

Chicago syndrome

With each passing month the feuds among bandits in Russia are acquiring an increasingly brutal character.

Igor BARANOVSKY

Until recently the shoot-out at the Moscow Alliance car show last summer was considered to be the most brutal confrontation yet between criminal groups. At that time six persons were killed in an armed battle between a Chechen and a Slav mafia groups. Equally well known is the incident involving the assassination of Amiran Kvantrishvili and another four persons in the office of the Vodolei (Aquarius) firm which occurred at roughly the same time. It seemed that these crimes could hardly be topped for their insolence and number of victims. However, already in the autumn of 1993 a new record was set by an emergency which rocked not only the Ryazan Region but the whole of Russia — on November 25, five masked men armed with AK automatic rifles burst into one of the city discos. The result of carnage was nine persons killed and another eight wounded.

This year began with unprecedented criminal acts in St. Petersburg. On the night of January 18 on the territory of the Oktyabrsky District a militia patrol stopped for checking a Moskvich-2141 car which was towing a Mercedes. In the luggage compartment of the Mercedes the

Plutonium reserves could create a disaster

Russia possesses plutonium reserves of over 140 tons, which is 50% more than the corresponding stocks of the USA, says Alexander BOLSUNOVSKY, an expert on Russia's plutonium complex. At present he works at the Monterey Institute of International Studies in California.

Vladimir ORLOV,

MN special correspondent

In an interview with the MN correspondent in San Francisco, Alexander Bolsunovsky said:

The total amount of plutonium produced in the USSR, and then in Russia for military purposes, as well as information on separate production facilities remain classified. At any rate, official figures were never published in the Russian press, and the Ministry for Atomic Industry pretends that all this is still top secret. For example, the amount of radioactive waste kept in the vicinity of secret cities is still concealed. It is probably still believed that any information connected with the reserves of components for nuclear weapons may be used by the "secret services of the potential enemy"...

A pistol upon retirement

A new type of small-arms owners is appearing

Maybe, the "potential enemy" as well is in no hurry to disclose its figures on weapon plutonium?

On the contrary, the USA was the first to stop the production of plutonium for warheads in 1988 and since then has been actively declassifying this information. In 1993, the US Congress published materials about all enterprises, under the Power Ministry, which took part in dismantling nuclear warheads, hence those previously involved in their production. Numerous drawings in the congressional documents show the diagrams of the movement of the warhead components between enterprises. The tables and diagrams show the movement of the number of dismantled warheads by year, beginning in 1980, and even in certain periods — by month. The photographs show the storages of nuclear components of warheads at the Pantex works, with explanations in the text regarding their inner structure. The USA openly published data on the overall production of weapons-grade plutonium from 1945-88.

The US press published the estimated value of weapons-grade plutonium produced in the USA at 100 tons...

Even before your calculations American scientists made their own analysis of plutonium reserves in Russia. How accurate was it in your opinion?

In the first reviews by American researcher Thomas Cochran from the Natural Resources Defense Council (co-author with Robert Norris) the stocks of plutonium fit for the production of nu-

clear weapons in the USSR (it should be noted that plutonium was produced, is still produced and kept only on the territory of Russia) were estimated at 100 tons. In subsequent reviews the authors quoted a figure of 115 tons. This was in 1990 and no doubt the figure was understated because of some inaccuracies in the initial information.

In April 1992, I published my calculations for the first time: 125-150 tons with the most likely estimate being 140 tons. I stick to these figures up to this day.

As for Cochran, in late 1993, on the basis of specified calculations, he published a new estimate of the total production of weapons-grade plutonium in Russia. His new figures are staggering. The total amount is 177 tons; figures from separate enterprises are estimated as follows: 58 tons produced in Chelyabinsk-65, 74 tons in Tomsk-7, and 45 tons in Krasnoyarsk-26.

Assuming that the mistake in the calculations of American researchers in assessing the production of Russian plutonium is similar to that in assessing the production of weapons-grade plutonium in the USA, it will show that the reserves of weapons-grade plutonium in Russia are 50% more than those in the USA.

One can argue about Cochran's figures, prove that they are somewhat overstated. One can assume that he is right if the plutonium production waste is included in those 177 tons. As for waste, I know for sure that the losses at Russia's plants are very large. As long as the Tomsk-7 (two) and Krasnoyarsk-26 reac-

tors keep running (and they will operate at least until the year 2000) plutonium reserves in Russia will greatly outnumber those in the USA.

Experts at the Ministry of Atomic Energy and the Defense Ministry of Russia proceed from the fact that weapons-grade plutonium is, so to say, Russia's second gold reserve, a sort of national wealth which must be preserved, if not multiplied...

Like most other plutonium experts, I am also convinced that it is not a blessing but a real evil which we must get rid of, and the sooner, the better. Science has not yet invented highly effective, safe and economical ways of using plutonium. This problem is being tackled by the best scientists in the USA, Belgium, France and particularly Japan, but so far with no noticeable progress.

San Francisco

MN file

Alexander Bolsunovsky, Candidate of Sciences (Physics and Mathematics), is 40 years old. He works at the Institute of Biophysics of the Siberian branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, member of the commission for studying the work of the plutonium complex of Krasnoyarsk-26. He investigated radioactive pollution in Chelyabinsk-65 and Tomsk-7. One of the authors of the book "Atom without the Stamp 'Classified': Viewpoints" (Moscow-Berlin, 1992) is now working in the USA on a book about weapons-grade plutonium.

