

Testimony to House Foreign Affairs Committee

Nuclear Strategic Arms Control

William J. Perry 24 June, 2009

I have been asked to testify to this committee on the future prospects for strategic nuclear arms control. I will do this by summarizing the relevant findings of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States which I chaired along with Jim Schlesinger, the relevant findings of a CFR Task Force, which I co-chaired, along with Brent Scowcroft, and the conclusions I reached from four different visits to Russia these past six months. I will begin by relating findings of the Commission and the Task Force to the emerging administration policy in this field as expressed by President Obama in his April speech in Prague.

The President said that the US faced growing threats from nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism, but that we must continue to hedge against the possibility of a resurgence of old threats. The Commission and the Task Force agreed with that assessment.

The President said that the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) would be critical tools in dealing with the emerging threats, and that the US apply more resources to the IAEA, work to strengthen the NPT and prepare carefully for NPT review conference in 2010. With regard to the IAEA, the Commission specifically recommended that the US provide stronger political, financial and technical support to the IAEA to enhance its capabilities to perform its unique and vital mission.

The President said that success in preventing proliferation would require the cooperation of all nations and that getting their full cooperation would entail meaningful progress in nuclear disarmament between the US and Russia. The Commission and Task Force agreed, but some members thought that link was strong and others thought it was relatively weak.

The president said that the US should move forward with the European missile defense system as long as an Iranian missile threat persisted, and that we should seek to find a way of cooperating on missile defense with Russia. The commission agreed. More specifically, the Task Force urged a delay in deploying missile defenses to Europe until the system has been proven but also recommended the system be linked to evolving assessments of the ballistic missile threats from Iran and North Korea.

The president declared that this administration seeks a world without nuclear weapons, and would work for it. He said that it would take a very long time to achieve this goal, but, In the meantime, we should seek to reduce the numbers and the salience of nuclear weapons. He also clearly stated as long as any nation had nuclear weapons the US would maintain safe secure and reliable nuclear forces that provided both deterrence and extended deterrence.

The Commission and the Task Force supported the commitment to maintain deterrence forces as well as the commitment to reduce the salience and numbers of nuclear weapons provided that the reductions were done bilaterally. But about half of the Commission members did not support the nuclear elimination goal. Some thought that such a goal was not feasible. A few thought that even if it was feasible it was not desirable.

The President said that he would seek to have the CTBT ratified. I agree with that goal; indeed I believe that if the US does not ratify CTBT that we will be unable to provide the necessary leadership in curbing proliferation. The Task Force also endorsed this goal. However the Commission members split 50-50 on whether this was desirable. The Commission prepared the pro and con views for ratification in its final report. However, the Commission did agree on steps the Administration should take to prepare the way for Senate re-consideration of the treaty.

The President also said that the US would seek to negotiate a follow-on START treaty and a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty. Both the Commission and the Task Force agreed with those goals.

The Commission discussed new strategic arms agreements in some detail, saying that the US should proceed in stages. The first stage could be completed before expiration of the START treaty in December if the US pursued modest objectives and kept it simple. Additional strategic arms treaties would necessarily involve very difficult issues, would take longer, and be much harder to reach agreement.

The Commission was formed by the Congress to inform the administration and the Congress on strategic issues entailed in the NPR now under preparation. Additionally, the NPR should inform the administration and the Congress on the nation's arms control strategy. I believe that this is, in fact, in process. The first phase of the NPR, which focused on actions that would affect the near-term treaty, is essentially finished. The second phase, which will focus on longer term and more difficult arms control issues, is just getting underway. It is also important in considering the more comprehensive arms control strategy, that the US should consult with allies and friends, especially those covered by extended deterrence. The Commission put a major effort in meeting with allies and seeking to understand their views, and their views are clearly reflected in the Commission's report. I understand that the administration already has such consultations underway.

The Commission made a number of substantial recommendations on the programs necessary to maintain safe secure and reliable deterrence forces. I have been briefed by senior officials in the DOD and DOE and am pleased to hear that the Commission's recommendations in that respect are being received positively by the administration and have been a fundamental input to the NPR.

I have had an excellent opportunity to see how these issues are regarded by the Russians, since I have made 4 trips to Moscow in the last 6 months, the most recent of which I returned from two days ago. I have talked with a number of Russian technical experts, a number of Duma members, and key government leaders, including the

President, Foreign Minister, and National Security Advisor. Besides these recent meetings, I have maintained a sustained dialog on security issues with Russian colleagues for almost 30 years, and, during the time I was Secretary of Defense, worked very closely with the Russian government in the dismantlement of nuclear weapons in the former Soviet republics under the Nunn-Lugar program. Nevertheless, I had stopped visiting Russia in 2007 and 2008 because I felt the relations between our two countries had become so strained that a constructive dialog had become impractical. But this February, at a security conference in Munich, Vice President Biden said that it was time to “press the reset button” on US-Russia relations. Many predicted that the Russians would react to that with cynicism or skepticism. But I had an opportunity to test this first hand in March when I visited Moscow for a meeting chaired by former PM Primakov and Henry Kissinger. The highlight of this meeting was a discussion with President Medvedev. He was preparing for his upcoming London meeting with President Obama, and I had the impression that he used his discussions with us to “test market” what he planned to say to President Obama. He told us that he supported the long-term goal of eliminating nuclear weapons. And he said that Russia was anxious to resume serious arms control discussions with the US, with the immediate goal of negotiating a follow-on treaty to START and SORT. He believed that such a treaty could and should be completed before START expired in December. Based on these and other comments, I was confident that our two presidents would have a constructive dialog. Indeed, that confidence was justified by the summit meeting that the two leaders had in London in April, and I believe that it will continue to be justified next month at the summit meeting in Moscow.

Nevertheless, there is some reason to be concerned about basically different perspectives between the US with Russia on nuclear arms treaties. They are strongly opposed to our ballistic missile defense system in Eastern Europe; they believe that the counting rules agreed to in SORT are disadvantageous to them, and they have not agreed to include non-strategic nuclear weapons, in which they have a large numerical advantage. I believe that these issues will not prove to be a barrier to the START follow-on treaty being negotiated this year; I can see a suitable compromise being worked out for the counting rules, and I believe that the both sides will agree not to consider non-strategic nuclear weapons this year. However, these will be very difficult issues to resolve in any follow-on agreements. On balance, I believe that we can this year negotiate a START follow-on treaty compatible with our security, but that in doing so both sides will decide to defer to future negotiations issues too difficult to resolve at this time. I believe that is right approach.