Russian Nuclear Missile De-Targeting and the Presidential Narrative

Testimony on Russian nuclear missile de-targeting, before the National Security Research & Development Subcommittee, US House of Representatives

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Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to have been asked to appear before this subcommittee to address the administration's claims that no nuclear missiles are targeted against the United States. My focus is not on the technical questions of those claims, but on public policy.

President Bill Clinton and Russian President Boris Yeltsin signed a strategic missile de-targeting agreement in early 1994. The stated purpose of the agreement was to protect the United States and Russia from an accidental or unauthorized nuclear strike by the other.

The administration quickly portrayed the agreement as something much different. Not only did the agreement protect the American people from an accidental Russian missile launch; we were soon told that the threat of Russian nuclear missiles-indeed, of any nuclear missiles-had been eliminated.

Between the signing of the de-targeting agreement and the end of 1996, President Clinton, Vice President Al Gore, Secretary of State Warren Christopher, Defense Secretary William Perry, National Security Advisor (and current Director of Central Intelligence-designate) Anthony Lake, and Deputy National Security Advisor (now National Security Advisor) Sandy Berger, stated publicly-on no fewer than 147 occasions-that no Russian nuclear missiles are targeted on the United States and its people.

This is a very serious claim. Yet technical experts say that the claim is impossible to make truthfully, because the de-targeting agreement is inherently impossible to verify. Furthermore, technical experts say that even if Russian strategic missiles are indeed de-targeted, they can be re-targeted easily in a matter of minutes if not less. The degree of civilian control of Russia's strategic forces is also a matter of debate here, as it is in the Russian Federation. I have worked with Russian lawmakers and officials in efforts to promote checks and balances, and have found that they do not exist institutionally.

Of the administration's 147 claims, the President and Vice President have stated unequivocally, at least 33 times, that no nuclear missiles at all are targeted against the United States. The implication is that the People's Republic of China has de-targeted its strategic forces from the U.S., even though Beijing rejected the President's offer for a de-targeting agreement.

An example of the claims is President Clinton's speech in Des Moines, Iowa, on 20 October 1995:

". . .for the first time since the dawn of the nuclear age, there is not a single, solitary nuclear missile pointed at an American child tonight. Not one. Not one. Not a single one."

Mr. Clinton said in a 2 February 1996 speech in Salem, New Hampshire:

"You look at the fact that we now have almost 180 nations committed not to get involved in the nuclear arms race, and the fact that the Russians and others have de-targeted their nuclear missiles so that now there are no more nuclear missiles pointed at any American homes for the first time since the dawn of the nuclear age."

Who are these "others"? The President has not told us, even though he pressed on with his claims, informing the citizens of Toledo, Ohio, on 26 August 1996:

". . .for the first time since the dawn of the nuclear age, on this night, this beautiful night, there is not a single nuclear missile pointed at a child in the United States of America."

Two days later, Vice President Gore told the Democratic National Convention:

"And our strength at home has led to renewed respect abroad: nuclear missiles no longer pointed at our cities. . . ."

These are not simply campaign slogans, but clear statements of policy. They recklessly contribute to a profound sense of complacency that in the post-Cold War world, the American people are free from the threat of nuclear annihilation. When one places such quotes in the context of developments and statements emanating from Russia and China, it becomes clear that the public has been terribly misled.

Official U.S. Statements in the Context of Strategic Developments in the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China

The administration's consistently repeated claims lead to the public impression that the nuclear threat is gone. The logical conclusion is that the need to counter such a threat-by technology controls, leveraging of U.S. aid and multilateral loans, strategic modernization, or ballistic missile defense-no longer exists. Thus the administration can justify its policies that have allowed supercomputers to be exported to Russian and Chinese entities that conduct nuclear weapons research and development, sent billions of tax dollars to Russian entities directly involved with missile and warhead development and production, effectively terminated key capabilities for modernization of the American strategic deterrent, and ensured that there will be no effective national defense against incoming ballistic missiles.

By juxtaposing administration claims with statements and actions in Russia and China, the following chronology attempts to add context to the idea that no Russian or other nuclear missiles are aimed at the United States. The chronology is not exhaustive, but is intended merely as an illustration of the disconnect between official policy and reality.

- 5 December 1994: National Security Advisor Anthony Lake is quoted in the State Department's Dispatch bulletin: "As a result of our engagement Russian missiles no longer target American cities or citizens."
- 22 January 1995: Col. Gen. Igor Sergeyev, commander-in-chief of the Strategic Rocket Forces, says the missile de-targeting had no effect on his ability to annihilate the United States. CBS broadcasts a 60 Minutes program segment from Gen. Sergeyev's war room. The Russian nuclear missile chief tells host Ed Bradley that his weapons can be "retargeted and launched from this war room . . . most in a matter of minutes."
- 24 January 1995: President Clinton tells the nation in his annual address: "This is the first State of the Union address ever delivered since the beginning of the Cold War when not a single Russian missile is pointed at the children of America."
- 25 January 1995: The Russian military mistakes a Norwegian atmospheric research rocket for a possible "surprise attack" by the United States. For the first time, President Boris Yeltsin takes steps toward authorizing the re-targeting of strategic warheads to prepare for a possible attack on the U.S. John B. Stewart, former Director of the Office of Foreign Intelligence at the Department of Energy, later cites an authority who described Moscow's near-miscalculation as "coming closer to a Russian nuclear launch than at any previous time during the Cold War, including during the Cuban missile crisis."

Mr. Yeltsin speaks about the incident with the Russian press, but the White House is silent.

- 26 January 1995: In an interview with Tom Brokaw on NBC Nightly News, President Clinton says nothing about the Russian incident of the day before. Instead he says, "There are no Russian missiles pointed at America now for the first time since the dawn of the nuclear age."
- 29 May 1995: Russian television unveils the new MAZ-79-221, an eight-axle mobile launcher for the SS-25 intercontinental ballistic missile upgrade.
- 30 May 1995: President Clinton tells the Colorado Springs Gazette, "there are no nuclear missiles pointed at the United States. We are destroying parts of our nuclear arsenal and so are the Russians." He says nothing about Russia's strategic modernization efforts.
- 31 May 1995: President Clinton tells U.S. Air Force Academy graduates at their commencement ceremony, "We are dramatically reducing the nuclear threat. For the first time since the dawn of the nuclear age, there are no Russian missiles pointed at the people of the United States."
- 1 June 1995: The Russian newspaper Rossiyskaya gazeta publishes an interview with Atomic Energy Minister Viktor Mikhailov, who reveals that his organization is producing a next-generation nuclear warhead.
- 5 September 1995: Russia's Military Space Forces announce a successful test-launch of the Topol-M ICBM, the follow-on to the SS-25, from Plesetsk. A Military Space Forces spokesman says, "Russia hopes to replace all its outdated missiles in the coming years."
- 7 September 1995: President Clinton tells a campaign fundraiser at Washington's Mayflower Hotel that "there are no Russian missiles pointed at this country for the first time since the dawn of the nuclear age, since our administration came in."
- 4 October 1995: The Strategic Rocket Forces begin a massive nuclear exercise that includes more test-launches of missiles intended to strike the United States.
- 6 October 1995: As the Russian nuclear missile drill takes place, President Clinton addresses a Freedom House conference (co-sponsored by the American Foreign Policy Council) declaring

once again: "Russian nuclear missiles are no longer pointed at our citizens and there are no longer American missiles pointed at their citizens."

- 4 January 1996: Former Assistant Secretary of State Chas W. Freeman briefs National Security Advisor Lake about his recent trip to Beijing. At the time, the PRC was planning a large-scale military operation, including the firing of ballistic missiles, to intimidate Taiwan as it held its first free presidential election. Freeman tells Lake that a high-ranking Chinese official warned against the U.S. defending Taiwan, making a remark Freeman interpreted as a threat to destroy Los Angeles, California, with a nuclear missile.
- 12 January 1996: President Clinton tells a Clinton-Gore luncheon in Nashville, Tennessee, "For the first time since the dawn of the nuclear age, there is not a single, solitary nuclear missile pointed at an American child, and I am proud of that."
- 24 January 1996: The *New York Times* reports on Freeman's briefing to Lake, in the first public revelation of what it termed "an indirect threat by China to use nuclear weapons against the United States."
- 2 February 1996: As if referring to China, President Clinton tells voters in Salem, New Hampshire: "the Russians and others have detargeted their nuclear missiles so that now there are no more nuclear missiles pointed at any American homes for the first time since the dawn of the nuclear age." He tells an audience in Concord, New Hampshire: "there is not a single nuclear missile pointed at an American city, an American family, an American child. That is not being done any more."
- 15 May 1996: *Ogonek*, a Russian news weekly, publishes the remarks of Rear Admiral Viktor Vasilyevich Patrushev, Chief of the Operations Directorate of the Russian Navy General Staff. "Yes, the presidents of the United States and Russia have signed the document according to which our missiles are not targeted at each other's countries any more," Patrushev says. But to him, the agreement is irrelevant to his strategic mission: "I know that the missiles can be re-targeted in an hour even without returning [our ballistic missile submarines] to their bases."
- 24 May 1996: National Security Advisor Lake tells the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, "no Russian missiles are targeted at America's cities or citizens."
- 4 June 1996: At the behest of the administration, Senate Democrats filibuster a bill that would deploy a national defense against incoming ballistic missiles.
- 6 June 1996: Russia test-launches a six-warhead SS-19 ICBM from Baikonur, Kazakstan. All six warheads reportedly strike their targets around Kamchatka, on the Pacific Ocean. Col. Gen. Viktor Yesin, Strategic Rocket Forces Chief of Staff, says it is Russia's 26th ICBM test lunch in five years.
- 18 June 1996: Deputy National Security Advisor Samuel "Sandy" Berger tells the Woodrow Wilson Center, "Because of President Clinton's agreement with President Yeltsin, Russian missiles no longer target American cities."
- 28 June 1996: Russia's Pacific Fleet conducts its first-ever simultaneous test-launch of strategic nuclear missile submarines, ITAR-TASS reports. The operation, in which three Delta-class submarines fire multiple missiles from the Sea of Okhotsk just north of Japan to a target range on the Barents Sea just north of Europe-approximately of equal distance between the launch site and the western United States-rivals any conducted during the Cold War. According to a Pacific Fleet spokesman, the large and complex test was designed to confirm the "actual combat readiness" of Russia's naval strategic forces.
- The same day, President Clinton proclaims, in a statement on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, "I have made reducing the nuclear threat one of my highest priorities. As a result, for

the first time since the dawn of the nuclear age, there are no Russian missiles pointed at our people."

- 2 July 1996: The Open Media Research Institute Daily Digest, which monitors the Russian press, reports that the week before, a Russian navy official "announced that the Navy would begin receiving a new generation of strategic submarines beginning in 2002."
- 3 October 1996: At General Staff headquarters, Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin personally oversees a complicated and expensive test involving the "nuclear briefcase" in which a Topol-M ICBM, a submarine-launched ballistic missile, and two air-launched cruise missiles aboard strategic bombers are launched.
- 6 October 1996: President Clinton says in a debate with Senator Bob Dole, "There are no nuclear missiles pointed at the children of the United States tonight and have not been in our administration for the first time since the dawn of the nuclear age."

Cohen decried administration's "cloak of secrecy"

In 1994, Senator William Cohen voiced concern over the administration's silence about Russia's revised military doctrine, which increases reliance on nuclear weapons. He introduced an amendment "to require the President to submit a report on the revised Russian military doctrine and Russian military operations outside Russia's border." The initiative became law, and the President issued the first report later that year. But as Senator Cohen complained in 21 September 1995 remarks on the Senate floor,

"the report . . . was classified from cover to cover, even though much of the report did not warrant being restricted by a security classification. The decision to throw a cloak of secrecy over this report probably was not related to the fact that it was submitted just a few days after [President Clinton's] Washington summit with President Yeltsin. I am only speculating here, but perhaps the administration did not want to embarrass President Yeltsin, although it is not clear that he would have been embarrassed at all. . . .
"Perhaps the administration was worried about being embarrassed itself given its acquiescence to Russian military adventures.
"In any case-no need to speculate about this-the decision to classify the report from cover to cover has prevented Congress from conducting a complete public debate about Russian actions and the administration's policy toward Russia, and it has prevented the American people from becoming fully informed on these matters."

The same can be said about fully informing the public on matters related to ballistic missile threats, and on the need to defend ourselves against them. Apart from some vague and scanty generalities, the administration has been virtually silent about Russia's increased reliance on nuclear weapons and its strategic modernization initiatives, and has downplayed concerns that political and institutional uncertainties in Russia might be deteriorating the command and control of strategic forces. Not once in any of his 130 statements did the Commander-in-Chief comment on the fact that Russia (and China) has been modernizing its strategic arsenal.

Russian Strategic Modernization

As it has in most sectors of society, economic hardship has taken its toll on Russia's strategic modernization program. Nevertheless, with its increased reliance on weapons of mass destruction, Moscow is investing what it can in these expensive programs. They include: the new Topol-M ICBM, the refitting of all Typhoon submarines to launch an upgraded submarine-launched ballistic missile, construction of the first of the Boreas class of ballistic missile submarines to succeed the Typhoon, development of a new air-launched cruise missile, a new multi-role strategic bomber, new generations of nuclear warheads, including miniaturized warheads; new generations of chemical weapons, including the "Novichok" class of binary nerve agents; and an active biological weapons program.

In my own research, apart from the chemical and biological weapons programs, I have found the Russian government, the Ministry of Atomic Energy, the Strategic Rocket Forces, and the Military Space Forces to be far more forthcoming about their missile and nuclear warhead modernization initiatives than has the United States government and our own armed forces. Russian authorities even take the trouble to announce their developments, translate them into English, and place them on the Internet for the world to see.

Our own government, which is so open in so many other areas, appears deliberately not informing the public, as then-Senator Cohen alleged, in order to cover up for its own misguided policies. The administration did not publicly acknowledge the clandestine Novichok nerve agent program until responding to a leak in February, 1997-more than three years after it was revealed in the Russian press. Significantly, when Mr. Cohen's predecessor, William Perry, visited Severodvinsk last October to view the dismantling of an obsolete Yankee-class submarine with U.S. aid, he was silent about the new attack submarine and ballistic missile submarine being built in the very same port. The administration seems to be abusing secrecy to limit criticism of, and thereby justify, the following policies:

- to relax technology transfer restrictions, as an apparent reward to Silicon Valley campaign donors, which has resulted in the sale of supercomputers and other sensitive technologies to Russian facilities that develop new strategic weapons (a case in point is the Silicon Graphics, Inc. sale of four supercomputers to the All-Russian Scientific Research Institute for Technical Physics, a major nuclear weapons laboratory at Chelyabinsk-70);
- to transfer hundreds of millions of dollars in tax dollars via NASA to Russia's space program, without attempting to ensure against diversion of funds to two integral partners in that program, the Military Space Forces and GRU military intelligence;
- to transfer billions of dollars more in multilateral loans to the Russian Central Bank, without ensuring that the money does not subsidize military programs;
- "erosion by design" of the U.S. nuclear stockpile;
- to remain committed to an outdated, Cold War-era Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty; and, stemming from this,
- to block deployment of effective national ballistic missile defense.

Perhaps, as our new Secretary of Defense, Mr. Cohen will take remedial action and make public a detailed accounting of the strategic missile programs and the nuclear warfare doctrines of Russia and China so this public debate can proceed.

Policy Implications

Are U.S. tax dollars being used to facilitate Russia's strategic modernization? The administration's assurances that no nuclear missiles are targeting the United States have many policy implications. In addition to our own defense considerations, which are beyond my purview, are foreign policy considerations that Congress can address simply by exercising its oversight responsibilities. They come under the general heading, "Are U.S. tax dollars being used to facilitate Russia's strategic modernization program?"Congress can do much to explore this question in the course of appropriating and authorizing funds. It striking that, despite Russia's ongoing economic crisis and decrepit military condition, Moscow can continue to develop new generations of weapons of mass destruction designed for war-fighting far beyond its neighbors' borders. This indicates where ultimate priorities lay under Boris Yeltsin and Viktor Chernomyrdin. No amount of wishful thinking can alter the fact that the United States remains the main intended target of Russian strategic forces-this more than half a decade and billions of dollars after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Areas Congress might explore include:

- Space cooperation. For many reasons, Russia cannot meet its commitments to cooperation in space. The main reason is financial, even though an estimated $600 million in taxpayer funds have been transferred, in cash, to Russia for its part of the program. Despite this large outlay, press reports indicate that much of the money has not gone to its intended purpose. The connection between Russia's space program and its military intelligence and strategic weapons sectors might explain where some of the missing dollars have gone. Moscow's military and spy satellite capabilities have deteriorated considerably, and resources must be committed to enhancing them. At the same time, it is worth mention that even though Moscow could not pay for rocket boosters to re-supply the Mir space station, it did come up with considerable cash to pay for strategic missile test launches and production of new generations of strategic weapons systems.
- Satellite launch subsidies. Similar questions might be asked about taxpayer-funded subsidies of satellite launches aboard Russian boosters. Certainly there might be aspects of the program that are in the national interest. But is it possible that taxpayer financing of these launches might in effect be subsidizing Russia's ICBM or military intelligence programs?
- Purchase of Russian reprocessed HEU. The United States has committed up to $12 billion in cash over the next 20 years to purchase reprocessed highly-enriched uranium (HEU) from formerly Soviet nuclear warheads as fuel for American nuclear power plants. In theory this program seems like an excellent idea. Yet the U.S. has not used its leverage to monitor Russia's destruction of nuclear warheads. The possibility has been raised that the taxpayer might be paying a corporation of Russia's Ministry of Atomic Energy (MINATOM) for reprocessed fuel from sources apart from warheads, and that U.S. funds might in fact be paying for MINATOM's continuing nuclear warhead development program.
- Multilateral loans. In December 1995, the Russian parliament voted to increase military spending to modernize its forces. In passing the budget, it specifically recognized that billions of dollars in Western loans would be needed to help finance the deficit.
- The Clinton administration increased such resources accordingly, urging the International Monetary Fund to approve an unprecedented three-year, $10.2 billion loan to the Russian Central Bank. Yet the conditions attached to these loans are almost purely economic. The approximately $20 billion sent to date or currently in the multilateral loan pipeline are fully

fungible in a system where power of the purse is controlled by the executive. There are no conditions in the terms of the loans that would prevent the money from enhancing Russia's strategic nuclear forces, and the administration has not sought to establish them.

- Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) assistance. It would be the ultimate irony if U.S. aid to help dismantle Russia's nuclear forces was actually being used to help modernize them. Much of the CTR assistance was not a separate appropriation, but was carved from existing Department of Defense and Department of Energy budgets.

Since 1994, the General Accounting Office (GAO) has raised the possibility U.S. CTR assistance inadvertently helps Russian military modernization. A 1995 GAO report states, "parent companies [designated for U.S.-funded conversion aid] would still produce some defense equipment . . . raising the possibility that U.S. aid could benefit the parent defense companies if safeguards are not put in place."

The Commerce Department has sought to attract American investment and technology to Russian military firms as part of the defense conversion program, even though some of those same firms would remain producers of systems for strategic weapons. A Commerce Department bulletin describes some of the Russian firms. One is "a major producer of electronic components for space and military use." Another is "responsible for design and development of land-based, road-mobile solid-propellant missiles." A third candidate for U.S. aid and investment is "a leading developer of . . . sea- and land-based cruise missile systems, and intercontinental ballistic missile systems." Others include "a leading center for the design of launchers and ground support equipment for missiles and aircraft," "a leader in the development and production of electronic control systems for missile complexes," and "a developer of submarine-launched ballistic missiles."

This represents the cream of the crop of Russia's military industry. None intends to go out of the military business. Interviews with Commerce Department officials reveal that they know that the enterprises, as stated in the directory, will continue to develop and manufacture high-tech weapons. In their view, if U.S. "conversion" aid helps stop some plants from manufacturing some arms, the money is well-spent. But General Accounting Office (GAO) investigations found that almost none of the aid is shutting down active production lines, and that some is actually helping to re-open dormant lines. The GAO also raised concerns that some U.S. aid is actually paying the salaries of individual scientists who continue to develop new weapons of mass destruction.

Conclusion

One of the reasons there is not a larger consensus for immediate deployment of an effective, national defense against incoming ballistic missiles is that the public and many of its elected representatives have not been informed about the threat. For three years, the President, Vice President, National Security Advisor, and CIA Director-designate, among others, have subjected the public to a steady drumbeat of baseless claims that the American people need no longer worry about being incinerated by Russia's vast strategic nuclear arsenal.President Yeltsin openly explained to the Russian people, immediately after the fact, that thanks to a communications glitch that mis-identified a Norwegian research rocket, he had come close to commencing a

procedure to authorize a nuclear strike against the United States. Yet appearing on network television within 24 hours of that near catastrophe, President Clinton said nothing about it, assuring the public yet again that no Russian missiles threatened America. It is time our leaders started telling the truth about continued nuclear dangers so that the public and Congress can conduct informed, open debates on the nature of the problem and provide for a common defense.