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The Wrong Deterrence: The Threat of Loose Nukes is One of Our Own Making

Dr. Bruce G. Blair, CDI President

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Nuclear terrorism, thankfully, is still only a specter, not a reality. But the recent wave of bloodshed in Russia underscores the urgency of the need to prevent terrorists capable of indiscriminate slaughter from acquiring nuclear bombs.

To its credit, the Bush administration has finally launched an ambitious initiative to better secure nuclear and radiological materials, particularly in violence-racked Russia. But unless the Global Threat Reduction Initiative, which was introduced in May, becomes part of a far more comprehensive approach to the challenges of nuclear theft and terrorism, it is destined to fall well short of its goal of safeguarding the American people from the threat of nuclear weapons.

The initiative builds on the bilateral nonproliferation efforts of the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction program, a U.S. government-funded, post-Cold War effort that focused on securing Russia's nuclear arsenal. The new, expanded cooperative effort seeks to collect weapons-grade plutonium and enriched uranium that could be used in nuclear bombs from dozens of additional countries, and to lock them down in secure facilities.

But with U.S. and Russian strategic nuclear forces still on hair-trigger alert, we need to recognize that present policies for reducing the risk of nuclear strikes against the United States by terrorists or rogue countries are inconsistent and self-defeating. On the one hand, in the name of deterrence, U.S. and Russian strategic nuclear forces both comply with their presidents' instructions to be constantly prepared to fight a large-scale nuclear war with each other at a moment's notice. On the other hand, in the name of nonproliferation, the United States and Russia cooperate closely in securing Russia's nuclear weapons against theft.

By keeping thousands of nuclear weapons poised for immediate launch, even under normal peacetime circumstances, the United States projects a powerful deterrent threat at Russia. But at the same time, it causes Russia to retain thousands of weapons in its operational inventory, scattered across that country's vast territory, and to keep them ready for rapid use in large-scale nuclear war with America. And to maintain the reliability of these far-flung weapons, Russia must constantly transport large numbers back and forth between a remanufacturing facility and the dispersed military bases. This perpetual motion creates a serious vulnerability, because transportation is the Achilles' heel of nuclear weapons security.

On any given day, many hundreds of Russian nuclear weapons are moving around the countryside. Nearly 1,000 of them are in some stage of transit or temporary storage awaiting relocation at any time. This constant movement between the far-flung nuclear bases and the remanufacturing facility at Ozersk in the southern Urals stems from the esoteric technical fact that Russian nuclear bombs are highly perishable. In contrast to American bombs, which have a shelf life of more than 30 years, Russian bombs last only eight to 12 years before corrosion and internal decay render them unreliable – prone to fizzling instead of exploding. At that point, they must be shipped back to the factory for remanufacturing. Every year many hundreds of bombs, perhaps as many as a thousand, roll out of Russia's Mayak factory. The United States turns out fewer than 10 per year. In Russia, the rail and other transportation lines linking the factory to the far-flung nuclear bases across 10 time zones are buzzing with

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nuclear activity and provide fertile ground for terrorist interception.

Keeping a small strategic arsenal consolidated at a limited number of locations close to the Mayak factory would be the ideal security environment for preventing Russian nuclear bombs from falling into terrorist hands. But the ongoing nuclear dynamic between the former Cold War foes creates the opposite environment, which undercuts security. Russian nuclear commanders, confronted with U.S. submarines lurking off their coasts with 10-minute missile-flight times to Moscow and thousands of launch-ready U.S. warheads on land- and sea-based missiles aimed at thousands of targets in Russia, are compelled to match the American posture in numbers, alert status and geographic dispersal. U.S. leaders must decide which goal takes precedence: sustaining the Cold War legacy of massive arsenals to deter a massive surprise nuclear attack, or shoring up the security of Russian nuclear weapons to prevent terrorists from grabbing them (or corrupt guards from stealing and selling them).

And terrorists grabbing such a weapon as it shuttles between deployment fields and factories is not the worst-case scenario stemming from this nuclear gamesmanship. The theft of a nuclear bomb could spell eventual disaster for an American city, but the seizure of a ready-to-fire strategic long-range nuclear missile or group of missiles capable of delivering bombs to targets thousands of miles away could be apocalyptic for entire nations.

If scores of armed Chechen rebels were able to slip into the heart of Moscow and hold a packed theater hostage for days, as they did in 2002, might it not be possible for terrorists to infiltrate missile fields in rural Russia and seize control of a nuclear-armed mobile rocket roaming the countryside? It's an open question that warrants candid bilateral discussion of the prospects of terrorists capturing rockets and circumventing the safeguards designed to foil their illicit firing, especially since the 9/11 Commission report revealed that al-Qaida plotters considered this very idea.

Another specter concerns terrorists "spoofing" radar or satellite sensors or cyber-terrorists hacking into early warning networks. By either firing short-range missiles that fool warning sensors into reporting an attack by longer-range missiles, or feeding false data into warning computer networks, could sophisticated terrorists generate false indications of an enemy attack that results in a mistaken launch of nuclear rockets in "retaliation"? False alarms have been frequent enough on both sides under the best of conditions. False warning poses an acute danger as long as Russian and U.S. nuclear commanders are given, as they still are today, only several pressure-packed minutes to determine whether an enemy attack is underway and to decide whether to retaliate. Russia's deteriorating early-warning network, coupled with terrorist plotting against it, only heightens the dangers.

Russia is not the only crucible of risk. The early-warning and control problems plaguing Pakistan, India and other nuclear proliferators are even more acute. As these nations move toward hair-trigger stances for their nuclear missiles, the terrorist threat to them will grow in parallel.

Even the U.S. nuclear control apparatus is far from fool-proof. For example, a Pentagon investigation of nuclear safeguards conducted several years ago made a startling discovery – terrorist hackers might be able to gain back-door electronic access to the U.S. naval communications network, seize control electronically of radio towers such as the one in Cutler, Maine, and illicitly transmit a launch order to U.S. Trident ballistic missile submarines armed with 200 nuclear warheads apiece. This exposure was deemed so serious that Trident launch crews had to be given new instructions for confirming the validity of any launch order they receive. They would now reject certain types of firing orders that previously would have been carried out immediately.

Both countries are running terrorist risks of this sort for the sake of an obsolete deterrent strategy. The notion that either the United States or Russia would deliberately attack the other with nuclear weapons is ludicrous, while the danger that terrorists are plotting to get their hands on these arsenals is real. We need to kick our old habits and stand down our hair-trigger forces. Taking U.S. and Russian missiles off alert would automatically reduce, if not remove, the biggest terrorist threats that stem from keeping thousands of U.S. and Russian intercontinental ballistic missiles fueled, targeted and waiting for a couple of computer signals to fire. They would fly the instant they received these signals, which can be sent with a few keystrokes on a launch console.

To keep them from flying, we ought to reverse our priorities for nuclear security. The U.S. government should not be spending 25 times more on its deterrent posture than it spends on all of our nonproliferation assistance to Russia and other countries to help them keep their nuclear bombs and materials from falling into terrorist hands. Both the United States and Russia should be spending more on de-alerting, dismantling and securing our arsenals than on prepping them for a large-scale nuclear war with each other.

The current deterrent practices of the two nuclear superpowers are not only anachronistic, they are thwarting our ability to protect ourselves against the real threats. ■

A Close Look at Russia's Leaders: Meeting Putin and Ivanov

Nikolai Zlobin, Ph.D., CDI Senior Fellow

According to widespread Russian opinion, August and September are the unluckiest months of the year. Consider: Russia's economic crisis of August 1998; the terrorist bombings of residential Moscow and Buynaksk and the Chechen invasion of Dagestan a year later; the sinking of the Kursk submarine in August 2000; and, in the summer of 2002, the floods of Novorossiysk that left over 100 dead, and the downing of a Russian helicopter in Chechnya that killed 118 people. August and September 2004 were no exception as a wave of terrorist attacks rocked Russia. This culminated in the death of over 330 people, most of whom were children, when terrorists seized Middle School No. 1 in the North Ossetian town of Beslan.

Despite this, Russia's most prominent information agency, RIA Novosti, scheduled a conference – "Russia at the Turn of the Century: Hopes and Reality" – to take place at this time of the year. The organizers invited a delegation of 30 leading Western experts, with the objective of creating greater awareness of Russia's current state of affairs. Among those invited, CDI was the only organization with two representatives: David Johnson, editor of *Johnson's Russia List*, and me.

We met with many leading politicians and businesspeople, but the crowning meetings were with President Vladimir Putin and Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov. We met with Putin just two days after the culmination of the Beslan tragedy, late in the evening following his return from a Cabinet meeting concerning the school's liberation.

The president invited us to his suburban residence, affording a more intimate, candid discussion. In the middle of the meeting, Putin even half-jokingly offered us vodka. Our conversation continued on for four hours, unexpectedly long for such an event. The format of our meeting was also unusual: Putin simply called on those with raised hands and listened attentively as each question was posed. The administration had not told us in advance what was off limits, nor did anyone seem concerned about the questions' contents. The atmosphere was free and easy going.

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Rethinking the Global Posture Review

Colin Robinson, Special to CDI

In May and June 2003, it became apparent that the Bush administration and the Department of Defense were seriously considering drastically reducing U.S. forces in western Europe and moving much of the remainder east to new U.S. allies. A fundamental change in the basing structure of U.S. forces worldwide was projected.

The idea was to create a web of austere forward operating bases, maintained by small permanent support units, with fighting forces deploying from the United States when necessary. The resulting footprint of U.S. military presence would be much lighter. Troops would deploy to these bare bases and leave their families behind.

The major reason for the projected shift was that the U.S. military presence around the globe has not been fundamentally reassessed since the end of the Cold War. The build-up of forces in the Middle East around Iraq in the 1990s had been primarily established on the bases in Saudi Arabia used in the 1990-91 Desert Shield and Desert Storm campaigns. The recent proposed realignment of U.S. troops unfolded when many European allies opposed the U.S. invasion of Iraq, but it appears that the plan was based mostly on an assessment of the strategic situation.

Now, faced with the continuing and costly commitment to Iraq, these plans look very different. Forces will be brought home from Europe and the Pentagon continues to move troops closer to prospective combat zones, but the idea of frequent rotational deployments to austere forward bases seems very unlikely.

First, the troops are simply not available, since most are already dedicated to operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Recall that U.S. ground troops entered former Yugoslavia in December 1995, and are still there. If the United States wishes to see a stable and friendly Iraq, to say nothing of a democratic one, it must be prepared for its troops to be stationed for a comparable amount of time. Whether the Army has the troops available for the type of operations originally envisaged in the base shift plans of mid-2003 is questionable.

Second, stationing troops abroad without their families could cause troop retention difficulties. Trying to rotate large numbers of troops for long periods will probably increase troop dissatisfaction, possibly even leaving

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The fact that Putin met with Western experts at this time pushed the event into the spotlight both domestically and abroad. The Kremlin's characteristic secrecy, as well as its infrequent spells of openness, made the gathering all the more singular. The entire world attempted to use this meeting to foretell Putin's next steps, his political reasoning, and the direction in which Russia is headed.

First, the fact that Putin met with foreigners during a time of national crisis is remarkable, all the more so considering he declined to meet with Russian journalists, politicians and local civil representatives. Apparently, the Kremlin deemed it wiser to convey its message via Western experts. Putin and his close advisors, some speculate, felt compelled to directly address the West, which often has difficulty understanding the Kremlin's positions.

Second, I was pleasantly surprised to see Putin deal with our questions off-the-cuff. He answered every question in detail, drawing upon history, the experience of other countries, and personal knowledge. It was evident that he had thought seriously about the issues raised and understood them well. It was also apparent that he had been deeply moved by the events of Beslan, and at times had difficulty concealing his emotions. He became somewhat

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units inoperable. In the current environment, many soldiers might only have 12 months at home before being sent abroad again. The Operation Gyroscope experiment in the 1950s of rotating entire units in and out of Europe was not maintained, nor was a later 1970s experiment on the same lines, Brigade 75. A former U.S. Army Europe commander, Gen. Montgomery Meigs, told the House Armed Services Committee in February that the Brigade 75 experiment did not work well, and was "a very difficult, painful experience."

The current 12-month unaccompanied tour to South Korea is already considered a hardship post. What is being proposed would make this close to the norm on top of the back-breaking strain of having over two-thirds of the Army currently committed to the Iraqi mission (either there, preparing to go, or just having returned).

Without a drastic reduction in the stress of the Iraq commitment or an unlikely expansion of the Army, the strategy as proposed in 2003 is practically impossible. The Army is simply not big enough to stand the strain.

Moving troops' heavy equipment back to the States also means a transport trade-off. Equipment will be shipped longer distances, unless it is pre-positioned forward. This could require more spending on sealift ships, or there might be potential bottlenecks at the beginning of operations when many units need to be shipped simultaneously.

What the administration was attempting to produce was a flexible program for basing U.S. land combat troops that could replace the Cold War garrisons in Europe and Korea. Having forces rotate through the chain of far-flung locations was hoped to deter potential threats and build better relations with possible future allies. However, infantry and tanks are not the best military instrument for responding to many possible future crises, and will be much less available, thanks to continuing Iraq rotational commitments.

Instead, if the administration wants the military to engage with worldwide partners, they have a better tool: the Army's Special Forces, who do a great deal of this work already. True, the Special Forces are too overstrained with Iraq and Afghanistan commitments to significantly increase their efforts. However, some regional contact activities could be carried out by liaison personnel, possibly drawn from other Army units, who do not reach the exacting standards required of Special Forces personnel in all skill sets, from languages to demolition to close combat skills. The other requirements could be met by making more support facilities available through negotiations, and the occasional deployment of a combat brigade for an exercise, supported by pre-arrangements with the permanent liaison parties. This would both build better links and reduce the strain on the combat troops by not forcing six-month unaccompanied tours in harsh environments. Meanwhile, the heavy divisions now returning home would remain available for Iraqi operations and other potential threats.

The Bush administration's 2003 plans for reducing its troop footprint abroad and replacing permanent presences with spartan bases assumed that, after the invasion of Iraq, the Army would be freed quickly for other missions. That was not true, and if the United States wants to win the peace as well as the war in Iraq, many U.S. Army forces will have to be earmarked for it and Afghanistan for some time to come. Faced with the difficult circumstances of late 2004, a redesigned approach seems a better way forward. This would build relationships with partners worldwide in order to better fight the war on terror with specialist personnel, and reduce the strain on hard-pressed U.S. combat troops. ■

Comparing Post-War Strategies: Neocons Refuse to Learn from the Past

Alan F. Kay, Ph.D., CDI Board of Advisors

The United States entered World War II (WWII) after a surprise attack unparalleled until Sept. 11, 2001. Today, supporters of President George W. Bush tie the two together when discussing post-war planning in Iraq. Since the casualties in Iraq are tiny compared to the official 308,600 U.S. deaths in WWII, it is not surprising that most Bush supporters believe "staying the course" will ultimately produce democracy in Iraq. However, evidence proves otherwise.

U.S. decision-makers during WWII were young enough to have witnessed the botching of the peace following WWI. The Allies refused to negotiate the surrender of Germany unless the government that had fought the war was replaced. Then the Allies forced the new government, which was not trusted by the German people, to accept the 1919 reparations-loaded Versailles Treaty. This proved to be so harsh that it led to the rise of Hitler, and within a decade, an even more horrendous war.

During WWII, U.S. decision-makers resolved to avoid previous mistakes by planning to secure the peace and becoming ready, willing, and able when the war ended to rebuild the defeated countries.

Gen. Douglas MacArthur deftly forced the leaders of all Pacific theater countries – allies, neutrals, and enemies – to witness Japan's surrender and a post-war preview on the battleship *Missouri*. He made clear that there would be no more enemies except for war itself. MacArthur's views were supported by the top generals of WWII: George Marshall, Dwight Eisenhower, Omar Bradley, and even noted hawk George Patton.

The 100,000 U.S. troops that occupied Japan laid a groundwork for reconstruction that gave hope and physical improvements to the Japanese people. They were provided with sufficient resources for rebuilding their economy, which ended up growing at a remarkable rate.

From the day the war ended, the rebuilding of Japan required U.S. experts to provide essential infrastructure services. This included over 500 interpreters, trained by the U.S. military well in advance of the surrender. I was one of them. During my seven-month stint, I was amazed that not one U.S. citizen was murdered or even attacked by any Japanese – in stark contrast to developments in Iraq 60 years later. A similar attention to the details of nation-building was required in Germany.

> "During WWII, U.S. decisionmakers resolved to avoid previous mistakes by planning to secure peace."

Securing the peace successfully in such short order turned our one-time militaristic enemies into anti-nuclear U.S.-friendly democracies.

Don't expect that in Iraq.

One of the most important aspects of war – post-war planning – could not have been more differently handled. WWII launched a process for turning enemies into friends. This is not happening in Iraq.

The 1991 Gulf War was a ground battle for only four days. After forcing Iraqi troops out of Kuwait, our troops could no doubt have quickly conquered Iraq. But President George H.W. Bush lacked the time, Arab support, and planning to occupy Iraq, and he wisely ended the war on the spot.

Unfortunately, George W. Bush and his aides forgot the hard-earned lessons of both World Wars. They reverted to accepting the failed "punishment" model of the peace following WWI, and ignored the "enemy-becomes-friend" model that led to the great success of WWII. The Bush administration's decision-makers were averse to nation-building, had neither the plans nor understanding of what would be required to secure the peace, and were misled by Iraqi exiles and biased readings of U.S. intelligence. They did not realize the importance of having enough boots on the ground to protect Iraq's historic treasures and holy places, halt looting, and prevent an insurrection and, perhaps, a civil war. The Bush administration has proceeded too far in this wrong direction and owes the American people an explanation, if not a clear apology, for botching the peace in Iraq.

A CBS June 23-27, 2004, poll found that 54 percent of all Americans say the United States must stay in Iraq until it becomes a "stable democracy." This is in line with the positions of both presidential candidates. Thus, it seems that the Bush administration's failure to win the peace in Iraq is likely to be a long, costly disaster. ■

Alan F. Kay, mathematician, social scientist and pioneer of public-interest polling, authored Locating Consensus for Democracy, Spot-the-Spin *and numerous public policy articles, and holds several patents.*

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irritated when a number of pointed questions were asked. Overall, I came away with the impression that there were no signs of confusion or alarm, which many in Russia have recently ascribed to Putin.

Third, I now realize that Putin pictures Russia and the rest of the world in a holistic way. It is useless to challenge parts of his understanding of the world, since his worldview makes up one complete whole, coordinated and internally consistent. As such, both the West and Putin's political opposition would do well to either accept the president's view in its entirety or reject it completely, and refrain from critiquing its constituent parts.

The president has become ideological, saying that democracy is a philosophical matter and that democratic institutions should correspond to a society's level of development. Most importantly, he said, democracy should not lead to the breakdown of the state. I understood this to mean that Russia's collapse is possible and that hidden conflicts exist, leaving the situation not as firmly under control as many believe. In my opinion, he feels strongly that this is indeed the case. Hence, he is most concerned with ways to shore up national unity. His holistic approach has weaknesses, including a simplistic view of what is happening in the world (e.g., the United States, Chechnya and the Caucasus). Taken together, we have a complete picture behind which stands a great deal of political will and an energetic, self-confident man.

Fourth, Putin spoke of Russia's peculiarities, noting that every country has its own history and unique characteristics. He believes classical liberal ideas will not take root in Russia. At the same time, however, Putin does not doubt Russia geopolitically belongs to Europe. He said Russia is part of a transatlantic civilization, with the United States at one end and Russia at the other. I believe Putin will foster Russia's development on the basis of a liberal economic model, but within the context of a pseudo-democratic system in line with the country's idiosyncrasies and not according to generally accepted traditions of the West. That is, the economy will be liberal, but the political system will grow increasingly centralized. Soon after our meeting, Putin announced concrete steps to address this issue, measures that the entire world interpreted as moving away from democracy.

Fifth, Putin had many novel ideas about Russia's foreign policy, including its relations with its close neighbors and the United States. For example, he said Russia is not interested in seeing the demise of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which he perceives as a major factor of world stability. However, Putin did say that the Baltic States' NATO entry was complete nonsense, seeing this as being politically motivated. Furthermore, when Putin was asked about the Ukraine, he answered that if Kiev wanted to move in the direction of the European Union, then by all means it could do so. If it was to join NATO in the same boorish manner as the Baltic republics, then there would be problems.

In a move that took many by surprise, Putin praised U.S. President George W. Bush. He even took the unusual measure of describing the Iraq conflict in a positive light. Putin also complained at length about Western media's coverage of Russia, calling it unfair and saying unseen forces in Western Europe and the United States seek to take advantage of Russia's current vulnerabilities.

Sources have said that after our meeting, Putin declined to meet with anyone for several days, retiring to a residence far from Moscow. Upon returning, he presented a large package of legislation strengthening Russia's central powers. This has been regarded as an attempt to use the war on terror as a means to consolidate his control and diminish the democratic process. Putin's proposal would in effect give him the power to appoint the regional governors and keep parliamentarians from running independently for office in the Duma. At the same time, he made recommendations that would further restrict freedom of the press and the free movement of Russia's citizenry. In other words, a rolling back of many freedoms and democratic processes has begun.

No less interesting was our two-hour meeting at the Ministry of Defense with Ivanov. The gathering took place in the same informal, spontaneous manner as our meeting with Putin. Ivanov also came off as a capable, resolute politician. He spoke openly about the problems facing Russia's military, his understanding of the country's main national security threats, and the opportunity to wage a common war with the United States against international terrorism. Like Putin, he expressed disappointment in the current level of cooperation in this struggle and voiced concern about the validity of the recent Afghan and upcoming Iraqi elections. He said that the plot to attack Beslan was not hatched in a cave – that Chechen leaders Maskhadov and Basayev were of secondary importance, and that the real organizers were far away from Russia. Ivanov said he was absolutely certain that the construction of the nuclear power plant in Bushehr would not help Iran develop nuclear weapons, although he did express trepidation about the possibility of such weapons being developed there sometime in the future.

Ivanov also said Russia's leadership was not gloating over America's difficulties in Iraq, explaining that Moscow does not desire the defeat of coalition forces. However, he allowed

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that many were skeptical about the possibility of cultivating liberal values there.

One of Ivanov's most interesting revelations was that Russia would like to discontinue the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, which was signed with the United States in December 1987, since he believes it is outdated. He confined this cessation to the United States and Russia only, leaving all others free to do what they like. Ivanov stressed that we were the first with whom he had shared this information.

Finally, at the meeting, as each attendee and his or her organization were named, Ivanov said he needed no introduction to CDI's representatives, whom he said he remembered well from a presentation he had recently given at our headquarters in Washington, D.C. At the conclusion of the event, Ivanov told me that he would be delighted to visit us again. ■

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