Senate the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. If enacted, this treaty would be a useful tool in our efforts to stem proliferation. I hope the Senate will be allowed to act on this treaty when we return.

While we have made some progress in realigning our national security policies to more fully reflect the realities of the post-cold war world, we still have much more to accomplish. Perhaps the most startling and dramatic indicator of how far we have to go is the fact that, as I stand here today—8 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall—the United States and Russia still possess roughly 14,000 strategic nuclear weapons and tens of thousands more tactical nuclear weapons. And even more alarming, both sides keep the vast majority of their strategic weapons on a high level of alert.

In a recent editorial, former Senator Sam Nunn and Dr. Bruce Blair assert that each nuclear superpower maintains roughly 3,000 strategic nuclear warheads ready to launch at a moment's notice. According to Nunn and Blair, while this practice may have been necessary during the cold war, ''today [it] constitutes a dangerous anachronism.''

Mr. President, I believe we can and must do much more to address the threat posed by nuclear weapons. On September 17, I sent a letter to the Congressional Budget Office asking them to assess the budgetary and security consequences of a series of measures designed to reduce the spread of nuclear weapons and the likelihood they would ever be used.

I expect to receive preliminary results from this inquiry by early next year. In addition, I conducted a meeting earlier this week to explore one particular means of reducing the risk of unauthorized or accidental use of nuclear weapons—removing from alert status some fraction of the strategic ballistic missile force.

As a result of this meeting and a series of discussions with Senator Nunn, Dr. Blair, and General Butler, I am convinced that it is time to seriously consider de-alerting at least a portion of our strategic ballistic missile. I say this for several reasons. First, the likelihood of a surprise, bolt-out-of-the-blue attack of our strategic nuclear forces is unimaginable if not impossible in today's world.

Keeping large numbers of weapons on high alert status fails to recognize this reality.

Second, concerns are growing about the reliability and condition of the Russian early warning and command and control systems. United States security depends on the Russians' ability to accurately assess the status of United States forces and to control their own forces. Public reports indicate their early warning sensors are aging and incomplete, their command and control system is deteriorating, and the morale of the personnel operating these systems is suffering as a result of the lack of pay and difficult working conditions.

It is in our interest to have Russian missiles taken off alert and Russian leaders given more time to interpret and respond to events.

Third, de-alerting a portion of our strategic missile force now could strengthen the hand of those in the Russian Duma who support START II and other United States-Russian security measures. De-alerting some United States strategic missiles could send an important signal at a crucial stage in Russia's consideration of the START II Treaty. In addition, when President Bush took unilateral action to de-alert a portion of our strategic forces, President Gorbachev reciprocated by removing from alert a number of Russian land- and sea-based missiles.

Finally, de-alerting a portion of our strategic missile force would not sacrifice U.S. security. The United States has already indicated a willingness to reduce its total strategic force to as few as 2,000 weapons. Even if we were to de-alert the entire MX force, the United States would retain roughly 2,500 weapons on alert status, and several thousand more could be made ready to launch. Moreover, should circumstances warrant, the United States could reverse any de-alerting measures it may take.

Mr. President, despite the fact that the Soviet Union dissolved and the cold war ended, the risks posed by nuclear weapons persist and evolve.

I plan to do what I can to explore options for reducing these risks. I believe de-alerting a portion of our missile force merits further study in this regard. I look forward to working with my colleagues and the administration in the next session of Congress to fully explore this measure as well as any other that could lessen the dangers of nuclear weapons.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. ROCKEFELLER addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Mr. President, I thank the minority leader, and I thank the Presiding Officer.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I might be able to speak as if in morning business for up to 20 minutes, and I further ask unanimous consent that at the completion of my remarks Senator BOXER be recognized.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. I thank the Presiding Officer.

FAST-TRACK LEGISLATION

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Mr. President, there has been a lot of debate on the floor over the last several days about fast-track authority, and a lot of it has run against my grain. I don't think it has been at a very high level. What I would like to do is respond to a few of the main arguments that have been used against it that I have heard from some of my colleagues about both the nature of fast-track authority and the need for fast-track authority.

Before I begin I would like to say that West Virginia's economy depends and will continue to depend enormously on strong growth in its exports. So any vote which is taken which does not support the proposition of promoting exports from West Virginia is one that I would question. Indeed, the U.S. economy is moving very strongly forward. I don't believe myself that the growth will continue in West Virginia as strongly as it might have if fast track does not pass this Congress, if we do not give that authority to the President. West Virginia had $1.3 billion in exports in 1996. That's about a 35-percent increase in exports since 1992. That is quite remarkable. West Virginia's specific exports to Japan, which is our second-largest export market, went up 128 percent in 3 years. Just think about that, Mr. President—a 128 percent in 3 years; increasing exports increases West Virginia—and that dramatic increase has been with just one country—Japan. And, in fact, that means West Virginia exports to Japan totaled about $116 million in 1996, which is not a lot in some States, but it is a lot in West Virginia. U.S. exports increased by $125 billion last year alone—a lot of this because of trade arrangements.

One thing is undeniably true—denying the President fast-track authority will not create a single new job in West Virginia. Nobody can make that argument with a straight face. It won't save a single job either to deny the President fast-track authority. It will only hamper our ability to sell goods to new markets, which is what this is about, and hurt the growth of a critical sector of our economy, and one that I have personally been working on very hard over the last 10 to 15 years.

I think most of the arguments about the revolutionary provisions of fast track are highly overstated, and highly dramatized. Fast-track authority isn't anything new. And, because it is a procedural mechanism, I don't think there is anything to be feared about it. I recognize that others don't think so. Some have good arguments. Most have rather poor arguments, I think. Fast track is a mechanism simply that helps the United States keep up with the changing world economy and deal with our trading partners in 21st century management.

So, let me take a moment to respond to a few of the persistent arguments which are used against fast track. These are just a few of them.

Is there sufficient congressional consultation accompanying fast-track authority: Very big contentious deal. Right? We are ceding all of our authority to the President of the United