

**By Rep Ike Skelton, Chairman of the US House of Representatives Armed Services Committee**

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 required the Secretary of Defense to perform a review of our nuclear posture, in coordination with the Departments of State and Energy.

The Administration's Nuclear Posture Review seeks to establish a bipartisan approach to nuclear policy, and, in my view, properly balances the role of our nuclear deterrent forces with the goals of preventing nuclear terrorism and weapons proliferation.

It contains exactly the balance that former Secretaries of Defense Bill Perry and Jim Schlesinger recommended to our committee a year ago when they presented the finding of the bipartisan Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States. 'This is a moment of opportunity,' the commission concluded, to reach consensus on U.S. nuclear strategy, but it is also a 'moment of urgency.'

The urgency, according to these experts, arises 'internationally, from the danger that we may be close to a tipping point in nuclear proliferation and, domestically, from an accumulation of delayed decisions about the nuclear weapon program.'

The Administration's Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) offers us the opportunity to act on the urgent issues, both internationally and domestically, that the commission identified.

Following the path first outlined by President Obama in his speech in Prague last year, the NPR calls for responsibly reducing the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy. This action opens the door to stronger steps against rogue states and those who would fail to protect nuclear technology and materials.

The NPR's new approach recognizes that we live in a complicated world that demands immediate action to protect us from the threat of nuclear terrorism, such as locking down loose nuclear materials in concert with other nations. And in that regard, I want to congratulate the President on obtaining the agreement of 47 nations here in Washington at the Nuclear Summit to lock down these materials within 4 years.

At the same time, the NPR is grounded in the strength of our nuclear deterrent forces. It calls for retaining a nuclear 'triad' of intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and heavy bombers.

I am also pleased that the review concluded that, as long as nuclear weapons are around, they will be maintained safely, securely and reliably; and consistent with the Stockpile Management statute recommended by this committee last year and codified in law by the Defense bill.

In addition to the NPR, the nation's nuclear posture and force structure has recently been influenced by the announcement and signing of a new Strategic Arms Reduction or START treaty with the Russians.

This new treaty comes at a critical time, as we approach the May Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. By agreeing to reduce their nuclear stockpiles, the U.S. and Russia have sent a clear message to the rest of the world.

This action by the two largest nuclear powers will only strengthen President Obama's efforts at the conference to impose stiffer punishments on nations such as Iran that are accused of violating the NPT.

The road before us to a world free of nuclear threats is long and will at times be difficult, but the signing of the historic New START Treaty moved us miles ahead toward reaching this final destination.

In his memoirs, Ronald Reagan noted that 'for the eight years I was President, I never let my dream of a nuclear-free world fade from my mind.'

Like President Reagan, President Obama is aiming high with his commitment to a world without nuclear weapons. But, as I read it, the President's Nuclear Posture and the New START Treaty are deeply rooted in a common-sense strategy that will enhance our national security by protecting us from the most urgent nuclear dangers.