

# The Russian Nuclear Threat Is Not Gone

By J. MICHAEL WALLER  
 "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." With those soothing words in his 1995 annual message to the U.S., President Bill Clinton assured Americans that the Soviet nuclear threat of old was over.

The year before, Mr. Clinton and Russian President Boris Yeltsin agreed that each country would "de-target" their nuclear missiles aimed at one another and retarget them harmlessly over the Pacific Ocean.

"The children are safe." It's been a standard line in presidential pronouncements ever since—80 at last count. The only problem is that this has more to do with feel-good rhetoric than with reality.

For Col. Gen. Igor Sergeev, commander-in-chief of the Strategic Rocket Forces, the Clinton-Yeltsin missile de-targeting had no effect on his ability to annihilate the U.S. Two days before Mr. Clinton's solemn announcement, the American news program "60 Minutes" broadcast a segment from Gen. Sergeev's war room. The Russian nuclear missile chief said that his weapons could be "retargeted and launched from this war room... most in a matter of minutes."

De-targeting makes for nice headlines, but it is impossible to verify. Retargeting can be as simple as changing a cassette tape.

According to Mr. Clinton, the Russian nuclear arsenal is not merely reducing in size; it is disappearing. After repeating his crowd-pleasing line in a March 2, 1995, speech, he

added, "Both our countries are dismantling the weapons as fast as we can." Not a hint of the ongoing retrofitting of Moscow's fleet of gigantic Typhoon submarines—each bearing 20 SS-N-20 missiles, and each SS-N-20 tipped with 10 nuclear warheads—to house the even more advanced SS-N-24/26. Not a whisper about the secret Sukhoi-T605 strategic bomber or the air-launched cruise missiles under development. Not a word about Russia's new generation Topol-M intercontinental ballistic missile then being readied for its first test launch.

The threat, the president continued, is gone. "And thanks to a far-reaching verification system, including onsite inspections which began in Russia and the United States today, each of us knows exactly what the other is doing."

Not quite. While Russian authorities have allowed many American inspections to take place, they almost routinely bar U.S. officials from certain facilities developing weapons of mass destruction even as they clamor for more aid. The Clinton administration has doled out hundreds of millions of dollars to help dismantle obsolete parts of the former Soviet arsenal, but it has failed to insist that U.S. inspectors be able to account for and monitor what Russian authorities do with the nuclear warheads—even though it agreed to pay to build the secure facilities to store them in Russia.

"We are dramatically reducing the nuclear threat," Mr. Clinton told the U.S. Air Force Academy graduating class of 1995. "For the first time since the dawn of the nu-

clear age, there are no Russian missiles pointed at the children of the United States."

Two days before, the Russians unveiled the new MAZ-79-221, an eight-axle mobile launcher for the Topol-M missile, a first-strike weapon designed to attack the U.S. The day after the speech, the Russian government newspaper Rossiyskaya Gazeta published a revelation by Atomic Energy Minister Viktor Mikhailov that a next-generation nuclear warhead was in production. On Sept. 5, at the Plesetsk cosmodrome, a spokesman for the Military Space Forces announced that Russia had successfully test-launched the Topol-M, adding, "Russia hopes to replace all its outdated missiles in the coming years." Two days later at a campaign fund-raiser, Mr. Clinton claimed for at least the 51st time that America's children were safe.

Mr. Clinton offered a de-targeting agreement to the People's Republic of China but was spurned. Although the Pentagon says that Chinese strategic nuclear missiles are indeed aimed at the United States, the president completely discounted such a possibility in 22 of his 80 speeches surveyed. Visiting Des Moines, Iowa, in October, Mr. Clinton assured a cheering crowd, "there is not a single, solitary nuclear missile pointed at an American child tonight. Not one. Not one. Not a single one."

The Chinese Communists disagree. On Jan. 4, 1996, after returning to Washington from Beijing where he held talks with senior Chinese leaders, former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense Chas. W. Freeman briefed President Clinton's National Security Adviser Anthony Lake about an alarming development. According to the New York Times, Mr. Freeman repeated to Mr. Lake what a Chinese official had told him: Beijing could attack Taiwan without fearing U.S. intervention because American leaders, "care more about Los Angeles than they do about Taiwan." The Times reported that Mr. Freeman characterized the remark "as an indirect threat by China to use nuclear weapons against the United States."

Clinton was unfazed. He promised a gathering of students, parents and teachers in Concord, New Hampshire, on Feb. 2, "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."

If the American press didn't question Mr. Clinton's claims, the former Soviet officer now in charge of Russia's strategic missile-firing submarine fleet did. Rear Adm. Viktor Padruker of the navy general staff echoed Gen. Sergeev in the May 15 issue of Ogonok magazine. "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," he acknowledged. But it didn't really matter: "I know that the missiles can be retargeted in an hour even without returning [our submarines] to their bases."

Despite this, and in the same month, Mr. Clinton's U.S. Senate allies fibbered to kill outgoing Republican Majority Leader Bob Dole's initiative to deploy a system to defend the United States against foreign missile attack. They succeeded. Two days later, Russia announced its 26th ICBM test since 1991. All six dummy warheads hit their target. On June 28, in the Sea of Okhotsk just north of Japan, three Russian submarines fired strategic missiles westward across the Eurasian landmass into the Barents Sea not far from Norway. It was described as the largest such test in Russian naval history.

Meanwhile, top Russian leaders threaten to withdraw from arms control treaties if the U.S. builds even the most rudimentary defenses against strategic missiles. The Clinton administration seems to be going along. And Mr. Clinton's false claims that America's children are safe continue to go virtually unchallenged.

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