

News Release



Defense Threat Reduction Agency

U.S. Strategic Command Center for Combating Weapons of Mass Destruction

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CELEBRATING THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program

ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA –National Security leaders around the world, U.S. defense experts, and former Senators Sam Nunn and Richard Lugar are marking the 25th anniversary of the day President George H. W. Bush signed the Soviet Nuclear Threat Reduction Act of 1991 into law. Now known as the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) Program, CTR is hailed as one of the most prescient pieces of legislation ever passed, and the most important nonproliferation program ever.

The idea for the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program began a little more than 25 years ago as the Soviet Union was collapsing and U.S. leaders were concerned about the security of the Soviet arsenal of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). There was great concern about what would happen to these weapons and materials when the Soviet Union ceased to exist. Senators Sam Nunn (D-GA) and Richard Lugar (R-IN) led the effort in the fall of 1991, holding hearings, working with other senators, and drafting the legislation that would bear their name.

The initial bill included \$400 million to help secure, account for, and destroy the enormous stockpiles of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons built up during the Cold War, the factories that produced and stored them, and the planes, missiles and submarines used to deliver them. This WMD complex was spread out over several states that would become independent nations when the Soviet Union collapsed. The bill was passed 84 to 6 in the Senate and on a voice vote in the House of Representatives before being sent to the President.

In the quarter century since the bill was signed into law, the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program has been one of the most successful U.S. national security programs. When the Soviet Union dissolved, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus became the 3rd, 4th, and 8th largest nuclear weapons powers in the world. The CTR program helped those three countries become nuclear weapons-free in short order.

To date, CTR has deactivated more than 7,600 nuclear warheads and destroyed more than 3,600 missiles and missile launchers, 33 submarines, 155 bombers, more than 1.6 million chemical munitions, and more than 4,000 metric tons of chemical weapons.

Secretary of Defense Ash Carter – who, as a young DoD analyst at the time, delivered a key report to Senators Nunn and Lugar in November 1991 outlining the dangers and possible solutions to the Soviet WMD – recently discussed the CTR program on a panel with Senators Nunn and Lugar. “The Cold War –and even the post-Cold Era—is history,” said Secretary Carter, “but the threat of unsecured and loose weapons of mass destruction endures. Thankfully so does the Nunn-Lugar idea and the CTR Team.”

“I don’t think anyone knew just how successful the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program was going to be when they passed it 25 years ago” said Acting DTRA/SCC-WMD Director Shari Durand. “And while CTR has wrapped up in Russia, the program has evolved and expanded beyond the former Soviet Union to address the WMD threats that we face around the world. To call CTR the most important piece of nonproliferation legislation passed since the Cold War might be an understatement. It’s probably one of the most important laws of any kind passed in the past quarter century, period. I am especially proud of DTRA’s role in executing this program.”

The Nunn-Lugar CTR program now operates in more than 40 countries worldwide. Advances in science and technology place an increased importance on countering the threat of biological and chemical weapons, and CTR continues to work with partner nations to mitigate these dangers.

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DTRA is the U.S. Department of Defense’s official Combat Support Agency for countering weapons of mass destruction, addressing the entire spectrum of chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and high yield explosive threats. DTRA’s programs include basic science research and development, operational support to U.S. warfighters on the front line, and an in-house WMD think tank that aims to anticipate and mitigate future threats long before they have a chance to harm the United States and our allies. SCC-WMD, the U.S. Strategic Command Center for Combating Weapons of Mass Destruction, synchronizes Combating Weapons of Mass Destruction efforts across our military’s geographic commands and leverages the people, programs and interagency relationships of DTRA at a strategic level. We work with the military services, other elements of the United States government, and countries across the planet on counterproliferation, nonproliferation and WMD reduction issues with one goal in mind: Making the World Safer.