

# Securing Russia's Deadliest Weapons

## REMOVING THE BARRIERS

What do you do when bureaucratic and political obstacles threaten to slow or even halt global initiatives for keeping nuclear, chemical and biological weapons out of the hands of terrorists? Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, nuclear threat reduction programs have succeeded in dismantling thousands of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems, protecting many tons of nuclear material, and converting additional tons into non-weapon-usable forms. Forty thousand metric tons of chemical weapons have been secured and await destruction. But despite such dramatic gains, progress is continually obstructed by inadequate funding, opposition from shortsighted members of Congress, bureaucratic snags and disputes over access to highly secret facilities. This year with Ploughshares Fund support, two major barriers have been removed.

Paul Walker of Global Green USA was incredulous when conservative members of Congress moved five years ago to completely cut off funding for the destruction of Russian chemical weapons. In 1994, as a professional staff member of the House Armed Services Committee, Walker accompanied the first-ever U.S. government delegation to the Russian town of Shchuch'ye to inspect the top-secret Russian chemical weapons stockpile that was housed there. He was astounded by the dilapidated warehouses that stored over two million artillery shells and missile warheads that were filled with enough deadly nerve gas to wipe out millions of people. Although many of the shells were small enough to be smuggled out in a backpack, the buildings were secured with nothing more than bicycle locks. Yet Congress sought to eliminate funds for upgrading security and building a new facility to safely eliminate the weapons.

From another office in Washington, DC, Ken Luongo of the Russian American Nuclear Security Advisory Council (RANSAC) saw the process of securing and

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**Rescuers spray a mock victim with decontaminating liquid in a simulated terrorist chemical attack.**

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PHOTO: AP/Misha Japaridze

**A plaque marks the site in Shchuch'ye where the U.S. and Russia are building a plant for destroying chemical weapons.**

eliminating Russia’s vulnerable nuclear materials in danger of being derailed by a legal impasse. At the insistence of former Undersecretary of State John Bolton, the U.S. was demanding that the Russians accept full liability for any accident that occurred while carrying out threat reduction projects, even if American contractors were at fault. The Russians refused to go along and negotiations stalled. The dispute was “a dagger pointed at the heart of the future of threat reduction programs,” says Luongo. It not only threatened critical ongoing work, but could potentially doom the Umbrella Agreement governing the entire Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) program, which would soon be up for renewal by the U.S. and Russia.

Thanks to Walker’s and Luongo’s understanding of how to convince policymakers of exactly what is at stake, and how to navigate the arcane American and Russian political systems, full funding for threat reduction programs, including chemical weapons destruction, was restored by Congress and the liability crisis was resolved. Both men are stepping up their efforts to expand support from the international community and to address security threats outside Russia. Luongo says that “much of what we’ve learned under CTR is directly applicable to the dangers posed by nuclear weapons in North Korea and South Asia, and other WMD challenges.” Adds Walker, “For me, the key lesson has been the importance of transparency and honesty at all levels – international, national, regional and local – in moving forward to eliminate these threats.”



PHOTO: Robert Trippett

## PAUL WALKER & KEN LUONGO

Working inside government on nuclear weapons issues convinced both Paul Walker and Ken Luongo of the essential role that non-governmental organizations play in the formulation of public policy. Both were on the staff of the House Armed Services Committee in 1992-93 in what Luongo remembers as a critical time. “Everything I had been working on in the arms control arena was about to change dramatically.” Walker agrees: “The Soviet Union had just collapsed. Congress was holding hearings on the possibility of weapons of mass destruction falling into the wrong hands. And 9/11 hadn’t even happened.”

Luongo went to work as the senior advisor on arms control and non-proliferation to Secretary of Energy Hazel O’Leary, but soon saw that the real challenge was keeping the nuclear threat reduction programs on track. With Ploughshares Fund support he launched the Russian American Nuclear Security Advisory Council, or RANSAC, a unique endeavor to keep influential people in the U.S. and Russia engaged in working to eliminate nuclear dangers and to generate initiatives to address

new challenges that were continually emerging. One RANSAC innovation was the establishment of scientific centers in closed nuclear cities where unemployed Russian nuclear weapons scientists could apply their knowledge to solving real world problems. “It had never been done in the most secret nuclear facilities in Russia before, and would not have been done without Ploughshares,” Luongo says.

Meanwhile, Paul Walker was concerned that relatively little attention was being paid to the daunting chemical weapons threat. He convinced Global Green USA, the U.S. affiliate of Green Cross International, and its founder Mikhail Gorbachev to spearhead the task of pressing for the destruction of Russia’s vast stockpile of poison gas weapons. He has directed Global Green’s Legacy of the Cold War Program for the last decade. “The abolition of chemical weapons in both the U.S. and Russia,” he says, “will set a historic precedent for eliminating a whole class of weapons of mass destruction. Nuclear weapons need to be our next abolition target.”