

Nuclear Minister Blames Provocateurs

Viktor Mikhailov, Russia's minister of the nuclear power industry, is known as an experienced professional, a skilled lobbyist for his sector, and an unyielding debater. He calls himself a hawk. In an interview with *MN's* Vladimir Orlov, the minister made a number of sensational statements.

The "thieves" are mainly provocateurs. I recently returned from the Chepetsk mechanical works. Over there they keep 100,000 tons of dumps — production waste after the extraction of uranium-235 — the price of which is no more than a few dollars on the world market. And suddenly mysterious people come there and offer workers \$10,000 or \$100,000 per kilo instead of one or five dollars. A temptation may naturally arise.

Who are those, as you call them, "provocateurs"?

Interior Ministry personnel. I asked the minister of internal affairs of Udmurtia: "Why do you do this?" He replied: "We need to identify the possible channels." I told him: "Do you understand that this is pure and simple provocation?" Some of their men are already under investigation and will be put on trial; these are general workers, metal craftsmen and fitters. They brought a trial batch, received the dollars and did not even have time to come home and delight their families when their arms were twisted, their dollars were taken away, and they were put in jail. But the undercover agents received promotion in rank. Of course, every department may have its own ways and means. But not this kind, after all! I brought representatives from local public opinion together and said: "Tell everyone that they will not be able to walk to the shop and buy a bottle of vodka since all of their money will be taken away and they will be arrested."

"I Don't Rule Out That Greenpeace Is Being Financed with Petrodollars"

Isn't this the method which was tested by German special services in Munich in August 1994?

Right. The Germans seemed to have found plutonium. It seemed to have arrived on a flight from Moscow. Further on something incomprehensible began. Russia was not given the material seized in Munich for analysis. But, after all, every plant has its own "face" which can be easily identified by the quantity of "superfluous" isotopes in the material.

That is, every enterprise can be identified by its "finger prints" and then its products will not be confused with anyone else's.

Exactly. Why then was the material not given to Russia for testing, but sent to the U.S. Los Alamos National Laboratory? Yet even there they replied that this was not weapon-grade material, but mixed uranium-plutonium fuel. Then they gave the captured substance for analysis to the International Atomic Energy Agency, and that analysis showed that the



Viktor Mikhailov, Russia's minister for atomic energy.

material was not of Russian origin. The noise started quietly dying down. But what happened before this? Kohl made statements, Schmidbauer came here. Maybe the implication here is the following — to show that Russia is incapable of coping with its nuclear industrial complex and, consequently, it must be placed under the West's control.

But isn't such a prosaic reason as economic competition more probable?

I do not rule this out. I have already said that competition is being stiffened on the world nuclear market. Russia has been making firm advances, for example, in China and Iran. Consumers like our uranium: it is cleaner and cheaper than American as we have the world's best technologies for its enrichment.

At last, it is time to put it bluntly: the trace of the gas and oil complex is visible in the campaign against the Russian nuclear power industry. Is there a need to say how powerful the lobbyists are who operate in pursuit of its interests? I, for one, will not be surprised if I learn that the same Greenpeace is being financed, among other things, with petrodollars. In Europe such an attack has been successful in part. The nuclear power industry has continued to hold and win stronger positions in Japan, North and South Korea, China, India, the countries of the Middle East, Latin America and the Caribbean. The fact that the above-mentioned regions gravitate towards the active development of the nuclear power industry also tends to irk the lobbyists from the oil and gas industry. Isn't it thorough them that journalists get some "exposure" on

"nuclear contraband" which later turn into ordinary false rumors?

"No Country Will Be Able to Make a Nuclear Bomb from Stolen Material"

Did you know about Operation Sapphire being prepared, to sell Kazakhstan's uranium to the United States?

We were perfectly well aware of what kind of material was in Kazakhstan as we had been offered it once. But we refused because we had this material. And all of a sudden the United States loudly code-named this ordinary operation as Sapphire, then it trumpeted about it for the whole world to hear and held a pompous press conference with the participation of three ministers. The ministers spoke about the immense contribution which the United States had made with Operation Sapphire to the cause of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and technologies. Of course, we know the extent to which the United States has been helping Kazakhstan and Ukraine in dismantling and destroying launch mounts. And we respect this aid. However, behind the propaganda wave it must not be forgotten that this aid is a trifle in comparison with what Russia has been doing along the same lines. For Russia the dismantling of the nuclear weapons taken out of Ukraine and Kazakhstan will cost roughly \$2-3 billion dollars. But the Americans have given something like a \$100 million dollars to Ukraine and Kazakhstan. This is merely one-tenth of Russia's spending.

Besides, I do not understand why the Americans carried out Operation Sapphire in secret. Were they afraid of Russia, Iran or Iraq? This is ridiculous.

But one often hears it said: some regimes in the Middle East could like to get hold of nuclear materials from Kazakhstan.

Nonsense. No country will be able to make a nuclear bomb from contraband material. For this you need a big, I would say, giant industry. To create a complex for extraction and processing is only one-fifth of the road. There are another four-fifths of the road needed to create the atom bomb. A country cannot become a nuclear power without such a complete complex.

"There Must Be No Ban on Nuclear Blasts for Peaceful Purposes"

It has been reported that Russia takes exception to the idea of a total ban on every kind of nuclear blasts, which is now being discussed at the talks in Geneva.

On the one hand, a ban on nuclear tests is a major step on the way to nuclear disarmament. On the other, the stockpiled nuclear arsenals call for constant maintenance, especially in the field of their safety. And for this, naturally, there is a need for limited low-yield nuclear tests. This is the military aspect.

As far as the "peaceful" aspect is concerned, I can say that we have carried out 122 nuclear blasts for peaceful purposes, and the Americans — about 50. For the time being these nuclear blasts have not brought about any big economic effect.

On the other hand, nuclear blasts could be instrumental for creating cavities for dumping chemical and petrochemical waste and radioactive waste, so as to reduce to the minimum their negative effect on the ecological situation. Proceeding from this, I personally believe that there must be no ban on nuclear blasts for peaceful purposes. This is not a question for me. It would be too simple to ban "everything." Instead of this we need to decide questions in common about the mechanism of carrying out such experiments as well as control over them. I in general have little faith in bans in science. Scientists will all the same carry on their work and, if a project of interest for the development of humankind as a whole appears, will it be possible to ban it?

And will Russia abide by the moratorium on nuclear testing? The Chinese are carrying on blasts, owing to which there have been difficulties at the Geneva talks. And you yourself once said that "two-three nuclear blasts a year are simply indispensable for Russia."

I do not go back on my word. But I think that we must have restraint. This is especially important at the threshold of the conference on the prolongation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

A New Era for Russia's Nuclear Power Politics

If you visit the prestigious Kurchatov Institute in Moscow as we did several weeks ago, be sure to see the heat exchanger lying on the floor of the IR-8 reactor building. Like a fallen statue of Lenin this set of metal tubes packed into a one-by-three foot aluminium cylinder tells the story of a revolution.

The cylinder is a key component of the IR-8 reactor, and it lays on the floor of the reactor building to be repaired. What is revolutionary is that it was not the reactor's operators at the Kurchatov Institute who decided repairs were needed but Russia's new nuclear regulatory agency, Gosatomnadzor (GAN).

The independent — repeat independent — regulatory body has received sweeping authority from Russian President Boris Yeltsin. It ordered the reactor, which is located in a heavily populated part of Moscow, to be shut down on safety grounds for a major

overhaul. More important is that the scientists at Kurchatov, one of Russia's foremost research centers, with its own reputation for independence and with ample access to Moscow's corridors of power, complied.

In another telling example of GAN's regulatory authority, the agency's nuclear fuel cycle division shut down activities at the Botchvar Institute for Non-Organic Materials Research for six months. In this case, GAN took action after determining that this research center was maintaining inadequate security over its stocks of sensitive nuclear materials — more than enough for a nuclear weapon. To be sure, these independent nuclear laboratories represent easier targets for GAN than the leviathan Ministry of Atomic Energy, (MinAtom), which is also subject to GAN's regulatory oversight. MinAtom is responsible for building, and now dismantling, Russia's nuclear weapons and operates the string of classified nuclear-weapon production complexes, such as Sverdlovsk-44 and Chelyabinsk-26, which to preserve secrecy, were previously known only by their postal codes. MinAtom also designs, builds, and operates Russia's civilian nuclear power reactors.

GAN has not yet ordered any of the major MinAtom facilities that con-

tribute to the production of nuclear weapons to shut down for safety or security infractions, but that day could come. With some 1,200 employees at seven regional centers and its Moscow headquarters, GAN routinely inspects MinAtom activities, and over the past two years the latter organization has grudgingly begun to recognize GAN's authority.

Indeed, earlier this year, GAN denied an operating license to MinAtom's research institute for chemical technology and forced a temporary halt to the operation of a MinAtom-run nuclear power plant in Leningrad.

Moreover, after reports of the smuggling of Russian plutonium to Germany last summer, Yeltsin put GAN in charge of developing and enforcing enhanced controls over Russia's enormous stocks of weapons grade nuclear materials, the vast bulk of which are held at MinAtom installations.

GAN's assertion of regulatory authority remains far from complete, however. It will take a number of years, for example, for it to promulgate standards for the protective measures MinAtom must take to ensure the security of its nuclear materials against theft. And when asked whether GAN possessed a detailed inventory of MinAtom's nuclear holdings — the obvious first step in assessing the adequacy of MinAtom's nuclear material

accounting and control procedures — a GAN official confessed that his agency was still a long way from acquiring such data on a comprehensive basis.

Moreover, although GAN also has authority over the safety of nuclear weapons in the hands of the Russian military and is also charged with overseeing the safety of nuclear submarine propulsion reactors, it is not exercising these mandates. Facing stiff resistance from Russia's armed services, GAN has decided that for now, it will focus on the safety and security of nuclear "materials" rather than finished "articles," such as nuclear weapons, and will concentrate only on land-based nuclear plants.

Still, GAN has already accomplished much, and the authority it has been given is truly extraordinary, even if not completely exercised. Indeed, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission has never been granted authority over U.S. nuclear weapons production facilities, much less over nuclear weapons themselves.

More important is the start GAN has made at establishing and enforcing its nuclear safety and security standards — bringing the first elements of the rule of law to one of the most sensitive and politicized secrets of Russian life.

By Leonard SPECTOR and Andrei ZOBOV, Carnegie Endowment Experts

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