

U.S.-Soviet Cooperation in Countering Nuclear Terrorism: The Role of Risk Reduction Centers

Sam Nunn

John W. Warner

We live in a world bristling with nuclear technology, ever growing in complexity and danger. In the last decade, there has been a relentless dispersion of the know-how, equipment, and materials necessary to build nuclear devices. In addition to the five declared nuclear powers, two more nations—India and Israel—are assumed to be capable of quickly fabricating a weapon. By the mid-1990s, perhaps as many as twenty nations will have the industrial capability to build nuclear weapons.

We live also in a world of terrorism, ever growing in its influence and virulence. The number of terrorist incidents worldwide has steadily risen from 500 in 1983 to 700 in 1984 to an estimated 1,000 in 1985. However, the destructiveness of contemporary terrorism has increased qualitatively in proportion to its quantitative rise. Suicidal truck bombers can obliterate entire embassies. Car bombs level densely habited city blocks. Previously unknown groups claim credit for destroying crowded, wide-bodied jets in mid-air. There seems to be no limit to their madness.

Accompanying these trends has been an even more ominous development: the emergence of state-sponsored terrorism. Terrorists are no longer necessarily solitary free agents pursuing individual ends or grievances. Increasingly terrorists are supported, directed, or employed by governments that see them as weapons of choice in advancing national interests through means short of declared conventional war. With the active support and backing of hostile regimes, terrorists have benefited immeasurably in terms of their weaponry, mobility, logistics, and intelligence resources.

Should these alarming trends in terrorism and nuclear proliferation ever converge, the world would clearly face a menace of unprecedented dimensions. As devastating as the prospect is, the threat posed by nuclear terrorism

is not limited to the almost unimaginable loss of life and damage that could be inflicted on a single city or area should a nuclear-armed terrorist detonate a device through design or inadvertence. Rather, the threat of nuclear terrorism has the potential of plunging much of the world into accidental or unintentional nuclear devastation.

Far-fetched? Consider these all too plausible scenarios, outlined in a 1984 RAND Corporation study.¹

Scenario 1. Terrorists attack a U.S. nuclear weapons storage depot in West Germany and capture a nuclear device. The United States suspects that the attack may have been instigated by the Soviet Union or that the terrorists may try to escape with the weapon to East Germany. How does the United States determine whether the Soviets played a role in the theft? Assuming the Soviets were not involved, how does the United States enlist Soviet assistance in blocking escape routes across the border? If the nuclear weapon has a short-range launch capability, how does the United States cooperate with the Soviets to ensure that the terrorists do not try to blackmail the Federal Republic of Germany by threatening to destroy its cities from a sanctuary east of the border? Assuming that the terrorists are neofascists intent on derailing West German détente initiatives, how does the United States assure the Soviet Union that the terrorists will not threaten East German cities from launch sites west of the border?

Scenario 2. A radical PLO faction claims to possess a nuclear device, which it threatens to detonate in Israel unless the Israeli government withdraws from East Jerusalem and the West Bank. The threat message is accompanied by a diagram of the device and a small amount of highly enriched uranium. Israel announces that any detonation will be followed by prompt, massive, and, implicitly, nuclear retaliation against states suspected of supplying the terrorists with the nuclear material and/or know-how (Libya, Iraq, or Syria). The Soviet Union announces that any such attack on one of its regional allies will be responded to in kind. Israel reminds the United States of its security commitments. Since neither superpower wants to get dragged into a nuclear war, how do they cooperate in determining whether the terrorist threat is real, and, if so, in nullifying the terrorists?

Scenario 3. A nuclear explosion occurs at a nuclear facility in Iraq, with a massive loss of life. Iraq blames Israel. A new Middle East war seems imminent, raising the specter of a superpower crisis that neither side wants. How do the United States and the Soviet Union cooperate in determining what actually caused the detonation and in defusing the crisis? Was the explosion caused by another Israeli aerial bombing of the facility? Was there an accident caused by the Iraqi operators of the facility? Was the facility attacked by Iranian saboteurs? Or was the detonation set off by Arab terrorists confident that Israel would be implicated?

Another nuclear terrorism scenario comprises the plot of a recent best-seller, *The Fifth Horseman*. Radical terrorists, supplied and trained by Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi, hide a nuclear device in New York City and threaten to detonate it unless the United States forces Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories. How might the United States determine if the threat is real? How could the United States enlist Soviet cooperation in persuading Qaddafi to back down? How could the United States ensure that any U.S. military action against Libya would not escalate into a superpower confrontation?

We believe that scenarios such as these are more than just hypothetically credible. We believe the danger of nuclear terrorism is clear and present and as such demands concrete preparations by the United States and the Soviet Union. These two countries have an overriding mutual interest in preventing such contingencies from ever unfolding or, failing that, in minimizing the possibility that a nuclear terrorism incident could provoke a nuclear exchange between the two. As Vice-President George A. Bush said at a colloquium on nonproliferation in Geneva in 1985, "Although we have so far been spared the terrible specter of nuclear terrorism, that doesn't mean that we don't need to begin addressing this problem."²

Indeed, it is the specter of nuclear terrorism, more than any other factor, that originally prompted and has subsequently sustained our deep interest in promoting U.S.-Soviet agreements on the establishment of U.S.-Soviet Nuclear Risk Reduction Centers and other important risk reduction measures.

Emergence of a Concept

The origins of the Nuclear Risk Reduction Center initiative date back to 1981, when Senator Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) wrote the commander of the Strategic Air Command (SAC), General Richard Ellis, and asked SAC, as the premier defense command in nuclear matters, to analyze the potential for an accidental nuclear exchange between the superpowers and to recommend some initiatives for dealing with the problem. Ellis, now retired from the air force, is serving as the U.S. representative on the U.S.-Soviet Standing Consultative Commission (SCC) and is one of the most thoroughly knowledgeable military men in the area of arms control, as well as an expert in nuclear policies and weapons.

Ellis established a group that studied this issue extensively, and their conclusions are as relevant today as they were five years ago. The SAC analysis showed that both the United States and the Soviet Union needed to improve dramatically their warning and attack characterization capabilities to deal with the use of a nuclear device by a terrorist or other third party in either peacetime or a crisis. Under several possible scenarios, SAC concluded that neither superpower could likely determine the party responsible for such an attack. The analysis identified many unconventional methods of nuclear de-

livery other than such normally discussed platforms as fighter planes or missiles that could be utilized by third parties to explode a device on US or Soviet soil

Joined by our late colleague, Senator Henry Jackson (D – Wash), we responded to Ellis's analysis and recommendations by introducing legislation in 1982 that required the Defense Department to evaluate a number of suggested measures that addressed this and other accidental nuclear war scenarios That legislation resulted in an April 1983 report by Secretary Caspar W Weinberger to the Congress outlining four specific risk reduction measures, all of which were eventually proposed to the Soviet Union

- 1 Adding a high-speed facsimile capability to the hot line
2. Creating a joint military communications link (JMCL) between the Pentagon and the Soviet military command
- 3 Installing high-rate data links between the United States and the Soviet Union and their embassies in the capital of the other country
- 4 Promulgating a multilateral agreement for nations to consult in the event of a nuclear incident involving terrorists

Although the Soviets demonstrated no interest in either the JMCL proposal or the improved embassy data link, agreements were reached with respect to improving the hot line and consultations about nuclear terrorism

In July 1984, the United States and the Soviet Union signed an accord governing the upgrade of the hot line Pursuant to this agreement, a facsimile capability is being added to the hot line that will enable each country to transmit and receive graphic materials In addition, the planned improvements will allow the US and Soviet heads of government to exchange messages more rapidly than they can with the existing teletype The increase in the speed of communication and the ability to send pictures and maps could be especially critical in future crises, including possible nuclear terrorism incidents This capability has been long overdue

The US -Soviet direct communication link will now consist of three circuits (two satellite circuits plus one wire telegraph circuit), one earth station in each country for each satellite circuit, and terminals in each country linked to the three circuits and equipped with teletype and facsimile equipment

The 1984 agreement specifies that the US government will sell the Soviet Union at cost the equipment necessary to install and maintain the improved hot line This transaction will include facsimile equipment, personal computer equipment, modem equipment, and microprocessor systems to ensure the privacy of these sensitive communications Most of this transaction will be completed in the initial sale of the specified equipment to the Soviet Union However, sales of services and additional equipment, including consumable items, will recur periodically over the life of the hot line Congressional

authority for the secretary of defense to execute these sales, on a reimbursable basis with the Soviet Union, was provided by Senate Joint Resolution 108, which we introduced and which both Houses passed in 1985

With respect to consultations concerning nuclear terrorism incidents, discussions with the Soviet Union on this subject bore fruit in June 1985 when the SCC announced that the two nations had concluded the Common Understanding to the Agreement on Measures to Reduce the Risk of Outbreak of Nuclear War between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics of September 30, 1971 (the so-called Accidents Measures Agreements)

The 1971 Accidents Measures Agreement was a spin-off of the SALT I negotiations. It covers three main areas.³

1. A pledge by both sides to take measures each considers necessary to maintain and improve its organizational and technical safeguards against accidental or unauthorized use of nuclear weapons
2. Arrangements for immediate notification should a risk of nuclear war arise from such incidents, from detection of unidentified objects on early warning systems, or from any accidental, unauthorized, or other unexplained incident involving a possible detonation of nuclear weapons
3. Advance notification of any planned missile launches beyond the territory of the launching party and in the direction of the other party

The 1971 agreement specifies that the parties shall utilize the hot line "for transmission of urgent information, notifications and requests for information in situations requiring prompt clarification "

Because of Soviet insistence on strict confidentiality, the June 14, 1985, SCC announcement on the new common understanding was extremely circumspect. It noted only that the understanding dealt with "the use of immediate notifications in connection with the Agreement on Measures" and "in no way changes or expands the Agreement on Measures, it merely records the parties' understanding of their obligations under it." However, at an international conference later that month, Vice-President Bush revealed that the agreement concerned "measures to combat nuclear terrorism." Administration officials subsequently provided the press with a few details on the new understanding, confirming that it clarified U.S. and Soviet responsibilities in the case of a nuclear explosion by a "third party," including terrorists. The officials indicated that although there was a mutual obligation to consult, there was no advance agreement on joint action.

Nuclear Risk Reduction Centers

One important risk reduction measure that has been included in our amendment to the fiscal year 1983 defense authorization act but that was not acted on by the administration was the establishment of Nuclear Risk Reduction

Centers The administration took the position at that time that although these centers might represent a useful long-term goal, it preferred to pursue its own package of proposals before taking on what it regarded as the more ambitious step of negotiating the establishment of the centers

Seeking expert help in fleshing out the center concept and in sharpening our arguments for proceeding with formal negotiations with the Soviet Union on this idea, we formed a working group in 1983 whose members included such experts in national security as former Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger, former CIA Deputy Director Admiral Bobby Inman, Lieutenant General Brent Scowcroft (USAF-Ret), General Richard Ellis, former Under Secretary of Defense William Perry, *Foreign Affairs* editor William Hyland, Georgetown University senior fellow Barry Blechman, and RAND Corporation president Donald Rice

In its report, released in November 1983, the Nunn-Warner Working Group on Nuclear Risk Reduction noted a "rising danger of nuclear terrorism" Although the group conceded that the specific risk in any one year of a terrorist group's acquiring a nuclear device was "no doubt a low probability," it stated that the "cumulative risk covering all such groups over ten or twenty years may be very great indeed" In its view, this sobering assessment underscored the "necessity of the two great powers initiating discussions aimed at establishing an explicit and comprehensive system for the prevention and containment of nuclear crises"

The group applauded President Ronald Reagan for proposing the four risk reduction measures that grew out of our 1982 legislation, however, it disagreed with the administration's decision not to embrace the Nuclear Risk Reduction Center concept, saying that there are "crucial political aspects" to preventing crises that can be addressed only through the "designation of particular representatives and facilities in both nations that would be assigned specific responsibilities for preventing a nuclear crisis"

In February 1984, we introduced Senate Resolution 329, which incorporated the recommendations of the working group and urged the president to propose the establishment of the centers The legislation identified five possible functions for the centers, three of which related directly to nuclear terrorism

- 1 Discussing procedures to be followed in the event of possible incidents involving the use of nuclear weapons by third parties
- 2 Maintaining close contact during nuclear threats or incidents precipitated by third parties
- 3 Exchanging information on a voluntary basis concerning events that might lead to the acquisition of nuclear weapons, materials, or equipment by subnational groups

- 4 Exchanging information about U S-Soviet military activities that might be misunderstood by the other party during periods of mounting tensions
- 5 Establishing a dialogue about nuclear doctrines, forces, and activities

In June 1984, the Senate voted 82-0 to approve an amendment to the FY 1985 defense authorization bill paralleling the language of Senate Resolution 329. This provision was subsequently approved in conference with the House and enacted into law (P.L. 98-525, Sec. 1108).

Negotiations with the Administration

Despite the overwhelming show of congressional support for the risk reduction center concept, the administration did not focus on the proposal in any depth until spring 1985. At that time, a number of factors—including the Soviet Union's return to the Geneva negotiating table, a moderation in the administration's pronouncements on U S-Soviet relations, and the increasing prospect of a Reagan-Gorbachev summit—created a more favorable climate for careful consideration of our 1984 legislation.

At a meeting we hosted in March 1985 attended by members of the Nunn-Warner Working Group and key administration officials in the risk reduction area, we outlined a specific concept for the organization and operation of the centers. Our presentation included a number of optional functions for the centers that we believed warranted consideration. By discussing specific options with the administration, we hoped to identify areas where common ground existed between us and thereby to overcome the administration's past coolness to this concept. A central premise of our approach was that it would be best to suggest some rather modest tasks that the centers could be assigned in their initial phase of operations, recognizing that a more ambitious set of responsibilities would have to evolve over time as the centers demonstrated their worth.

The concept we presented built on the 1971 Accidents Measures Agreement, the 1963, 1971, and 1974 hot line accords, and the provisions of the Antiballistic Missile Treaty dealing with the responsibilities of the SCC. This approach reflected our sense that the Soviets would be more likely to respond favorably to the Nuclear Risk Reduction Center concept if it were presented in the context of an incremental expansion of existing agreements rather than as a new proposal.

Under our concept, the centers would be separate facilities in Moscow and Washington, linked by modern communications equipment, they would keep a twenty-four-hour watch on events that could lead to nuclear incidents. The U S center would be directed by an ambassador-level official who would report directly to the National Security Council through the president's national security adviser. The permanent staff would include diplomatic,

military, and intelligence personnel. We left open the question of whether each center would be jointly staffed by U.S. and Soviet personnel.

At the March meeting, we outlined five options for the functions to be assigned the centers. The first involved a function that has traditionally been associated with the risk reduction center concept—that of serving as the primary point of contact for the exchange of all military information required under U.S.-Soviet agreements (for example, about accidental detonations of nuclear weapons and advance notification of intercontinental ballistic missile test flights). This option corresponded to the function cited in our 1984 legislation concerning the exchange of information about military activities that otherwise might be misunderstood during periods of mounting tensions.

The second option was to have the SCC meet on a rotating basis at the Washington and Moscow centers. The agreements establishing the SCC do not require that the body meet only in Geneva. By associating the risk reduction center concept with the SCC (whose charter specifically assigns it responsibility for the implementation of the 1971 Accident Measures Agreement), we hoped to promote two goals—an expansion and revitalization of the role of the SCC and the incorporation of the center concept within the existing framework of the Accidents Measures Agreement.

Option 3 related to the ongoing bilateral discussions regarding nonproliferation between the United States and the Soviet Union. We suggested that these semiannual discussions led on the U.S. side by Ambassador Richard Kennedy, be held at the centers. If progress so warranted, we also suggested that the two delegations might authorize the establishment of a standing working group on nuclear terrorism that could conduct discussions at the centers more frequently. This option corresponded to another of the functions cited in our 1984 legislation—the exchange of information concerning events that might lead to the acquisition of nuclear weapons by terrorists.

The fourth option was drawn from a proposal by President Reagan in his September 1984 UN speech—regular, institutionalized ministerial or cabinet-level meetings between the two countries. The president suggested that these meetings, which we proposed be held in the centers, could include the exchange of five-year military plans. We also proposed that such meetings discuss the procedures to be followed by both nations in the event of nuclear terrorism incidents.

The last option also related to a proposal that President Reagan had endorsed, although it had been put forward by many others, including a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General John W. Vessey, as well as Senators Carl M. Levin and Sam Nunn, and fifty-three other senators in a letter to the president in 1983—regular, high-level meetings between U.S. and Soviet military officials. These meetings could promote a dialogue on nuclear doctrines, forces, and activities, as recommended in our 1984 legislation. We

indicated that we thought the centers would be an ideal facility for these exchanges

The March meeting was followed by five months of intensive consultations with the administration, during which the participating agencies reached a firm consensus on what was, and was not, viable from their perspective. In many instances, the administration accepted key elements in our proposal. In the course of our discussions, however, four strongly felt administration concerns became evident:

First, to avoid compromising security, the administration was adamant that the centers should not be jointly staffed by U.S. and Soviet teams. Second, doubts about the value and effectiveness of the SCC were so pronounced in some quarters of the administration that any role for this body in the centers was effectively vetoed. Third, the agencies were extremely leery of giving the centers any specific responsibility for joint U.S.-Soviet planning for nuclear terrorism incidents. Notifications and consultations were endorsed, but joint contingency planning was ruled out.

Last, the administration felt strongly that the principal role of the centers should be crisis prevention, not crisis management. Were the superpowers to find themselves in a dangerous confrontation, the administration insisted that existing mechanisms, including the hot line and the crisis control team headed by the Vice-President, would come into play. Thus, the administration stressed that the mandate for the centers should be to help prevent a crisis from occurring by relaying information and facilitating discussions intended to reduce the risk that a tragic misunderstanding would precipitate a crisis. In this context, however, the centers could perform a vital role by ensuring that the United States and the Soviet Union would be making decisions based on an identical data base in Washington and Moscow.

Outcome of the Negotiations

We concurred with some of these reservations. On others, we disagreed, suspending for the time being any further efforts to resolve conflicting perspectives. Within this framework, we were able to reach final agreement with the administration on a specific concept for the initial establishment and functioning of the centers. At an August 26 meeting at the White House with Robert McFarlane, the president's national security adviser, we agreed that the centers initially should be structured along the following lines:

They would be established in Washington and Moscow and maintain a twenty-four-hour watch on any events with the potential to lead to nuclear incidents.

They would be linked by communications equipment equivalent to that accepted in the 1984 hot line upgrade agreement.

The US center would be manned by US diplomatic and military personnel, and vice-versa. Designated liaison officers from each embassy would be given access to the other party's center under controlled escort on a periodic basis.

The centers would serve as communications links for all required military and arms control notifications. They would also function as a meeting place for ministerial-level visits and other diplomatic discussions relating to risk reduction and confidence-building measures and as a meeting place for Incidents at Sea sessions, high-level military exchanges, National War College exchanges, and other discussions designed to promote a dialogue on nuclear doctrines, forces, and activities.

Joint annual reviews of the functioning of the centers would be conducted at the centers. This approach has proved especially helpful in maintaining the effectiveness of the Incidents at Sea agreement, signed on behalf of the US Navy in 1972 by Senator Warner, who in his capacity as secretary of the navy headed the US delegation during the two years of rigorous negotiations.

In our discussions with McFarlane, we made it clear that we continued to believe (and would state so publicly) that, as our experience in operating the centers grew, we envisioned expanding their role into more ambitious areas, including joint planning for responses to incidents involving the use or threatened use of nuclear weapons by terrorists or other unauthorized parties. Other evolutionary refinements might include joint staffing of each center and upgraded communications, such as teleconferencing systems.

Negotiations with the Soviet Union

At a meeting with General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev at the Kremlin on September 3, 1985, we had the occasion to present our concept for the centers directly to the Soviet leader. We were in Moscow as part of a delegation led by Senators Robert Byrd (D-W Va.) and Strom Thurmond (R-S.C.). At the meeting, we handed Gorbachev a set of materials that explained the background of this initiative and summarized the points of agreement we had reached with the administration with respect to the initial organization and functioning of the centers. We also outlined our view of the expanded roles the centers might take on in time. Gorbachev responded positively, stating that the proposal "demanded attention." During our visit to Moscow, we also had an opportunity to discuss the risk reduction center concept with top Soviet Ministry of Defense officials.

Building on this foundation, the United States was able to raise the risk reduction center issue at the November 1985 summit without having to start

from scratch in explaining the concept to Gorbachev. During the summit discussions, the Soviets took a somewhat reserved stance, indicating interest but emphasizing that it was a U.S. initiative (perhaps in the hope of getting us to give up something to gain their assent.)

The summit discussion focused more on the question of where the center question should be negotiated than on how the centers would operate. The Soviet delegation indicated a strong preference for using the Nuclear and Space Arms Talks (NST) in Geneva as the negotiating forum. The U.S. delegation, however, feared having the risk reduction center proposal linked, and thus possibly held hostage, to resolution in the NST negotiations of such difficult issues as the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) and offensive arms reductions. Instead, it advocated independent negotiating teams.

The two sides reconciled their conflicting points of view by adopting a deliberately vague sentence in the U.S.-Soviet summit communiqué: "The two sides agreed to study the question at the expert level of centers to reduce nuclear risk taking into account the issues and developments in the Geneva negotiations." The United States took satisfaction from the words "at the expert level," a diplomatic phraseology normally used to denote separate teams. The Soviets stressed the words "taking into account," which suggested at least an indirect linkage to the NST negotiations.

Notwithstanding this procedural dispute, it is important to emphasize that the two nations did agree in principle to begin negotiating the establishment of the centers. As President Reagan said in his postsummit address to a joint session of Congress: "We agreed to begin work on risk reduction centers."

Future of the Centers

The immediate task is to resolve the issue of the negotiating forum. Here it is worth asking what the implications would be of acceding to the Soviet position that the center question be addressed in Geneva.

First, there are precedents for establishing a risk reduction working group as a formal part of the NST negotiations. In the original START negotiations, the two sides discussed confidence-building measures (CBMs) in a special subgroup prior to the Soviet walk-out in 1983. This approach was also successfully employed in SALT I to produce the 1971 Accidents Measures Agreement.

The principal U.S. concern is that the centers could be held hostage not only to U.S. concessions on such major negotiating issues as SDI but, more narrowly, to selective Soviet goals in the CBM area, such as a ban on close approaches to either side's territory by aircraft carriers of the other side. On the other hand, using the Geneva talks would at least ensure that the Soviet

team negotiating the centers include political as well as military representatives. One source of U.S. frustration during the 1983–1984 talks on the hot line upgrade was that the Soviets restricted their negotiating delegation to technical-level personnel, a move that blunted efforts by the United States to use the talks to promote a broader political dialogue about risk reduction.

The main advantage of using the alternative approach of negotiating teams is that the centers would be isolated from the vicissitudes of the Geneva talks, at least directly. It is important to recall that the hot line upgrade negotiations were carried to a successful conclusion after the Soviets walked out of the INF (Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces) and START negotiations.

If the United States can persuade the Soviets to appoint a full range of political, military, and technical specialists to their team, the main hurdle the United States would have to overcome would be the delicate bureaucratic question of who to put in charge of the U.S. delegation. There are compelling arguments for putting the U.S. center under National Security Council (NSC) auspices rather than assigning this responsibility to the Pentagon or State Department. If a Pentagon or State Department official were put in charge of negotiations, it could prejudice the decision as to where the center is located. Moreover, we are particularly skeptical that the Soviets would continue to show interest in this concept if it appeared to them that the centers were an initiative of the Pentagon. The more the centers are associated with the Defense Department, the greater will be Soviet suspicions that the centers are seen by the United States essentially as an intelligence-gathering device. Since the Defense Department would probably contest putting the State Department in charge of negotiations, we believe the talks should be run out of the NSC, with appropriate Defense, State, and CIA personnel detailed to the delegation.

Conclusion

Strategic arms control efforts have for some time concentrated almost exclusively on the number of launchers and warheads each side has and the possibility of a premeditated strategic strike. With few exceptions, arms control negotiations in recent years have tended to focus on ways to reduce the size or alter the characteristics of U.S. and Soviet nuclear arsenals. In short, nuclear arms control negotiations have been attempting primarily to reduce the risk of nuclear war indirectly by concentrating on the capabilities of the two superpowers to wage one.

We earnestly hope that the Geneva negotiations will be crowned with success and that the two sides can indeed cut their respective offensive arsenals by 50 percent. But even if these talks succeed, there will still be far more than enough nuclear weapons to destroy both countries. This realization

places an extraordinary premium on thinking seriously about catalysts more likely to lead to a nuclear war than the prospect of a premeditated first strike. As Ambassador James Goodby has perceptively observed "Arms control experts have tended to think of risk reduction as not central to present-day security needs, and therefore not worthy of the intense interest and the lobbying efforts given to those more traditional negotiations, particular nuclear arms reduction. This is a mistaken attitude."

Preventing nuclear terrorism should be high on the agenda of U S -Soviet relations. In this regard, Nuclear Risk Reduction Centers can play an invaluable role in facilitating discussions aimed at forestalling possible contingencies and in providing a mechanism for dampening escalatory dangers that might otherwise result from any future nuclear terrorism incident. In addition to these crucial substantive functions, the centers could serve to reassure anxious publics that the governments they have entrusted with command authority over tens of thousands of nuclear devices are giving the highest priority to reducing the risk that any of them will ever be used, whether by design or by accident.

Nuclear Risk Reduction Centers are an idea whose time has come. The challenge confronting the United States and the Soviet Union is to transcend the deep-rooted differences and competing interests that complicate so many aspects of their relationship and to act decisively in this area where their common interests are so clearly manifest.

Notes

1 "Improving the Means for Intergovernmental Communications in Crisis" (Santa Monica: RAND, Report R-3157-FF June 1984)

2 Transcript of Vice-President Bush's remarks to the Groupe de Bellerive colloquium on nuclear proliferation, June 29, 1985

3 U S Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, *Arms Control and Disarmament Agreements, 1982 Edition* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1984)