

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4904

June 3, 2009

The Honorable Michael Nacht
Assistant Secretary of Defense
for Global Strategic Affairs
The Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon,
Washington DC 20301-1400

Dear Dr. Nacht,

I write to request that while conducting the Nuclear Posture Review you consider the need to consolidate and reduce the size of our domestic nuclear complex in order to minimize the risk of nuclear terrorism. A wide ranging group of national security experts, including Henry Kissinger and Sam Nunn, have identified the threat of nuclear terrorism as one of the key national security threats facing our nation. The danger that terrorists could steal nuclear materials or information or attack a nuclear weapons facility in the United States presents a grave danger to the United States. In order to reduce this threat, we must identify the ideal size and configuration of our domestic nuclear facilities to minimize the risk of a terrorist incident while maintaining a credible deterrent and working multilaterally to rid the world of nuclear weapons.

The Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States stated in its final report that "terrorist use of a nuclear weapon against the United States or its friends and allies is more likely than deliberate use by a state." Given this threat, I encourage the Department to review the need to minimize the size of the nuclear complex that sustains our arsenal. It is not necessary for terrorists to steal and smuggle nuclear materials from overseas to carry out an attack as we maintain nuclear materials within the United States that could be used to create an improvised nuclear device or a so-called "dirty bomb." Some of these materials are maintained in facilities in close proximity to major population centers. Given that even the most advanced security measures cannot guarantee against attacks, many experts have concluded that we need to consolidate our nuclear weapons infrastructure and reduce our stockpiles of excess fissile materials. Press reports today that the United States inadvertently released information regarding the storage of such materials within the United States demonstrates the ongoing challenge of securing these materials. We could significantly increase U.S. security by taking precautionary measures without compromising our deterrence capabilities.

Numerous government reports have highlighted the difficulties we have faced in securing our nuclear complex. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported in 2007 that the Department of Energy (DOE) "is facing challenges in improving its security measures to respond to the increased threat" that was identified in the wake of 9/11. In 2008, DOE's Office of Independent Oversight conducted an evaluation of security at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory which included a mock terrorist attack. The

office concluded that Livermore's security program had significant weaknesses, particularly with respect to the performance of Livermore's protective force and the physical protection of classified resources. GAO has reported within the last year that both Livermore and the Los Alamos National Laboratory have had difficulty sustaining corrective actions to address security deficiencies. In 2007, GAO found that DOE has made little progress consolidating and disposing of special nuclear material.

In addition to reducing the risk that terrorists could obtain nuclear materials or attack nuclear facilities in the United States, such precautionary measures would bolster our efforts to encourage other countries to increase the security of their nuclear materials. It would also enhance the United States ability to lead efforts to rid the world of nuclear weapons.

Sincerely,



Russell D. Feingold
United States Senator