

The Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program

Securing and Safeguarding Weapons of Mass Destruction

Today, there is no greater threat to our nation's, or our world's, national security than the illicit spread of weapons of mass destruction.

Senator Sam Nunn, March 1996. ¹

Key points:

- Through the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction program, the U.S. provides funding and expertise and works with partner governments to secure and eliminate weapons and materials of mass destruction.
- Since its establishment in 1991, the Cooperative Threat Reduction program has had remarkable success – over 7,600 warheads have been deactivated, over 2,300 missiles destroyed, and 24 nuclear weapons storage sites secured.
- The Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction program is still relevant to today's security threats. Expanding the program will enhance U.S. security by providing increased protection against nuclear, chemical, and biological terrorist attacks.

Background: A Bold Idea

When the Soviet Union collapsed, a new nuclear security threat was born. Former Soviet Union states Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan inherited massive nuclear arsenals of questionable safety and security.

Congress acted quickly to address this threat, passing the Soviet Threat Reduction Act in November 1991.

Also called the Nunn-Lugar Act for its authors, Senators Sam Nunn (D-GA) and Richard Lugar (R-IN), the act provided U.S. funding and expertise to former Soviet Union states to secure and dismantle nuclear, chemical, and biological materials, weapons, and delivery systems.

The Department of Defense Cooperative Threat Reduction Program (CTR) works with partner governments to achieve these goals. ²



Senator Lugar inspects an SS-18 ICBM being readied for destruction at Suravatikha, Russia on August 27, 2002.

The Nunn-Lugar Expansion Act in 2003 opened the CTR program to states outside the former Soviet Union. The next year Albania became the first non-USSR country to receive CTR funding.

The destruction of Albania's chemical weapons stockpile was completed in 2007.³

In addition to the Department of Defense CTR program, a number of other U.S. programs address nonproliferation in former Soviet states. Among these are the Department of State's Global Threat Reduction and Export Control and Related Border Security Assistance programs and the Department of Energy's International Nuclear Materials Protection and Cooperation, which includes the Second Line of Defense and Megaports programs.

The vital importance of these programs was made clear in 2003, when Libya voluntarily gave up its nuclear weapons program. State Department funds were used to secure Libya's nuclear materials and equipment and transport them to the United States.

The Scorecard: Targets Met, Threats Averted

"No one would have predicted in the 1980s that Americans and Russians would be working together to collect dangerous weapons materials around the world."

Senator Richard Lugar⁴

The CTR program has made remarkable strides towards eliminating WMD and delivery systems and securing WMD-materials in former Soviet Union States. Perhaps the most well-recognized achievement is that Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus - the third, fourth and eighth largest nuclear weapons powers in the world - are nuclear weapons free.

But there are many other CTR success stories.

Here are just a few highlights from the Nunn-Lugar Scorecard:⁵

- 7,619 strategic nuclear warheads deactivated
- 902 intercontinental ballistic missiles destroyed
- 33 nuclear submarines capable of launching ballistic missiles destroyed
- 2936 metric tons of Russian and Albanian chemical weapons agent destroyed
- 24 nuclear weapons storage sites secured
- 39 biological threat monitoring stations built and equipped



Senator Lugar placing a chemical weapon shell inside a briefcase – an example of the weapon's dangerous portability. November 1991

Cooperative Threat Reduction in the 21st Century

Overcoming Obstacles

“The success of the Department of Defense Cooperative Threat Reduction program,” reads the introduction to the National Academy of Sciences 2009 report on CTR, “was not a forgone conclusion.” Indeed, the obstacles the program has faced make its success all the more remarkable.

The Nunn-Lugar Act encountered opposition from the beginning, as some members of Congress objected to providing aid to former Soviet states. The danger posed by unsecured nuclear arsenals outweighed these objections and the Act passed the Senate with strong bipartisan support.

However, CTR still has its critics – analysts and policymakers arguing that US assistance allows Russia to divert funds to other programs. ⁶

Because of this and other objections, congressional support for CTR funding has been inconsistent. Congress at times has taken steps to expand the program, for example increasing funding and drawing attention to securing chemical and biological materials in the 1997 Defense Authorization Act.

At other times, Congress has imposed limits on the program, for example refusing to authorize the construction of a chemical weapons dismantlement facility in 2001. ⁷

A New Role

“The Cold War may be over, the nuclear arms race between the Soviet Union and the United States may have ended, but the possibility of terrorists using nuclear weapons is very real indeed.”
Sen. John Kerry, 2004 ⁸

Despite lapses of congressional interest and inconsistent financial support, the CTR program has made and continues to make vital contributions to national security.

In fact, the program’s many achievements are a testament to its effectiveness as well as its continued relevance in the 21st century.

Indeed, there is widespread recognition that the CTR program is a vital tool in addressing 21st century security threats.

While the concern over “loose nukes” in former Soviet states has diminished (due in no small part to the CTR program), awareness of the risks of nuclear, biological, and chemical terrorism has risen.

The International Atomic Energy Agency reports close to 600 incidents involving the theft or loss of nuclear or other radioactive material. ⁹ Many incidents of nuclear smuggling have taken place in former Soviet Union states. ¹⁰

In the face of these new threats, the role of the CTR program has expanded from securing former Soviet arsenals to general nuclear nonproliferation efforts.



Russian military personnel examine toxic agent containers in 2000 at a chemical weapons storage site at Gornyy.

Moving Forward: Strengthening Cooperative Threat Reduction

“Expanding the nation’s cooperative threat reduction programs... would enhance U.S. national security and global stability.”

The National Academy of Sciences, 2009 ¹¹

The Cooperative Threat Reduction program’s history of success on a shoe-string budget makes it the ideal tool to address 21st century nuclear security threats.

However, to be truly effective the program must be expanded and strengthened.

Senator Richard Lugar, long-time champion of nuclear nonproliferation efforts, has led the way in recommending steps to strengthen the CTR program. ¹²

The National Academy of Sciences in a 2009 report on CTR supported Senator Lugar’s recommendations. ¹³

Areas for strengthening the Cooperative Threat Reduction program include:

Increased Funding

Since its creation in 1991, CTR’s mission has expanded significantly. Funding levels have increased only slightly, however, from \$400 million in 1991 to just over \$500 million in 2012.

Unlike many programs, CTR has demonstrated high impact with limited funds. Increasing the CTR budget would unquestionably be a sound investment.

Expanded Flexibility

The NAS report finds “many of the legal and policy underpinnings of the current DOD CTR...cumbersome, dated, and limiting.” As a program with roots in the Cold War, it is perhaps unsurprising that CTR’s legal and policy frameworks are outdated. This has hindered CTR in cases where it could be most effective.

In 2004, for example the only available funding source for efforts to dismantle Libya’s nuclear weapons program was a small nonproliferation program in the Department of State. The Nonproliferation and Disarmament Fund, Senator Lugar explained, “*does not have the size, scope or experience to do dismantlement operations, to employ nuclear scientists or undertake longer-term nonproliferation efforts... The Defense Department’s Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program is well-equipped to deal with Libya’s biological and chemical weapons.*”

CTR funding cannot not be used, however, in countries under U.S. sanctions. Addressing these and other CTR restrictions will be crucial as the U.S. prepares to deal with future nonproliferation threats, such as Syria’s chemical weapons program. ¹⁴

Engaged Leadership

Leadership from Congress and the administration is key to efforts to strengthen nuclear nonproliferation efforts. Both branches should demonstrate their commitment to protecting the United States from weapons of mass destruction by elevating and expanding the CTR program.

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ENDNOTES

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Building a New American Arsenal

The American Security Project (ASP) is a non-partisan initiative to educate the American public about the changing nature of national security in the 21st century.

Gone are the days when a nation's strength could be measured by bombers and battleships. Security in this new era requires a New American Arsenal harnessing all of America's strengths: the force of our diplomacy; the might of our military; the vigor of our economy; and the power of our ideals.

We believe that America must lead other nations in the pursuit of our common goals and shared security. We must confront international challenges with all the tools at our disposal. We must address emerging problems before they become security crises. And to do this, we must forge a new bipartisan consensus at home.

ASP brings together prominent American leaders, current and former members of Congress, retired military officers, and former government officials. Staff direct research on a broad range of issues and engages and empowers the American public by taking its findings directly to them.

We live in a time when the threats to our security are as complex and diverse as terrorism, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, climate change, failed and failing states, disease, and pandemics. The same-old solutions and partisan bickering won't do. America needs an honest dialogue about security that is as robust as it is realistic.

ASP exists to promote that dialogue, to forge consensus, and to spur constructive action so that America meets the challenges to its security while seizing the opportunities the new century offers.



American Security Project

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