

Special Report

Introduction: Assessing US Nonproliferation Assistance to the NIS

JAMES CLAY MOLTZ¹

*Dr. James Clay Moltz is Assistant Director and Research Professor at the Center for Nonproliferation Studies of the Monterey Institute of International Studies, where he also directs the Newly Independent States Nonproliferation Project. He was the first Editor of **The Nonproliferation Review** (1993-98) and is co-editor of **The North Korean Nuclear Program: Security, Strategy, and New Perspectives from Russia** (Routledge, 2000).*

Historically, managing the decline of a major military power has not been the concern of other states in the international system. Indeed, states have normally viewed relative decline by former rivals as a major benefit with few, if any, negative repercussions. However, by early 1991, the increasing danger that the Soviet Union might be unable to control its military forces and related nuclear, chemical, biological, and missile infrastructure marked an unprecedented threat in world history: specifically, the possibility that weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and related technology and know-how might spread in an uncontrolled manner around the globe to states with aggressive intentions or organizations with terrorist aims. In this context, a small number of senators led by Sam Nunn (D-GA) and Richard Lugar (R-IN) recognized that trying to deal with this threat through focused assistance programs fell clearly within US national interests and merited a unique historical experiment in “cooperative threat reduction.” This special report section presents the findings of a major study to assess the contributions to nonproliferation made by the US assistance programs that followed the Nunn-Lugar initiative.

Since the passage of the so-called Nunn-Lugar legislation by the US Congress in 1991, the United States has allocated approximately \$2.7 billion for nonproliferation assistance and weapons dismantlement activities in the former Soviet Union.² The original 1991 legislation, which passed less than a month before the Soviet break-up, called for:

...cooperation among the United States, the Soviet Union, its republics, and any successor entities to (1) destroy nuclear weapons, chemical weapons, and other weapons, (2) transport, store, disable, and safeguard weapons in connection with their destruction, and (3) establish verifiable safeguards against the proliferation of such weapons. Such cooperation may involve assistance in planning and in resolving technical problems associated with weapons destruction and proliferation. Such cooperation may also involve the funding of critical short-term requirements related to weapons destruction and should, to the extent feasible, draw upon United States technology and United States technicians.³

These efforts eventually included a variety of cooperative projects with the governments of Belarus, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan conducted under the US Department of Defense's Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) program for weapons elimination, as well as related activities under the Department of Energy for the safeguarding of nuclear materials. The Departments of Commerce and State have also conducted assistance programs in particular areas, such as export control training and the provision of civilian research opportunities to former weapons scientists.

Overall, these assistance efforts have aimed at helping the newly independent states (NIS) of the former Soviet Union in dealing with the legacy of their inherited weapons of mass destruction, as well as related material, technologies, and know-how, with the common goal of improving safety and reducing the proliferation threat these items represent. Although often forgotten, the "cooperative" element of these programs involved the crucial (and not always easy-to-obtain) support of the governments, militaries, and nuclear officials involved, in order to acquire access to facilities, establish activities and offices, transfer significant amounts of nuclear safety technology and construction materials, and transport visiting foreign nationals to sensitive sites across the former Soviet Union.

In terms of their accomplishments, US nonproliferation and dismantlement assistance programs have greatly facilitated the transition of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine to non-nuclear weapons status by providing funding for the removal of weapons, the destruction of silos and delivery vehicles, and the conversion of facilities to peaceful uses. While problems remain, particularly for former weapons enterprises, without such assistance these states would still have large stockpiles of nuclear weapons and delivery vehicles on their territories today under questionable conditions of safety and control.

In Russia, where the bulk of US funding has been spent, significant progress has been made in the elimination of large numbers of nuclear weapons, the training of nuclear custodians in technology-based systems of material protection, control, and accounting, and the destruction of delivery vehicles and toxic fuels. Through programs associated with the Nunn-Lugar legislation of 1991, more nuclear weapons have been removed from

service in the former Soviet Union than currently reside in the stockpiles of the China, France, and the United Kingdom combined.⁴ As of December 1999, these programs have helped deactivate 4,854 nuclear warheads, destroyed 373 long-range ballistic missiles, eliminated 354 missile silos, sealed 191 nuclear test tunnels, and cut up 12 nuclear submarines capable of carrying 160 strategic missile launchers.⁵

However, while a bipartisan majority has continued to support these programs at a cost of approximately \$400 million a year, they have not been without their critics. A number of studies have found fault with programs for: (1) spending too much in Russia and not enough on US contractors (violating the original congressional mandate); (2) spending too much on US weapons laboratory trips and personnel and not enough on improving conditions at fissile material sites in Russia; (3) using resources inefficiently on efforts of dubious effectiveness (such as conversion projects); and (4) indirectly supporting Russian rearmament and weapons modernization.⁶

Other problems relate to difficulties that have arisen with the NIS governments, whose still evolving political, economic, and legal systems have made work in this region—given the normal US requirements for accountability, efficiency, and transparency—extremely trying both for overseers and program implementers. These problems include nightmarish logistical issues, such as dealing with customs officials, combating theft, ensuring installation, providing training (in Russian), and doing so in a manner that enables congressional and General Accounting Office oversight.

In addition, these programs have faced a number of problems arising from taxation. As one of the main providers of hard currency to some of the facilities and impoverished regions involved, there has been a natural tendency for government officials at various levels to try to extract "rents" from this funding. Critics have charged that the United States is wasting money and that programs should simply be cut off if Russia and other states refuse to cooperate. US negotiators have worked long and hard to overcome these problems. The US side has achieved some progress with the May 1999 passage of a law by the Russian Duma officially exempting nonproliferation assistance programs from taxation. How this law is actually implemented at the local level, however, remains to be seen.

Political problems in the US-Russian relationship have also periodically threatened support for US nonproliferation and dismantlement assistance programs, both in Washington and in various NIS capitals. While no major programs were cancelled during the NATO bombing in Yugoslavia in 1999, Russia halted cooperation on certain training programs. More recently, some legislators in the United States have called for the termination of funds for these programs in response to the Russian military campaign in the breakaway Chechen republic that began in late 1999.

Given this debate between supporters and critics of these programs, it is not surprising that by 1998 a number of studies had been undertaken to assess US programs under the Nunn-Lugar (and follow-on Nunn-Lugar-Domenici) legislation. These assessments focused on various criteria, including: accounting procedures, defense conversion, US national security interests, and sustainability.⁷ However, no study focused on evaluating these activities in terms of their *nonproliferation* effectiveness, despite an important evolution that had taken place in the nature of US programs. In the years before 1995, when the Department of Defense controlled all funds under Nunn-Lugar, US assistance had focused almost exclusively on weapons dismantlement. However, with the decision to diversify the funding and include line items for assistance within other departmental budgets (particularly the Department of Energy), the focus of programs began to move more to the problem of combating proliferation threats through a variety of specific mechanisms: nonproliferation training, fissile material consolidation, defense conversion, and funding for weapons scientists to perform non-weapons research. Thus, nonproliferation had *de facto* become an important (arguably the most important) aim of the overall effort, yet no assessment had analyzed these programs with respect to this focus.

In early 1998, in anticipation of Russian and US presidential elections in 2000 and in the wake of a number of critical comments on Capitol Hill regarding US assistance programs, the Center for Nonproliferation Studies (CNS) proposed to undertake a two-year study to assess these programs using their contribution to reducing proliferation threats in the former Soviet Union as the primary assessment criterion. A key element of the proposed study would be the extensive use of the CNS's "core group" of scientists, government officials, journalists, and academics in the former Soviet Union as contribu-

tors. Many of these CNS core group members had access to information and facilities beyond the reach of previous Western assessments.

Thanks to a two-year grant from the Smith Richardson Foundation,⁸ the study began in the fall of 1998 with a meeting of an expert advisory board in Monterey and the creation of five working groups of combined CNS, other US, and NIS experts to analyze the following functional areas of US programs: (1) missile dismantlement and nuclear weapons protection, control, and accounting; (2) nuclear submarine dismantlement and naval fuel-cycle operations; (3) chemical and biological weapons elimination; (4) material protection, control, and accounting programs at civilian facilities; and (5) programs to halt illicit trafficking and brain drain and to strengthen export controls. In mid-November 1998, CNS organized the first meetings of these working groups through its branch office in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Work on the assessment began with the assigning of specific research questions to various working group members and the development of plans for extensive interviews of officials and other specialists, both in the region and in the United States. The project eventually commissioned over 30 individual studies and conducted over 400 interviews. The project also convened a series of smaller workshops in Moscow, Washington, and other capitals to discuss draft findings⁹ and to refine the project's research questions.

To ensure consistency and make possible the comparison of programs and patterns across issue areas, all authors used a standard list of questions, including such subjects as identifying the nature of the specific proliferation threats in their issue area, describing the organizations involved on both the US and NIS sides, determining metrics for evaluating success and failure, and analyzing the sustainability of US programs absent US funding.¹⁰ Each of the working groups supplemented these core questions with other relevant queries.

Leaders of the working groups compiled the resulting research papers and other findings developed by working group members during the course of summer and fall 1999. The leaders of the groups then wrote comprehensive overview reports for their areas, including concluding sections that provided specific policy recommendations. The working group leaders presented these draft reports for comment and feedback at a large international conference in Monterey from December 11 to 13, 1999, attended by more than 150 senior gov-

ernment officials and policy analysts from the United States, Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Ukraine, and several other NIS countries. With the benefit of the useful suggestions and critiques obtained during the conference, the authors of the five reports then completed final revisions of their papers in early 2000 for publication in this special report section of *The Nonproliferation Review*.

CNS is publishing these assessments and their related policy recommendations in order to help inform the debate on US nonproliferation and dismantlement assistance programs as the United States moves through presidential and congressional elections during the course of 2000. We hope that a well-informed debate on these programs will contribute to improving their effectiveness and assuring their sustainability after assistance is eventually terminated. The following special reports make it clear that US assistance programs deserve credit for a number of significant accomplishments. The reports also make apparent the enormity of the tasks ahead and the proliferation threats still extant, given the size of the post-Soviet states' inheritances of WMD, sensitive materials and technologies, and related know-how. Each report contains specific recommendations for how to address the remaining challenges, as well as on the relative priorities that should be assigned to the remaining tasks. In recognition of the on-going debate on the viability of future US funding, the papers also consider recommendations for cutting off funding in areas where programs have not resulted in success, have dubious nonproliferation goals, or where NIS partners may not have fulfilled their end of the bargain.

Although President William Clinton has called upon the US Congress to continue funding these efforts in the former Soviet Union under the so-called Expanded Threat Reduction Initiative—with an additional \$4.5 billion in funding¹¹—congressional support is not guaranteed. All parties recognize that ultimately US interests lie in turning over these important nonproliferation efforts to competent NIS scientists, military leaders, and government officials. The debate revolves around how long this will take and what must be done in the meantime to ensure that programs are sustained once US funding is terminated. With these observations in mind, CNS offers the findings of its assessment in hopes of promoting further study and discussion of these important issues over the coming year and into the next US administration, to the benefit of US and international interests in promoting nonproliferation.

¹ The author thanks Richard Combs and Roland Lajoie for their suggestions.

² "Cooperative Threat Reduction Agreement Extension," *Congressional Record*, US Senate, June 23, 1999, statement by Senator Bingaman (D-AZ), p. S7522.

³ Soviet Nuclear Threat Reduction Act of 1991, *Congressional Record*, November 27, 1991, p. S18798.

⁴ Senator Richard Lugar, "Nunn-Lugar: The Past as a Guide to the Future," speech delivered at the conference on "Assessing US Dismantlement and Nonproliferation Assistance Programs in the Newly Independent States," organized by the Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies, Monterey, California, December 13, 1999.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ For some of these critical reports, see United States General Accounting Office, *Weapons of Mass Destruction: Status of the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program* (RCED-96-222), September 1996; United States General Accounting Office, *Concerns with DOE's Efforts to Reduce the Risks Posed by Russia's Unemployed Weapons Scientists* (RCED-99-54), February 1999; and J. Michael Waller, "Loving the Russian Bomb," *Insight* (Washington, DC), December 6, 1999.

⁷ These assessments included, for example: Graham Allison, Ashton B. Carter, Steven E. Miller, and Philip Zelikow, eds., *Cooperative Denuclearization: From Pledges to Deeds*, Center for Science and International Affairs (CSIA) (Harvard University) CSIA Studies in International Security, No. 2 (January 1993); John M. Shields and William C. Potter, eds., *Dismantling the Cold War: U.S. and NIS Perspectives on the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program* (Cambridge, MA: CSIA and the MIT Press, 1997); Jason D. Ellis and Todd Perry, "Nunn-Lugar's Unfinished Agenda," *Arms Control Today* 27 (October 1997); and Kenneth N. Luongo and William E. Hoehn III, "Getting it right," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 54 (May/June 1998).

⁸ Dr. Marin Strmecki of Smith Richardson expressed interest in this proposal and provided CNS with a number of suggestions to improve the study, including the appointment of an expert advisory board to assist in the development of an effective and unbiased research methodology. Members of the advisory board eventually included: Coit Blacker, Lewis Dunn, Ronald Lehman, Michael Moodie, and William Schneider.

⁹ CNS is grateful to several additional foundations that provided funding for some of these activities, including: the Carnegie Corporation, the Ford Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the John Merck Fund, the Ploughshares Fund, the Prospect Hill Foundation, the Scherman Foundation, and the W. Alton Jones Foundation.

¹⁰ The core list of questions included: (1) What is the nature of the proliferation problem in your area of research? (2) How well have existing US programs addressed this threat and with what specific effects and metrics for measuring success? (3) Who are the major actors in this field on the US side and on the Russian/NIS side? (4) What accounts for areas of success in US programs in your area and what accounts for areas where the programs have failed? (5) What proliferation threats are not being addressed by existing US programs? (6) Why have existing assistance programs not addressed them to date? (7) To what extent do you believe that the US and NIS sides have agreed on the nature of the problem and on the most effective means of addressing it? (8) How does the on-going economic crisis in the newly independent states affect the effectiveness of existing and/or future programs? (9) How would you evaluate the sustainability of existing programs and what do you anticipate would be the results of the termination of existing programs? (10) Are there measures that the NIS governments could take to alleviate these problems? What are the barriers to adopting such programs? (11) Are there new programs either on the US or NIS sides that you would recommend for the consideration of policymakers in this area? and (12) Based on the activities in your area of expertise, what lessons (both positive and negative) can you draw that might be relevant as guidelines for the implementation of future activities?

¹¹ William J. Clinton, "Continuation of National Emergency with Regard to Weapons of Mass Destruction—Message from the President of the United States," (US House of Representatives, H. Doc. No. 106-158, November 10, 1999).