

Putting Some Sparkle Into The Evian G-8 Summit: Cooperative Threat Reduction

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With the Group of Eight (G-8) industrialised nations gathered for their annual economic summit meeting, in Evian, France, the rising number of global problems is presenting them with a daunting agenda.

While the future of Iraq and proposals to stimulate the sluggish world economy are topping that agenda, a number of urgent security issues are also being discussed. One involves a stock-take on the little known agreement from last year's summit in Geneva: the G-8 Global Partnership Against Weapons of Mass Destruction.

In short, the Global Partnership programme is designed to safeguard the weapons complex of the Former Soviet Union (FSU) and prevent proliferation of deadly nuclear, as well as chemical and biological materials. Russia is thought to have enough surplus nuclear weapons material to make at least 60,000 nuclear warheads (in addition to an estimated arsenal of approximately 5,000 deployed strategic nuclear warheads and an even more dangerous and unknown number of tactical nuclear weapons, estimated at approximately 3,400). In the absence of reliable systems to safeguard and account for this huge stockpile, much of this material is highly vulnerable to theft or diversion to terrorist and 'rogue' states. A similar Cold War legacy exists in relation to Russia's chemical and biological weapons programmes.

The United States has shown commendable leadership in attempting to address this issue. The US Nunn-Lugar cooperative threat reduction (CTR) agenda is now in its 12th year, and more recently has begun to be supported by European states and the G-8. At the June 2002 Kananaskis Summit in Canada, the G-8 countries pledged to provide up to \$20 billion over the next decade. Under the '10+10over10' plan, the United States will contribute \$10 billion over the next 10 years to threat reduction and nonproliferation programmes (mainly in Russia) while the other G-8 members will collectively contribute the same amount over the same timeframe.

These US-led threat reduction activities have produced significant, quantifiable results in Russia and other parts of the Former Soviet Union (FSU), including: roughly 6,000 nuclear warheads removed from deployment; more than 400 missile silos destroyed; nearly 1,400 ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, submarines and strategic bombers eliminated; storage and transportation of nuclear material made more secure; 150 metric tons of weapons-grade uranium eliminated; a major biological weapons production plant eliminated; and 40,000 chemical, biological, nuclear and missile weapons scientists provided with support to pursue peaceful research.[1] Over \$1 billion a year is now being made available for international threat reduction programmes – but it is not enough.

But how about this for an alternative 10+10+10 equation: Over the past ten years, less than one tenth of the amount spent in ten weeks on neutralising Iraq's alleged WMD threat has been directed at eliminating the much greater threat arising from within the FSU.

Much of the threat reduction agenda remains to be completed. Roughly half of the nuclear weapons-grade material in Russia remains inadequately secure, the destruction of chemical weapons is just starting, and much remains unknown about past biological weapons activities.[2] Moreover, the two main reemployment strategies for weapons scientists in the WMD complexes in Russia and the FSU—science research contracting and technology-driven commercialisation and business development—are proving inadequate, and failing to provide many career changing opportunities.

So what needs to be done? First, the cooperative threat reduction agenda needs reform and accelerated implementation. To this end, each of the G-8 countries should appoint a central coordinator for threat reduction and develop a comprehensive long-term plan of implementation.

Second, more money is needed to accelerate implementation of existing plans, especially in areas of relative neglect, such as alternative job creation, retraining of weapons scientists and downsizing weapons complex infrastructure. Additional funds are also needed to expand the scope of threat reduction to include new materials and new countries. Possible fiscal solutions being mooted include the exchange of Russian debt for nonproliferation projects and the expansion of the partnership to other non-G-8 countries. Reconsideration of the costly and

contentious plutonium disposition plans should also be on the agenda, but is unlikely to get a hearing because of vested interests.

Third, improved oversight of threat reduction projects by elected representatives in partner countries is needed. Where appropriate a single congressional or parliamentary committee in each of the G-8 countries should be given the responsibility of providing oversight of all the threat reduction activities, progress and problems.

Fourth, sustained political support for cooperative threat reduction has to be shown by the G-8 in order to overcome funding limitations and restrictions, bureaucratic hurdles and delayed implementation.

Fifth, the Russian Government needs to improve the overall environment for threat reduction, including the provision of financial transparency, facility access and legal protection. But transparency cuts both ways: a comprehensive global inventory of nuclear warheads and fissile material is also urgently needed, as is an inventory of US and Russian tactical nuclear weapons.

And finally, threat reduction should begin at home. It is not just a Russian problem. In addition to assisting Russia to disarm under the Global Partnership programme, the other three nuclear-armed G-8 states (the United States, the United Kingdom and France) should reaffirm their intention to implement the 13 disarmament steps agreed to in 2000 under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The United States has approximately 6,800 operational nuclear weapons, and their destructive power is the equivalent of some 80,000 Hiroshima-sized bombs. These weapons, and the smaller numbers deployed by France and the United Kingdom, continue to threaten the very existence of humankind, yet fail to deter the asymmetric terror activities of non-state groups like al Qaeda. Indeed, the continuing proliferation of nuclear weapons and related materials only increases the likelihood of a terrorist group eventually obtaining a 'dirty bomb' capability or even a nuclear warhead.

The US Senate's decision last week to at least partially rescind a 10-year ban on funding research and development of new 'low-yield' nuclear weapons, was both unnecessary and destabilising. Instead, the US Government needs to renounce its goal of expanding the US nuclear arsenal. Similarly, US and Russian warheads that are no longer operationally deployed under the Treaty of Moscow should also be eliminated under the threat reduction programme. And efforts to expand threat reduction programmes and principles to new regions and countries, such as North Korea, the Middle East and South Asia also need to be urgently explored.

Cooperative threat reduction represents the 'third way' in nuclear non-proliferation: a middle ground between multilateral arms control regimes and coercion or preemption. As such it offers a practical approach to disarmament that all members of the G-8 can support. Robust political and financial backing for this agenda in Evian could put some much needed fizz back into a glass currently half empty.

[1] Reshaping US-Russian Threat Reduction: New Approaches for the Second Decade, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and Russian American Nuclear Security Advisory Council 2002, p1.

[2] Ibid.