This workshop on strategic stability and nuclear threats, held 8-10 July 2002 in Moscow, covered subjects far different from those during the Cold War. A strong theme was the potential or present instability in East Asia and particularly South Asia and the Middle East. The US-Russian relationship was discussed in the immediate aftermath of the Moscow Summit in May, where the successor to the SALT-START strategic nuclear weapons treaties was signed, and the termination in June of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty upon the US withdrawal. The fact that the workshop covered but did not dwell on these US-Russian matters (or even the changing political relationship between the two) is evidence that concerns about strategic stability and nuclear weapons are largely focused elsewhere. Thus, the seventeen participants from outside Russia, who were joined by a large and knowledgeable Russian contingent, covered a broad range of subjects. They also enjoyed a never-ending variety of events scheduled by the energetic Alexander Nikitin and hosted by the Russian Pugwash Group, and benefited from informative sessions at the Russian Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Atomic Energy and the Kurchatov Institute.

**US-Russian Strategic Relations**

Notwithstanding the signing of the Declaration on New Strategic Relations at the May summit between Presidents Bush and Putin, the nature of this evolving relationship is unclear even as Russia moves politically toward the West and focuses on its economic development. The Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty itself is a flawed document, but will keep Russia in rough parity with the US on deployed strategic nuclear weapons through 2012, particularly since the ban on MIRV’d ICBMs in START II will never enter into force. Hope was expressed at the workshop that some of the ambiguities in the new treaty, including how to count the deployed weapons covered by the Treaty and the verification regime, might be resolved over the new term
and that ratification would be prompt. Neither has happened as the year 2002 draws to a close. Left unresolved by a ceiling of 1700-2200 deployed warheads are central questions starting with the continuing role of nuclear weapons, the dismantlement of the excess warheads and conversion of the fissile materials. Little optimism was voiced that these carryover issues from the Cold War buildups would be addressed anytime soon.

The demise of the ABM Treaty was noted more by sadness than as raising Russian security concerns. Participants seemed to take their cue from President Putin’s conclusion that in the near-term (10 to 15 years), US ballistic missile defense programs would not adversely effect Russia’s deterrent capability. The general sense was that the primary impact of the US BMD programs would be elsewhere, particularly East Asia.

The US-Russian Cooperative Threat Reduction program, now in its tenth year, has been successful, but needs to be accelerated and expanded. Participants were fortunate to hear a pioneering proposal to apply the learning and experience in Russia to the physical protection of nuclear weapons and facilities in other countries, particularly India and Pakistan, in this era of heightened concern with terrorism and nuclear proliferation. But neither India nor Pakistan is a party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), nor is either a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group. The legal and policy issues are new and acute, and even the readiness of India or Pakistan to accept outside suggestions or assistance is uncertain. Further, no single approach is likely to work and cooperation may occur first on non-nuclear-weapon materials. Nevertheless, this new initiative could be of real importance and non-governmental groups, including Pugwash, could have important roles. Unfortunately, no one from India or Pakistan was present to respond in Moscow.

Nuclear proliferation has already occurred in South Asia and raises acute and continuing challenges. The two other geographic regions discussed were East Asia and the Middle East. The former appeared to many to be less pressing, assuming China’s modernization remains unprovocative, disputes over Taiwan do not flair up dangerously, and North Korea remains contained. Concerns were expressed about Pyongyang’s intent and the future of the Agreed Framework, but in July 2002 when the workshop was held the Korean peninsula was still quiet
[editor’s note: this situation markedly deteriorated in November 2002 when North Korea announced it was resuming pursuit of a nuclear weapons capability.]

The Middle East, particularly including Iraq and Iran, were the center of intense discussions. No one differed with the conclusion stated by several that if Iraq crossed the nuclear-weapon threshold, Iran would as well. Iran is clearly on a path that brings it closer to nuclear-weapon capability, but the public evidence of its policy is ambiguous. While several participants stressed the US desire that Russia curtail or end its nuclear relationship with Iran, one suggested that the US should no longer oppose Russian policy if Russia committed to the take back the spent fuel from any reactors it builds in Iran. Other participants noted the ambiguity in past and present Iranian acts, but believe Russian assistance, particularly the construction of a single reactor at Bushehr, is appropriate. Those supporting the differing US and Russian policies all seemed to agree that Iran’s future decisions would be guided, in part, by developments in Iraq. No one suggested that Iran would necessarily remain a non-nuclear weapon state even if Iraq’s programs were credibly stopped.

The discussion of Iraq’s nuclear ambitions raised the most diverse views. One participant bluntly stated his understanding of US policy — Iraq was on course to develop nuclear weapons, sanctions were ineffective, and military action therefore necessary. (At the same time, he indicated a military response was not considered appropriate for dealing with either Iran or North Korea.) Regime change might come from an internal coup, but the US view was that a pre-emptive strike was necessary in the alternative. He described the differing motivations within the Bush administration, and thought they would never be resolved. He noted the disagreement among experts on the consequences of military action, particularly a US occupation of Iraq.

The Russian and Chinese positions were presented as dependent on the UN Security Council actions and giving Iraq a final chance. One participant thought a coup within Iraq unlikely and raised questions about the impact of war on the Iraqi civil population, the general geographic area, and public opinion in Europe. Israel’s three-decade nuclear capability, even if devoted to its defense, was recognized as a huge unsettling factor particularly in the absence of peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. Returning to the general theme of the
workshop, one participant suggested that the search for stability in the Middle East may in fact lead to instability.

Other themes expressed at the workshop on related matters included:

• the NPT regime seemed relatively stable for most states, notwithstanding the differing applicable standards to certain parties and among the three non-parties, Israel, India and Pakistan, and the suspect performance of several parties;
• Russian nuclear weapons had no role in areas of regional conflict and should be removed; and
• the building a new US-Russian relationship will take a great deal of time and must be based on a real understanding of each other’s security needs and concerns.

In brief, the workshop explored a number of difficult, if not intractable, problems in a fast-changing world where anti-terrorism and nuclear non-proliferation are priorities. It was clear from the discussions that while agreement on ends may be achieved, the means to achieve them are likely to remain divisive.
Final List of Participants

Dr. Gunnar Arbman, Director of Research, Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI), Stockholm, Sweden


Dr. Jeffrey Boutwell, Executive Director, Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, Cambridge, MA, USA

Dr. Oleg Bukharin, Research Scientist, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey, USA

Prof. Francesco Calogero, Professor of Theoretical Physics, University of Rome "La Sapienza", Rome, Italy; Chairman, Pugwash Council

Prof. Paolo Cotta-Ramusino, Professor of Mathematical Physics, University of Milan, Italy; Secretary General, Union of Italian Scientists for Disarmament (USPID); Director, Program on Disarmament and International Security, Landau Network – Centro Volta, Como, Italy; Secretary-General (elect), Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs

Robert Einhorn, Senior Advisor, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Washington, DC, USA

Dr. Rose Gottemoeller, Senior Associate, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, DC, USA

Prof. Frank von Hippel, Professor of Public and International Affairs, Program on Science and Global Security, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey, USA

Mr. Hu Zhongkun, Second Secretary, Department of Arms Control and Disarmament, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Beijing, China

Mr. Robert Nurick (USA), Director, Carnegie Moscow Center, Moscow, Russia

Prof. George Rathjens, Secretary-General, Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs; Professor Emeritus, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA

Honorable John B. Rhinelander, Senior Counsel, Shaw Pittman, Washington, DC, USA; Vice Chairman, Lawyers Alliance for World Security (LAWS); Director, Arms Control Association (ACA)

Mr. Gary Samore, International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), London, UK

Mr. Paul Schulte, Director Proliferation and Arms Control, Ministry of Defence, London, UK
Rear-Admiral (Rtd.) Camille Sellier, Adviser, Commissariat a l'Energie Atomique (CEA), Direction des Applications Militaries (DAM), Bruyères Le Châtel, **France**

Mr. Daniel Sneider, National/Foreign Editor, *The San Jose Mercury News*, San Jose, California, USA

**Pugwash Rome Office:** Claudia Vaughn, Pugwash Conferences, via della Lungara 10, I-00165 Rome, Italy, Tel. (++39-06) 687-2606, Fax: (++39-06) 687-8376, Mobile: (++39-333) 456-6661, E-mail: pugwash@iol.it

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**Russian and CIS PARTICIPANTS**

**Acad. Georgy Arbatov**, Emeritus Director of the Institute of USA and Canada Studies, Russian Academy of Science, member of the Russian Pugwash Committee, **Moscow**

**Dr. Dmitri Borisov**, Program Manager (Nuclear Programs in Russia), Nuclear Threat Initiative, Inc. (Moscow Office)

**Acad. Yevgeni Velikhov**, President, RNC Kurchatov Institute of Atomic Energy, Academician-Secretary of the Devision of the Information Technology and Computers Systems of the Russian Academy of Sciences, (former Vice President of the Russian Academy of Sciences), member of the Presidium of the Russian Pugwash Committee, **Moscow**

**Prof. Alexander Ginzburg**, Deputy Director, A.M. Obukhov Institute of Atmospheric Physics, Russian Academy of Science, Professor of Climate Change, International University in Moscow; Director, Development and Environment Foundation; Consultant to Moscow Mayor Department; member of the Presidium of the Russian Pugwash Committee, **Moscow**

**Dr. Igor Gonnov**, Director, Obninsk Business and Innovation Center, Secretary, Obninsk Branch of the Russian Pugwash Committee, **Obninsk, Kaluga Region**

**Dr. Dmitri Danilov**, Head of Department of European Security, Institute of Europe, Russian Academy of Science, **Moscow**

**Maj. Gen. (Rtd.) Vladimir Dvorkin**, Leading Scientist, Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Sciences, (former Director of the 4th Central Institute of the Russian Defence Ministry), member of the Russian Pugwash Committee, **Moscow**

**Dr. Anatoly Dyakov**, Director of Center, Moscow Physical and Technical Institute, **Dolgoprudny, Moscow Region**
Gen. Lt. Sergey Zelentsov, Deputy Director, Institute of Strategic Stability of Minatom, Moscow

Prof. Nikolay Chernoplekov, Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Director of the Institute of Superconductivity and Solid State Physics of the RNC “Kurchatov Institute”, Moscow

Prof. Mikhail Ignatiev, Head of Department, St. Petersburg State University of Aerospace Engineering, Chairman, St. Petersburg Branch of the Russian Pugwash Committee, St. Petersburg

Acad. Yuri Kagan, Head of Section, RNC Kurchatov Institute of Atomic Energy, Moscow

Dr. Viktor Kamyshanov, Deputy Chairman, International Federation for Peace and Conciliation, Moscow

Prof. Serguei Kapitza, Deputy Chairman of the Russian Pugwash Committee, Head of laboratory, Institute of Physical Problems, Russian Academy of Science, Moscow

Anton Khlopkov, Research Fellow, PIR—Center of Political Studies, Moscow

Acad. Sergey Kolesnikov, Member of the State Duma of Federal Assembly (Parliament) of the Russian Federation, Chairman, Russian Committee of the International Physicians for Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), Chairman of the East Siberian Scientific Center of the Russian Academy of Medical Sciences, Member, Russian Pugwash Committee, Moscow / Irkutsk

Prof. Vassily Krivokhizha, Deputy Director, Russian Institute of Strategic Studies, Member, Russian Pugwash Committee, Moscow

Acad. Nickolay Laverov, Vice President of the Russian Academy of Science, Director, Institute of Geology of Ore Deposits, Petrography, Mineralogy and Geochemistry of the Russian Academy of Sciences, member of the Russian Pugwash Committee, (former Vice Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers [1987—1991]), Moscow

Mikhail A. Lebedev, Executive Secretary of the Russian Pugwash Committee under Presidium of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Program Manager (International Security and Disarmament) of the International Federation for Peace and Conciliation, Chairman of the Russian Student Pugwash, Moscow

Acad. Boris Litvinov, Deputy Scientific Head of Russian Federal Nuclear Center — All-Russian scientific institute of theoretical physics (RFNC — VNIITF), member of the Russian Pugwash Committee, Snezhinsk, Chelyabinsk Region

Lt. Gen. Vladimir Medvedev, Head of Department, Institute of Strategic Stability of Minatom, Moscow
Acad. Viktor Mikhailov, Director, Institute of Strategic Stability of Minatom, Scientific Head of Russian Federal Nuclear Center — All-Russian scientific institute of experimental physics (PFNC — VNIIEF), member of the Russian Pugwash Committee (former Minister of Atomic Energy of Russia [1992—1998]), Moscow / Sarov, Nizhny Novgorod Region

Prof. Alexander Nikitin, Deputy Chairman of the Russian Pugwash Committee, Director, Center for Political and International Studies, Professor of Moscow State Institute of International Relations, First Vice President Russian Association of Political Science, Member of the Pugwash Council, Moscow

Dr. Vladimir Orlov, Director, PIR—Center for Political Studies, member of the Russian Pugwash Committee, Moscow

Dr. Veniamin Polysaev, Assistant Director, Institute of Strategic Stability of Minatom, Moscow

Acad. Nickolay Ponomarev-Stepnoy, Vice President, RNC Kurchatov Institute of Atomic Energy, Moscow

Dr. Stanislav Rodionov, Senior Research Fellow, Institute of Space Studies, Russian Academy of Science, member of the Russian Pugwash Committee, Moscow


Marshal Igor D. Sergeev, Advisor to the President of the Russian Federation on Strategic Stability, former Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation [1997—2001], Moscow

Amb. Roland Timerbaev, Chairman of the Council of the PIR—Center for Political Studies, member of the Russian Pugwash Committee (former Soviet Ambassador to Vienna UN organizations), Moscow

Acad. Yuri Trutnev, Deputy Scientific Head of Russian Federal Nuclear Center — All-Russian scientific institute of experimental physics (PFNC — VNIIEF), member of the Russian Pugwash Committee, Sarov, Nizhny Novgorod Region

Dr. Yuri Fedorov, Deputy Director, PIR—Center for Political Studies, member of the Russian Pugwash Committee, Moscow

Gen. Col. Vladimir Yakovlev, Chief, Staff for Coordination of Military Cooperation of CIS States, Moscow
GUEST
Luodmila Goldanskaya, Moscow

STUDENT / YOUNG PARTICIPANTS
Nickolay Bobylyov, Lector, Saint Petersburg State Technical University, St. Petersburg

Alexander Brekhovskikh, PhD Student of the A.N. Bakh Institute of Biochemistry, Russian Academy of Sciences, Board Member of the Russian Student Pugwash, Moscow

Veronica A. Ginzburg, Deputy Chairman, Russian Student Pugwash, Research Fellow, Institute of Global Climate and Ecology, Russian Academy of Science, Moscow

Yulia A. Nikitina, Student, Moscow State Institute of International Relations, Member Russian Student Pugwash, Moscow

UKRAINE
Gen. Maj. Vadim Grechaninov, President of the Ukrainian Atlantic Council, Kiev

Dr. Anatoly Shevtsov, Director, Dnepropetrovsk Branch, National Institute for Strategic Studies, Vice Chairman Ukrainian Pugwash Committee, Dnepropetrovsk

STAFF
Alexander Buchnev, Center for Political and International Studies, Moscow