

# ISSUE BRIEF

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## International Security Advisory Board's Misplaced Focus a Cause for Concern

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The U.S. and its allies face many grave dangers today, including the spread of ballistic missiles and nuclear know-how. The International Security Advisory Board (ISAB), designed to provide independent analysis and advisement regarding such issues for the Secretary of State, recently published a report titled “Mutual Assured Stability: Essential Components and Near Term Actions.” The report’s recommendations, however, are almost exclusively focused on improving relations with Russia and largely ignore the risks associated with a nuclear North Korea and Iran.

Such omission is dangerous.

**Unexplained Shift.** The report does not fully address issues specified in the Terms of Reference by then-Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International

Security Ellen Tauscher. Of the six issues specified, ISAB focuses on only one: “The possible components of mutual assured stability and what the United States would need to see happening to have the confidence to consider very low numbers and, eventually, agree to the elimination of nuclear weapons.” Remaining points are related to international cooperation, nuclear reductions management and conditions for the nuclear-free world, possible tensions between nuclear reductions and effective deterrence, stabilizing factors outside of deterrence, and U.S. force structure supporting deterrence.

It is clear from the Terms of Reference that the State Department automatically assumes the U.S. has more nuclear weapons than it needs and that nuclear weapons reductions are good.

Such a notion is flawed. The focus of the report should be on how to strengthen deterrence in an international environment where all nuclear weapon states—except the U.S.—modernize their respective nuclear arsenals and increase reliance on nuclear weapons in their force postures.

The report should recognize that Iran is armed with long-range

missiles and continues its nuclear weapons program while North Korea already has nuclear weapons and the capability to reach the U.S. Combined with dramatic disparity regarding tactical nuclear weapons in the European theatre, further U.S. nuclear weapons reductions are likely to be dangerous, as allies would start to question U.S. commitment to nuclear guarantees.

An October 19, 2007, ISAB report focused on preventing a rapid expansion in the number of states possessing nuclear weapons and recommended, among others, moving “the NPT [Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons] review discussions away from a utopian view of a nuclear-weapons-free world which will not happen for a long time, if ever.” The same report also recommended conducting a study of what deterrence means today and what will it mean in the future. “At the conclusion of the study, proposals should be made to modernize deterrence capabilities,” states the 2007 report. There are no such recommendations in the latest ISAB report and no explanation of the position change.

**Focus on Russia: Missing the Important Pieces.** An almost exclusive focus on Russia is one of the major flaws of the report. While

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it recognizes the difficulties involved in moving toward a more productive relationship with Russia, it bases its recommendations on misplaced assumptions about Russia's perceptions of its own interests.

The Obama Administration has already tried to operate under the assumption that both countries share "values, motives, and norms." The results of the ill-fated "reset" policy are well known:

- Mistreating allies and limiting U.S. missile defense in pursuit of Cold War-style arms control;
- Continuing Russia's efforts against U.S. interests in Syria and Iran;
- Not supporting Russia's opposition during the Kremlin's brutal crackdown; and
- Disregarding deterioration of the rule of law in Russia.

Additionally, the ISAB report deems the Public Health Cooperation, including affordable health care delivery, as one of the essential components for "Mutually Assured Stability" in the U.S.-Russia relationship. While cooperating on infectious disease prevention and other health-related issues is important, the focus seems misplaced in the context of the report. Strategic stability would be better served if the U.S. and Russia cooperated on countering terrorism—where the interests of the two countries actually coincide. Regrettably, the report does not mention "terrorism" once.

The ISAB also recommends changing "U.S. doctrine and posture away from defining our nuclear posture based on perception of

Russia as the primary threat, toward a doctrine of general deterrence, a posture in which attacks from any direction are discouraged, without singling out a particular adversary or enemy (reciprocal action required)." The Obama Administration's 2010 Nuclear Posture Review states that "Russia and the United States are no longer adversaries."

Russia is far from reciprocating. According to Mark Schneider's October 14, 2011, testimony before the Strategic Forces Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee, "[T]he Russians have engaged in numerous types of nuclear threats, including 15, approximately, high-level nuclear targeting threats."

The ISAB fails to appreciate the stabilizing role the missile defense program has in an environment with new actors armed with ballistic missiles—including long-range missiles. The Heritage Foundation research notes the U.S. and its allies would be best served if they adopt a "protect and defend" strategy, which recognizes that military forces are designed to provide for the common defense while diplomacy and arms control are to prevent aggression. The resulting force posture would be defensive in nature and encompass offensive and defensive weapons—conventional and nuclear. The ISAB only mentions the need to "conduct a joint U.S.-Russia review of the requirements for national and multilateral missile defense ... with the goal of achieving a shared understanding of each nation's requirements for effective missile defense."

Yet, Moscow continually objects to the U.S. expanding its missile defense deployments. On May 3, 2012, Russian Chief of General Staff Nikolai Makarov threatened a

preemptive strike on North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) territory if the U.S. proceeds with the deployment of the Phased Adaptive Approach, the missile defense protection plan for Europe and the U.S. This clearly illustrates why the U.S. and its allies need missile defense. Any potential limitations of the system would leave the U.S. more vulnerable to North Korean or Iranian ballistic missile attacks.

#### **Setting the Record Straight.**

In the end, the ISAB report seems more about offering a rubber stamp endorsement of the Administration's failed Russia "reset" policy than seriously analyzing threats to peace and security in the world today. In particular, emphasizing cooperation with Russia while omitting other nuclear players such as North Korea, China, or Pakistan, is dangerous. Implications of an environment where states are armed with nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles go beyond Russia and impact U.S. alliance structure. This is too serious an issue to ignore. Congress should:

- Call for clarification regarding the ISAB's departure from its positions stated in the October 19, 2007, report;
- Insist the State Department give the ISAB realistic Terms of Reference which recognize dangers possessed by other countries' nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs;
- Demand the ISAB examine the stabilizing role that missile defense plays in the environment with new actors armed with ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons; and

- Insist the ISAB identify new deterrence capabilities enabling a move toward a more defensive strategic posture.

**Protect the U.S. and Its Allies.**

In today's world, consequences of omitting new challenges and ignoring future uncertainties are significant. The U.S. must adopt a posture that will allow it to protect its populations and allies, as well as respond to unexpected geopolitical

developments. Arbitrary and unrealistic assumptions are not a good starting point for planning a strategy.

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