



Bringing business models to our nation's security

September 12, 2006

The Honorable Duncan Hunter
The U.S. House of Representatives
2265 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-0552

Dear Chairman Hunter:

Five years after the September 11th attacks, our country faces another deadly threat. Terrorist attacks on U.S. soil using weapons of mass destruction "would be the surest way to top 9/11," as former acting CIA director John McLaughlin testified in June. A likely source of this grave threat also persists: the vast arsenals of the former Soviet Union – bomb-grade nuclear materials, lethal viruses, and millions of shells of nerve agent – remain under-secured and at risk of theft or diversion.

However, a cost-effective first line of defense exists: the Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) program, which is providing needed security for nuclear weapons storage and transport, locking down biological pathogens, and working to destroy the most vulnerable and proliferable of chemical weapons – all for less than one-tenth of one percent of the Pentagon's annual budget.

Business Executives for National Security (BENS), a national non-partisan organization, strongly supports the CTR program's urgent mission and applauds measures by the House and the Senate, in their versions of the FY 2007 Defense Authorization Bill, to bolster its impact. The House proposal for a National Academy of Sciences study – to assess challenges to the program and devise ways to better manage and facilitate it – makes eminent business sense and deserves Senate backing. Both chambers also have offered useful language to extend waiver authority for a chemical weapons destruction facility, reducing the chance that procedural delays could endanger this important project and the vast sums already invested in it.

Unfortunately, this and past measures do not go far enough to remove legislative bottlenecks that continue to slow progress and waste valuable resources. Each year, administration officials must spend thousands of hours assessing Russia's compliance with standing conditions on chemical destruction and the CTR program as a whole – even when it is immediately clear that Russia cannot meet them. Moreover, conditions like Russia's adherence to human rights obligations, although important, do not directly bear on the critical issue of its weapons' security; instead, that disconnect may alienate our foreign partners in this cooperative venture. Annually struggling through this lengthy exercise, while diverting time and effort that could better address proliferation challenges, makes neither business nor common sense.

Fortunately, a solution is at hand. The Senate version of the Defense Authorization Bill contains language that removes the CTR conditions and the inefficiencies they bring. This measure met with overwhelming bipartisan support when raised by the Senate last year; this year, it was approved as an amendment by unanimous consent. BENS urges the House-Senate defense conference to similarly approve this highly practical proposal and incorporate it into the final authorization bill. Anything else simply keeps America muddling through bureaucracy in the face of one of its gravest threats.

Sincerely,

Charles G. Boyd
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President and CEO

Stanley A. Weiss
Chairman