
Present at a New Creation

By

Deputy Secretary of Defense John J. Hamre,
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[Editorial regarding the new Defense Threat Reduction Agency, established October 4, 1998, as a result of the Defense Reform Initiative, and how the Post-Cold War era requires new thinking to meet new challenges.]

Fifty years ago, in the wake of the Allied triumph in the Second World War, the United States stood at a pivot point in history. We faced a new world of threats. Science had split the atom. Ideology had split the world. America's very survival demanded that we think and act anew. One of our greatest acts in doing so was to unify all of our military services under a single Department of Defense which would be greater than the sum of its remarkable parts.

Today, in the wake of our triumph in the Cold War, America stands at another pivot point. We again face a new world of threats. Chemical and biological weapons are in the hands of rogue regimes and transnational terrorist organizations which are more likely to use them and less concerned with the consequences. Recent events such as release of deadly sarin gas into the Japanese subway system by the obscure Aum Shinrikyo cult demonstrate the ease with which determined groups and individuals can put societies at risk. As Secretary of Defense William Cohen has said, these weapons have become "the poor man's atomic bomb," which can be transported to our shores "in a bottle or a briefcase."

Once again we are challenged to think and act anew. Once again, we are unifying our efforts and creating a new whole that will be greater than the sum of its remarkable parts.

On October 1, Secretary Cohen established the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA). This new umbrella organization reflects lessons learned from the business sector and applied under Secretary Cohen's ongoing Defense Reform Initiative—re-engineering core functions, consolidating programs with similar goals, eliminating duplication and overlap. DTRA brings together outstanding experts from a number of Pentagon agencies and programs—including the successors of the Manhattan Project, who served as guardians of the atom through five decades of Cold War—to meet head-on the security challenges of the new millennium.

This new defense agency has three primary missions: to maintain America's current nuclear deterrent capability; to reduce the threat from nuclear, chemical and biological weapons; and to counter threats posed by those weapons of mass destruction.

Maintaining a robust and credible nuclear deterrent capability—managing and sustaining our nuclear stockpile, equipment and facilities—is one of the most important challenges facing the United States. DTRA will provide operational and analytical support for our stockpile stewardship duties, and technical support for all nuclear weapons in Defense Department custody. DTRA will also serve as the U.S. Government's focal point for implementing U.S. arms control inspection, escort and monitoring activities and for developing treaty verification monitoring technologies.

For seven years, the Cooperative Threat Reduction program—championed through Congress by former Senator Sam Nunn (D-GA) and Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN)—has contributed substantially to our national security by helping to better account for, and eliminate, weapons previously aimed at the United States by countries of the former Soviet Union. DTRA will consolidate and streamline all aspects of the "Nunn-Lugar" program, as we continue to help nations born of our Cold War adversary destroy and establish safeguards against the proliferation of those weapons. In addition, through its Defense Technology Security Administration, the new DTRA will monitor the international transfers of U.S. technologies that could be misused to support the production and delivery of weapons of mass destruction, to ensure that any and all such transfers are consistent with U.S. national security interests.

Of the challenges to those interests, none poses a more significant threat in the post-Cold War environment than chemical and biological weapons. The relative low cost and simplicity of their design and technology make them the "weapons of choice" for a variety of rogue states and terrorist organizations. DTRA will draw upon our disparate chemical and biological weapons defense expertise to centralize and focus Department of Defense efforts to prepare for and respond to a chemical or biological attack against U.S. or friendly forces. DTRA will also oversee the development and implementation of special weapons technologies to defend against and respond to chemical and biological weapons and materials. Such expertise will provide U.S. military commanders in the field with options for effective targeting against underground or hardened structures, as well as enhanced capabilities to assess battle damage.

When weapons of mass destruction find their way to those determined to threaten American national interests, our leaders must be able to respond. The Defense Threat Reduction Agency will lead Department of Defense efforts in supporting operational forces and developing field systems designed to counter the proliferation of such weapons. In addition to developing defenses for the U.S. and its allies, Pentagon officials must also do everything possible to protect American armed forces and their families from acts of terrorism. DTRA will serve as the field agent for force protection, conducting "vulnerability assessments" designed to protect our men and women in uniform, as well as our civilian employees and their dependents, from acts of terrorism.

Last Thursday, Secretary Cohen told the talented and creative experts now being brought together under one organizational framework that they were "present at a new creation." The new Defense Threat Reduction Agency will not only bring technical and operational synergy to the full spectrum of Pentagon efforts to prevent, deter and defend against weapons of mass destruction. It will, in Secretary Cohen's words, "help catapult America, safe and secure, into a new century."