Russia's Proliferation Pathways

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Introduction

Nuclear proliferation, especially to or by terrorist groups, is commonly regarded as one of the greatest, if not the greatest, threats we and other governments face. Yet the enormous difficulties confronting terrorists who wish to acquire, maintain, and then deploy a nuclear weapon or device suggest that the more likely threat is one posed by a state that either uses such a weapon or makes it available either to other governments or to a terrorist group.[1] This point also applies to the procurement of possible biological weapons by terrorist groups where again dependency on the state plays a large role in obtaining the necessary materials.[2] And if we are to judge from the analogy of the greatly hyped discourse on biological weapons proliferation and the wildly over-inflated assessments of the likelihood of biological warfare and especially such warfare perpetrated by terrorists using advanced bioweapons, the likelihood of terrorists acquiring and using nuclear weapons by themselves may also be comparably overstated, especially in view of the difficulties involved in obtaining, storing, preparing, and using both kinds of weapons.[3]

Therefore at present it seems like the most likely route of proliferation is by states to states or by agencies connected with a state to another state. Indeed, recent examples of proliferation like North Korea's construction of a reactor for Syria that was clearly intended for military purposes is an example of the phenomenon by which one state opens the way to another to become a nuclear power.[4] Likewise, Syria and North Korea in this and other cases have used their own state-run illicit programs to fund these programs or to acquire the materials necessary to sustain them.[5] Similarly Syria and Iran's transfer of weapons to Hezbollah exemplifies the pathway by which a state might enable terrorists to obtain desired military capabilities, be they conventional or nuclear. Therefore the likelihood of such pathways to nuclear and/or missile proliferation remains quite high for several reasons. Historically no state to date has been able to develop nuclear weapons on its own except for the United States, the first nuclear power. Either they stole the secrets as in the Soviet case, or they had help from other states as in every other case, including the DPRK-Syrian connection. And today due to the revolutions in international affairs occasioned by the end of the Cold War and globalization governments' structural incentives to go nuclear and their ability to obtain needed materials from the permanent members of the Security Council or from other nuclear powers have increased considerably.[6]

Neither are terrorist groups the only non-state organizations implicated in terrorism. As part of globalization, states and groups like A.Q. Kahn's "import-export" ring, or nuclear Wal-Mart (depending on your preference) have proliferated, forging links among governments and businesses operating in established states.[7] Thus the new nuclear powers can, and in Pakistan's case, have been conduits of further proliferation. Khan's operation almost certainly grew out of and may well have remained in large measure a Pakistani state enterprise (in all senses of the term) throughout its duration.[8] Moreover, even the public announcement of this

operation did not lead to its breakup or to Pakistan's quest for nuclear technologies (which apart from their use in Pakistan could then be resold elsewhere) from other countries. Indeed, that quest for foreign technologies, notably Russian ones, continues.[9] Thus Bruno Tertrais concludes that, while the Khan network is unique, its efficiency resided largely in its being based on a state network. Today computers can now replace much of the work that sophisticated engineers had to do and poorer countries can download the software for making the metal alloys needed for this work. But even so, no new network is conceivable without state sponsorship based on actual experience of directing a national nuclear program. Therefore we can expect that if such a network develops it is likely to be a North Korean or Iranian one.[10] And the North Korean reactor that Syria commissioned exemplifies the process, especially as it is now claimed by the CIA that Syria could have used the reactor to produce fuel for 2 nuclear weapons.[11]

Consequently just as the means or pathways for procuring and then developing nuclear materials have expanded so too has the number of states who are nuclear capable grown. American estimates talk of 35-40 states that have a latent nuclear capability (knowledge, technology and materials) that could easily be enhanced through participation in open civilian nuclear energy programs even as they have parallel clandestine military programs.[12] As a result,

In a world characterized by high nuclear latency, a number of risks stand out. One is simply that there may be multiple ways for states to be considered nuclear-capable. While robust nuclear weapons programs remain the most serious proliferation danger, a range of possibilities below this threshold or level of capability must be of concern as well. So must be models of weapons development enabled by technologies and processes that may be easier to conceal and harder to detect (for example laser enrichment).[13]

In this context, A.Q. Khan's operation may come to be seen not as an anomaly but as a harbinger of the future.[14] At the same time, Khan's operation could not have flourished without the quite visible cooperation of European suppliers and foreign governments who suspected what was going on but looked the other way. Thus his operation confirms the necessity of foreign help for governmental proliferators even as it also could have become the conduit of nuclear materials and secrets to terrorists. Khan's operation is thus an exemplar and possible precursor of secondary or even tertiary proliferation that goes beyond transferring capabilities to terrorists to denote the process whereby new or recent nuclear powers facilitate further nuclearization among other states. Something of this sort may be happening, e.g. in the DPRK's and Russia's relations with Myanmar where both states are evidently assisting Myanmar's quest for nuclear power if not weapons.[15] Secondary and tertiary proliferation also exists with regard to missiles and delivery systems. Thus in 2006 Yahya Rahim Safavi, Commander of Iran's elite clerical Army, the Pasdaran, disclosed that Iran has "no prohibitions or reservations" about providing missile systems to "neighboring and friendly countries." Indeed, Tehran considers it a duty to help other friendly countries that "are exposed to invasion of the Zionist regime."[16]

Thus we see a proliferation of pathways to proliferation. Chaim Braun and Christopher Chyba denote three particular pathways. First comes latent proliferation by which a county maintains a façade of compliance with the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) while covertly developing weapons capabilities as North Korea and Iran have done. Second is "first-tier proliferation" where material stolen or bought from private firms and/or state nuclear programs assist proliferators in developing weapons and delivery systems. And third comes what we have called secondary or tertiary proliferation, which they call second tier proliferation or proliferation rings where developing countries with varying degrees of capability assist other such states with their proliferation programs. Pakistan's relations with North Korea, Iran and Libya, and North Korea's ties to Syria exemplify this form of proliferation.[17] At an earlier stage China's ties to and support for proliferation in North Korea, Iran, and Pakistan also facilitated the establishment of such rings.[18]

Russia

Our focus here is on the second of these pathways, specifically the Russian one. As we shall see, within this category of pathways from the Russian state to proliferators who then do what they please, there are then several branches by which Russia might contribute to proliferation, either as a matter of policy or inadvertently. In an age of multiplying demand for nuclear materials, technology and know-how where the supply is considerably more constrained than is the demand and possibly becoming more so due to nonproliferation pressure from a U.S.-led coalition, the abundant supply of all these components in Russia makes it a tempting source of what proliferators need. Furthermore, for reasons described below the environment in Russia is all too permissive for launching such proliferation efforts. In this context the abundance of nuclear material in Russia, the apparently still inferior means for guarding it and the visible nonchalance of the Russian regime regarding proliferation raise several red flags. Indeed, as we shall see below, officials, if not the government as a whole, have in the past and may still be colluding to transfer materials, know-how, or technology to proliferating states. Therefore these red flags should go up for several reasons.

The first of these branches to proliferation is the rather self-serving and self-seeking Russian nonchalance about proliferation relative to other states' concerns about the problem. Russian analysts and officials habitually claim that Russia and the United States share a common interest in nonproliferation and that Moscow opposes either Iran or North Korea obtaining nuclear weapons. Therefore if America will take Russia's advice and recognize its equities in these issues, a political solution will ultimately come about that defuses the problem and is a win-win arrangement.[19] However, the reality is rather different. First, Moscow's approach to proliferation is explicitly instrumental and based strictly on expediency, i.e. an approach where national interest, coldly asserted, takes precedence over all other considerations. It is driven by Russia's traditional support for cold-blooded Realpolitik and by its own concept of its "sacro egoismo" (sacred egotism) as an independent actor whose independence and full sovereignty is the alpha and omega of its foreign policy actions. Furthermore Russia's full and unconstrained freedom to do as it pleases must first be respected by everyone else as a starting principle in their relationships with them. Danish General Michael Clemmesen, the Commandant of the Baltic Defense College, wrote in his blog analyzing the cyber-attacks in Estonia of April-May, 2007 that,

The attitude of Russia to the world and especially to its neighbors is presently close to that of the great power attitudes of that earlier [pre -World War I-author] period. It is built on a demand for '*respect'* for the country because of its size. It is rooted in the geostrategic and geopolitical attitudes tainted with Social Darwinism that dominated the conservative elites of all *other* major European states of the period. *(*Italics in original*)*,[20]

This approach governs Russia's real approach to proliferation which is rather different than this somewhat idealized view. For example, in early 2002 Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov told us what the motive forces of Russia's approach to proliferation issues are, i.e.,

Russia scrupulously adheres to its international obligations in the sphere of non-proliferation of mass destruction weapons, means of their delivery, and corresponding technologies. The key criteria of Russian policy in this sphere are our own national security, the strengthening of our country's international positions and the preservation of its great power status.[21]

Thus Russia evaluates proliferation issues not according to whether the regime is democratic or not as in America, but on the basis of whether a country's nuclearization would seriously threaten Russia and its interests.[22] Therefore, threats to the nuclear order or to the global or regional balance as such are not directly relevant to its calculations. If proliferation benefited Moscow, it would probably find ways to support it even if it formally had to pose as an opponent. For example, Robert Einhorn testified in 2006 to the Senate that,

Russia, which a year ago said it couldn't provide nuclear fuel to India's Tarapur reactors because of its Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) obligations, recently sent a large fuel shipment to those reactors, arguing (over the objections of most NSG members) that it was entitled to do so under the NSG's "safety exception."[23]

Thus, in commenting on the June 2007 proposal by President Putin to let the Americans jointly manage the Russian missile defense radar at Gabala, Azerbaijan, Russian chief of Staff, General Yuri N. Baluyevsky stated that, Washington's claim that Russia now admitted to an Iranian threat was a misinterpretation. While Russia never denied a global threat of nonproliferation of missiles and nonproliferation, "we insist that this trend is not something catastrophic, which would require a global missile defense system deployed near Russian borders."[24] Western analysts have picked up on this as Russian officials have told them that there is no reason to stop Iran because Iran's activities drive up the price of oil to Russia's benefit. As Ariel Cohen of the Heritage Foundation has observed,

If this is the case and Iran goes nuclear with Russian help, it changes the prognosis for the oil prices. It changes the ability of Iran to block exports of oil from the Persian Gulf. It may change the global economic situation. And Russia, of course, benefits because Russia is a high price oil exporter.[25]

Likewise others speculate Russia makes cooperation with the West against Iranian nuclearization dependent upon potential commitments to refrain from enlarging NATO to include Ukraine and Georgia or from "meddling" in the CIS.[26] Thus Russia privately threatened Washington and NATO that if they went ahead with a Membership Action Plan for Ukraine (MAP) at the 2006 NATO Riga summit, it would drastically retaliate, including arming Iran against the US. Conversely if Washington suspended the offer of membership Russia might then become much friendlier on the Iranian issue.[27] This example underscores the fundamentally short-sighted and self-seeking Russian policy towards Iran and toward proliferation threats more generally.

Another favorite line of argument is that Western tactics of "state terror" are a major contributing cause to their resolution to keep seeking the bomb forcefully preventing would-be proliferators from obtaining the bomb. And while we should be concerned about the instability of many states who seek the bomb, that instability is itself often the result of misguided Western policies.[28] Therefore,

The attempts to prevent forcefully someone from possessing the nuclear potential will only lead to simpler nuclear technologies and increased access to them, up to their possession by self-proclaimed states and nongovernmental organizations. In fact it is what represents the main threat, but is directly connected with the need for nuclear weapons that is created by the policy of restricting sovereignty of weak countries.[29]

This logic leads, of course, to still more justifications for nuclear proliferation as this writer, Anatoly Baranov the editor of *FORUM.msk* openly admits. Thus, he writes "By the way, this is yet another reminder for Ukraine on the need to reactivate in good time its own nuclear program."[30] Another popular refrain is that American concern to limit missile and technology transfers to potential proliferators is merely an attempt to oust Russia from profitable markets for its wares, and replace it by American exporters. Therefore since this is all self-seeking competition, American complaints can and should be dismissed on those grounds.[31]

In other words, while Moscow opposes proliferation, it does not regard it too seriously as a threat unless it goes to enemies. And in any case it will not do much about the problem, leaving it up to America to take the lead only insofar as it grants Moscow the respect it craves and abdicates from interfering in regions close to Russian interest. Moreover, since Russia starts its foreign policies with the presupposition of enemies, most notably America, anything that seems to

threaten American interests like Iranian and North Korean proliferation is not something for it to worry too much about. Instead they are opportunities for Russia to advance its agenda/s. Alexei Arbatov's recent assessment cogently outlines Russia's approach to proliferation and its posture on the issue. As Arbatov notes,

For Russia the acquisition of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles by India and Pakistan and the prospects of further proliferation are adding some new elements to a familiar and old threat, rather than creating a dramatic new one as is the case with the United States. The USSR and Russia have learned to live with this threat and to deal with it on the basis of nuclear deterrence, some limited defenses (like the Moscow BMD system and national Air Defenses) and through diplomacy, which is used to avoid direct confrontation (and still better, to sustain normal relations) with new nuclear nations.[32]

Other analysts second this notion that Russia's response to Indo-Pakistani proliferation was a low-key one and point out that for Russia the United States was and in many quarters still is regarded as the only or most likely potential adversary.[33] Instead Moscow regards vertical proliferation (qualitative improvement) as opposed to horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons to new states with greater alarm than does the United States. Russia's posture thus reverses America's which takes greater alarm at horizontal proliferation.[34]

So while nuclear and missile proliferation are serious Russian security issues, and even more so because of its geographical proximity to all existing and potential third nuclear weapon states, Russia does not profess undue alarm at this trend. Unlike America it advances no claim to be a global "policeman," does not deploy military sites or armed forces abroad (except in some post-Soviet states) and does not employ its forces in serious combat operations. Thus it avoids challenging other countries, including actual or potential nuclear and missile-capable regimes. Due to Russia's vulnerability and lack of reliable security protection and commitments from other nations its non-proliferation stance is much more cautious and flexible than that of the USA. Moreover, given Russia's post Cold War weakness it has been forced to confront other security threats that are incomparably more urgent to it than proliferation.

Among those threats are these listed by Arbatov:

- The instability and bloody conflicts across the post-Soviet space and in the North Caucasus of Russia proper (which has a 1,000 km common border with the volatile South Caucasus).
- NATO's continuous extension to the east against strong Russian objections.
- Continuing stagnation of Russian armed forces and defense industries and Russia's growing conventional and nuclear inferiority to the United States and NATO.
- The threat of expanding Muslim radicalism in the Central Asia (7,000 km of common border with Russia).
- The scary growth of economic and military power of China (5,000 km of common border with Russia).
- Recently, the plan of the deployment of U.S. BMD sites in the Czech Republic and Poland and the pressure of Washington in favor of accepting Ukraine and Georgia to NATO have moved to the forefront of Moscow's security concerns.[35] Arbatov further observes that,

There is a broad consensus in Russia's political elite and strategic community that there is no reason for their nation to take U.S. concerns closer to heart that its own worries - in particular if Washington is showing neither understanding of those problems of Russia, nor any serious attempts to remove or alleviate them in response for closer cooperation with Russian on non-proliferation subjects.[36]

This does not mean that Russia simply ignores the threat of proliferation. President Putin told a BBC interview in June 2003 that: "If we are speaking about the main threat of the twenty-first century, then I consider this to be the problem of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction." He then spoke about the same subject at the session of the UN General Assembly on September 26, 2003.[37] Russia also exercises control over foreign economic operations with nuclear materials, special non-nuclear materials and corresponding technologies, as well as dual-use goods and technology, principally as a component of the policy of non-proliferation. The Export Control Law, adopted in 1999, has locked in the term "Export Control" specifically for this sphere. In the 1995 Law on national regulation of foreign trading activities, Export Control was described as the full set of measures for the implementation of a "transfer procedure" for agreed-upon goods, technologies and services. The 1999 law codified this term as "foreign trading, investment, and other activities, including production cooperation in the field of the international exchange of goods, information, work, services, and results of intellectual activities, including exclusive rights to them (intellectual property)." This means not only the export of goods and technologies abroad, but also their transfer to a foreigner within the territory of the Russian Federation. In January 1998, the Russian government introduced rules for "all-encompassing control" (catch-all).[38]

As Arbatov also observes, unlike America, Russia does not view North Korea and Iran as potential enemies. Iran also occupies the second or third place (depending on the year) among buyers of large lots of Russian arms, which has helped the military-industrial sector to survive in spite of limited defense orders for the Russian armed forces for many years. Finally, Iran is an extremely important geopolitical partner of Russia's, a growing “regional superpower” that balances out the expansion of Turkey and the increasing U.S. military and political presence in the Black Sea/Caspian region, and simultaneously contains Sunni Wahhabism’s incursions in the North Caucasus and Central Asia.[39] Thomas Graham, formerly of the National Security Council, concurs in this assessment of Iran, seen from Moscow as the dominant regional power in the neighobrhood who can project power into the Caucasus and Central Asia as well as the Persian Gulf. Therefore Moscow values Iran’s refraining from doing just that by its pro-Iranian policies.[40] Russian diplomats confirm this evaluation of Iran’s importance to it. T hus Gleb Ivashentsov, the then Director of the Second Asia Department in the Russian Foreign Ministry, told a Liechtenstein Colloquium on Iran in 2005 that:

Iran today is probably the only country in the greater Middle East that, despite all of the internal and external difficulties, is steadily building up its economic, scientific, technological, and military capability. Should this trend continue, Iran—with its seventy million population, which is fairly literate, compared to neighboring states, and ideologically consolidated, on the basis of Islamic and nationalist values; with a highly intellectual elite, with more than eleven percent of the world’s oil and eighteen percent of natural gas reserves; with more than 500,000 strong armed forces and with a strategic geographic position enabling it to control sea and land routes between Europe and Asia—is destined to emerge as a regional leader. This means that the Islamic Republic of Iran will be playing an increasing role in resolving problems not only in the Middle East and Persian Gulf area but also in such regions that are rather sensitive for Russia as Transcaucasia, Central Asia and the Caspian region. This is why dialogue with Iran and partnership with it on a bilateral and regional as well as a broad international basis is objectively becoming one of the key tasks of Russia’s foreign policy.[41]

Therefore Russia’s nuclear policies towards Iran according to Graham aim at gaining insight and thus leverage upon Iran’s overall nuclear energy program, e.g. through its ability to control the tempo of supply of nuclear fuel to the Bushehr reactor.[42] Russian nuclear exports are also much more important to its economy than are nuclear exports for the U.S. economy. Indeed, Russia, like other major powers is feverishly competing with them to sell its reactors all over the world thereby opening up potentially new proliferation possibilities.[43] As Arbatov indicates,

Among Russian exports (predominately oil, gas, and other raw materials) nuclear contracts relate to only a few types of high-technology products (beside arms sales) that are competitive on the global market. This is deemed an important high added-value component of the export structure and a matter of status of an advanced participant in the world trade.[44]

Thus he and many other observers agree that we must not underestimate the role of internal factors in Russian policy. Because the Ministry of Atomic Energy (now the Federal Atomic Energy Agency) has been chronically under-funded for the purposes of maintaining, converting and dismantling its nuclear legacy from the USSR, income from sales to China, India, Iran, and other countries are indispensable for life support of this immense social and technological organism. In turn, ROSATOM is playing an important role in the formulation of the technical and economic facets of Moscow's actual policy on nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear power plant construction contracts, in particular in Iran.[45]

Given these aforementioned considerations we may describe Russia's position regarding proliferation as does Arbatov, namely:

- Russia has an interest in enhancing the non-proliferation regimes, but this is not the main priority in its foreign policy or security strategy.
- Russia views with a lot of skepticism the global strategy of non-proliferation and counter-proliferation declared by the United States, seeing in them a policy based in the practice of double standards and an attempt to veil other political, military, and commercial interests, including nuclear exports, with the goal of non-proliferation.
- Russia is not inclined to sacrifice its own economic and political interests in peaceful nuclear cooperation with other countries for the sake of the abstract non-proliferation ideal (especially in the United States' unilateral interpretation). It will not initiate any further tightening of the regime (especially one associated with economic losses), while at the same time observing the letter of the provisions of the NPT, IAEA safeguards, and agreed-upon norms for nuclear exports.
- Relations with the United States are of considerable significance for Russia (including CTR and GNEP programs) and it is prepared within certain limits to take U.S. demands into account.
- At the same time Moscow will resist Washington's pressure to abandon its dealings with other countries that are legal from the standpoint of the NPT, even if these countries at this point in history are not to the liking of the current U.S. administration and even if there is suspicion about the military nuclear proclivities of Russia's foreign partners. In this sense, the continuation of the Bushehr project and its possible expansion have gained not only practical significance for Moscow ($5 billion in income), but a sense of principle and political significance as well.
- Russia will object, as will the majority of U.S. allies, to using force to resolve non-proliferation problems (although for political considerations it has supported the Proliferation Security Initiative, or PSI), and will give preference to diplomatic and economic instruments in reinforcing the NPT. Russia has supported recent UNSC resolutions on Iran and [the] DPRK but will resist "hard sanctions" (i.e. oil embargo, cutting communications etc.) and will veto the use of force.
- Russia's non-proliferation policy (just as defense and arms control postures) will probably stay passive and mostly reactive, except when promising direct economic benefits (as with the multilateral uranium enrichment plant in the Siberian city of Angarsk). Without initiatives from outside, Russia would hardly initiate or readily endorse more strict export controls, embargoes on sales of nuclear fuel cycle components or more intrusive IAEA guarantees. However, it may use nuclear and missile proliferation as a pretext for withdrawing from some treaties, foremost the INF-SRF Treaty of 1987, apparently motivated by other military and political reasons.[46]

Not surprisingly, we see this nonchalance in the current concrete proliferation issues of the day, namely North Korea and Iran. In the North Korean case, even though North Korea is on Russia's border and its activities have already stimulated a missile, if not missile defense race in East Asia, Moscow has displayed a visible Schadenfreude (joy at another's sorrow) directed against America when North Korea tested missiles and then a nuclear weapon in July and October 2006.[47] At the same time, Russian officialdom views Washington's general insistence on nonproliferation controls as merely or mainly an effort to pressure competitors in the nuclear and arms markets.[48] A recent analysis of Russian reactions to the February 13, 2007 six-party agreement on North Korean denuclearization strongly suggests the continuation of this misanthropic view.

Moscow's reasoning on the February 2007 deal conflicts with that of the Bush Administration: 1) it came about as a result of the United States correcting its past mistaken diplomacy; 2) it is likely to fail because the United States will not fulfill its commitments; 3) the talks serve as a model of multilateralism, applying pressure only in extreme need through unanimous Security Council resolutions and encouraging diplomacy in which officials having good ties to all parties play the decisive role; and 4) at fault is a U.S. worldview that demonizes the North Korean regime in order to justify a strategy of global hegemony. Given this line of reasoning, Russians are inclined to interpret ambiguities in the timing of mutual steps in carrying out this deal as U.S. attempts to gain one-sided advantage.[49]

Russia's position on Iran is even worse in spite of the fact that Russia cannot plead ignorance of this threat. Indeed, it is entirely possible that Moscow does not want there to be a solution to Iran's challenge as some observers have noted. Specifically,

At the same time, a political solution of the Iranian nuclear issues is in conflict with Russian strategic interests. If the problem is settled, Russia will not be able to use it as a bargaining chip in the relationship with the West. What is more, the dispute is only likely to be settled if, instead of the current extremist regime, moderate pro-western, political and economic groups come to power. In that case Iran may go back to being an American partner. This would be against Moscow's expectations and its strategic stance. The Kremlin is interested neither in a nuclear-armed Iran, nor in ending its nuclear program.[50]

Prominent Russian generals still, and quite mendaciously given Russia's publicly voiced apprehensions about Iranian missiles, deny that Iran represents any kind of missile threat.[51] They do so, of course, to inveigh against U.S. missiles defenses in Central Europe. Putin's recent interview with Le Monde, given as Prime Minister of Russia, demonstrates Russia's efforts to have it both ways with regard to proliferation and Iran. Thus his statements allow him and the Russian government to claim that it opposes proliferation and has counseled restraint upon Iran, while supporting it and blithely denying that it is building nuclear weapons.

I don't think the Iranians are looking to make a nuclear bomb. We have no reason to believe this. The Iranian people are very proud and independent. They are trying to implement their legal right to develop peaceful nuclear technologies. I should say that formally Iran hasn't violated any rules. It even has the right to carry out enrichment. It only takes a quick glance at the relevant documents to confirm this. There were some claims that Iran hadn't revealed all its programs to the IAEA. This is what we need to clear up. But to a large extent Iran has revealed its nuclear programs. I repeat there is no official basis for legal claims against Iran. But I have always openly told our Iranian colleagues that we take into account that Iran is not isolated in a vacuum, but in a very dangerous and volatile region. They should keep this in mind and avoid aggravating their neighbors and the international community, and should take steps to convince the international community that they have no secret plans. We have worked in very tight cooperation with our partners in Iran and within the framework of the six-party talks, and we will continue to do this in the future. We are against—this is our principle - we are against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. We think it's a very dangerous trend. And most importantly it's not in the

interest either of Iran or the region as a whole. Because the use of nuclear weapons in such a small region as the Middle East is nothing short of suicide. In whose interest could a nuclear bomb possibly be used? Palestine? If nuclear weapons were used, Palestine would cease to exist. We remember the Chernobyl tragedy—all it takes is for the wind to blow in the wrong direction, and that's it! Who could possibly benefit from this? We think it's counter-productive. This has always been our position and I hope this opinion will be shared by President Medvedev. We will use any means possible to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons.[52]

We should contrast these carefully chosen pro-Iranian words with earlier statements to U.S. audiences by high-ranking Russian defense officials who told U.S. analysts, that if Iran gets 3000 centrifuges, as the IAEA now admits Iran to have, it could have the required nuclear material for a bomb in 18 months.[53] By that reckoning Iran should have a bomb by 2009-10. Although high-ranking Russian government and military officials regularly claim that Iran poses no threat and does not have the capability to threaten either Europe or Israel with nuclear missiles, in fact they themselves know this claim to be false. Some Russian generals have even admitted as much. And both Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov and former Chief of Staff General Yuri Baluyevsky have acknowledged it.[54] Yet d espite the fact that is military knows full well that Iran is developing nuclear and missile capabilities that can threaten Russia itself as well as it neighbors, military leaders and the government persist in publicly denying the existence of such a threat.[55]

But Moscow still seeks to mitigate, if not avoid, sanctions on Iran. It also is trying to get the other members of the "sextet "(America, England, France, Germany, and China) to give Iran security guarantees to induce it to stop enrichment and proliferation activities and is telling Iran that while it supported UN mandated sanctions, that these are not serious threats. And it is doing so in spite of the fact that Iran has publicly maintained that it will continue defying UN resolutions (and all this comes form a power that never fails to make its point about the alleged superiority of the UN as a security manager).[56] Obviously Iran's expectation that Russia will shield it from serious threats while it continues to build its nuclear weapons and does so relatively unscathed, and that Iran will derive considerable benefits form its association with Russia still holds water.[57]

Indeed, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov used the NIE's findings of December 2007 to say that Russia has no evidence that Iran was conducting research for a nuclear military program before or after 2003 as Washington had previously asserted.[58] Even more bizarrely he has stated that, that U.S. missile defense plan for Eastern Europe not only aims at deterring Russia (which is utterly false), he also argues that it is intended to replace the Iranian regime.[59] Even though Moscow now urges Iran to cease enrichment and heed the mandate of the IAEA, it still falsely claims that Tehran is undertaking such cooperation. Thus Russia and Iran are, according to President Putin, stepping up cooperation, Lavrov reportedly offered Iran a strategic partnership in November 2007 that would include lifting of all sanctions and prevention of new ones, and a treaty on arms sales plus cooperation in economics, energy, and even space. Apparently it would entail as well joint cooperation in Central Asia and the Caucasus as aspiring security managers of those regions. Furthermore, such partnership would mean that Russia views any encroachment on Iran's interests as constituting and encroachment upon its own interests.[60] Lavrov also complains hat the West's refusal to acknowledge Iran's positive gestures towards the IAEA are leading to the isolation and estrangement of Iran which, in turn, hinders clarification and resolution of all the issues pertaining to Iran's nuclear program.[61]

Lavrov has even repeatedly argued since then that "Iran deserves to be an equal partner of all regional countries in the resolution of the problems of the Near and Middle East."[62] He has also proposed a similar involvement of Iran in Black Sea security issues![63] Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Losyukov has also recently indicated that Moscow is resubmitting not only Iran's but also Pakistan's membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). This last point, concerning Pakistan marks a new departure and a concession to China, as well. Presumably the quid pro quo would be Chinese support for Iranian, and maybe Indian membership.[64] Thus Russia returns Iran's earlier favor and seeks to promote its standing throughout the entire Middle

East and Central Asia. Similarly Nikolai Bordyuzha, the Director of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO-Moscow's defense alliance in Central Asia) has recently said that Iran could be invited to join the CSTO thus giving it a voice in the defense of Central Asia under Russian supervision. Moreover, any use of force by Washington in Iran would threaten this organization's remit, i.e. security in Central Asia.[65]

Despite Russian denials, there also appears to be a plan to upgrade Russian arms sales to Iran of S-300 anti-air missile defense systems to make any foreign air strikes on Iran more difficult. Meanwhile it has begun sending nuclear fuel to the reactor at Bushehr as part of its policy to gain nuclear footholds throughout the Middle East, claiming that the fact that Iran is buying this fuel and is supposed to return spent fuel to Russia shows that Iran has no 'objective need' for generating its own nuclear fuel or for enriching uranium. Even so Iran merely pockets the fuel and moves forward.[66] However, as Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni notes, Moscow's supplying of nuclear fuel to Iran while it enriches uranium is "inconceivable" given the threat that Iran poses to Russia and all the former Soviet republics should it achieve the bomb.[67] In fact at least some Russian commentators have wondered aloud whether or not Russia's efforts to tie Iran to it are in fact leading to it being tied to Iran or at least embarked upon a process that it cannot truly control.[68]

Amazingly Lavrov has said that, that North Korea's nuclear weapons are a threat to international order whereas Iranian nuclearization would not be such a threat.[69] Other analysts, like the Carnegie Endowment's Dmitri Trenin, say that Iran is a nuclear problem in waiting but Pakistan is a clear and present concern if not danger.[70]

Here again the explanation is pure Realpolitik, namely the search for partners against America in the Gulf who would allow Russia to claim again that it truly is a great power, the need to forestall Iranian based threats to the Caucasus and Central Asia, and economic opportunities.

Thus there has been no change in Russian policy since Ivashentsov (now Ambassador to Seoul) uttered his anlaysis. On April 30, 2008 President Putin delivered a message to the Iranian government through the Secretary of Russia's Security Council, Vlaentin Sobolev stating that, "Russia confirms the principles of mutual relations with Iran and her policy will not depend on who is in power." Sobolev further added that Russia's and Iran's positions on major regional and international issues "are very close and compatible". Moreover Iran has a right to obtain peaceful nuclear technology (a right that is not in question, what is at issue is Iran's systematic deception of and prevarication to the IAEA-Author). Lastly Sobolev said that Russia wiill promptly fulfill all its obligations in regard to the nuclear reactor at Bushehr.[71] Until today, however, Iran has continued to defy UN resolutions about enrichment, is generating more centrifuges and is engaged in an ongoing and massive covert effort to obtain missile technology abroad.[72]

Russia's nuclear policy does not stop with Iran and North Korea. Not surprisingly, Moscow has gone beyond helping Myanmar acquire nuclear energy, it also is seeking other worlds to conquer in the nuclear sphere and exploiting its ties to Iran to acquire economic benefits and political influence by offering nuclear power to hitherto non-nuclear states who clearly have no need for it other than as an an attempt to counter or perhaps ultimately deter Iran. Thanks to Iran's increasingly undisguised military nuclear program and conventional rearmament 13 Sunni Arab nations are seeking some form of nuclear power.[73] And Russia is ready, willing, and able to provide many of them with nuclear reactors and know-how.[74] These are not the actions of a state that takes the specter of proliferation too seriously.

Neither is this "nonchalance" about proliferation the only reason why Russia should remain a state of concern to us with regard to proliferation. Indeed, there are several reasons why Russian behavior on proliferation issues raises concerns. First, Moscow consistently behaves as if it were in a state of denial regarding its sale of dangerous military systems abroad once it becomes clear that they could be used. A consistent line of defense against criticisms of the sale of conventional

weapons or of nuclear technologies is that American complaints are purely cynical and that all it really wants to achieve is to oust Russia from a profitable market so as to take it over itself. Thus in regard to Azerbaijan's blocking of Russian nuclear technologies earmarked for Iran, Moscow claimed that this was done for "political reasons."[75] Likewise, in 2006, despite massive Israeli proof of Russian weapons being diverted from Syria and Iran to Hizballah, Russian officials derided these claims as nonsense even though its is quite unlikely that Moscow did not know what the ultimate provenance of its weapons would be.[76] Thus because of the personal, economic, and political interests of the exporting agencies involved as well as the government (subject that is further touched on below) and their individual leaders who have a well-known pecuniary interest in arms and nuclear technology sales Russia invariably first replies to such charges by offering a stiff denial and/or accusation of the bad faith of the accuser, behind which lies a strong determination not to admit the truth either to itself or to others about such deals.

The large-scale deals that Russia, through Gazprom, is negotiating with Iran for access to Iranian fields or to supply the projected Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline (IPI also play a very large role in shaping Russian policy because this involvement gives major Russian political actors a vested stake in close ties to Iran.[77] Similarly Moscow is happy to exploit and benefit from Irano-European tensions because that precludes Iran's becoming a rival for Russia in the supply of natural gas to Europe through alternative pipelines like the EU's Nabucco pipeline for which Iran would be a crucial partner.[78] Indeed, one Russian official, Gazprom's man in Tehran, Abubakir Shomuzov, has even advocated extending the Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline to China to tie Russia, China, India, Pakistan, and Iran together in a very big project having major strategic implications as well as many consumers.[79] Moscow supports the IPI to tie Iran and the other participants into its vision of a vast trade, energy, and infrastructural North-South corridor.

Meanwhile Gazprom is also ready to help finance or even manage it as well since President Putin has approved this deal and the Pakistani government has also approved the possibility of Gazprom financing and/or constructing the pipeline.[80] Gazprom has also recently negotiated a major deal with Iran to develop the huge South Pars gas field, the island of Kish in the Caspian Sea, and the North Azadegan gas field.[81] Obviously these ties weigh heavily against supporting any effort by Washington and the EU to leverage Moscow to put pressure on Iran. Similarly Iran and Russia are in deep negotiations over the possibility of creating major deals involving other Gulf producers like Qatar and forming a gas cartel. While this cartel might not be formally called one, it would, if these negotiations do conclude successfully for Moscow and Tehran, certainly be one in fact with enormous economic and geostrategic ramifications throughout the Gulf and the CIS if not even further abroad.[82]

This mentality that combines cynicism, greed, power hunger, offensiveness, and prevarication is also linked to a second problem here, namely the asymmetry of Russian and American perceptions and responses to problems of proliferation and terrorism. Trenin's observations are cited above.[83] Similarly three Russian analysts (Alexei Arbatov, Aleksandr' Pikayev, and Retired General Vladimir Dvorkin) observe, that,

In Russia, most officials and experts agree that the main factors influencing their country's vulnerability are, first, the high level of terrorist activity in its territory and, second its relative geogrpahic proximity to a number of "threshold" countries. In addition, Russian experts believe that he so-called new nuclear states could release nuclear materials. Moscow worries, in particular about the situation in Pakistan, "because of information constantly coming [from this country] which, it seems, has become a 'transit point' for the transfer of secret nuclear and missile technologies." In this context, it has been argued that, given the traditional alliance between Pakistan and Washington, the "American partners have a vast arena for strengthening export controls and stopping the illegal transfer of WMD technologies and means of delivery from that country." Russians think that measures to counteract potential nuclear leaks should be designed primarily for developing countries.[84]

On the other hand, they claim that in the United States Russia (albeit decreasingly) is seen as the main threat in this regard, obviously something that rankles Russian elites.[85] Likewise Russia, unlike America and the EU, does not regard Iran and the organizations that it sponsors like Hizballah and Hamas as terrorists. But the EU and the United States are relatively unconcerned about what Russia regards as its main terrorist threat, "Sunni Wahabbism" in the North Caucasus and Central Asia. And obviously a similar asymmetry of perceptions exists with regard to the threat posed by Sunni fundamentalism in Pakistan.[86]

In this connection we must remember that for the Russian atomic industry and its defense sector the sale abroad of their products—be they reactors, other nuclear technologies that can be marketed as being peaceful in intent, and conventional weapons—is of the utmost significance for otherwise they would have been and may still be in jeopardy of not surviving. This motive exists beside as well as apart from the classical and well-known significance of such sales as a way of enhancing the sellers' political presence and influence in the buyer's state. We see both motives of enhancing influence and gaining revenue throughout the 1990s and more recently as in the discussions with 13 Arab states about selling them reactors. The Myanmar reactor episode exemplifies the motives driving both Russia and Myanmar. Russia is vigorously trying to sell nuclear reactors abroad to anyone who will buy them but has met with difficulties in entering markets already dominated by Western competitors "at a time when reform of the Russian nuclear industry to make it more profit oriented has heightened the need for revenue from foreign trade." Thus Moscow is selling reactors to Myanmar and Iran which have been shunned by AtomStroiEksport's (Rosatom's export agency) Canadian, French, Japanese, and American rivals. The 2006 loss to Westinghouse of bids for reactors for China displays its difficulties in surmounting this competition.[87] This deal was attrractive for other reasons too.

Myanmar continued to be interested in the Russian nuclear research facilities in part because of their relatively low price, estimated at $5Million in 2002. Russia's willingness to provide the facilities and related support was also appealing because Moscow did not attach conditions related to human rights issues in Myanamar and because the added links with Russia would serve Myanmar's desire to offset China's growing influence in the country. Russia, on the other hand, was keen to enlarge its list of potential nuclear customers and, building on this and its long history of arms sales to Myanmar, hoped to expand economic cooperation with Myanmar more genereally, to gain access to its substantial mineral resource base.[88]

Russia's more recent efforts to sell nuclear reactors to Gulf and Arab states also partake of the quest for influence and profits but also indicate that Moscow is trying to exploit its standing as a friend of Iran whom Arab states are also trying to persuade to influence Iran against going nuclear. To prove its bona fides or reliability as a "friend" to them it offers them nuclear reactors even as it abets Iran's development of nuclear technology at the Bushehr reactor and sells it conventional weapons. During his tour of Jordan, Qatar, and Saudi Aabia in 2007 Putin offered all these states major energy deals, arms sales, and even nuclear power, ostensibly for peaceful purposes, but in reality signifying his efforts and theirs to balance what they all realize is Iran's refusal to stop its nuclear program and put it under effective IAEA supervision.[89] In fact Russia is offering up to 13 Arab states nuclear technologies of one or another sort. Russia is even launching Saudi satellites and undertaking major business initiatives with Saudi Arabia.[90] Since all these states seek nuclear energy inconsiderable degree because of fear of Iran's example, Russia's policy seems to be a myopic short-term pursuit of financial gain through the sale of reactors or other technologies even at the risk of destabilizing the entire region at a much higher level of risk than is already the case.

In line with this wholly instrumental or utilitarian approach to the proliferation issue we also encounter a third factor that impedes Russo-American cooperation on proliferation. Thus Russia's policymakers seem to have decided to use support for Iran as a kind of equivalent of a Swiss army knife, i.e. as a policy response that can answer any policy from the West that it does not like. We have seen above how Russia played the Iran card to avert negative outcomes with regard to

NATO enlargement in 2006. Western observers either were aware of this gambit or grasped the psosibility of such instrumental use of the proliferation issue. For, as George Perkovich wrote in 2006,

Russia is particularly tempted to see cooperation in the Iran case as a lever to use against U.S. interference in other issues of greater conern to Moscow. As the U.S. (and France and the United Kingdom) urged Moscow in October [2006] to take a tougher stance on Iran, President Putin was focused on a hightened dispute with Georgia. Georgia's leadership in turn beseeched the U.S. and Europe to stand up for democracy, human rights, and other Western norms which the Georgian leadership embraces. This dispute has wider implications, as Georgia has sought eventual membership in NATO, to which the Bush Administration has been recpetive. Georgia is such a high priority to Putin that it is difficult to imagine that he would not see Russia's position on Iran as a way to affect Washington's position on Georgia. Yet, the Bush Administration seems not to see and bargain on the basis of such connections—not that his would be appealing: Russia's widespread and growing violation of Western norms raises the moral costs of Realpolitik bargaining with it.[91]

This assessment coincides with that of Russian analyst Andrei Ryabov who wrote in 2007 that,

Russia's tougher stance on the Iranian nuclear program was perceived as a possible turning point in determining the spheres of rivalry and cooperation with the United States, and on the broader level, with the Western community overall. Indeed, the contemporary international situation affords a considerable number of factors that favor Russia and its Western partenrs reaching some consensus on the problem of "distribution of roles," one vital to them, and has at long last clarified where they closely interact and where they continue to fight one another.[92]

These analyses and conclusions, of course, points to the wider problem of bargaining with Russia on this and other issues, namely, the moral costs of doing so. But equally problematic is the fact that Russia has reepatedly shown that it regards existing contracts as nothing more than statements of intent, whether in regard to foreign energy investments, or solemn treaties like the Helsinki treaty of 1975 and the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty of 1990.[93] This cavalier attitude towards international commitments, a stance tied to Moscow's insistence on absolute untrammeled autocracy at home and equally unconstrained freedom of action abroad and the lack of a rule of law makes the attainment of credible commitments with Moscow an exceedingly problematical process. At the same time, this use of its stance towards Iran as a bargaining chip with which to leverage all kinds of different potential gains underscores the fundamentally shortsighted and self-seeking Russian policy towards Iran and toward proliferation threats more generally.

The Crime Issue

The second branch of the Russian pathway is the pervasive criminality and corruption of the Russian state. Indeed, it is not too much to say that Russia, in the estimation of numerous diplomats, intelligence officials, and analysts is a Mafia state where the government, energy firms, organized crime and state intelligence agencies work hand in glove or as an integrated fist to advance their aims.[94] These trends towards a fusion of criminal and state power were already discernible several years ago.[95] So, for example, it is quite clear that the notorious arms trader and gun runner Viktor Bout enjoyed the state's protection as long as he stayed in Moscow and Russia even made efforts to get him back after he was arrested in 2008 in Thailand.[96] Similarly it is also well known that defense industry was and is still a highly lucrative endeavor, second only to energy in its attractions for corruption. In 2003 it was riddled with gangland hits as the state tried to take it over but is possibilities for corruption have not abated. Rather since government and organized crime work together, those possibilities have migrated now to state officials and those working for them.[97] Covert arms sales where income is hidden from tax collectors

continue. For example a recent scandal indicates that Russia has covertly sold Egypt Tor M1 surface to air missiles since 2005 and 6 9M334 modules with missiles in 2006 until the firms in question recently fell victim to the tax officials and the courts.[98] Likewise, CBS News in the United States recently reported on the Russian Mafia or mob in the United States and its connections with the Russian military. Thus FBI agents posing as mobsters met with a Russian General who was offering "long-range missiles, tanks, submarines, everything" for sale.[99] Finally Ukrainian journalist Vladimir Fillin recently charged that influential "Chekist (a reference to the original name of the Soviet secret police) forces in the Russian Federation are "sheltering" heroin and cocaine smuggling into Ukraine and Europe.[100] Russian government sources similarly announced that in the past 18 months, 500 military officials were arrested for corruption.[101] So it would not be unusually difficult for corrupt officials or for the government to arrange a covert and possibly corrupt sale or transfer of nuclear technologies to proliferators using the channels of both Russian state agencies and organized crime if they wanted to do so for reasons of personal greed or because Moscow deemed it to be in its overriding national interest.

There are more than ample sources, including those by Russian officials, indicating the fusion of state structures with organized crime groups. Thus a 2005 study of linkages between terrorists and organized crime groups in Chelyabinsk Oblast, the site of many closed cities, concluded that Russian crime is increasingly transnational, having many and easy links with foreign crime groups, many of whom are themselves linked to foreign governments or insurgent-terrorist groups (e.g. the FARC in Colombia), hosting many crime groups from the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Caucasus. Drug use has grown considerably making workers in these cities, many of whom are former criminals or connected to criminals who are returning to these cities, a prime target; expertise in money laundering has also grown and gone global; Muslims living near these cities, are targeted by extremist recruiters; and the regression against democracy and in favor of Soviet methods is withering those media and social groups that could reveal corruption and crime. At a time when the effectiveness of police and security agencies here is declining, the opportunities for fruitful collaboration between criminal and terrorist groups have grown.[102]

While most analyses suggest that until now nuclear smuggling activities have been the work of amateurs and does not show a nexus of nuclear smuggling between criminals and terrorists, the conditions in Chelyabinsk merit serious observation.[103] Second, this lack of a nuclear connection this does not mean we can be complacent for as the CBS example shows, high-ranking generals are perfectly willing to move conventional weapons. Indeed the rise of organized crime in Russia has been accompanied by a veritable explosion of cases of trafficking in weapons inside Russia, through at least the year 2000.[104] Moreover, there is ample precedent for high-level trafficking in WMD weapons. During the 1990s, General Anatoly Kuntsevich, who supervised the destruction of formerly Soviet chemical weapons was widely regarded as a corrupt general who smuggled VX precursors to nerve gas to Damascus for research purposes, Israeli intelligence also charged that Russian scientists were helping Syria develop VX and biological weapons.[105] There is evidence suggesting collusion by Russia not just to help Iraq rearm before the 2003 invasion, but also to help improve its chemical and biological warfare capabilities.[106] Similarly already in 2003 an unsuccessful attempt by a Russian gang to obtain WMD for foreign interests was reported. In 2005 it became known that Ukraine was the middleman for the illegal transfer of Kh-55 nuclear-capable cruise missiles to Iran and China in 2000-01.[107] And of course the murder of Anatoly Litvinenko in November 2006 by polonium smuggled into London from Russia raises the most disturbing questions. Meanwhile Turkey is increasingly concerned about the rising number of seizures by its authorities of nuclear materials originating from the former Soviet Union and Moldova is worried by reports that high-level representatives of Al-Qaeda, Hamas, Iran, and Chechnya have traveled through the country to establish operational bases there.[108]

The Third Pathway, Smuggling

There are also serious grounds for heightened concern because of some more recently observable trends within the context of WMD smuggling from Russia. Quite recently, The Northwest Customs Directorate announced that it had uncovered 70 illegal attempts to move radioactive and nuclear materials across the Russian border. The directorate's acting head, Aleksandr Getman, stressed that none of the cases involved weapons-grade nuclear material and that such smuggling usually involves nuclear fuel pellets.[109] And on July 17, 2008 an Uzbekistani, Anar Godzhayev, who operated an export firm to Iran from Astrakhan in Russia, was arrested for smuggling a more than a ton of tantalum sheets and foil for conceivable use in Iran's nuclear reactors missile components, and chemical treatment technology.[110]

A survey of seizures of trafficked nuclear material and actors involved in the smuggling form 2001-2005 concluded that, "the former Soviet Union still stands out as a major staging area for criminals trading in radioactive substances, with Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, and Belarus taking the lead."[111] Renssalear Lee warns that, "Russia's 5000 mile long, largely uncontrolled border with Transcaucasian countries and Kazakhstan is an open invitation to traffic in nuclear materials and other lethal items."[112] While reports of cases in the former Soviet Union since 2001 suggest a decline in smuggling of kilogram-level quantities of weapons-grade materials there is the appearance of trafficking in chemical and biological materials for 2001-06.[113] Elena Sokova reports that the Center for Nonproliferation Studies has chronicled 17 attempts to smuggle HEU out of Russia since 1992, including some discussed below. She also finds that security for Russian HEU still, after sixteen years of substantial efforts to eliminate terrorist or criminal access suffers from serious shortcomings.[114] She cites two recent cases highlighting the smuggling of Russian HEU in 2003 that was broken up at the Georgian Armenian border, and a 2006 case in Georgia.[115] In the latter case the culprit was caught with 79.5 grams of nearly 90% enriched uranium and had agreed to bring a sample of a 2-3 Kilogram cache to Georgia "only after he was given assurances by undercover agents that the buyer for the HEU represented "a serious organization from a Muslim country." As Sokova notes,

These and earlier smuggling cases speak volumes about the importance of Russia's role in addressing the nuclear terrorism threat, including the risks associated with HEU in the civilian sector and the security of fissile materials in general.[116]

Meanwhile trafficking routes have become more varied and now embrace virtually all of the post-Soviet countries of Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. Most important, in this context, the Caucasus, Balkans, and Central Asia have become major smuggling routes for trafficking in persons (e.g. the sex trade), drugs, and conventional weapons leading to a situation where smuggling routes and corrupted officials are already in place and well-established. Furthermore there is extensive evidence tying one or more terrorist group—not just Muslim terrorists either—to the trafficking in narcotics and conventional weapons (much less so to trafficking in persons).[117] What is most important here is that terrorists in these regions use the same routes as do traffickers in people, drugs, and guns and use their connections with the arms and drug trade to finance their operations.[118]

For these reasons we cannot be complacent about the possibilities of smuggling nuclear or heavy enriched uranium (HEU) or other material necessary to nuclear weapons from the former Soviet Union. There is no doubt such cases are continuing. In Kazakhstan officials broke up such a nuclear smuggling ring which was tied to the agents of an undisclosed foreign intelligence service in 2007.[119] Russia's special units of the Ministry of Interior's troops (VVMVD) detained over 40,000 raiders and foiled over 340 attempts to trespass into vital sites and reach special cargo in 2007. While not all of these were nuclear sites, this reflects a considerable effort to penetrate

those special sites like design bureaus, nuclear power plants, research institutes, ammunition depots, defense-industry enterprises, stores of explosives, high-security sites, etc.[120] Still more alarming is the fact that Russia admitted that in 2007 customs officials thwarted over 120 attempts to smuggle “highly radioactive materials” out of the country and 722 attempts to smuggle such material into Russia, showing a dangerous trend in trade among the ex-Soviet states.[121] Therefore complacency about what is happening in and around Russia is unwarranted and recent episodes of smuggling or of the transfer of nuclear technology underscore the grounds for such concern. Matthew Bunn and Anthony Wier summarized several cases in 2006.

The corruption case against former Minister of Atomic Energy Yevgeni Adamov is only one of many indicators suggesting that this corruption and insider theft has penetrated Russia’s nuclear establishment as well. In April 2006, Russian police arrested a group of conspirators that included a foreman of the Elektrostal nuclear fuel fabrication facility—which processes large quantities of HEU every year—for stealing 22 kilograms of low-enriched uranium. Several of the mayors of Russia’s ten closed nuclear cities have been arrested or forced out either for corruption, or for helping to set up fraudulent tax schemes for Yukos and other businesses. An investigation by a team of American and Russian researchers uncovered extensive corruption, drug use, organized crime activity, and theft of metals and other valuable items at the Mayak plutonium and HEU processing facility in the closed city of Ozersk.[122]

Similarly in 2006 Major General Sergei Shlyapuzhnikov, Deputy Chairman of the Ministry of Interior (MVD) section responsible for guarding these closed territories and cities was relieved of his duties for helping organize smuggling in and out of these closed territories—in particular for giving out passes allowing people and their vehicles to enter and leave these territories without being checked.[123]

Since this corruption allows people at the top to move weapons or technologies in and out of Russia for profit it is dangerous on that account. But this corruption also renders Russia’s nuclear “archipelago” vulnerable to terrorism acting in tandem with criminals or posing as such. These are not idle concerns. In 2005 Minister of Interior Rashid Nurgaliev confirmed that international terrorists have planned attacks against Russian nuclear and power industry installations to seize nuclear materials and build weapons of mass destruction.[124] Since then senior officials have confirmed that terrorists are conducting reconnaissance at nuclear weapons sites.[125] Neither is it impossible that such groups could find Russian scientists who might be willing to help them. Surveys conducted in 2002-03 indicated that 21% of those surveyed would consider working for or in a rogue state.[126] While material conditions have improved considerably since then; this is still a highly disturbing figure even if it shows that the overwhelming majority of scientists would not consider working for those kinds of states.

In the light of the following recent cases of illicit nuclear smuggling or of the transfer of nuclear materials and given that context, a high degree of continuing vigilance concerning Russia’s nuclear materials is still called for. For example many U.S. officials in the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA)working on the Comprehensive Threat Reduction program mandated by the Nunn-Lugar legislation of 1991 worry that Russia will not follow through on maintaining the necessary level of safety for its nuclear archipelago once the pram is terminated and handed over to Russian control in 2008.[127] Indeed, in the two years alone, there have been several disturbing episodes. On January 9, 2008 Kyrgyz authorities announced that on December 31, 2007 they had taken possession of a small load of Cesium-137 that could be used for a dirty bomb aboard a train bound for Iran. Little more information has been released since then, but this shows how vulnerable Central Asia might be to the smuggling of nuclear or radioactive substances.[128] A year earlier Georgia sentenced a Russian national, Oleg Khintsagov, for attempting to sell bomb-grade uranium to Georgian agents. He had smuggled the uranium from the neighboring province of South Ossetia. Khintsagov, too terrified of whoever abetted him, never revealed the source of his uranium although Russian authorities ultimately (apparently after stalling the Georgians for quite some time) conceded the origin of that uranium.

The answers given by Russian officials to the Georgians' questions about this uranium's provenance were clearly unsatisfactory and formalistic. Here again numerous pertinent questions remain unanswered but the ability of smugglers to evade customs in Russia, bring uranium into South Ossetia a haven of smuggling, and thence to Georgia raises serious questions about the security measures in place against such contingencies in both Russia and Georgia as well as the possibility of collusion with insiders in Russia.[129]

What makes this case still more alarming is the fact that previous smuggling incidents involving radioactive materials have taken place in Georgia seven alone between 1999 and 2005 and then Khintsagov's case in 2006.[130] The weakness of the state, a high and persisting level of corruption and the proximity of zones like South Ossetia that locals refer to as the world's largest duty-free zone underscores the threats we face from the corruption and criminality of Russian officials and nuclear personnel and the relative ease with which all kinds of contraband can be smuggled out of Russia through the Caucasus to other destinations.[131]

Finally, in March 2008, Azeri officials interdicted a shipment of heat insulating equipment from Russia to Iran, ostensibly for the Bushehr reactor, because it lacked the required export permit. This led them to suspect that the shipment might be in violation of UN Security Council sanctions on Iran. What is interesting about this affair is that it took the Russian authorities over a month to produce the required paperwork and secure the release of the equipment to Iran and presumably Bushehr. In the meantime, though, the usual pattern of complaints that this was a political move instigated by the West, etc. repeatedly surfaced in the Russian press. So instead of prompt action to rectify what should have been a bureaucratic mistake or oversight, Russia tried to stonewall and bluff its way through the affair.[132] The pattern of Russian responses here is not unlike that seen in the Georgian smuggling case above. Obviously that pattern of behavior is highly inconsistent with Russian protestations of its opposition to proliferation and ability to defend its borders against nuclear smuggling. That pattern reflects the nonchalance in practice that characterizes Russia's posture towards proliferation and suggests that the pathways from Russia are by no means as closed as Moscow would like to pretend.

Conclusions

The evidence and analysis presented here suggests that the danger of nuclear smuggling from Russia is by no means foreclosed even if the CTR program is approaching its termination. Moreover, the combination of nonchalant attitude towards the threat of proliferation combined with pervasive corruption, widespread anti-Americanism, and the expansive drive of Russia's "sacro egoismo" as a reviving great power do not augur well for a policy that will vigilantly try to prevent smuggling or non-proliferation, particularly in areas near Russia where it has traditionally played the great power game with great vigor. Russian intentions to sell Myanmar and 13 Arab states reactors testifies to the dangers that Russia might be flirting with in its single-minded pursuit of its short-term perception of its national interest at the expense of all other considerations. For the next administration, whether its extends the CTR or not, this means that under the best of circumstances inducing Russia to clean its own house for its own sake or to take a more robust attitude towards combating proliferation will probably be a necessary but Sisyphean task. Indeed, it is by no means inconceivable that we will see further proliferation crises generated, at least in part by Russia's short-sighted and self-centered policies, if not its corruption and negligence. While that next administration will not have the luxury of desisting from those tasks and pursuing common ground with Moscow to prevent proliferation, nobody should be under any illusions that such success will be likely, great, or easily obtained.

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