

Rep. Tauscher Addresses the Progressive Policy Institute on Nuclear Security and Missile Defense

Progressive Solutions For Nuclear
Security And Missile Defense

Remarks For The Progressive Policy Institute's "Close the Security Gap" Forum

By Rep. Ellen O. Tauscher

Thank you Will for your leadership at the Progressive Policy Institute. A big thanks to Jim for organizing this conference and showing that progressives have a strong, smart approach to protecting our country; and thank you all for being here. It's rewarding to be in the same room with so many of the people who are working to take our country in a new direction.

I just returned earlier this week from leading a congressional delegation to Afghanistan and Pakistan. We looked at two of the biggest security challenges of our time. One is a struggling state with resurgent terrorist groups. The second is a nuclear armed state, operating outside the Nonproliferation Treaty, in the most volatile area in the world.

After visiting both countries I sat down with the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Mohamed El Baradei, in Vienna to discuss the international community's efforts to deal with rogue states like North Korea and Iran. The trip clarified a number of things for our delegation -- foremost, the need for the United States to lead our allies in multi-lateral efforts to tackle the most pressing global security challenges -- whether it be stabilizing Afghanistan and Pakistan so they are no longer breeding grounds for the Taliban and al Qaeda, or the global effort to combat the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

After eight years of the Bush Administration bashing arms control treaties and failing to lead on nonproliferation, Washington is poised for change. With the election of Barack Obama, we would move closer to a day when we can once again put a progressive vision on nonproliferation into practice. A vision that smartly sees the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction as a problem with multiple, not strictly military, solutions. A progressive solution puts the stewardship of our arsenal, nonproliferation programs, and the international arms control regime into one coherent strategy that better protects the American people.

As Chairman of the House Armed Services Strategic Forces Subcommittee, I have spent the past two years working to rationalize our nuclear complex, strengthen our stockpile stewardship programs, beef up security at the nuclear labs, and ensure that our nonproliferation programs have the support and funding they deserve.

Today, I'll address today's biggest nuclear challenges, and progressive ideas to meet them.

Like many of you, I have long worried that our government does not have a clear understanding of the proliferation threats we face. The new president's first task should be to understand the true nature of proliferation. The Bush Administration has done a very poor job of understanding the capabilities of terrorist groups and identifying the challenge posed by breakout nuclear powers.

We cannot ignore groups like Al Qaeda who aim to acquire nuclear weapons. But we miscalculate if we confuse intent with capability. Al Qaeda may want nuclear weapons but likely does not have them - at least not yet. It is critical that we also determine the full extent of A.Q. Khan's nuclear black market across Southeast Asia and the Middle East. And, we need to have the intelligence capabilities to detect the assembly of nuclear weapons by a terrorist group.

Any comprehensive threat assessment must also take a close look at the international demand for nuclear power, which can create proliferation problems. The demand for nuclear power is growing exponentially, and understandably. The IAEA projects that at least sixty more nuclear power plants will come online over the next fifteen years, for a total of over five-hundred power plants worldwide. The United Nations warns that of the sixty countries which currently operate or are constructing reactors, at least forty have the infrastructure to build nuclear weapons on relatively short notice. For nations willing to break the rules, the legal pursuit of nuclear energy can be a backdoor to developing illegal weapons capabilities.

While we should not prevent countries from using nuclear power, the next president's threat assessment must be able to identify when it may be turning into a weapons program. Once the next president and Congress have a better understanding of these threats, it's critical that we find the best solutions to meet them. Our resources are finite, and part of the answer has to be strengthening existing international norms and, where necessary, inventing new frameworks to manage and contain the threat of further proliferation. After eight years of kicking treaties in the teeth, it is time that the United States recommit ourselves to the arms control regimes that have served and secured our interests for so long.

But recommitting need not mean embracing old tools in their current state. The high road for the Obama Administration will be taking the best achievements of previous administrations, strengthening them, and exploring new policies like vigorous interventions to remove loose nuclear material. We must build on the successes of the past, whether they are binding treaties like the Nonproliferation Treaty; multilateral regimes like the Nuclear Suppliers Group; international bodies like the IAEA; or a series of export controls and sanctions.

A top goal for the new administration should also be to ensure that the international nuclear club expands to include every country that has nuclear weapons, whether they have acknowledged them formally or not. This club should include India, Pakistan and Israel. It's the only way we are assured the owners of weapons, know-how and materials are following the same rules - or frankly any rules at all. The Bush Administration's decision to give India -- which is not a member of the Nonproliferation Treaty -- the benefits of nuclear trade without any of the responsibilities was shortsighted, and may encourage an arms race in South Asia. Other countries that we may want to draw into the NPT in the future will now see no incentive whatsoever to do so, undermining our security interests.

India, Pakistan and Israel must be brought into the nuclear club and asked to adopt serious nonproliferation commitments. New concepts like coercive inspections or expanded threat reduction have a place alongside the existing arms control mechanisms in our toolbox. And, the highly partisan debate witnessed in the Senate in 1999 should not be the end of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty story. The Senate must take up and ratify this treaty.

There is also something Congress can do in the meantime to bolster international nonproliferation efforts. The CTBT Organization is building and operating an amazing monitoring system that provides the international community with the ability to detect nuclear tests. The system provides the multi-lateral validation that is vital in assessing events like the October 2006 nuclear test conducted by North Korea. It's equally vital that the United States and Russia negotiate a legally binding replacement to START, which is scheduled to expire at the end of next

year. Despite current tensions between both countries, we still need to work with Russia to reduce our arsenals. As the United States and Russia reduce the number of deployed nuclear weapons in the spirit of the Moscow Treaty, these rules become more and more crucial. These rules create the confidence on which mutual deterrence relies.

The United States must also lead a multi-lateral push to strengthen the International Atomic Energy Agency. The IAEA has seen the demands placed on it grow dramatically, but has had no real growth in its budget for several years. Modest investments in this area will pay substantial dividends for global nuclear security.

After engaging our allies on international norms, we must also ensure that we have the most effective missile shield to protect our allies and ourselves. There are some Republicans who cling to Ronald Reagan's notion of Star Wars as sacred. They are wrong. And there are some in our party who still cling to their Reagan-era objections. They are wrong, too. The House voted in 1999 to "deploy as soon as technologically possible an effective National Missile Defense system capable of defending the territory of the United States against limited ballistic missile attack." I have been working to achieve that - authorizing only what makes sense and cutting what doesn't. All told, the Democratic-led Congress authorized all but about one-and-a-half billion dollars of the Bush Administration's over twenty-one billion dollar request over the last two years.

There has been a lot of attention lately on the U.S.-Poland agreement to base long-range missile defense interceptors there. Let me be clear - the way the Bush Administration rolled out its proposal last year was just plain awful. We need a system that focuses first on existing threats. For eight years, the Bush Administration has asked Congress to fund unproven science projects to create a layered missile defense system from literally the ground in Alaska to outer space. Moreover, the only plan the Bush Administration has for European security is against long range missiles, a threat that has not yet materialized.

But the Bush Administration's lousy start with Poland doesn't have to mean our lousy result. Democrats are committed to working with our NATO allies to defend against the threat posed by short, medium, and long range ballistic missiles, including the growing threat from Iran. And, we are going to do it with a system that is sufficiently tested, designed to counter the real threats we face, and fully integrated with NATO. Senator Obama has backed the approach I've put forward on European missile defense. I look forward to once again having a president who understands that America's strength comes not just from having the greatest military in the world, but also from the indivisibility of Alliance security.

However, we can finally get it right in Poland and still miss the big picture here at home. We need to revamp the bureaucracy in Washington. A bipartisan report from the Partnership for a Secure America made clear this week that our government is so disorganized it gets failing grades on addressing proliferation. Multiple agencies have an alphabet soup of offices and programs with responsibilities for various facets of nonproliferation. While our nation's nonproliferation programs all have had success, they are not guided by an overall plan or someone with real authority. Because of this lack of high-level attention and leadership, some programs have either lapsed or been burdened with unrelated restrictions. For example, the Nuclear Cities program which helped find alternative employment for Russian weapons scientists was killed off by George W. Bush's first Secretary of Energy. That's why I championed a concept which Speaker Pelosi ultimately included in H.R. One when Democrats first regained the majority: an Office of Nonproliferation in the White House. The director is given full budget authority over all our nonproliferation programs and is tasked with designing and implementing a strategic plan for addressing WMDs.

Makes sense, right? That's what the House thought. It's what the Senate thought, too. And it's what President Bush signed into law. But more a year later, President Bush has yet to name a director. I know that President Obama would not be so distracted as to make the same mistake.

Beyond all the steps I've laid out to make our nonproliferation programs more coherent, our nuclear policy deserves a thorough public debate. I have long been committed to pushing our strategic and nuclear weapons policies out of the Cold War paradigms and into the new century. That's why I helped establish an independent, bipartisan commission headed by Bill Perry and Jim Schlesinger to examine U.S. strategic posture, paying close attention to our nuclear weapons policy. I believe this commission can help frame the discussion about the role nuclear weapons should play in our evolving notion of deterrence. How the United States manages and maintains our nuclear arsenal directly impacts how credible we can be when pressing for global nonproliferation. We have committed under Article Six of the Nonproliferation Treaty to work in good faith toward nuclear disarmament, but we must also sustain a minimum deterrent for the foreseeable future.

So how do we craft a nuclear weapons strategy that meets this challenge?

The most recent Nuclear Posture Review is almost six years old. Its call for a "New Triad" promised to deemphasize nuclear weapons, but that promise was undermined by its call for new types of nuclear weapons. And its endorsement of preemptive nuclear strikes is terrifying. In this context, we find ourselves at a critical juncture in our strategic posture. The human capital and

physical infrastructure we rely on to keep our nuclear weapons safe, secure and reliable is aging. And nuclear weapons experts tell us that in coming years the Life Extension Programs currently used to maintain our legacy weapons will no longer be cost-effective. From reorganizing the bureaucracy to developing a Nuclear Posture Review that's more robust than it is earth penetrating, President Obama will have a full plate when it comes to correcting the past eight years and developing the nuclear policy our country needs - and global security dictates.

As we look to answer these significant questions about our arsenal and the most effective ways to combat weapons of mass destruction, I look forward to working with all of you to make sure we make the right choices for the American people.