

# THE LEGACY OF **Nunn-Lugar**

Russia opts out of a program credited with eliminating thousands of nuclear and chemical weapons



A Russian Typhoon class submarine awaits dismantling under the Cooperative Threat Reduction program.

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**Scholars believe the Chinese character for crisis contains symbols for both danger and opportunity. Such a juxtaposition of words, however, was an apt representation of the dangers inherent in the rapid disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. The military of that nuclear-armed superpower was in disarray, and many feared nuclear weapons and other military material could fall into the hands of terrorists and criminal organizations. Out of that disarray emerged opportunity. In June 1992, the United States, Russia and other post-Soviet states implemented the Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) program treaty to address this overriding threat and expand cooperation in security, energy, economics and other areas of mutual concern.**



But in October 2012, after 20 years of Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) program success, the Russian government announced it would not renew its participation in the program at its expiration in June 2013. The American proposal to renew CTR was “at odds with our ideas about the forms and basis for building further cooperation in that area,” a statement on the Russian Foreign Ministry website said. “To this end, we need a more modern legal framework.”

### **UNPRECEDENTED SUCCESS**

The CTR program, widely known as Nunn-Lugar after the two U.S. senators (Sam Nunn and Richard Lugar) who introduced it, secured enormous stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and nuclear and chemical weapons materials and technologies. It also led to the destruction and decommissioning of warheads, missiles, launchers and submarines. Speaking for many in the West, *Congressional Quarterly* called Nunn-Lugar one of the “most effective non-proliferation initiatives.”

According to *Congressional Quarterly*, the U.S. has spent about \$15 billion on the program in 20 years, a relatively small sum considering its successes and the original costs of the weapons being destroyed. As of January 2013, the program has deactivated an estimated 7,613 warheads, destroyed 1,605 ground-based and submarine-launched ballistic missiles and 3,794 metric tons of chemical weapons agent, and secured dozens of weapons storage sites and laboratories. Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Belarus had joined the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty by 1994 and completely denuclearized by 1996, destroying or transferring to Russia their Soviet-era nuclear weapons. As recently as 2009, Russia opened the Shchuch'ye Chemical Weapons Destruction Facility in the Ural Mountains to destroy a stockpile of

chemical and nerve agents potentially large enough to kill everyone on Earth.

Despite these well-documented successes, Russia wants to change the program substantially. Russia is not the economically distressed country it was when it approved the CRT program, and Moscow emphasized that it no longer needs the financial assistance that was crucial to the program's success. "Russia has significantly increased its own budget appropriations to honor its international disarmament obligations in the past years. For instance, the financing of the destruction of chemical weapons and disposal of nuclear submarines alone has exceeded \$7 billion," the Foreign Ministry statement said.

Russia's primary concerns with the current structure of the CTR program are provisions that it considers "discriminatory," a Russian Foreign Ministry official told the ITAR-TASS news agency. Russia dislikes legal provisions that protect the



Former U.S. Senator Sam Nunn, left, and then-U.S. Senator Richard Lugar attend the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Symposium in December 2012 in Washington, D.C. GETTY IMAGES

U.S. government and its employees or contractors from legal liability for accidents related to the program. The publication *Arms Control Today* said such issues were raised the last time the agreement was renewed in 2006. The Russian government is also unhappy with a provision that allows the U.S. to inspect disarmament equipment it pays for – a provision originally included to protect program assets from fraud and graft. In Moscow's view, this gives the U.S. access to too much sensitive defense-related information.

## MISSION INCOMPLETE

International nonproliferation experts expressed concern about Russia's rejection of Nunn-Lugar, despite Moscow's assertion that the program is no longer needed to secure its WMD arsenal. The program's 2017 goals include the deactivation of another 1,600 nuclear warheads; the destruction of hundreds more missiles, launchers and silos; and the elimination of an additional 1,500 metric tons of chemical weapons agent. Concerns have also been raised about Moscow's commitment to Nunn-Lugar's nonproliferation targets. The Russian Foreign Ministry says it has increased the budget for disarmament, but some experts worry that Russia will not divert sufficient funds or qualified scientists and engineers to nonproliferation efforts, given the Kremlin's recent push for expensive military modernization and upgrades.

"The danger is the same as it was right from the beginning – that these weapons and materials fall into the wrong hands," Joseph Cirincione, of the nonproliferation advocacy foundation Ploughshares Fund told *Congressional Quarterly*. "The big difference today is that nuclear terrorism is a much more real threat than it was 20 years ago." Kenneth Luongo of the Arms Control Association insists the break with Nunn-Lugar could have global consequences. "If the agreement is terminated, then it sends one of the worst signals to the international community about the importance of cooperation to secure loose nukes," Luongo told *Arms Control Today*.

## PERFECT STORM

When then-Senator Nunn visited the Soviet Union in 1991, immediately following the failed coup against Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, he discovered through conversations with Soviet officials that there were serious problems with the security of nuclear and chemical weapons stockpiles and with weapons development research and materials. Strategic nuclear weapons were deployed only in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan and remained under fairly tight security, but there was also enough weapons-grade uranium and plutonium to make 50,000 more bombs, plus tactical nuclear weapons spread throughout the country and numerous chemical weapons depots. Nunn returned to the U.S. determined to address this newfound danger and teamed with Senator Lugar to sponsor the CTR program.

Deteriorating morale in the Russian military made the security situation worse, Nunn said in a 1997 radio interview. "The people who were guarding those weapons of mass destruction, and the people who were knowledgeable about how to





A technician takes apart a Kh-22 air-to-surface missile at an air base in Ozernoye, Ukraine. The weapon was eliminated under the Cooperative Threat Reduction program.

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make them, in many cases were unemployed,” Nunn said, calling it “the perfect storm.” With that in mind, the CTR included provisions to finance science and technology centers to employ scientists and engineers with knowledge of WMD, lest they be hired by rogue regimes or terrorists.

### INVALUABLE TOOL

According to the Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI), a nonproliferation organization co-founded by Nunn, the CTR program is increasingly relevant as it evolves to meet the changing security environment. Al-Qaida and other terrorists groups have long sought WMD, including nuclear weapons or material. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, increased recognition of this threat and earned Nunn-Lugar additional financing and exposure. In 2003, the U.S. Congress passed the Nunn-Lugar Expansion Act, authorizing the program to operate outside the former Soviet Union, and by 2007 Albania’s substantial chemical weapons stockpile had been eliminated.

“The Nunn-Lugar program arose from the ability to see new dangers emerging in a changing world

and to create new partnerships to fight the threats,” NTI said in its 2012 report “The Nunn-Lugar Vision.” “As the world continues to change, threats will take new forms, and partnerships will have to be even more creative and more agile.”

The CTR program has proven to be an invaluable tool to build trust between the former Cold War foes and could be a global model for nonproliferation programs. Weapons of mass destruction remain a security threat as long as the means to create and deploy them are within reach of states or nonstate actors that view them as an acceptable means to achieve political goals. Cooperation between the U.S. and Russia, which still have the two largest WMD arsenals in the world, is essential to nonproliferation efforts and for two decades the CTR has proven to be an effective vehicle for this cooperation.

“The program is crucial not only because it secured a breakthrough as far as the solution of issues that have been acute since the early 1990s are concerned, but because it allowed us to accumulate political capital that has now turned into a mechanism of cooperation and partnership,” Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told NTI. □