

Statement of William J. Perry
Before the
House Armed Services Subcommittee on Strategic Forces
Hearing on "Strategic Posture of the United States"
Washington, DC, March 2, 2011
3:30 PM – 2118 Rayburn House Office Building

Introduction

Chairman Turner, Ranking Member Sanchez, and Members of the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Strategic Forces, I am here today at your invitation to discuss the findings and results of the work of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States.

In 2009, Congress appointed our 12-person bipartisan group to conduct this review of U.S. strategic posture, and asked me to serve as Chairman with Jim Schlesinger as Vice-Chairman. This Commission deliberated for nearly a year and in 2009 reported our findings to the Administration, to the Congress, and to the American people. Today I appear to discuss those findings with today's Congress. I have reviewed my testimony from 2009, and find that I substantially agree with what I said then, so this written testimony differs from what I presented in 2009 only in bringing it up-to-date with events that have transpired since then.

The Commission greatly benefited from the input of a number of members of Congress, outside groups, and individuals of every stripe that care deeply about these issues and their country. Likewise, we were enriched in our understanding of these issues by the thoughtful perspectives and advice of nations that are U.S. allies, friends, or fellow nuclear powers. We received unstinting assistance from the Executive Branch, which has been individually and collectively supportive of the Commission. The United States Institute of Peace, its employees, and contractors provided outstanding support to the Commission, and I thank them again. I also want to make special mention of and praise the members of our five Expert Working Groups and their leaders, who volunteered countless hours of their time in supporting the Commission and its work and provided us with strong intellectual assistance of the highest caliber.

While each Commissioner, including myself, would have written a report that would be worded somewhat differently than our final report, it is most significant that with the exception of parts of the chapter on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), this is a consensus document. And even with CTBT, while we could not agree on common language overall, we did agree on recommendations that would prepare the way for Senate reconsideration of the Treaty. We strove to ensure that the essence of our disagreement was presented as clearly and succinctly as possible so that interested individuals and groups can review the arguments, weigh them carefully, and reach their own conclusions.

At the beginning of the Commission's work, I did not imagine that such an ideologically disparate group of senior experts would find so much common ground. And the trail we followed to arrive at this document was not always easy for us, logistically, intellectually, or emotionally. But the seriousness of the issues, and the stakes involved for America and the world, called forth the "better angels" in all of us Commissioners, resulting in a largely consensus document. We hope that the Executive Branch and Congress will also face these national critical security policy issues in a similar nonpartisan spirit.

Background

In conducting its work, the Commission adopted a broad definition of strategic posture. We defined the scope of our work to include all dimensions of nuclear weapons, including the key infrastructures that support them, and all the major tools to counter the nuclear threat to the United States and its allies, including arms control, missile defense, and countering nuclear proliferation. But we also defined some limits to our inquiry. For example, we chose not to expand our scope of work to address issues associated with all weapons of mass destruction, though we did address the question of whether and how nuclear weapons have a role in deterring attacks with biological weapons. Neither did we examine threats such as cyber attacks and space conflict, though this does not mean we consider them unimportant. I believe that cyber attacks, in particular, merit serious examination in the near future. Also, our pre-eminent conventional military capabilities are themselves a major strategic force, but we understood Congress was not seeking our advice on these matters.

Commission Findings

When one considers the destructive power of the nuclear weapons within our strategic posture, which generated important disagreements throughout the Cold War and after, it is not surprising that the American nuclear posture has been, and will continue to be, highly controversial on key issues. What was surprising is the extent to which our commission did reach agreement on numerous issues related to our deterrent capabilities, nonproliferation initiatives, and arms control strategies, which I believe are the three key components of U.S. strategic posture in the years ahead. The Commission agreed that the nation must continue to safeguard itself by maintaining a nuclear deterrent appropriate to existing threats until such time as verifiable international agreements are in place that could set the conditions for the final abolition of nuclear weapons. That is, we seek to safeguard our security by supporting military and intelligence programs that maintain our deterrence force. At the same time, we also seek to safeguard our security by supporting largely non-military programs that prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons to other states, that reduce the number of nuclear weapons worldwide, and that provide better protection for the residual nuclear forces and fissile material. Both approaches are necessary for America's future; each can and should reinforce the other; and neither by itself is sufficient as long as nuclear weapons still exist in the world.

Nuclear weapons served to safeguard our security for decades during the Cold War by deterring an attack on the U.S. and its allies. We will need them to continue to perform

this deterrence role as long as others possess them as well. On the other hand, if nuclear weapons were to fall into the hands of a terror organization, they could pose an extremely serious threat to our security, and one for which traditional forms of deterrence would not be applicable, given the terrorist mindset. We must be mindful that Al Qaeda, for example, has declared that obtaining a nuclear weapon is a “holy duty” for its members. Preventing nuclear terrorism is closely tied to stopping the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and recent developments in North Korea and Iran suggest that we may be at or near a tipping point in nuclear proliferation. (The urgency of stopping proliferation is articulated compellingly in the recent WMD Commission report: “World at Risk.”)

While the programs that maintain our deterrence force are national, the programs that prevent proliferation and safeguard nuclear weapons and fissile material are both national and international. Indeed, it is clear that we cannot meet our goal of reducing the proliferation threat without substantial international cooperation. We cannot “go it alone” on this crucial security issue, nor need we, given that the nations whose cooperation is most critical are at risk from nuclear proliferation as much as we. But the international programs that are most effective in containing and rolling back proliferation can sometimes be in conflict with the national programs designed to maintain deterrence. Thus a strategic posture for the U.S. that meets both of these security requirements will necessarily have to make some tradeoffs between these two important security goals when they are in conflict. Some commissioners give a priority to dealing with one threat while others give a priority to dealing with the other threat. But throughout the deliberations of the commission, there was unswerving member loyalty to the importance of assuring U.S. security in the years ahead, and all of our members sought to strike a balance that supports, to reasonable levels, both of these security needs. To a large extent, I am pleased to say, we were able to meet that objective.

The need to strike such a balance has been with us at least since the ending of the Cold War. President Clinton’s policy on nuclear posture spoke of the need to “lead but hedge.” That policy called for the U.S. to lead the world in mutual nuclear arms reductions and to lead in programs to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons, while at the same time maintaining a nuclear deterrent force that hedged against adverse geopolitical developments. The leadership aspect of this policy was demonstrated most vividly by a cooperative program with Russia, established under the Nunn-Lugar Program that dismantled about 4,000 former Soviet nuclear weapons and assisted Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan in removing all of their nuclear weapons, a signal contribution to a safer world. U.S. leadership has also been demonstrated by the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, (signed during the Clinton administration but not ratified), the Moscow Treaty (ratified and entered into force during the Bush administration), and New START (ratified and entered into force during the Obama administration).

President Obama’s Nuclear Posture Review has moved this strategy forward by expressing a strong commitment to maintain a U.S. nuclear deterrent that is safe, secure, and reliable, while at the same time working towards the goal of ultimately eliminating all nuclear weapons. This is, in a sense, the most recent formulation of the “lead but

hedge” policy. The Commission believes that reaching the ultimate goal of global nuclear elimination would require a fundamental change in the world geopolitical order, something that none of us believe is imminent. Senator Sam Nunn, former chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, who has espoused the vision of nuclear elimination, has described this vision as the “top of the mountain,” which cannot be seen at this time, and the exact path to which is not yet clear. But he argues that we should be heading up the mountain to a “base camp” that would be safer than where we are today, and from which the path to the mountaintop becomes clearer. When we reach the base camp, it would:

- Provide for U.S. nuclear forces that are safe, secure, and can reliably deter attacks against the U.S. and our allies;
- Be headed in the direction of the global elimination of nuclear weapons; and
- Be stable -- that is, it should be sustainable even under typical fluctuations in geopolitical conditions.

Senator Nunn and I both believe that getting the international political support to move to this “base camp” requires the United States to affirm the vision of global elimination of nuclear weapons, but this was not a position taken by the Commission. This base camp concept serves as an organizing principle for my own thinking about our strategic posture, since it allows the United States to both lead in the struggle to reduce and ultimately eliminate the nuclear danger; and hedge against a reversal in this struggle, providing an important safety net for U.S. security. While some of the commissioners do not accept this view of the base camp as an organizing principle, all commissioners accept the view that the U.S. must support programs that both lead and hedge; that is, programs that move in two parallel paths – one path which protects our security by maintaining deterrence, and the other which protects our security by reducing the danger of nuclear weapons.

The first path, “Deterrence,” would include the following components:

- Clarify our policy on use of nuclear weapons to include a statement that our nuclear forces are intended to deter an attack against the U.S. or its allies (extending this security guarantee to our allies is often referred to as “extended deterrence”) and would be used only as a defensive last resort; at the same time, our policy would reaffirm the security assurances we have made to non-nuclear states that signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).
- Back up our deterrent and extended deterrent policy by assuring that our nuclear forces – including the weapons themselves, their delivery platforms, and the surveillance, detection, and command/control/communications/ intelligence infrastructures that support them and the National Command Authority – are safe, secure, and reliable, and in sufficient quantities to perform their deterrent tasks;
- Maintain the safety, security, reliability, and effectiveness of our nuclear weapons stockpile by an enhanced nuclear weapons Life Extension Program as long as it is

feasible; but ensure the nuclear weapons laboratories maintain their capability to design a new weapon should that ever become necessary;

- Provide robust support for the Stockpile Stewardship Program, DOE's highly successful program to ensure the safety, security, and reliability of the nation's nuclear stockpile without testing. This program seeks a comprehensive, science-based understanding of nuclear weapon systems, and entails pushing the frontiers of computing and simulation along with ensuring robust laboratory experimental capabilities. The weapons labs have achieved remarkable success with stockpile stewardship since it was instituted a decade and a half ago.
- Maintain all three weapon laboratories with programs that fully support the nuclear weapons programs and maintain their scientific and design vitality. Besides weapons programs, their program mix should include fundamental research and energy technologies as well as an expanded national security role, which will benefit other dimensions of the security challenges we face.
- Transform our weapons production capability by reducing and modernizing it, giving first priority to the Los Alamos plutonium facility, followed by the Y-12 site Uranium Processing Facility site after the plutonium facilities are under construction. The goal would be to have a capability to produce small numbers of nuclear weapons as needed to maintain nuclear stockpile reliability. (The Administration's requested FY 2011 budget provides funding for both of these actions.)
- Provide proven strategic missile defenses sufficient to limit damage from and defend against a limited nuclear threat such as posed by North Korea or Iran. The defenses should be effective enough so that such countries could not believe that a missile attack by them would succeed. But the defenses should not be so numerous or capable as to stimulate Russia or China to take countering actions, increasing the nuclear threat to the U.S., its allies, and friends, therefore undermining efforts to reduce nuclear numbers and, consequently, nuclear dangers.
- Reprogram funding to initiate F-35 fighter aircraft contractor participation with NNSA to assure that the U.S. would maintain current capabilities available to support U.S. allies.

The administration's Nuclear Posture Review, which was issued after our report was submitted, supports all of those components and calls for the funding necessary to achieve them. The Commission recognizes the tension between modernization and nonproliferation. But so long as modernization proceeds within the framework of existing U.S. policy, it should minimize political difficulties. As a matter of policy, the United States does not produce fissile materials and does not conduct nuclear explosive tests, and does not currently seek new weapons with new military characteristics. Within this framework, the United States should seek all of the possible benefits of improved safety, security, and reliability.

The second path, “Reducing the Danger,” includes the following components:

- Re-energize efforts to reverse the nuclear proliferation of North Korea and prevent the nuclear proliferation of Iran. Seek global cooperation to deal with other potential proliferation concerns arising from the anticipated global expansion of civilian nuclear power.
- Negotiate arms reduction treaties with Russia that make significant reductions in the nuclear stockpiles of Russia and the United States. The treaties should include verification procedures and should entail real reductions, not just a transfer of weapons from deployed to reserve forces. The first treaty could decrease deployed strategic warheads to numbers lower than the lower SORT limit (Moscow Treaty of 2002), but the actual numbers are probably less important than the “counting and attribution rules” of preceding agreements. New START, ratified by the Senate in December, meets all of these requirements. Follow-on treaties should seek deeper reductions, which would require finding ways to deal with difficult problems such as addressing “tactical” nuclear forces, reserve weapons and engaging other nuclear powers.
- Seek a deeper strategic dialogue with Russia that is broader than nuclear treaties, to include civilian nuclear energy, ballistic missile defenses, space systems, nuclear nonproliferation steps, and ways of improving warning systems and increasing decision time.
- Renew and strengthen strategic dialogue with a broad set of states interested in strategic stability, including not just Russia and our NATO allies but also China and U.S. allies and friends in Asia.
- Augment funding for threat reduction activities that strengthen controls at vulnerable nuclear sites. The surest way to prevent nuclear terrorism is to deny terrorist acquisitions of nuclear weapons or fissile materials. An accelerated campaign to close or secure the world’s most vulnerable nuclear sites as quickly as possible should be a top national priority. This would build on and expand the important foundation of work begun under the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program. Commit to the investment necessary to remove or secure all fissile material at vulnerable sites worldwide in four years. This relatively small investment could dramatically decrease the prospects of terrorist nuclear acquisition. The Nuclear Summit, held last April, sought to get the cooperation of other nations in safeguarding nuclear sites around the world.
- Seek Senate ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and encourage other hold-outs to do likewise. I strongly support Senate ratification of the CTBT, but I want to be clear that my view is not shared by all commissioners. I believe that the Stockpile Stewardship Program, established as a safeguard when the U.S. signed the CTBT, has been an outstanding success and has given us the needed confidence in the reliability of our stockpile without nuclear explosive testing. The United States has refrained from testing nuclear weapons for 17 years already and has no plans to

resume such testing in the future. Prior to seeking ratification, the Administration should obtain an explicit understanding with the P-5 states as to what tests are permitted by the treaty, and conduct a careful analysis of the issues that prevented ratification a decade ago. (All commissioners agree that these preceding steps should be taken, but not all commissioners support ratifying the CTBT.)

- While the Senate has the responsibility for considering the CTBT for ratification, both the Senate and the House should support funding for any Treaty safeguards the Obama Administration may propose, which will be essential to the ratification process.
- Prepare carefully for the NPT review conference in 2010. (The review conference has already been held).
- Seek an international Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty, as President Obama has called for, that includes verification procedures, and redouble domestic and international efforts to secure all stocks of fissile material, steps that would discourage both nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism.
- Seek to strengthen the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in its task to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons to other nations and control access to fissile material. In particular, work with the IAEA to promote universal adoption of the Additional Protocol to the NPT, which would allow extra inspections of suspected nuclear facilities as well as declared facilities.
- Develop and pursue options for advancing U.S. interests in stability in outer space and in increasing warning and decision-time. The options could include the possibility of negotiated measures.
- Renew the practice and spirit of executive-legislative dialogue on nuclear strategy that helped pave the way for bipartisanship and continuity in policy in past years. To this end, we urge the Senate to consider reviving the Arms Control Observer Group, which served the country well in the past.

Concluding Remarks

In surveying six-plus decades of nuclear history, the Commission notes that nuclear weapons have not been used since 1945. It is clear that a tradition against the use of nuclear weapons has taken hold, which we must strive to maintain, and urge all nuclear-armed nations to adhere to it.

I see our present time as a moment of opportunity but also of urgency. The opportunity arises because the Russian government has indicated a readiness to undertake a serious dialogue with the U.S. on strategic issues. The urgency arises because of the imminent danger of nuclear terrorism if we pass a tipping point in nuclear proliferation. The commissioners agreed on what direction they wanted the world to take. They rejected the vision of a future world defined by a collapse of the nonproliferation regime, a cascade of nuclear proliferation to new states, a resulting dramatic rise in the risks of nuclear terrorism, and renewed fruitless competition for nuclear advantage among major powers.

The commissioners, as pragmatic experts, embraced a different vision. They saw a world where the occasional nonproliferation failure is counter-balanced by the occasional rollback of some and continued restraint by the many. They saw a world in which nuclear terrorism risks are steadily reduced through stronger cooperative measures to control terrorist access to materials, technology, and expertise. And they saw a world of cooperation among the major powers that ensures strategic stability and order, and steadily diminishes reliance on nuclear weapons to preserve world peace, not as a favor to others, but because it is in the best interests of the United States, and the world. I believe that implementing the strategy our report recommended will help the United States lead the global effort to give fruitful birth to this new world.