secretary of Defense Bill Perry has argued that U.S. threats to consider using our nuclear arsenal against North Korea if it did not cease its weapons program in the early 1990's was a critical part of the U.S. effort to a weapons development program at that time.

Since then, however, North Korea has judged we would not use our nuclear weapons to prevent their program.

But what of the risk of global terrorists and other non-state actors acquiring and using WMDs arguably the greatest threat to the U.S. and its allies? Nuclear weapons are largely irrelevant to the pursuit by such non-state actors of nuclear weapons and other WMD capabilities.

That said, as Secretary Gates explained last month when he spoke at the Carnegie Foundation, our nuclear weapons may deter nations that may consider enabling terrorist groups in their pursuit of WMD capabilities.

As he noted, our rapidly improving forensics capabilities will enable us to hold such nations accountable or “fully accountable” as Secretary Gates said – if they so enable al Qaeda or other terrorists.

I believe Secretary Gates is right, and this should become an important feature of our nuclear posture. Any step we can take to reduce the likelihood that nuclear weapons, materials, or technology pass from a nation to a terrorist group such as al Qaeda is one we must take.

Which is why our non-proliferation programs deserve more support.

There is one other fundamental role our nuclear weapons play, beyond deterring hostile nuclear powers. They provide an extended deterrent to our closest allies, reducing the need for them to maintain their own nuclear weapons. This directly reduces the number of nuclear weapons in the world, and represents a significant element of our non-proliferation efforts.

What kind of nuclear posture is required to meet these critical national security objectives?

How do we balance the need to maintain some weapons to meet these objectives while working to stem the proliferation of nuclear weapons?

Such balance is crucial and should be a cornerstone of the new Nuclear Posture Review.

The first way a new NPR can move toward such balance is to recognize the limited functions of our nuclear weapons.

Limited purposes require limited numbers of weapons.

The new NPR should move beyond discussion merely of our deployed stockpile, and address our entire arsenal. That will demonstrate to the world that we are serious.

The new NPR should also be more outward looking than its predecessors. Our posture relates directly to international security, and is therefore interwoven with the decision of both our allies and adversaries.

Finally, the new NPR must recognize how the United States manages and maintains our nuclear arsenal. This directly impacts our credibility in pressing for global nonproliferation. The United States has committed under Article Six of the Nonproliferation Treaty to work in good faith toward nuclear disarmament.

In 2010, the United Nations will participate in a world-wide review of the Nonproliferation Treaty. Strengthening multilateral efforts to thwart the spread of nuclear weapons depend greatly on President Obama taking bold action. He must work to embrace the arms control measures that have served our interests in the past.

There are other measures we can and should undertake.

The Obama Administration, and the new NPR, should build on the best achievements of previous administrations.

We should also explore new policies such as vigorous interventions to secure loose nuclear material.

Whether we are talking about binding treaties like START; multilateral regimes like the Nuclear Suppliers Group; international bodies like the IAEA; or a series of export controls and sanctions, the new Obama administration must weave together a diplomatic initiative to prevent additional nations, like Iran, from obtaining nuclear weapons.

Also, India, Pakistan and Israel must be brought into the nuclear club and asked to make serious nonproliferation commitments. New initiatives like coercive inspections or expanded threat reduction have a place alongside the existing arms control mechanisms in our toolbox.

The two most important steps we can take involve two treaties one the U.S. has never ratified, and one that will expire in a year.

The new NPR should recommend ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

Fifteen years of science-based stockpile stewardship programs have made it possible for the United States to use our brain power and scientific tools, rather than testing in the Nevada desert to ensure the reliability of our nuclear deterrent.

No other single action could send a clearer signal to the rest of the world that the United States is committed to controlling the spread of nuclear weapons and materials.

The United States and Russia must also negotiate a legally binding replacement to the START agreement, which is scheduled to expire in December of next year.

In sum, the new Nuclear Posture Review must strike a balance between ensuring our nuclear deterrent force is safe, secure and reliable, and leading the world in a collaborative way to reduce the global nuclear danger.

Too often we are presented with a false choice. Either maintaining an unnecessarily high level of nuclear weapons as a hedge against uncertainty which I believe would undermine our efforts to reduce global nuclear risks or allowing our arsenal to rust and corrode away.

Neither is acceptable.

Since becoming Chairman of the Subcommittee on Strategic Forces at the House Armed Services Committee, I have emphasized the importance of the Stockpile Stewardship Program. For more than a decade, this program has made it possible

for us to assure the safety, security and reliability of our nuclear deterrent without nuclear testing. Under the right leadership, it will continue to do so.

The job of the Defense Department, and the Nuclear Weapons Council, is to establish requirements for our nuclear stockpile. It is the job of the National Nuclear Security Administration to provide and maintain that stockpile.

The NNSA, through the stewardship program, has delivered on this responsibility.

If the Obama Administration is to effectively assess our options for reducing our nuclear arsenal, it must understand the risks and tradeoffs associated with different approaches.

I believe we can demonstrate to the world that we are not expanding our nuclear capability quite the opposite and still be good stewards of the limited capabilities we maintain.

From 1994 to 2004, we had a law on the books called “Spratt-Furse” that prohibited research and development of so-called mini-nukes. It was important because of the signal it sent to the world that the United States was not looking for new applications for nuclear weapons.

As we embark into the next phase of stockpile stewardship, we should renew the Spratt-Furse law, so our intentions are clear.

In addition, we can’t forget the burgeoning demand for nuclear energy in our calculations.

That is why I believe the United States should take a bold step and lead the world in an effort to create an international nuclear fuel bank.

A bank that would allow nations, with growing economies and a demand for reliable and inexpensive energy, access to nuclear energy while keeping the most sensitive parts of the fuel cycle under International Atomic Energy Agency supervision.

At heart is the idea that there is no absolute need for countries to possess their **own** enrichment or reprocessing facilities if what they truly desire is nuclear energy for electricity production.

In the end, our nuclear deterrent capabilities are still required. The challenge, and the choice, is how to reduce the global dangers of nuclear weapons given that reality.

I believe we can find a balance while never losing sight of the goal to reduce our arsenal to zero.

Thank you very much for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions.