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## A Different Kind of Complex: The Future of U.S. Nuclear Weapons and the Nuclear Weapons Enterprise

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In an October 28 speech to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace entitled "Nuclear Weapons and Deterrence in the 21st Century," Secretary of Defense Robert Gates noted the continued importance of U.S. nuclear weapons for deterring possible opponents and for reassuring allies that they do not need to develop their own weapons. He argued that, to carry out these responsibilities, a Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW) as well as a modernized complex for nuclear weapons that would allow the building of new weapons without nuclear explosion testing are needed.

I have great admiration for Secretary Gates and suggested months ago that he should be urged to continue to serve in an Obama administration. His dismissal of the Air Force secretary and chief of staff over negligence in management of nuclear weapons (see [page 44](#)) was a rare and appropriate action. In regard to the RRW program and other nuclear weapons questions, however, the leadership of the Department of Defense is ill served by its advisers on nuclear warheads, who appear not to be conveying to the secretary the judgment of the nuclear weapons labs that the plutonium pit of each U.S. nuclear weapon is expected to last at least 85 years.

Gates' recent remarks echo a 2007 report of the Departments of Defense, Energy, and State that suggested that delays in the replacement warhead program would "raise the prospect of having to return to underground nuclear testing to certify existing weapons."[\[1\]](#)

The chairman and ranking member on the House Appropriations energy and water subcommittee wrote in August 2007 that, "It is irresponsible for the administration to make such an assertion." They correctly noted that that "there is no record of congressional testimony or reports sent to Congress by the Administration claiming...that a resumption of testing to verify the performance of warheads would be a necessity."[\[2\]](#)

Congress ultimately rejected the administration's proposal for an ambitious, multidecade plan to build replacement warheads and a nuclear weapons infrastructure to carry out the program. Not only were some key legislators unconvinced of the technical need for replacement warheads, but they questioned the administration's assumptions about the future role and size of the U.S. nuclear arsenal. The 2008 House report on the fiscal year 2008 energy and water appropriations bill