



The Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program

As the Soviet empire collapsed, it became clear that an emergency situation was dangerously close. 30,000 nuclear weapons and a vast weapons production complex were spread over four sovereign states. Some 40,000 tons of chemical weapons and a large biological capability were also present. In response, the United States devised a program to consolidate, secure and eliminate materials and infrastructure in the 15 states that evolved in the former Soviet territory.

Origin and Purpose

The Department of Defense Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) program, also known as the Nunn-Lugar program, was created for the purpose of securing and dismantling weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their associated infrastructure in the former states of the Soviet Union. Founded by Senators Sam Nunn (D-GA) and Richard Lugar (R-IN) through the passage of the Soviet Threat Reduction Act in 1991, the program aimed to address the large nuclear arsenals inherited by former Soviet states Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan after the Soviet Union's collapse. The June 1992 "Umbrella Agreement" signed by presidents George H. W. Bush and Boris Yeltsin authorized CTR programs between the United States and Russia.

Housed within the Department of Defense's Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA), the CTR Program initially pursued four primary objectives:

1. Consolidate and secure WMD in a limited number of secure sites;
2. Inventory and account for these weapons;
3. Provide safe handling and safe disposition of these weapons as called for by arms control agreements; and
4. Offer assistance in finding gainful employment for thousands of former Soviet scientists with expert knowledge of WMD or their delivery systems.

Due to its success, Congress acted in 2004 to extend CTR activities beyond the territory of the former Soviet Union on an exceptional basis and then in 2008, it normalized the expansion of CTR activities around the world. Today, the CTR Program provides funding and expertise to more than [30 countries](#) to secure, eliminate, protect and interdict WMDs at the source.

The Office of Cooperative Threat Reduction in the Department of State coordinates CTR programs between U.S. government agencies and foreign governments. The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) in the Department of Energy manages lab-to-lab programs like efforts to improve the security of nuclear warheads in storage and nuclear materials at civilian, naval, and nuclear weapons complex facilities. It also helped Russia dispose of plutonium removed from its nuclear weapons and shut down its plutonium-producing reactors.

CTR Activities

The final update to the [Nunn-Lugar Scorecard](#) as of May 31, 2013 is accompanied by a short list of some of the CTR program's other accomplishments from [DTRA](#):

Metric	Amounts in Former Soviet Union & Albania circa. 1994	Reductions as of May 31, 2013	2018 Target	Percent Achieved
Warheads Deactivated	13300	7616	9265	82.20%

ICBMs Destroyed	1473	926	1288	71.90%
ICBM Silos Eliminated	831	498	652	76.40%
ICBM Mobile Launchers Destroyed	442	197	359	54.90%
Bombers Eliminated	233	155	155	100%
Nuclear ASMs Destroyed	906	906	906	100%
SLBM Launchers Eliminated	728	492	612	80.40%
SLBMs Eliminated	936	695	748	92.90%
SSBNs Destroyed	48	33	40	82.50%
Nuclear Test Tunnels/Holes Sealed	194	194	194	100%
Nuclear Weapons Transport Train Shipments		616	829	74.30%
Nuclear Weapons Storage Site Security Upgrades		24	24	100%
Cooperative Biological Engagement Laboratories Secured		47	82	58.50%

- Destroyed all the missiles and warheads located in the former Soviet republics of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine;
- Securely shipped more than 600 shipments of nuclear warheads from less secure storage to more secure storage or destruction;
- Secured 10 chemical weapons sites and destroyed more than 4,700 tons of chemical weapons agent originating in Albania, Libya, Russia, and Syria;
- Engaged more than 30 countries on three continents in biological threat reduction efforts. These efforts include facilitating the construction or renovation of more than 100 laboratory and storage facilities and coordinating more than 300 cooperative research projects aimed at safely studying, detecting, and diagnosing especially dangerous pathogens;
- Provided civilian employment for more than 22,000 former WMD scientists.

History of Cooperation with Russia

For more than 20 years, the United States and Russia worked together to improve the security of nuclear weapons and weapons-usable materials at [nearly 150 sites](#) in dozens of countries. They also converted 500 metric tons of highly enriched uranium from Russian nuclear warheads to reactor fuel, which provided Americans with electricity; turning megatons to megawatts.

In October 2012, Russia rejected a U.S. proposal to renew the CTR agreement, stating that CTR was “not consistent with our ideas about what forms and on what basis further cooperation should be built.” Three days prior to the expiration of the Nunn-Lugar umbrella agreement, Presidents Barack Obama and Vladimir Putin [reached an agreement](#) to continue U.S.-Russian nuclear security efforts, albeit in a truncated form. This new

arrangement operates under the 2003 “Framework Agreement on a Multilateral Nuclear Environmental Programme in the Russian Federation (MNEPR),” and a related protocol signed on June 14, 2013. Under the new framework, the United States was able to continue most of its nuclear security-related work, but ceased joint efforts pertaining to the dismantling of missiles, bombers, and chemical weapons. Russia had assumed responsibility, financial and otherwise, for carrying out the latter three dismantlement efforts.

MNEPR and the Invasion of Ukraine in 2014 and 2022

Following Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014, U.S.-Russian cooperation was suspended and faces legislative restrictions to resume cooperation within Russia. Even during this time of turmoil, Russia and the United States [continued to cooperate](#) to remove highly enriched uranium from third countries, including Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Georgia.

As the two countries with 90% of the world’s nuclear weapons and 80% of the world’s weapons-usable nuclear materials, the United States and Russia have a special responsibility to be custodians of their vast stockpiles, even as cooperation remains difficult.

In recent history, the CTR program has expanded from on-site efforts, such as the securing and disposal of nuclear material and storage site security system maintenance, to mobile WMD security control, including enhancing land and maritime border security. CTR’s capacity-building is implemented primarily by the Biological Threat Reduction Program (BTRP) and the Proliferation Prevention Program (PPP), which have both completed most of their activities in the former Soviet states and are now branching out. BTRP has initiated a series of projects focused on WMD pathogens in Africa, Southeast Asia, the Middle East and elsewhere. PPP is upgrading border and maritime security along potential proliferation pathways in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Finally, the Chemical Weapons Destruction program has been involved in “one-off” elimination projects, such as destroying Libya’s and Syria’s chemical weapon arsenals.

On the biological front, however, there have been major complications as well as disinformation campaigns directed at Ukraine. The United States’ BTRP has [partnered](#) with the government of Ukraine since 2005 to support peaceful and safe biological detection and diagnostic capabilities and to reduce the threats posed by pathogens. In 2014, Russia illegally took possession of two Ukrainian-owned laboratories that BTRP upgraded and continues to deny Ukrainian access to these facilities. Russia has also accused Ukraine of possessing a clandestine biological weapons program with support from the United States, based on deliberate misinterpretation of CTR-related bio safety cooperation. Up until 2014, the CTR program operated in conjunction with Russia and within Russia in laboratories owned by the Russian government.