

## **Eliminating Prime Targets of Terrorism: Russian Chemical Weapons Destruction**

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The recent White House announcement that terrorist networks, including the Al Qaeda cells of Osama bin Laden, are actively seeking weapons of mass destruction — nuclear, chemical, and biological — should come as no surprise to most observers. The mailings of anthrax spores in the United States since September 11th have made it abundantly clear that innovative and technically skilled criminals and terrorists are able and willing to utilize a variety of nondiscriminatory terror weapons to make their points.

What is surprising is that a five-year U.S. effort to help Russia destroy its vulnerable stockpiles of 40,000 tons of chemical weapons (CW) has this month met surprising opposition within the Department of Defense. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld issued a memorandum in November to halt support for the destruction of 5,400 tons of Russian nerve agent stockpiled just north of Kazakhstan. While this move is unlikely to be the final answer from the Bush Administration, which up to now has supported elimination of Russian chemical weapons, it illustrates well how irrational, ideological, and bureaucratic the response to terrorism can be.

I undertook an official on-site inspection of the easternmost of seven major Russian chemical weapons stockpiles in 1994, early in the new U.S. Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) Program. This bipartisan program, founded by Senators Sam Nunn and Richard Lugar to help post-Cold War Russia destroy its large arsenals of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, has committed some \$400-500 million annually for almost 10 years now to meet this enormous challenge. It has been successful in destroying thousands of nuclear weapons, launch systems, and production facilities; building secure storage facilities for weapons-grade nuclear materials; constructing laboratories for overseeing safe destruction techniques; and designing a major chemical weapons destruction facility for Shchuch'ye, the site of my 1994 CTR inspection.

Shchuch'ye is in the Kurgan Oblast and lies between the regional capital, Kurgan, and the larger city of Chelyabinsk. It's about a 1,500 mile flight southeast from Moscow, over the Ural mountain range that separates European from Asian Russia. This is one of the largest and most battlefield-ready of the Russian CW sites, containing both artillery shells and missile warheads filled with deadly nerve agent. The family of nerve agents is one of the most deadly in Russian, American, and other chemical weapons arsenals. One drop on the skin or inhaled is sufficient to induce convulsions and death within a few minutes. The last known use of this type of agent was in the 1995 Tokyo subway attack when the Japanese terrorist network, Aum Shinrikyo, killed 12 subway riders and injured some 5,000 others.

The Shchuch'ye stockpile was chosen by the Russian Ministry of Defense and the U.S. Cooperative Threat Reduction Program five or more years ago as the first Russian site to be destroyed because of its battlefield-ready arsenal and also because of its vulnerable location to the Asian subcontinent in the "Stans" — Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan. Since September 11th, the vital importance of destroying this arsenal has become all the more clear.

Shchuch'ye's millions of artillery shells are warehoused in dozens of above-ground, poorly maintained, corrugated metal and wooden buildings in three-meter-high shelving that looks like wine racks. When I walked through several of these warehouses in 1994, some racks were filled, some half-filled, and some empty. When I asked the commanding officer how they maintained confidence in the inventory, he responded that they kept the barndoors locked at all times. Unfortunately, the locking mechanism on these buildings were simple bicycle locks.

The two-meter-long missile warheads, especially impressive in size and weight, sit on the floor of identical warehouses on railroad dollies, ready for rail transportation to missile sites and mating with Russian Frog and Scud missiles such as we saw Iraq fire at Israel and coalition forces in the Gulf War.

The Russian, European, and American governments have long been concerned over the lack of security of these Russian chemical weapons sites and the resultant vulnerability of the shells and warheads to theft, diversion, and proliferation. It is for this reason that a CTR program for destruction was created in the mid-1990s and directed primarily at the Shchuch'ye site.

The Cooperative Threat Reduction Program has committed some \$200 million to date to design, test, and scale-up Russian technologies for the safe and environmentally sound demilitarization of this stockpile. At present, the two-stage technology of neutralization (mixing the nerve agent with a caustic reagent) and bituminization (solidifying the resultant liquid with an asphalt mixture and storing it in sealed, retrievable sites as toxic waste) has been successfully scaled up, and full facility design plans are close to completion.

This program, however, has suffered from political attacks in recent years that need now to be overcome. The first problem has been the fact that the House Armed Services Committee in Congress has been successful in zeroing out administration funding requests of \$130 million and \$35 million in FY00 and 01 respectively. The primary reasons given were that some HASC members and staff saw the program as more a domestic "environmental" problem for Russia than an international security issue; that the Russian government was not placing sufficient priority on the program itself; and that our European allies were not participating adequately.

Since then the Russian government has responded positively to congressional concerns and reorganized its bureaucracy into a new superagency, the Russian Munitions Agency, led by Dr. Zinovy Pak, a respected take-charge manager. Pak has also been successful in expanding annual Russian funding to over \$120 million, some six times prior Kremlin and Duma commitments. Also important is the fact that a dozen European countries, after some very active lobbying and outreach by governments and NGOs — including Mikhail Gorbachev's Green Cross — have now committed some \$150 million to the Shchuch'ye project and the other six Russian CW stockpile sites. Germany, for example, is constructing a pilot destruction facility at the Gorny lewisite stockpile in the Saratov Oblast. Italy has agreed to construct utility pipelines in the Kurgan Oblast. And Britain has pledged some \$18 million to the project.

This has apparently not been sufficient for hardliners in Congress, however. This past summer the House Armed Services Committee once again planned to delete restored by unanimous consent in the full HASC markup when proposed by the senior bipartisan team of congressman Curt Weldon and congressman John Spratt.

The Senate, in both its Republican and Democratic majorities in recent years, has been very supportive of the Russian CW destruction project. The White House has also weighed in recently as part of its anti-terrorism campaign. The State Department, committed to meeting the legal requirements of the international Chemical Weapons Convention requiring full abolition of U.S. and Russian CW stockpiles by 2012, is also supportive of moving forward with construction at Shchuch'ye. Yet, it's apparent that Cold War ideologues who had opposed the 1997 ratification of the CWC, are still trying to wage war on the project from the Pentagon.

This issue may indeed be resolved once and for all at the Putin- Bush summit. Regardless, it will be important for the public to demand that the Shchuch'ye stockpile be destroyed on an accelerated schedule and that both Russian and American chemical weapons be securely stored and destroyed safely and expeditiously over the coming

decade.

What needs to happen, in short, is the following. (1) The Bush Administration and the U.S. Congress need to make clear that destruction of the Shchuch'ye CW stockpile is a top priority for U.S. and global security and that funding will be forthcoming for FY02 and beyond. (2) The CTR program director, Gen. Thomas Kuenning, must be given reprogramming authority in order to allow sufficient funds to flow to the project based on accelerated construction schedules. (3) The Russian government must continue to work cooperatively with the United States and other governments and contractors and, as required by Congress, must continue its annual funding commitment. (4) European governments, as required by Congress, must also continue to support the project. And (5), U.S. and international development agencies must also participate in helping build a sustainable economy in the Kurgan region and thereby indirectly supporting the demilitarization project.

Only by abolishing chemical weapons globally and permanently establishing a long-lasting taboo for the use of weapons of mass destruction will we all be more secure. Support for Russian and American chemical weapons destruction programs is one of the very best investments in U.S., Russian, and global security for the 21st century.

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