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Cooperative Threat Reduction Program: Arms Control in Central Eurasia

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In 1992, many began to realize the threat of unguarded weapons and nuclear material in the former Soviet Union. After the USSR's collapse, stockpiles of weapons and weapons grade materials were left in nations such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, Belarus, and Azerbaijan. Unsecured, many feared that these weapons would fall into the wrong hands and some even feared a future nuclear war. Two men actively concerned about this issue were Senators Sam Nunn and Richard Lugar. In an attempt prevent these "loose nukes" from being bought or stolen from terrorist organization or rogue states, the senators set out to form a program funded by the government to facilitate international security.¹

According to the private website set up by Nunn and Lugar, the purpose of the program is to "to lessen the threat posed by weapons of mass destruction, to deactivate and to destroy these weapons, and to help the scientists formerly engaged in production of such weapons start working for peace²." Named the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program, this program is better known by the Nunn-Lugar program in reference to its founders. Funded by appropriations for the US defense budget, this program is aimed at preventing an armed catastrophe through securing nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons in the area.

Another main objective of the program is to provide work for scientists who were used during the Cold War in the industry of weapons technologies. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many scientists were out of work, especially in the weapons research

¹ Carter, Ashton. "Frontline: Russian Roulette: Inside Russia's Nuclear Complex: Comments on the Nunn-Lugar Program." Front Line. 2007. 03 Aug. 2007 <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/russia/arsenal/lugar.html>>.

² Lugar, Richard, and Sam Nunn. "Conversion of Soviet Weapons of Mass Destruction." Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program. 03 Aug. 2007 <<http://www.nunn-lugar.com/>>.

industry. Many countries, especially the Ukraine, were very hesitant to cease these programs due to concern that these scientists would be disgruntled and seek work elsewhere.

Kazakhstan has shown enormous support for the program, such as when President Nazerbayev called the White House in 1994 to alert the United States Government that the Government of Kazakhstan found a massive amount of weapons grade material located within their national borders. Eager to help, those involved in the Nunn Lugar program quickly began to plan a method to secure the material in the United States. The material was then secretly flown out in a mission known as Project Sapphire, which stayed secret until after the nuclear material was in the United States. The United States was concerned that terrorist organizations or rogue states could possibly obtain this material, aiding to their goal of nuclear proliferation. The CRT program is said to have conducted other clandestine meetings such as these, but most are still classified. Many believe that these missions further aid to the War on Terror, taking weapons and weapons material out reach from those desire to use it for personal gain or terrorist activity.³

This program has had its difficulties. One program created with CTR funding known as the Defense Enterprise Fund (DEF) had many bureaucratic problems. Nunn and Lugar believe that this program suffered from “gross mismanagement” and a lack of governmental oversight. As a result, the program was discontinued in 2003, meaning that \$67 million in grant money was wasted without concrete results.⁴ However, overall, this program has shown to be extraordinarily successful, with an estimated seven thousand nuclear warheads being dismantled in the years the program has been in existence. Since its creation, this program has increased security measures at weapons storage facilities, chopped up bombers, dug out and destroyed missile silos, and much more.

Thankfully, members of Congress and the United States Government realize the usefulness of this program and have planned for funding appropriations to be raised by fifty million dollars each year.⁵ However, this program could certainly use more funding. Only five hundred million dollars is being appropriated for the year of 2008, compared to the estimated amount of over one hundred thousand dollars that is being spent in Iraq each minute.⁶

While programs in the Middle East and other developing countries are necessary and effective at reducing the amount of instability in tumultuous world regions, preventive defense programs, such as the CRT program, are also essential. By preventing the proliferation and mobility of nuclear material and weapons, the United States will not only gain peace of mind, but will also prevent disaster as we enter a period of history in which terrorism is an inveterate threat.

³ Carter, Ashton B., and William J. Perry. Preventive Defense: a New Security Strategy for America. Washington: Brookings Institution P, 1999. 65-91

⁴ Nunn, Lugar. <<http://www.nunn-lugar.com/>>.

⁵ United States. Cong. House. The 9-11 Commission Combating Proliferation Implementation Act. 110 Cong., 1st sess. HR 360. 09 Jan. 2007. 10 Aug. 2007 <<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/thomas>>.

⁶ Mazzetti, Mark, and Joel Havemann. "Iraq War is Costing \$100,000 Per Minute." Seattle Times 03 Feb. 2006. 10 Aug. 2007 <http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/politics/2002780385_spending03.html>