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## Undoing Adamov

By Vladimir Orlov

President Vladimir Putin's decision to fire Nuclear Power Minister Yevgeny Adamov is a significant event and an encouraging sign for those who are concerned about fostering an appropriate international climate to ensure the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons and dual-use technologies.

Russia has always observed its obligations as an officially recognized nuclear-weapons state and as the successor of the Soviet Union. Moreover, a nonproliferation policy clearly corresponds with Russia's national interests. It avoids the problems that would be caused by unpredictable neighbors armed with weapons of mass destruction and facilitates Russia's efforts to preserve its elite status on the world stage.

Adamov, however, ignored these obvious truths. Although he mouthed platitudes about the "importance" of nonproliferation, in practice he expedited a number of nuclear deals that ran counter to Russia's national interests and its international commitments.

For instance, during Putin's visit to India last October, Adamov lobbied a proposal to supply New Delhi with 58 tons of uranium dioxide for a nuclear-power plant in Tarapur. This deal had only limited commercial appeal, but it undermined Russia's political positions and was a transparent violation of Moscow's obligations as a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group. All NSG member states except Belarus denounced the plan at the NSG meeting last December, and the Clinton administration declared the Tarapur deal "a serious threat" to the nonproliferation regime. In short, Adamov dealt a serious blow to Moscow's international prestige.

Adamov, however, went further and last December he publicly declared that Moscow might withdraw from the NSG and other international export-control regimes "if current restrictions concerning cooperation in peaceful nuclear energy uses are not modified." Such ultimatums run counter to Russia's official policy with respect to the NSG.

Adamov's proximity to Putin and to certain influential business communities helped him convince the president to include the so-called "initiative on nonproliferation" in his Millennium Summit speech at the United Nations in New York last September. This initiative stated some noble political goals, but in practice it called for a number of dubious measures. According to Nikolai Ponomaryov-Stepnoi, a leading expert of the Kurchatov Institute, the ideas contained in the technical part of Putin's statement were "unclear to the public, have caused equivocal interpretations and have not been accepted by many experts." He argued that "such innovations have not yet been proved with scientific and technological work and are not indisputable as far as major principles are concerned."

Adamov also launched a large-scale campaign



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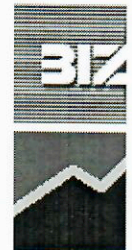
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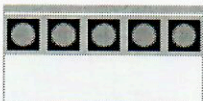


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**There is no reason why Russia should not proceed with the construction of the Bushehr nuclear power plant in Iran.**

in favor of amendments to existing legislation governing the import of spent nuclear fuel. In principle, such imports do not threaten the nonproliferation regime and could even result in some commercial benefits for Russia.

However, it is certain that the \$20 billion figure constantly cited by Adamov was a conscious deception of the public and the country's leadership. Although a number of skeptical officials argued that the proposal requires thorough scrutiny in order to avoid undermining Russia's national security, Adamov preferred to ram his initiative through the State Duma regardless of any obstacles. Fortunately, though the Duma passed the bill in its first reading, it wisely postponed voting on the second reading.

Adamov's replacement as nuclear power minister, Alexander Rumyantsev comes from the Kurchatov Institute and immediately faces a number of difficult tasks. Experts highly esteem Rumyantsev's professional skills and the promise he seems to bring to his new post. In order to build on this esteem, Rumyantsev should state unequivocally and immediately that the Nuclear Power Ministry will abandon any attempts to substitute its corporate policy for state policy in the area of nuclear nonproliferation. He must pledge that the ministry's leadership will remain committed to Russia's international nonproliferation obligations, its national legislation and the provisions of the 2000 National Security Concept.

Strict compliance with the nonproliferation regime, however, does not preclude the ministry's commercial activities in the area of nuclear export. On the contrary, it has vast opportunities in this sphere. There is no reason why Russia should not proceed with the construction of the Bushehr nuclear power plant in Iran. However, Moscow will have to rethink the fate of some other deals.

We can only hope that the changes within the Nuclear Power Ministry will enable the Foreign Ministry to speak about Russia's commitment to nonproliferation without any reservations or hesitations. In the field of nonproliferation, transparency is of the utmost importance. The logical next step at this point would be to form an arms control and nonproliferation agency directly subordinate to the president that would develop and monitor a coherent, coordinated policy in these areas. Such an agency could also monitor international threat-reduction assistance to Russia and should be headed by a diplomat with an impeccable international reputation.

Such an agency would defend Russia's national interests — not least from those within the Nuclear Power Ministry who, like Adamov, confuse their corporate interest with national policy and thereby undermine the president on the international stage.

*Vladimir Orlov is director of PIR-Center for Policy Studies, a nonprofit nongovernmental organization that studies arms control and nuclear nonproliferation issues. He contributed this comment to The Moscow Times.*

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