



**Pugwash Workshop on  
Impending Challenges to Strategic Stability:  
Constraining the Nuclear Threat**

Moscow, Russia, 8-10 July 2002

*Report by*

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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.

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