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**Proliferation Problems as Seen from Moscow**

**By**

**Dr. Andrei Shoumikhin**

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### **Who Is Afraid Of Proliferation?**

The non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) is an important priority of Russian foreign and military policy. Basic Russian approaches to WMD non-proliferation are strongly reminiscent of Soviet-era approaches. Moscow puts considerable emphasis on international legal norms, particularly those that involve the UN system. For example, official Moscow still considers the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) “the top-most international instrument that helps assure global and regional stability and security”.<sup>1</sup>

In a special statement in connection with the anniversaries of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Russian Foreign Ministry repeated the long-standing Soviet/Russian appeal for “a comprehensive approach to the entire range of issues concerning nuclear non-proliferation.” While stressing that “painstaking work in the political and diplomatic field is essential” to promote non-proliferation, the statement also warned that “attempts to resolve the problems by force are dangerous”<sup>2</sup>—a clear allusion to the U.S. approach to Iraqi non-compliance with nonproliferation norms.

Moscow recognizes that, in recent years, unsettling trends have been gaining momentum in the field of nuclear non-proliferation:

this was apparent in North Korea’s statement that it was withdrawing from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty [NPT], and also in the reluctance of India, Pakistan and Israel, which remain outside the NPT’s legal area, to join it as non-nuclear states.<sup>3</sup>

Other “negative factors” that worry the Russians include:

attempts by non-state structures, including international terrorists, to gain access to weapons of mass destruction, and the continuing incentives to acquire and proliferate WMD as a result of intractable regional crises and the weakness or absence of national export control measures on the part of many states.<sup>4</sup>

The official Russian position still places a strong emphasis on the need for broad international regulatory actions—an approach that echoes the Soviet perspective on non-proliferation. However, many individual Russian experts voice serious doubts about the ability and willingness of the international community at large to act in concert. Further serious doubts exist about the readiness of members of the “nuclear club” to take the lead in non-proliferation efforts while resisting temptations to benefit directly or indirectly

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<sup>1</sup> Vladimir Rybachenkov, “Non-Proliferation Regime and Reduction of Weapons of Mass Destruction.” Center for the Study of Problems of Disarmament, Energy, and Ecology Course, “Non-Proliferation Regime and Reduction of Weapons of Mass Destruction and National Security,” (Moscow, Russia), November 1, 2002. <<http://www.armscontrol.ru/course/lectures/rybachenkov5.htm>>

<sup>2</sup> *RIA-Novosti*, August 6, 2004 [FBIS Translated Text CEP20040806000301].

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

from the spread of nuclear and other technologies—a process that inexorably leads to the acquisition of WMD capabilities by a growing number of current non-WMD-possessors.

Many Russian experts blame the West and the United States for the regular failure of non-proliferation initiatives. As Valerii Fomin, head of the Export Control Policy Section at the Department of Security and Disarmament of the Russian Foreign Ministry, stated recently in a lecture at the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology,

Under the current Administration in power in the U.S. ... attempts to strengthen international regimes in the sphere of non-proliferation and arms control fail to meet with support.<sup>5</sup>

The West is also widely blamed for “double-standard” approaches to non-proliferation that exempt pro-Western regimes and states from criticism for their nuclear programs and concentrate exclusively on those Third World regimes—many of them close former or current Russian clients—that oppose the West ideologically, politically and/or militarily. Moscow also maintains that many Western, particularly U.S., moves such as unilateral sanctions against alleged proliferators, are in fact intended to eliminate competition in profitable areas of international trade, e.g. nuclear energy production, rather than as steps to fight proliferation.

Perceptions of this sort result in widespread doubts about the expediency of following in the wake of non-proliferation policies and initiatives promoted in the West. In an extreme and so far minority view fueled by resentment towards U.S. policies, WMD proliferation should not be regarded as “a Russian problem” at all. According to independent military analyst Sergei Kremlev writing in the *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye* weekly:

Proliferation... is a key problem only for the United States, but it is secondary for Russia. And it will hardly be rational or useful for Russia, if in general we will regard Russian nuclear problems through the prism of someone else’s problems... There’s no doubt—for the United States, the acquisition of nuclear status by a number of “threshold” states would signify the undermining of its global pretensions. For Russia, in a number of cases, that development of events would even be indirectly advantageous (for example, nuclear weapons in Latin America). The proliferation problem is being actively inflated by America not so much because the threat of the general “nuclearization” of the planet is already so great. The bugaboo of proliferation is simply very convenient for the justification of gendarme actions with regard to any opponent to the United States that is inadequately strong.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Valerii Fomin, “Missile Technology Non-Proliferation Regime: Political and Legal Aspects.” Center for the Study of Problems of Disarmament, Energy, and Ecology Course, “Non-Proliferation Regime and Reduction of Weapons of Mass Destruction and National Security,” (Moscow, Russia), March 10, 2004. <<http://www.armscontrol.ru/course/lectures04a/vvf040310.htm>>

<sup>6</sup> Sergei Kremlev, “A Retaliatory Strike Must Be Inescapable: For Russia, Nuclear Deterrence is not Only Rational but also the Only Alternative.” *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozrenie*, April 9, 2004. [FBIS Translated Text CEP20040412000259].

## Ballistic Missile Proliferation

In an interesting nuance, virtual unanimity exists in Russia on the effects of unauthorized spread of missile technologies as a rising threat to Russian security. It is widely recognized, given the Russian geo-strategic situation, that “the spread of missile technologies is a greater threat for us [the RF] than for America.”<sup>7</sup>

In the opinion of Anatolii Tsyganok, director of the Center for Military Forecasting of the Political and Military Analysis Institute and professor of the Academy of Military Sciences, Russia’s military infrastructure responsible for early warning and rapid response to potential missile attack, is fatally obsolete and leaves the country extremely vulnerable:

The structure of our Ministry of Defense, the structure of military command and control, is an anachronism of the 1960s. The General Staff sends out a directive to the district, and the district, to a separate army, and thence an order goes down to the corps and division. This takes days, however the approach time of a cruise missile is computed in minutes. Even at large-scale exercises representatives of the combat arms operate on their own account. We need in peacetime to be forming territorial command elements—like the operational commands of the United States. These structures should weigh the possible threats in their sectors and respond to them. To unsanctioned missile launches included.<sup>8</sup>

Mr. Tsyganok identifies some sources of missile threat for Russia. Significantly, they include countries with which Russia is currently maintaining close political relations and/or is involved in active trade in weapons and military technologies—including ballistic missiles. At the same time, he excludes the U.S. and NATO from the list of potential adversaries:

[Missiles could approach us] from Iran, which we are helping build a nuclear center in Bushehr. This is dual technology. Launches are possible on the part of Pakistan, which is coordinating efforts with China to obstruct India—they consider it their main adversary. Launches on the part of North Korea are not inconceivable either—nothing can be foreseen in a totalitarian state. Intermediate-range North Korea missiles could reach Khabarovsk, long-range missiles are capable of hitting Sakhalin. Russia needs on the basis of this picture to have territorial commands: Southern, Asia-Pacific, and, hypothetically, Western... NATO and the United States will be a real threat to us only if the communists return to power in Russia.<sup>9</sup>

Russian experts generally lament that “there exists no universal international legal norm in the area of [missile] proliferation.”<sup>10</sup> In effect, many would have preferred to conclude

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<sup>7</sup> Fomin, “Missile Technology Non-Proliferation Regime,” March 10, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Nikolay Poroskov, “Simple Simon Syndrome,” *Vremya Novostei*, August 4, 2004 [FBIS Translated Text CEP20040804000337].

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Fomin, “Missile Technology Non-Proliferation Regime,” March 10, 2004.

a “Ballistic Missile NPT” with membership that would include as many “problem countries” as possible.

Russia has been a member of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) since the mid-1990s. However, similar to a situation with WMD non-proliferation, Russia often voices disagreements with Western policies deemed “one-sided” or “discriminatory” within the framework of the MTCR. Explains Valerii Fomin from the RF Foreign Ministry:

Our Western colleagues constantly raise the problem of “countries of concern,” while we try introduce balance into the on-going discussion since to us it is strange when we receive, for example, ten documents of the Iranian missile program, and not a single one on the Pakistani missile program, and in Pakistan they now have an open military regime. Or Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of Ben Laden—how is it better than Egypt or Syria? In other words, if there is a missile potential we should talk about it. A forbidden theme for our Western colleagues is the missile program of Israel that possesses the most powerful missile potential in the Middle East but has signed practically no treaty in the sphere of WMD proliferation.<sup>11</sup>

### **Russia as a Source of Proliferation**

One of the most important issues that divides Russia from the West, and prevents the “meeting of minds,” let alone close cooperation in the area of WMD non-proliferation, is to what extent, if at all, Russia itself represents a willing or unwilling source of proliferation. Not surprisingly, Moscow tries hard to refute Western allegations that it (1) fails to assure absolute safety of its nuclear facilities and materials, and (2) is involved in trade/transfer relationships with “dubious” regimes and countries that empower them to acquire WMD and missiles in contravention of existing international norms and export limitations.

### **Safety of Russian Nuclear Assets**

On August 3, 2004, Russian Defense Minister Sergey Ivanov personally organized a tour of a nuclear arsenal near Olenegorsk (Kola Peninsula) for 49 military specialists from 17 NATO countries in a highly-advertised attempt to dissipate doubts about the safety of Russian WMD storage facilities and to demonstrate readiness to deal with any emergencies including terrorist attacks. For the first time, experts from Brussels received access to one of Russia’s 20 nuclear arsenals. They were also familiarized with key elements of physical protection for the secret facility, while Defense Minister Sergey Ivanov, in his words, personally demonstrated “our capability of ensuring security for nuclear facilities.”<sup>12</sup>

More specifically, NATO observers were invited to see the Avariya [Russian for “accident”] 2004 exercises to protect and defend Russian nuclear facilities. The scenario

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Aleksandr Babakin, “‘Avariya’ in Nuclear Arsenals. NATO Captured without a Fight Security Plans for Russian Secret Arsenals,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, August 4, 2004. [FBIS Translated Text CEP20040805000163].

of the exercises was developed in detail by the 12<sup>th</sup> Main Directorate of the Russian Defense Ministry headed by Colonel General Igor Valynkin.

Military analyst from *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* Aleksandr Babakin commented with a touch of sarcasm:

For now, it is difficult to talk about a terrorist threat to Russian nuclear weapons, but our erstwhile potential enemy is now remarkably familiar with methods of transportation and protection of convoys, as well as the composition of their security support and weapons. During the exercises (which will last until 5 August), the NATO experts will also see tactics of protecting a special-purpose train. It may be assumed that NATO special-purpose troops will now introduce corrections to their training methods. As always, traditional Russian window-dressing proved indispensable... The security and life-support systems of this nuclear arsenal were recently upgraded and practically all of its automobile and armored equipment was repaired. For now, however, the Russian Defense Ministry does not have enough money to modernize other arsenals.<sup>13</sup>

Babakin noted that the exercise in the Kola Peninsula was obviously pursuing both military and political goals:

Sergey Ivanov used the occasion to remind the guests from Brussels that the United States promised already in 2002 to allocate \$5 billion to enhance the protection of and recycle weapons of mass destruction and that only \$400 million has come in. Most of these funds have already been spent on the construction of plants destroying chemical weapons. General Valynkin and his nuclear arsenals received only a very insignificant portion of the money. So, Russia expects the promised help from Washington. This is exactly why Russia has disclosed its innermost military secrets.<sup>14</sup>

### **“Nuclear Suitcases”**

Since the early 1990s, Moscow often has had to face criticism in connection not only with a potentially dangerous breakdown in assuring safety of nuclear and other WMD assets but also with reports of the actual “loss” of some dangerous weapons and materials, e.g., miniature nuclear devices. Military observers of the *Krasnaya Zvezda* note:

Russia has conducted the [“*Avariya 2004*”] exercise at the background of “warning signals” from the West on the safety of Russian nuclear arsenals and the ability of the state to defend nuclear facilities... Moreover, foreign mass media are disseminating more and more warnings about possible use by Al Qaeda militants of “miniature nuclear charges” and the so-called “nuclear suitcases”.<sup>15</sup>

In the early 1970s, the Soviets developed at least two types of nuclear devices for subversive activities in the enemy territory. The first one weighed 40 kg and had a 0.2-1

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Dmitrii Gordeev and Aleksei Lyashenko, “Nuclear Facilities: Under Reliable Protection.” *Krasnaya Zvezda*, August 3, 2004.

kiloton equivalent. Reportedly, it could be prepared for detonation by one person over 20 minutes. Later on, a more compact model was developed weighing 30 kg. Russian troops also possessed small-size nuclear artillery charges.<sup>16</sup> Colonel-General (Ret.) Victor Yesin argues in the *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* that under no circumstances could Russian “nuclear suitcases” get into the hands of terrorists:

All of them [miniature devices] were kept in one arsenal in the territory of Russia. They were never released to the troops. I may say with full authority that not a single “nuclear backpack” was ever lost at that arsenal. Nor had they ever had them at the KGB—only special GRU [Main Intelligence Department of the Defense Ministry] contingents and special marine troops had backpack nuclear devices among their weapons... In April 2000 at a Conference on the implementation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty [the then Foreign Minister] Igor Ivanov declared that all nuclear mines in Russia had been destroyed... There have been two comprehensive inspections to verify the safety of nuclear backpacks. The first one was conducted by a joint commission of the Defense Ministry and the Ministry of Atomic Energy. Then, when more hullabaloo was raised President Boris Yeltsin ordered Andrei Kokoshin, the then secretary of the RF Security Council, to conduct still another inspection. I was included as member of the commission. In the course of the cross-examination I personally counted each nuclear backpack. This is why I reiterate with full confidence: not a single portable nuclear warhead had been lost.<sup>17</sup>

### **Cooperation with Rogues**

The differences between Russian and Western treatments of specific developing countries of course help define efforts at developing common non-proliferation strategies. Official Moscow, almost as a matter of principle, rejects the notion that its relationships with “rogue” countries have negative proliferation implications. Consistent with that position, Russia takes strenuous exception to U.S. sanctions against Russian MIC companies for alleged proliferation-related activities. More often than not, they claim that these violations either never took place or cannot be convincingly documented. An oft-heard explanation in Moscow is that sanctions are intended to eliminate competition for the U.S. in world markets of advanced technologies.

A most recent episode with U.S. sanctions against a Russian MIC enterprise involved the “Altai” Federal Scientific-Production Center [*federal’nyi nauchno-proizvodstvennyi tsentr Altai*], which the U.S. State Department accused of inappropriate missile-related activity. Officials of the Altai region and the “Altai” production center declared that “U.S. allegations reflect the Americans’ commercial interests” and cannot apply to an enterprise that produces mostly civilian goods.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Vladimir Ivanov, “Osama’s Nuclear Ax May Fall on American Heads,” *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie*, July 30, 2004.

<sup>17</sup> Victor Yesin, “Terrorists Can Use Nuclear Devices,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, July 30, 2004. <[http://www.ng.ru/politics/2004-07-30/2\\_terror.html](http://www.ng.ru/politics/2004-07-30/2_terror.html)>.

<sup>18</sup> Aleksandr Babakin, “State Department Fights against Russian Defense Contractors,” *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie*, July 23, 2004.

Moscow also rejects reports in the Western press asserting that North Korean medium-range missiles are making use of Soviet technologies derived SS-N-5 and SS-N-6 (Russian designation R-27) submarine launched ballistic missiles (SLBM). According to explanations provided by *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*:

Pyongyang had indeed some technological data having bought 12 decommissioned Russian submarines of the “Foxtrot” and “Golf II” classes. They were bought by the North Koreans in 1993 as scrap. A certain Japanese firm acted as an intermediary at that point. [According to an unnamed source], “These submarines still had important elements of the R-21 missile system including launch silos and stabilization sub-systems.” Later on, Pyongyang had allegedly acquired blueprints for the R-27 missile system and possibly technical recommendations of Russian specialists... The Defense Ministry maintains that with such a powerful missile, the DPRK may well “hit against territories 2,000km away.” However, at the Russian Defense Ministry they categorically deny that [the North Koreans] possess such a missile weapon, and point out that in its time, DPRK had indeed purchased several old decommissioned subs that at one point had been armed with ordinary torpedoes. This information was confirmed by deputy designer-general of the state missile center “Construction Bureau after Academician V.P. Makeev” [“*Konstruktorskoe buro imeni akademika V.P. Makeeva*”] Yurii Telitsin: “Indeed, DPRK had purchased old Russian diesel torpedo submarines. Specialists of our state missile center had never gone to DPRK, and never helped [North] Koreans with the creation of a powerful offensive missile weapon on the basis of our old R-27 SLBM... I think the U.S. is engaged in a purposeful campaign against Russian defense enterprises.”<sup>19</sup>

Speaking in support of the Russian version, military expert Major-General (Ret.) Vladimir Dvorkin asserted that the DPRK presents near-term threat to the United States:

North Korea may present a missile threat to the U.S. only in [the] distant future. To do that, it has missiles developed locally of the “Taepodong – 2” type. North Korea does not possess any other means... [The DPRK] has to conduct a long series of flight tests for maximal ranges that cannot be concealed. This will take no less than 7 years.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, Russia also continues to deny supporting Iranian nuclear or missile weapons programs. While aware of the potential direct confrontation between the U.S. and the Islamic Republic of Iran over the latter’s efforts to acquire WMD,<sup>21</sup> Moscow intends to continue nuclear cooperation projects with Tehran on its own terms. As recently stated by Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov:

Russia supports the right of Iran as a state-member of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons to peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Iran is our neighbor and traditional partner. In the field of atomic energy, prospects and

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<sup>19</sup> Andrei Terekhov and Aleksandr Babakin, “Russia Never Came into Collusion with Kim Jong-il,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, August 5, 2004.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Vladimir Kuzar, “Is Iran Next?” *Krasnaya Zvezda*, August 3, 2004.



scope of partnership are being defined with due regard to the implementation by Tehran of its obligations vis-à-vis the IAEA. Moreover, the development of cooperation depends on the solution of the issue of returning to Russia the spent nuclear fuel from the nuclear station that is being built in Bushehr.<sup>22</sup>

## **Conclusions**

Discrepancies in Russian and American/Western approaches to WMD and ballistic missile non-proliferation may expand further, particularly if situations in Third World regions deteriorate and lead to more conflicts there. Moscow's policy is impacted by contradictory interests: the desire to expand export of weapons and high technologies to countries that are prepared to pay for them, and the recognized need to improve relations with the U.S. and the West.

Apparently, Moscow will continue to balance these interests. In the realm of global politics and diplomacy, it will profess its devotion to non-proliferation goals and attempt to play leadership roles in non-proliferation activities, particularly those that evolve at broad international forums where activist positions may help reap additional benefits, e.g. wider recognition and popularity among Third World countries.

At the same time, given its reliance on foreign revenues, Russia will seek opportunities for expanding trade in weapons and advanced technology, e.g. those used for nuclear energy production. For some Third World countries, Russia has already emerged as a preferred, albeit exclusive, partner in some areas of sensitive technology. With global divisions expanding, opportunities for "special relations" in various regions may improve even further.

However, given its continued economic and military-political weaknesses, Moscow will have to watch for negative Western, particularly U.S., reactions to "overzealous" expansion of military sales to countries the West sees as unreliable and/or dangerous. At least in the foreseeable future, Russia may be expected to try to avoid open confrontation with the U.S. on proliferation related issues. Moscow is also obliged to watch its "rogue" partners lest these advanced technologies be turned against Russia or its interests.

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<sup>22</sup> Nuclear Control: Information, Issue No. 25, July 21–28, 2004. <<http://www.pircenter.org>>