When I arrived at the Department of Energy, the Cold War had just ended. Since then, we have focused on making sure that the technology and know-how to create weapons of mass destruction do not get to irresponsible countries or to terrorists.

President Obama has given us a demanding mission: to make sure all vulnerable nuclear material in the world is locked down within four years. It’s harder today to know where the threat comes from—and our concerns are not limited to a massive exchange of weapons between superpowers. Now the threat is as little as a grapefruit-size lump of uranium or a Coke can-size chunk of plutonium in the hands of a suicidal terrorist.

We’ve collaborated closely with our Russian colleagues over the last 15 years to secure thousands of warheads and hundreds of tons of weapons-usable material. Together we are working with other nations to decrease the threat. We are also developing technology, installing equipment, and training our foreign partners to detect and stop weapons-usable material at international border crossings, airports, and major seaports.

Right now, our organization consists of about 400 people in Washington and thousands of technical experts in our national laboratories. At any given time, we have hundreds of people working in remote areas of the world to improve nuclear security and keep America safe.

What counts the most in any organization is accomplishing the mission, and it only happens through individuals who get real things done. The trick is to hire the best people possible, give them the resources and strategic guidance they need, don’t micromanage them, give them credit when they are successful, and take care of them and their families.

I feel blessed to work with this national security team, and I believe we are making the world a safer place. I’m grateful to American University for recognizing the value of the work this organization performs.

—Kenneth E. Baker