

**International Security  
Nonproliferation  
Arms Control**

**DIGEST OF THE RUSSIAN JOURNAL**

**YADERNY KONTROL**

**(NUCLEAR CONTROL)**

**Volume 7, № 1**

Winter 2002

**PUBLISHER: PIR CENTER FOR POLICY STUDIES  
IN RUSSIA**

Moscow, 2002

*Yaderny Kontrol (Nuclear Control) Digest. Volume 7, No.1. Winter 2002*

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YADERNY KONTROL  
(NUCLEAR CONTROL)**

**International Security. Nonproliferation. Arms Control.**

**Volume 7**

**N 1 (21)**

**Winter 2002**

Published four times a year since 1996

Contains selected analytical articles from *Yaderny Kontrol*, a journal published in Russian six times a year

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Subscriptions worldwide (Russian and English editions): please, send requests to fax +7+503-234-9558 or e-mail: [info@pircenter.org](mailto:info@pircenter.org). Checks or wire transfers. Express mail delivery.

**Circulation:**

Russian journal: 2,000 copies

English Digest: 800 copies

**Signed for printing**

on October 20, 2001

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- The editors wish to express special thanks to the Center for Nonproliferation Studies at the Monterey Institute of International Studies for making this publication possible through its support of the PIR Center for Policy Studies in Russia

**Publisher:** PIR Center for Policy Studies in Russia  
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Commentary

**THE RUSSIAN NGO  
COMMUNITY: A NEW PLAYER  
ON THE RUSSIAN  
NONPROLIFERATION AND  
ARMS CONTROL SCENE**

**by Dr. Vladimir Orlov,  
PIR Director**

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Translation into English. Abridged version

In the early 1990s the phrase “a Russian non-governmental organization in the area of international security, arms control and nonproliferation” sounded, like an oxymoron. Russia inherited from the Soviet Union quite a sensitive attitude towards security, which had always been the domain of the state and its institutions, rather than of NGOs. For a long time many Russian officials could not believe that any organization or institution that was not officially controlled would be *allowed* to address such *sensitive* issues.

**Fighting for the Independence and the Right to Exist**

However, liberalization of social life during Boris Yeltsin’s era and some democratization empowered Russians (both legally and practically) to establish independent research institutions, to set up academic media, including the field of WMD nonproliferation.

For instance, in January 1996 the Russian Federation adopted the *Law on Non-Profit Organizations*. This law has been effective and provides a fair legal basis for the activities of Russian NGOs (although, as it happened, the legal acts, instructions and clarifications approved later did not improve, but worsened, the situation). Publishing and work of the mass media are regulated by one of the most liberal (at least so far) Russian laws.

Obviously, any *complacency* would be *dangerous*. Under the current domestic political circumstances in Russia, it is no longer fashionable to speak about democracy; indeed, some regard this word as nearly obscene. Though it is not a matter of returning to a totalitarian regime, the society is undergoing a long transition. It is not clear

yet whether the principles of freedom of speech and expression which were laid down in the late 1980s and early 1990s will endure throughout this transition, for nowadays some people consider them to be *unnecessary*.

In this context, NGOs are regarded with a certain ambivalence, or even suspicion. Sometimes the nature of the third sector is not understood, and its existence is called into question. Attacks against NGOs in Russia sometimes turn into a kind of organized defamation, whose objective may be to destroy, to shut down, to place under control, to transform into go-NGOs (governmentally controlled NGOs), or to oversee financial flows under the guise of granting formal independence. Therefore, Russian NGOs attempting to promote public awareness of nuclear safety and security issues and environmental problems, and/or to perform *independent* analysis of the Kremlin’s activities (domestic and foreign policy, defense and security matters) find themselves in quite a difficult situation.

There is a saying, “Not all criticism is a thought, but any thought is criticism.” Evidently, in accordance with this saying, if NGOs refrain from *critical* analysis, their intellectual activities will hardly make any sense. What Russia now needs is not more NGOs (several hundreds of thousands of NGOs have already been founded and incorporated), but *critical* and *analytical* NGOs.

I often have to answer the question posed by Western colleagues, “How do you manage to preserve and develop a nonproliferation NGO in Russia at present?” To be honest, it is a difficult task. We manage it, thanks to the enthusiasm of the people who work hard, regardless of the external situation and likely pressure, even when it seems to them that they cannot bear such pressure.

It would be a mistake, however, to go to the other extreme and to claim that NGOs in Russia cannot survive at all. This would simply not be true. NGOs successfully act in various spheres, including nonproliferation and arms control. They implement research projects, work as activists, convene conferences, freely disseminate their publications, have access to the major mass

media, educate the younger generation and influence the opinions of the executive and legislative branch through a wide variety of educational efforts.

Moreover, it may seem paradoxical, but more and more government officials, Duma deputies, and parliamentary staff are opening their minds to new ideas and the independent assessments provided by NGOs. It is no secret that the authorities are overburdened with information and analysis which is produced within the government and is not always unbiased. Large academic institutions – the once powerful think tanks of the Soviet political science – are losing their positions.

Most likely, over the last decade we have succeeded in convincing many government officials of our usefulness. Thanks to our persistency and the quality of our analysis, we have managed to make them *respect* us and *sympathize* with us, sometimes contrary to the sentiments of their *superiors*.

Thus, one may assume that despite numerous obstacles and challenges, *NGOs in Russia will continue to exist, are developing, and have impressive prospects for the future.*

My organization – the PIR Center – was founded in 1994, like many other organizations, by a small group of enthusiasts with varying professional and life experiences, ages, and political beliefs, but with a common view on how to develop of the organization in a way that would give special emphasis to the adjective “nongovernmental”. Some of my colleagues had worked for the state and now sought freedom of expression. Others, who were younger, were inspired by the opportunity to build something new that went beyond traditional patterns. Now, in the next few weeks we will celebrate the seventh anniversary of *Yaderny Kontrol Journal* – the first major project of the PIR Center. When we started the journal had a few hundred readers; nowadays we have thousands. We began with a single project; today we have seven different periodicals and two dozen research projects. The number of our personnel has increased tenfold. Our progress has been truly significant.

### **Nonproliferation Watchdogs**

What are the major present-day tasks for Russian NGOs working in the area of security, nonproliferation, and arms control?

*First*, NGOs should, and are able to, participate in *formulating Russia’s nonproliferation policy*. We should not wait for the authorities to seek to work with us, to restrain our activities and to cut the opportunities for independent research. We should take the initiative in working with the authorities and convey our position and our concerns – through conferences and seminars, through dissemination of our publications, and through direct interpersonal communication.

*Secondly*, NGOs should contribute to *shaping public opinion* and hence, to affecting the ideas and actions that lead to WMD proliferation in Russia. It is quite difficult to influence Russian public opinion, but this is not a reason to abandon education and training efforts aimed at wider audiences, those that attempt to reach the public through educational projects, the press, and the Internet.

*Thirdly*, NGOs should continue to provide *independent expertise* in the area of nonproliferation and arms control (especially with respect to nuclear weapons), to draw the public’s attention to urgent nuclear safety and security matters, to the shortcomings of MPC&A, to the brain drain and illicit trafficking in nuclear material and to violations of export control regimes. Investigations and research are somewhat impaired, however, for although we enjoy the legally binding right of access to information, the authorities give us the information we seek very reluctantly. We need to be persistent.

*Fourthly*, NGOs should not forget that any debate about “strategic stability,” “balance of interests,” etc. cannot overshadow Russia’s (and the P-5’s) *unequivocal commitment* to move towards general and complete nuclear disarmament. When we say “security” we mean “disarmament.” This is why our key mission is to facilitate US-Russian dialogue in the area of strategic and tactical nuclear arms control, so that the nuclear arsenals of the

parties keep diminishing and other nations may join the disarmament process.

### **Ten Conditions of NGO Survival and Progress**

Although the third sector in Russia survives and hopes for the best, no one can guarantee the sustainability of its development. Clearly, certain conditions are critical to NGOs' success in such spheres as international security (including arms control and nonproliferation). What are these conditions?

(1) Above all, an organization should be incorporated and should conduct its activities on *Russian territory*. This is a crucial factor for success, as it facilitates the accomplishment of many of the aforementioned tasks. In the future, this factor will probably remain to be crucial.

(2) Such an organization *should be completely independent* of the Government, lobbyist groups associated with the Government, and of political parties. This independence should be both legal and financial. Now that the authorities (and large political players as well as big businesses) feel the temptation to *control everything that is controllable*, it would be a big mistake to seek favors from the authorities (in the form of their being founders or *funders*), since such relationships are fraught with political entanglements. In addition, it would be difficult for the organization to ensure unbiased analysis under these conditions. NGOs should avoid two extremes – groundless criticism and appeasement. They should strive to achieve independence and to provide high-quality analysis and a critical appraisal of developments.

Meanwhile, the degree of influence of NGOs on decision-making depends on their ability to maintain fruitful contacts with the branches of power and to affect their policy.

(3) Such organization clearly should evidently be *non-profit*. It is known that the Russian legislation does not prohibit NGOs from engaging in commercial activities, unless these activities run counter to the objectives and tasks stated in their statutes or founding charters. Russian NGOs should strictly comply with the letter of the law.

(4) The organization should be financed *from more than one source*. It is better to secure grants from several foundations than to have one large grant from a single donor. Although it is more complicated to administer several grants from different sources, it is worth the trouble, as multiple sources of support help to avoid the danger of over-dependence on one source.

For mature Russian NGOs with sound financial track records, it is important to *obtain two- or three-year grants*, since multi-year grants facilitate strategic planning and personnel management.

(5) In the long run, *people*, with their intellectual abilities, enthusiasm and devotion to the organization, are *more decisive* to an organization's success than other factors. There is no standard way to attract good people and build a sound staff, but it seems helpful to bring together people of different generations. This creates an excellent combination of experience and practice and energy and fresh concepts. It would be useful also to encourage an inflow of young specialists and university graduates from the regions (including from the closed nuclear cities). There are many problems in this sphere, but some of them can be solved if a system of fellowships and internships in nonproliferation for young Russian specialists is set up, as I have proposed.

(6) To carry out high-quality analysis, an NGO must have *a combination of social science and technical expertise*. Arms control, nonproliferation, or projects aimed at reducing threats of international terrorism are inter-disciplinary subjects, and political scientists, military personnel, or physicists by themselves cannot give a comprehensive and balanced picture. Moreover, not all NGOs can afford to recruit specialists in different areas. In this event, it is important to maintain close ties with the university community and to turn to it for consultation. We often underestimate the academic capabilities of universities and other Russian institutions of higher education, although they may in time become true partners of NGOs both in Moscow and in the regions without affecting their independence, contributing rich expertise and paving the

way for NGO-conceived or run educational programs within the universities.

It is noteworthy that a Moscow-based technical university (MEPhI), in cooperation with the PIR Center, has become an educational pioneer. Their combined efforts resulted in a new educational program in Russia - "Security and Nonproliferation of Nuclear Materials"- which has now become the model for similar programs in a number of other universities, including several regional ones.

However, NGOs in Russia can hardly afford such a luxury as pure research and analysis. They need an activist and outreach component to their work.

(7) This is why research activities should be combined with a *wide outreach* - in the form of publishing (journals, newsletters); work with the mass media (the latter often prefer to do without expert assessments, but the situation has begun to change slightly for the better); and finally, through Web sites and electronic newsletters.

A number of target audiences (such as government officials and legislators) still require traditional methods of outreach, education, and interaction - conferences, seminars, and round tables. However, for other audiences, cheaper and more efficient options are available, thanks to technological progress, and should be widely used. These more efficient options include online conferences, video conferences, CD-ROMs, Internet libraries, etc.

(8) An indispensable element of outreach is well-planned *feedback*, which enables the organization to evaluate its effectiveness.

(9) NGOs should *strictly comply with Russian legislation*. I could say a lot about attempts of the Russian bureaucracy to diminish the effects of the equality granted by the law to the third sectors. There are also dozens of examples of the inefficiency of the laws. My colleagues from other NGOs could add dozens of their own examples, and finally, we would have a picture of Russian practices with respect to the NGOs. These practices are far from the norms of a state governed by the rule of law. We express our discontent. A number of lawyers have made

recommendations to the legislators, detailing these practices and demanding their abrogation. Nevertheless, it will presumably be a long process before Russian NGOs are able to defend themselves from the arbitrary actions of the officials, from ignorant or corrupt tax collectors, etc.

Nonetheless, the existing laws should be observed, otherwise we will never achieve the rule of law.

This situation indicates that Russian NGOs need *constantly available legal assistance*. To a certain extent, the role of a law clinic in Russia has been played by the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF). But Russian NGOs have more questions and concerns than the small number of CAF lawyers can physically handle. But even the most successful NGOs cannot afford to have professional and skillful lawyers on their staffs. Therefore, this situation is one of the most urgent ones to address. It also relates to the problem of accounting accusations in the non-profit sector. The risk of falling victim to arbitrary actions by officials is high, while experience with defending one's rights and freedoms is still limited.

(10) An indispensable condition for sustainable development of the third sector in Russia is *interaction and mutual assistance among NGOs, including both research and activist organizations*. We are fighting for a common cause. We have nothing to quarrel about. With trends toward *control* of human rights and freedoms and *controllable democracy* growing in Russia, the Russian NGOs working in the area of nonproliferation and arms control should coordinate their efforts. They should jointly resist all attempts of the Russian authorities to guide the activities of the NGOs and to stimulate public distrust of NGOs. Such coordination should begin with regular exchanges of information about activities and projects, exchanges about legal experiences, and implementation of joint projects and eventually lead to the establishment of a Russian Nonproliferation and Arms Control NGO Network.

As the first step, I would support the proposal of my senior colleague Amb. Roland Timerbaev that before the end of 2002

a collection of articles by the leaders of Russian NGOs active in this sphere should be published. The articles may be devoted to their vision of the role and prospects for the third sector and their organizations in present-day Russia and in Russia of tomorrow. The PIR Center could coordinate the editorial process. I would like to invite to participate my highly respected colleagues from the Center for Disarmament, Energy and Environment (Anatoly Dyakov), the Center for War and Peace Journalism (Mikhail Pogorely), the Committee of Scientists for Global Security (Mikhail Vinogradov), the Center for Political and International Studies (Alexander Nikitin), the Movement for Nuclear Safety (Natalya Mironova), and others.

#### **Russian NGOs and the West**

Now-a-days I often hear the following question asked, "Does partnership with Western NGOs hamper the activities of Russian NGOs, given the growing suspicion of the Kremlin regarding NGOs?" There are even rumors that some Russian NGOs are already curbing such cooperation.

I feel strongly that such contacts are absolutely necessary. Nor has anyone actually curtailed such interaction. On the contrary, now that Russian NGOs have passed through their period of adolescence, we have a unique opportunity to collaborate with Western NGOs as true and equal partners, which may enhance mutual respect and the efficiency of such cooperation.

Russia is a part of the Western world. At present, one can feel a trend towards more integration with the civilized world, and this course is of strategic importance.

In this connection, the experience of the West's third sector is particularly valuable for us. Cooperation with US partners was the key element of the activities of Russian NGOs at the dawn of this movement in Russia, and it is still a key element. Meanwhile, Russian institutions are working to expand their ties with other western countries – the UK, Germany, Italy, Norway, France, etc.

In this context, one cannot help mentioning the contribution since 1991 of the Center for

Nonproliferation Studies of the Monterey Institute of International Studies to nonproliferation training and to forming the present community of nuclear nonproliferation experts in Russia and the CIS.

To date, many Russian and US NGOs have established long and sustained cooperation and continue to carry out joint projects and to hold joint seminars and conferences. Such joint projects have been launched by the PIR Center and CNS, the Center for War and Peace Journalism and the Center for War, Peace and News Media at New York University, the Committee of Scientists for Global Security and Stanford University, by the Center for Export Controls and the Center for International Trade and Security at the University of Georgia, etc. RANSAC comprises representatives from both countries. The Carnegie Moscow Center is a representative office of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, but it might well be regarded as a Russian-US "joint venture".

Thus, a channel for bilateral nonproliferation dialogue at the expert, non-governmental level has been established. This dialogue is not sensitive to changes in official bilateral relations. On the contrary, when these relations deteriorate, when diplomats do not hear one another or receive distorted information, contacts among the NGOs enable the countries to exchange more accurate information, to perform a calm analysis, and to find ways out of the stalemate.

Joint activities of the Russian and US NGOs in the area of nuclear nonproliferation resulted in the establishment of the Moscow Forum for Nuclear Nonproliferation. This forum emerged during the Moscow International Nonproliferation Conference held jointly by the PIR Center and the Carnegie Moscow Center in October 2000. The conference brought together more than 200 representatives of 24 states. It provided an opportunity to share ideas not only for experts from North America and Europe, who normally dominate such international forums, but for specialists from Iran, Pakistan, India, Israel, and Cuba as well.

The Moscow International Nonproliferation Conference played an important role in shaping an international environment conducive to promoting nonproliferation values. Besides, it was the first time that Russian NGOs working in this field were united within one forum.

It is common knowledge that Western nations (notably the United States) are not only a source of strong contacts with research partners, but also the major (and sometimes the only) source of funding.

The generally negative attitude of the Russian authorities towards the fact that the third sector in Russia is mostly financed by US foundations is well known. However, there is a lot of myth-making about it, too. Even when such a negative attitude is present, it is mitigated by the fact that even some important programs of such sensitive state structures as the MOD, the Minatom, Gosatomnadzor, depend on foreign (above all US) assistance.

In any case, we do not have to be embarrassed about the sources of our funding, regardless of the location of the *funders'* headquarters. We are proud of the list of our donors and display it prominently in our publications.

We would be happy to add to this list some Russian foundations. But new Russian entrepreneurs have not yet been inspired by the example of US donors and prefer to immortalize their names by building palaces for themselves rather than by supporting Russian nonprofit activities. I still hope that the situation will change one day for the better. Going forward, we will try to include in our educational programs training programs for businesses, which claim to be interested in strengthening peace and promoting disarmament, as well as for other sectors.

The involvement of big and respectful Russian business in supporting the third sector is the matter for the future. Nowadays it is important to preserve the financial independence of Russian NGOs, to strengthen it without dubious commercialization. Perhaps, in the future one may think about forming an endowment for leading Russian NGOs in the area of nonproliferation. Anyway without attention and backing of large US foundations, the self-confidence and dynamism of NGOs will suffer. We count on this support.

For this reason, many in Russia follow the developing activities of the newly established foundation – the Nuclear Threat Initiative. The leaders of Russian NGOs keep in mind Vladimir Putin's letter to Sam Nunn and Ted Turner stating that, *"Russia is open for broad cooperation with the United States" in the area of nonproliferation and further arms reduction "both at the governmental and non-governmental levels. I assume that there are good prospects for your work with Russian partners."*

Obviously, the development of cooperation between Russian NGOs and Western partners requires *equality and transparency*. The nonproliferation community is a small village. There should be no rivalry and no attempts to distinguish between big brothers and younger brothers, even though the financial capability of US NGOs clearly differs from that of Russian NGOs, since the economies of the two nations differ. It is important to ensure that foundations encourage such equal and transparent cooperation.

Hopefully, this interaction will have a bright future. Many NGOs working in this area are mature and competent organizations, so we assume that they will be able to protect their independence, their freedom of analysis and expression, and their opportunities for broad dissemination of information, for nonproliferation's sake.