

D'Agostino SW 21 Talking Points
29 January 2009

Today, no national consensus exists on the future role of our nuclear deterrent or on the implications of our nuclear posture for U.S. nonproliferation obligations/objectives.

This meeting is helping to promote broader understanding of the nuclear mission.

But more must be done.

Rep. Ellen Tauscher has articulated a “way ahead”:

“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.”

The linkage of the core capabilities and expertise developed over six decades in support of nuclear weapons programs to this more “comprehensive strategy” is clear. Our weapons program has

- Enabled critical global nuclear threat reduction efforts,
- Supported nonproliferation, arms control, and nuclear counterterrorism activities,
- And it has contributed to a broad array of national security goals beyond nuclear weapons.

But as Ms. Tauscher said, the U.S. nuclear posture must evolve from its Cold War framework to its role as one component of a comprehensive strategy for reducing nuclear threats worldwide.

How can this best be achieved?

We must find a “middle ground” that could provide a basis for restoring consensus, last achieved during the Cold War, on nuclear policy and its relationship to nonproliferation and arms control.

This is the charge for the Strategic Posture Commission led by Bill Perry and Jim Schlesinger, whom you heard from today.

Let’s recall for a moment the role that nuclear weapons served during the Cold War:

- Helped to prevent the large-scale wars of aggression that led to tens of millions of deaths,
- Deterred the use of nuclear weapons against the U.S. and its allies,
- Assured allies who rely on extended deterrence for their own security.

But today’s security environment is more varied, less predictable, and dependent on local and regional factors.

- Regional tensions/potential for major wars, have not gone away,
- Nuclear weapons remain a factor in the security calculations of several countries, some with increasing emphasis, and

- Opportunities for states to “go nuclear” may increase with trends of increased global reliance on nuclear power, conceivably leading to a proliferation “tipping point.”

In this security environment, a credible extension of the U.S. nuclear umbrella to allies is at least as important today as it was a decade ago.

Moreover, with growing concerns about nuclear terrorism, renewed focus must be given to preventing terrorists from acquiring nuclear warheads or fissile materials.

And we should not expect terrorists to be deterred by threats of retaliation.

However, when coupled with credible nuclear forensics capabilities and declaratory policy, U.S. forces can act to discourage witting state transfers of nuclear warheads or materials to terrorists.

Therefore, as one component of a broad strategy for a safer world, the United States will continue to maintain a nuclear deterrent for the foreseeable future and it is my job in the National Nuclear Security Administration to take care of the warheads that make up the deterrent.

Over the coming months, President Obama will be advancing his program to bolster U.S. leadership in reducing global nuclear dangers and achieving strengthened nonproliferation. Just look at the White House web page at “Preventing Nuclear Terrorism” some elements include:

- **Secure Nuclear Weapons Materials in Four Years:**
- **Strengthen Policing and Interdiction Efforts:**
- **Strengthen Nuclear Risk Reduction Work at Defense, State, and Energy Departments:**
- **Convene a Summit on Preventing Nuclear Terrorism:**
- **Strengthen the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA):**
- **Seek Real, Verifiable Reductions in Nuclear Stockpiles, and**
- **Work with Russia to Increase Warning and Decision Time, among others.**

The DOE will play a critical role in this effort. Let me explain.

Scientists and engineers in the National Nuclear Security Administration at our labs and plants have developed and sustained, over the six decades of the nuclear era, a unique set of skills and capabilities that respond to a much broader array of nuclear security needs beyond nuclear weapons:

They provide Support to international efforts to control warheads and fissile materials,

They provide Support to the intelligence community on foreign nuclear weapons programs,

They have assessed potential terrorist nuclear designs to inform render safe capabilities,

They are developing nuclear forensics capabilities to identify the origin of terrorist nukes and thereby provide means to deter witting state transfers of warheads/materials to terrorists,

They provide Nuclear incident response and consequence management,

And of course they perform R&D to:

- detect nuclear warheads/materials being smuggled,
- detect proliferant activities, and
- strengthen capabilities for treaty monitoring and warhead transparency.

It is essential to retain these core capabilities and broaden and deepen their application to a broader range of security issues beyond the nuclear warhead.

In so doing, the common linkages connecting U.S. nuclear force posture, nuclear threat reduction activities, nonproliferation, nuclear counterterrorism, and arms control and disarmament will be strengthened and global security advanced.

As the nation reaches a consensus on the deterrent I believe one thing will be clear... that we cannot move forward without a strong Science, Technology, and Engineering base to provide a foundation for our decisions. This technical base is what makes the DOE and NNSA different from most other organizations.

In fact, if our stockpile gets smaller we will depend on these capabilities even more in the future. We absolutely cannot let our guard down when it comes to maintaining a pre-eminent scientific and technology base.

While we talk allot about a stockpile stewardship program and the job of maintaining our stockpile and dealing with unexpected issues, I see the job as much broader than that. I see the job as being a steward of our nuclear science and technology base.

This could as well be called a nuclear security stewardship program and that nuclear security is manifested in our scientists, engineers, technicians, and all those that support them. While the maintaining our nuclear stockpile will form the core of the work that we do for the nation, it is that core that has provided the foundation to allow us to have the largest non-proliferation program in the United States and the world.

It is that core that has allowed us to work with our international partners to allow for significant participation in the Global Initiative to Combating Nuclear Terrorism, and it is that core that allows us to marshal all of our intelligence and technical capabilities to be able to address nuclear emergencies. To render safe an improvised nuclear device certainly here in the United States, but also to make that capability available to our international partners.

Close

Despite some uncertainty that may exist in the nuclear community, I am optimistic.

I am optimistic because I see the next phase of stockpile stewardship leading us into even more discovery and an even better understanding of our nuclear deterrent and it will shed light on how we make this the smallest deterrent consistent with our needs, the safest deterrent possible, the most secure deterrent when it comes to deploying the best modern security technologies, and the most reliable deterrent so that we can even have greater confidence that we would not need an underground test.

I am optimistic because I see a wonderful opportunity to come to a consensus on our nation's security strategy. I am optimistic because I have seen a renewed debate at the highest levels on nuclear policy issues that spans across the legislative and executive branches of government as well as the international community and other non-governmental organizations. I am optimistic because this consensus starts with meetings and workshops like this. I look forward to the Strategic Posture Commission report that will help inform Congress and the Administration. And I look forward to the next nuclear posture review that will take in all of this good work and develop a posture consistent with the presidents' stated objectives and that provides a significant enough level of detail that allows for implementation.

A significant part of my job will be to participate in that national debate and nuclear posture review of course, but more importantly to lay out a vision for our nation's capability in all things nuclear

This vision is based on the reality that the nuclear debate is not just about warheads and the size of the deterrent. The vision is that we must think more broadly and we must think about shifting our focus towards nuclear security. Or, in the NNSA, from a nuclear weapons complex to a nuclear security complex.

In the end it all comes down to people. It comes down to maintaining the best people in this country, and it comes down to stewardship of our people

What a wonderful opportunity we have before us. Let's be sure to get this right.

Thank you and I would be happy to take a few questions.