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## A New United States Agency to Oversee Nuclear Weapons Programs: Consequences of Language for Nuclear Weapons Security and Safety

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Abstract. This article provides an example of how language can lead to a well-meaning nuclear weapons policy that might have little positive consequence and significant negative consequence.

In the aftermath of putative Chinese espionage at Los Alamos National Laboratory and circulation of reports of many security violations and vulnerabilities at the Lab, some members of the United States (US) Congress and of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (FIAB) continue to propose a separate office--viz., a semi-autonomous agency within the Department of Energy--to oversee US Government nuclear weapons programs. A counterproposal by the US Secretary of Energy is the creation of an undersecretary of energy billet to control the Department's nuclear programs.

One point of contention between proposal and counterproposal is responsibility for so-called "nonweapons" labs. FIAB head and former US Senator Warren Rudman has attempted to "bring around" Mr. Richardson by calling for the Secretary to keep responsibility for the nonweapons entities. On paper, Mr. Rudman's call may have its merits and demerits concerning security, safety, and the furthering of knowledge. In the nuclear weapons world, however, the call seems far removed from a consensual reality "on the ground."

The problem? In a world wherein basic and applied science and technologies have multiple usages, even the broadest and most general distinctions of and demarcations between "weapons" and "nonweapons" seem to fail. Therefore, if the intent of an administrative reorganization is to upgrade nuclear weapons security and safety and the premise is that the current guardians have been remiss, one as well can only predict failure. Valuable information will still be under the stewardship of the guardians who have been remiss in their duties.

Some cynical political observers might suggest that the proposed reorganization has less to do with increasing security and safety than in taking advantage of real and putative security and safety shortfalls for professional, personal, and even ideological gain on the bureaucratic playing fields. However, it seems more likely that the language chosen by Mr. Rudman and many others concerning "weapons" and "nonweapons" in the context of reorganization reflects a variant of subjugating discourse. The linguistic construction of "weapons" and "nonweapons" has little correspondence to an isomorphic, substantive, and functional construction. That is, both terms hopelessly overlap as to nature and to consequence--examples can be ascribed to either of the terms. Along with a similar lack of correspondence between linguistically defined organizational schemes and their natures and consequences, nuclear weapons security and safety may become even more tenuous. Such linguistic entities insidiously subjugate legitimate security and safety concerns to fictive discourse. Here, indeed, is an example of talking the talk without walking the walk. (See Gerth, J. (June 23, 1999). In wake of espionage, debate on new nuclear arms agency. *The New York Times*, p. A4; Kogan, S.M. (1998). The politics of making meaning: Discourse analysis of a "postmodern interview." *Journal of Family Therapy*, 20, 229-251; Kull, S. (1988). *Minds at war: Nuclear reality and the inner conflicts of defense policymakers*. Basicbooks, Inc.; The Brookings Institution. The U.S. Nuclear Weapons Cost Study Project:

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Estimated 1998 Spending on U.S. Nuclear Weapons and Weapons-Related Programs, <http://www.brook.edu>; Wheeler, S.C., Green, M.C., & Brock, T.C. (1999). Fictional narrative change beliefs: Replications of Prentice, Gerrig, & Bailis (1997) with mixed corroboration. *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review*, 6, 136-141.) (Keywords: Espionage, Nuclear Weapons.)