

The Cooperative Threat Reduction Program

In the fall of 1991, conditions in the disintegrating Soviet Union posed a clear threat to nuclear safety and stability globally. An estimated 30,000 nuclear weapons were spread among the former Soviet republics. About 3,200 strategic nuclear warheads were located outside of Russia on the territories of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine. Political, social, and economic upheaval heightened the prospects that the former Soviet republics would not be able to provide for safe and secure storage or disposition of these nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction. These conditions also caused concerns that former Soviet scientists and engineers would export their expertise or services to countries wishing to acquire nuclear weapons.

To complicate matters further, Russian willingness to implement arms control agreements and measures to which it had become the principal party was impacted by economic troubles which made implementation costly, reductions in weapons slow, and re-direction of strategic forces burdensome. The Russian defense establishment provided little support to efforts to reduce the stockpile of weapons inherited at the time of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The concept of revealing the location of facilities, the quantities of weapons, and the weapons capabilities was resisted by the FSU military, political hard-liners, and the defense-industrial complex.

In response to these circumstances and their associated threats, the U.S. Congress initiated the Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) program in November 1991. Often referred to as the Nunn-Lugar program after the two Senators who spearheaded the effort, this initiative provided the Department of Defense with the authority and funding to assist the eligible states of the former Soviet Union in weapons dismantlement and destruction, strengthening the security of nuclear warheads and fissile materials in connection with warhead dismantlement (chain of custody activities), and demilitarization of the new independent states (NIS) infrastructure. The assistance comes in the form of equipment, services, and technical advice.

The arguments made in the Congress for continued funding of the program center around national security, international security, and economic factors. The program is helping to prevent the emergence of new threats as the new independent states continue to deal with the uncertainties and instabilities of post-Soviet sovereignty independence. The dollars spent on the CTR program are of a significantly smaller scale than those spent during the Cold War to deter and defend against the Soviet Union's weapons of mass destruction. And the program increases transparency of the Russian nuclear weapons programs.

While the program got off to a slow start, mainly as a result of the time it took to obtain agreements for cooperation with the NIS and the difficult task of getting the recipient governments to specify technical requirements sufficiently clearly to solicit goods and services from U.S. businesses, it has often been described in business terms as "win-win-win": CTR projects reduce the threat; they help the NIS build peaceful, commercially viable market economics, while reducing excess military capacity; and they provide opportunities for U.S.