Funding CW Demilitarization in Russia: Time to Share the Burden

Harold P. Smith, Jr.

"It is imperative that America’s NATO allies take up a greater share of the financial burden, an essential step if Congress is to continue its generosity." 

The Clinton administration was hard pressed to communicate this step, and given the limited financial resources available to Russia to destroy its huge stockpile of some 40,000 metric tons of CW agents, it was at least as difficult for the Yeltsin government. Nonetheless, both administrations succeeded and with this step the question became not whether to eliminate the two stockpiles, but how to do so. Of course, there was also the question whether the two countries could meet the destruction deadlines specified by the treaty and, if not, what should be done? At the time the CWC entered into force, neither country had exhibited great success with CW demilitarization. Admittedly, the American approach—high-temperature incineration—was beginning to destroy weapons, but the program’s lifecycle cost has grown from the original estimate of $1.7 billion in 1985 to the current estimate of $15.7 billion; its completion date has been extended several times, and is now set for 2007. Although the U.S. Army’s chosen program—Although the U.S. Army’s chosen program—

Priot to April 29, 1997, when the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) entered into force, there was neither a legal basis nor a set of timelines for the complete destruction of Russia’s chemical weapons (CW) that was acceptable simultane-ously to the Russian Federation and to the United States. With the approval of the CWC by the Russian parliament and the U.S. Senate, all was changed. At last, there was an agreed-upon instrument with international approval and the means for international scrutiny by which the world’s two largest stockpiles of chemical weapons would be destroyed.

The Clinton administration was hard pressed to communicate this step, and given the limited financial resources available to Russia to destroy its huge stockpile of some 40,000 metric tons of CW agents, it was at least as difficult for the Yeltsin government. Nonetheless, both administrations succeeded and with this step the question became not whether to eliminate the two stockpiles, but how to do so. Of course, there was also the question whether the two countries could meet the destruction deadlines specified by the treaty and, if not, what should be done? At the time the CWC entered into force, neither country had exhibited great success with CW demilitarization. Admittedly, the American approach—high-temperature incineration—was beginning to destroy weapons, but the program’s lifecycle cost has grown from the original estimate of $1.7 billion in 1985 to the current estimate of $15.7 billion; its completion date has been extended several times, and is now set for 2007.

Although the U.S. Army’s chosen program—Although the U.S. Army’s chosen program—

Harold P. Smith, Jr. was the assistant to the secretary of defense for nuclear, chemical and biological defense programs from June 1993 to January 1998.

Help. It had the experience, the resources and, most importantly, thanks to Senators Sam Nunn (D-GA) and Richard Lugar (R-IN) and to Representatives John Murtha (D-PA) and Joseph McDade (R-PA), the political support to offer such assistance.

The political will was there, but just barely. It took great skill by the interested congressional leaders to provide authoriza-
tion in the fiscal year (FY) 1992 Department of Defense (DDO) budget for $400 million in security assistance to support the states of the former Soviet Union in dismantling and eliminating weapons of mass destruction. Because no new funding was appropri-
ted under the Soviet Nuclear Threat Reduction Act (commonly referred to as the Nunn-Lugar legislation), the Pentagon had to reallocate monies from other DOD ac-
counts, all of which were fully subsidized and strongly defended. With the end of the Cold War, the entire DOD budget was in decline and demands for everything from equipment acquisition to quality-of-life improvements were on the rise. It would surprise no one that very little money was actually obligated in FY 1992 for actual Nunn-Lugar expenditures. In fact, although Congress approved an additional $600 million in Nunn-Lugar as-
sistance in the FY 1993 DOD budget, by the end of 1992 the Bush administration had obligated essentially no funds at all.

However, 1993 marked an important turning point. In January, the Clinton admin-
istration came to power and with it came a new deputy secretary of defense, William Perry. In collaboration with Secre-
tary of Defense Les Aspin, Perry brought with him not only a fresh, experienced and dedicated team. Perry also brought a firm personal commitment to implement what was to become the Cooperative Threat Re-
duction (CTR) program. An important part of that commitment was to assist Russia in dismantling its CW arsenal. From that mo-
moment, it was ordained that CW dismantle-
ment would proceed as fast as Russia would allow. By January 1994, the neces-
sary commitment from the Russian government was obtained. A journey of imme-
asurable twists had begun.

General agreement on chemical de-
militarization, although difficult, was simple compared to the ensuing details. The first consideration was the selection of a technology for eliminating Russia’s CW stockpile. From the American point of view, nothing could have been simpler. The United States had been working on the problem for over a decade—with expenditure-

The Russian Chemical Weapons Stockpile

Pochep 18.8 percent of stockpile VX, sarin, soman

Leonidovka 17.5 percent of stockpile VX, sarin, soman

Gornyi 2.9 percent of stockpile mustard, lewisite and their mixture

The Shchuch’ye 13.6 percent of stockpile VX, sarin, soman, plosgene

St Petersburg

Kambarka 15.9 percent of stockpile lewisite

Maradykovsky 17.4 percent of stockpile VX, sarin, soman, mustard-lewisite mixture

Tochep 18.8 percent of stockpile VX, sarin, soman

Shchuch’ye 13.6 percent of stockpile VX, sarin, soman, plosgene

The United States’ joint destruction facility on Johnston Island, a remote island over 700 miles southwest of Hawaii, was operating at satisfactory levels of destruction, with an enviable safety record and without harm to the environment. The former was a matter of record; the latter was the conclusion of the on-site Fish and Wildlife Commission, an agency beyond the purview of DOD. Furthermore, the use of incineration technology at Tooele, Utah—the largest of the nine U.S. storage sites, holding more than 40 percent of the stock-

ple—had been accepted by all appropriate authorities despite the loud and skillful pro-

The political will and way

At the end of the Cold War, it was widely recognized that the arsenals of the two superpowers should be greatly re-
duced and, in the case of chemical weap-
ons, eliminated. But it was also recognized that the magnitude of the task was beyond the resources of a Russia in transition. No one could expect Russia to restructure its political, military and economic bases, and at the same time dismantle its stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction in the absence of assistance from those nations that should, in their own interest, assist. The United States was, in particular, well posi-
tests of local and national interest groups inadmissibly opposed to incineration. In short, the American side was justifiably confident that the Russian technology was at hand and could be offered gratis to the Russians, there being no proprietary considerations. The Americans, not the Russians, had their own technology of which they were understandably proud, for the destruction of CW agents. Perhaps the Russians saw a long-
terms and opted for a diplomatic solution, including the signing of a joint statement on the issue.

The Russian plan for destruction of chemical weapons calls, first, for the elimination of blister agent stocks and for the destruction of nerve agent stocks at the remaining five stockpile locations, starting with artillery munitions and other ordnance at the Kemerovo Arsenal in Siberia. Consequently, Russia offered artillery rounds with mostly nonpersistent agents as a starting point. It was incompatible with the longer-term war-fighting needs of the Russian counter-proposals would be interpreted as stalling, and the purpose of stalling was presumed to be reluctant, in order to give up its chemical weapons. Unfortunately, there were those, presumably within the Russian military establishment, who felt exactly that, but it seems unlikely that they commanded much attention. Other than those, themselves, there was no evidence to support such a conclusion. For example, the use of chemical weapons demands that the minimum of storage time for the United States states or 1955, this country's CW arsenal could not be used, and it is beginning to seem sure.

The selection of a Depot

The selection of a technology was only the first of a difficult set of decisions. Next was the choice of the first depot in Russia. In the United States, the Department of Defense identified several potential candidate sites, and the United States was straightforward: maximum reduction of the threat. With a minimum expenditure of money and effort, there was no reason to believe that the Americans go to war. The selection of a site was done with the understanding that it would provide the best protection for the United States, and that the site was distant from the test site. The Russians were the first to choose the site, and the one chemical weapon was destroyed. As a result, U.S. support for the Russian program was not likely to be forthcoming. The United States believed that if the Chinese were going to underwrite the costs for one demilitarization site, it might make sense to choose the one requiring the most infrastructure.

After all, when the weapons are gone and the infrastructure is in place, the money is available, and the harvest is farther than the current infrastructure would remain. That infrastructure would mean a far better life for those who would benefit from the destruction of chemical weapons. The Russians agreed to underwrite some of the costs for the plant and the civil infrastructure, necessary to convince the local Russian authorities that their country was going to be protected. The United States agreed to underwrite some of the costs for the Russian Ministry of Defense that construction of the civil infrastructure would begin by June 1999. How this will be accomplished in light of Russia's current financial crisis is beyond any certainty. The United States, however, is committed to providing the necessary funding to the Russian Government, and the Russian Government has committed to providing the necessary funding to the Russian Government. The United States Government, through its embassy in Moscow, is working with the Russian Government to ensure that the necessary funding is provided.

The Path Ahead

The path beyond Shchuchye looks bleak. Indeed, the financial turmoil of 2007 and 2008, combined with the fact that the United States has not provided the promised funding, means that the project may never be completed.
NEWS AND NEGOTIATIONS

UNSCOM Future Uncertain After Strikes on Iraq

CULMINATING EIGHT YEARS of frustration over a UN Financial Sanctions Committee's failure to impose and maintain financial sanctions against Iraq, the United Nations is considering a new strategy. The United Nations Security Council has expressed concern that sanctions were not sufficiently enforced, and the UN Secretary-General has called for a stronger and more effective strategy.

The new strategy involves a comprehensive review of the sanctions regime, including a review of the UN Development Program's role in enforcing the sanctions. The Secretary-General has also called for increased financial resources to support the sanctions regime.

The United Nations is also considering a new approach to enforcement, including the possibility of imposing new sanctions on individuals and companies that violate the sanctions regime.

The future of the sanctions regime is uncertain, with some calling for a return to more traditional methods of enforcement, while others argue for a more radical approach.

Reaction to the Air Strikes

The United States and other coalition forces launched a series of air strikes on Iraq on December 17, 1998. The strikes were a response to Iraq's refusal to allow UN inspections, and were intended to pressure Iraq to comply with UN resolutions.

The strikes caused significant damage to Iraq's air defense system and infrastructure, and resulted in the deaths of several civilians. The United States defended the strikes, arguing that they were necessary to protect coalition forces.

Despite the success of the high-temperature incineration technology used in the destruction of the U.S. chemical weapons (CW) stockpile underway, Russia has chosen an alternative approach, one which could further delay Moscow's destruction obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention.

A lone, earth-covered concrete "trench," where CW munitions and agents are stored at the first full-scale U.S. destruction facility, near Tooele, Utah.

Despite the success of the high-temperature incineration technology used in the destruction of the U.S. chemical weapons (CW) stockpile underway, Russia has chosen an alternative approach, one which could further delay Moscow's destruction obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention. A lone, earth-covered concrete "trench," where CW munitions and agents are stored at the first full-scale U.S. destruction facility, near Tooele, Utah.
We tell the world what time it is.

From global hot spots to the back rooms of Congress, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists gives you the inside story on the events that shape our world. Subscribe to the Bulletin for only $28*. Save 22% off the cover price.

- The Bulletin
  of the Atomic Scientists
  6042 S. Kimbark, Chicago, IL 60637
  Tel 773 702-2555
  Fax 773 702-9725


- Averting a Train Wreck With North Korea
  Leon V. Sigal

- Funding CW Demilitarization In Russia: Time to Share The Burden
  Harold P. Smith, Jr.