

STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

May 6, 2009

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee:

The Congress established the Commission on Strategic Posture in order to provide recommendations regarding the appropriate posture for the United States under the changed conditions of the early twentieth-first century. The appointed Commissioners represent a wide range of the political spectrum and have had quite diverse judgments on these matters. Nonetheless, urged by members of Congress, the Commission has sought to develop a consensus view. To a large—and, to some, a surprising—extent, the Commission has succeeded in this effort. Secretary Perry and I are here to present that consensus to this Committee. We are, of course, indebted to the Committee for this opportunity to present these recommendations.

For over half a century, the U. S. strategic policy has been driven by two critical elements: to maintain a deterrent that prevents attacks on the United States, its interests, and, notably, its allies—and to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The end of the Cold War, and particularly the collapse of the Soviet Union/Warsaw Pact, along with the substantial edge that the United States has developed in conventional military capabilities have permitted this country sharply to reduce our reliance on nuclear weapons, radically to reduce our nuclear forces, and to move away from a doctrine of nuclear initiation to a stance of nuclear response only under extreme circumstances of major attack on the United States or its allies.

On the other hand, the growing availability of nuclear technology, along with the relaxation of the constraints of the Cold War, have obliged us to turn increasing attention to the problem of nonproliferation and, in particular, to the possibility of a terrorist nuclear attack on the United States.

Secretary Perry has just spoken on the diplomatic issues and the problems of preventing proliferation, and the risks of nuclear terrorism. I, for my part, will focus on the need, despite its substantially shrunken role in the post-Cold War world, to maintain a deterrent reduced in size, yet nonetheless reliable and secure—and sufficiently impressive and visible to provide assurance to the thirty-odd nations that are protected under the U. S. nuclear umbrella.

1. Since the early days of NATO, the United States has provided Extended Deterrence for its allies. That has proved a far more demanding task than protection of the United States itself. In the past that has required a deterrent sufficiently large and sophisticated, to deter a conventional attack by the Soviet Union/Warsaw Pact. It also meant that the United States discouraged the development of national nuclear capabilities, particularly during the Kennedy Administration, both to prevent proliferation and to avoid the diversion of resources away from the development of conventional allied capabilities. With the end of the Cold War and the achievement of U. S. preponderance in conventional capabilities, the need for so substantial a deterrent largely disappeared. Nonetheless, the requirements for Extended Deterrence still remain at the heart of the design of the U. S. nuclear posture. Extended Deterrence still remains a major barrier to proliferation. Both the size and the specific elements

of our forces are driven more by the need to reassure those that we protect under the nuclear umbrella than by U. S. requirements alone. Even though the overall requirements of our nuclear forces have shrunk some eighty percent since the height of the Cold War, nonetheless the expansion of NATO and the rise of Chinese nuclear forces, significant if modest, have altered somewhat the requirements for our own nuclear forces.

2. Even though the most probable source of a weapon landing on American soil increasingly is that of a nuclear terrorist attack, nonetheless the sizing of our own nuclear forces (in addition to other elements of our deterrent posture) remains driven in large degree by Russia. Our NATO allies—and most notably the new members of NATO—remain wary of Russia and would eye nervously any sharp reduction of our nuclear forces relative to those of Russia—especially in light of the now-greater emphasis by Russia on tactical nuclear weapons. Consequently, the Commission did conclude that we should not engage in unilateral reductions in our nuclear forces and that such reductions should occur only as a result of bilateral negotiations with Russia under a follow-on START Agreement. Any such reductions must, of course, be thoroughly discussed with our allies
3. Our East Asian allies also view with great interest our capabilities relative to the slowly burgeoning Chinese force. Clearly that adds complexities, for example, to the protection of Japan, though that remains a lesser driver with respect to overall numbers. Still, the time has come to engage Japan in more comprehensive discussions—akin to those with NATO in the Nuclear Planning Group. It will also augment the credibility of the Extended Deterrent.

4. The Commission has been urged to specify the number of nuclear weapons the United States should have. That is an understandable question—particularly in light of the demands of the appropriations process in the Congress. Nonetheless, it is a mistake to focus unduly on numbers, without reference to the overall strategic context. Clearly, it would be illogical to provide a number outside of the process of negotiation with Russia—given the need to avoid giving away bargaining leverage. In preparation for the Treaty of Moscow, as with all of its predecessors, the composition for our prospective forces was subjected to the most rigorous analyses. Thus, it would seem to be unacceptable to go below the numbers specified in that Treaty without a similarly rigorous analysis of the strategic context—which has not yet taken place. Moreover, as our Russian friends have repeatedly told us: strategic balance is more important than the numbers.
5. Given the existence of other nations’ nuclear capabilities and the international role that the United States necessarily plays, the Commission quickly reached the judgment that the United States must maintain a nuclear deterrent for “the indefinite future.” It must convey, not only the capacity, but the will to respond—in necessity. Some members of the Commission have expressed a hope that at some future date we might see the worldwide abolition of nuclear weapons. The judgment of the Commission, however, has been that attainment of such a goal would require a “transformation of world politics.” President Obama also has expressed that goal, but has added that as long as nuclear weapons exist in the world, the United States must maintain “a strong deterrent.” We should all bear

in mind that abolition of nuclear weapons will not occur outside that
“transformation of world politics.”

6. We sometimes hear or read the query: why are we investing in these capabilities which will never be used?”. This is a fallacy. A deterrent, if it is effective, is in “use” every day. The purpose in sustaining these capabilities is to be sufficiently impressive to avoid their “use”—in the sense of the actual need to deliver the weapons to targets. That is the nature of any deterrent, but particularly a nuclear deterrent. It exists to deter major attacks against the United States, its allies, and its interests.

Years ago the role and the details of our nuclear deterrent commanded sustained and high-level national attention. Regrettably, today they do so far less than is necessary. Nonetheless, the role of the deterrent remains crucial. Therefore, I thank this Committee for its continued attention to these critical questions.