

The Honorable Ernest J. Moniz
Secretary of Energy
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20585-1000

September 8, 2015

Dear Secretary Moniz,

We write regarding the Department of Energy's (DOE's) "Red Team" report conclusion that the department can greatly reduce cost and risk by blending its excess weapons plutonium down for disposal as waste instead of continuing down the mixed oxide (MOX) fuel path. Many of us have come to similar conclusions in the past.

As outside nuclear experts and former government officials dealing with nonproliferation issues, we have looked at the matter closely. DOE can uphold its obligation to safely dispose of this material without implementing the MOX program. More important, in addition to saving money, ending the current MOX program would be in the nation's national security interest.

Continuing with the MOX program and recycling work helps plutonium recycling advocates in Japan, China, South Korea, and other states maintain the illusion that plutonium separation and recycle are activities that responsible non-weapon states engage in. The United States has for four decades consistently opposed the spread of such activities because of the obvious proliferation danger of putting nuclear-weapons explosive materials into commercial channels.

It would be particularly advantageous to U.S. nonproliferation objectives to end the MOX program now. Japan is on the verge of opening its large reprocessing plant at Rokkasho. Ending the U.S. MOX program and thereby underlining that plutonium has no economic value would put the U.S. in a much better position to urge Japan to put off any such decision.

More broadly, there is an opportunity to ask not only Japan, but South Korea and China to join in a decision to defer commercial plutonium-based fuel activities (to include commercial "demonstrator" sized projects). None of these activities make economic sense. A simultaneous announcement would help these governments deal with their plutonium recycling interest groups. Indeed, we believe that such an announcement at the upcoming Nuclear Security Summit next spring would constitute a historic step to strengthen the nonproliferation regime.

Sincerely,

Peter Bradford, Vermont Law School, former U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commissioner

Joseph Cirincione, President, The Ploughshares Fund; former professional staff member, House Armed Services Committee

Robert Einhorn, Senior Fellow, The Brookings Institution; former Assistant Secretary of State for Nonproliferation

David Freeman, former Chairman of the Tennessee Valley Authority Board of Directors

Ambassador Robert Gallucci, Georgetown University, former Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs

Richard Garwin, IBM Fellow Emeritus, Thomas J. Watson Research Center

Victor Gilinsky, Energy Consultant, former U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commissioner

Jessica Matthews, Distinguished Fellow, The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; former Director of the Office of Global Issues, The National Security Council

Joseph Nye, Harvard, John F. Kennedy School of Government, former Chairman of the National Intelligence Council

Ambassador Thomas Pickering, Distinguished Fellow, The Brookings Institution; former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations

Henry S. Rowen, Professor (emeritus), Asia/Pacific Research Center, Stanford University; former Chairman of the National Intelligence Council

Gary Samore, Executive Director for Research, Belfer Center, Harvard University; former White House Coordinator for Arms Control and Weapons of Mass Destruction

Henry Sokolski, Executive Director, The Nonproliferation Policy Education Center; former Deputy for Nonproliferation Policy, Department of Defense

Frank von Hippel, Senior Research Physicist, Professor of Public and International Affairs (emeritus), Princeton University; former Assistant Director for National Security, White House Office of Science and Technology

CC: National Security Advisor, Ambassador Susan Rice
Secretary of State John Kerry
Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter