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Security

The Nuclear Eight: Expectations and Chances

Leaders of the seven leading industrialized countries and Russia meet in Moscow on April 19 and 20 to discuss nuclear security problems.

By Vladimir ORLOV,

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This is the first time that the "G-8" will meet at a summit that does not fit in with the annual timetable of top-level meetings. Moreover, the idea came from Russia, and its agenda contains a theme that is equally sensitive to heads of state and ordinary citizens. The Eight produce most of the world's nuclear power, and they own 80 percent of all nuclear reactors. All official owners of nuclear weapons, except China, will be represented in Moscow.

To most ordinary citizens, the words "nuclear power" symbolize the unbreakable bond of good and evil. Atomic power is one of the most important and ecologically pure energy sources. Global nuclear power replaces the need to burn 800 million tons of coal leading to the discharge of an additional 1.5 billion tons of carbon dioxide. The evil can be seen in Hiroshima and Chernobyl. Today, there are new threats of nuclear terrorism, nuclear blackmail and the theft and smuggling of nuclear materials.

Nuclear theft has been blown out of proportion by journalists. The result was a string of "soap bubbles" and unverified rumors. Russia wants to discuss issues linked with the safety of nuclear power stations and cooperation in that area.

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It is reluctantly ready to discuss the safety of "military atoms." Realizing that it is always better to attack, Russia is seeking to shed its perennial role as the target of criticism for its poor handling of nuclear materials. To that end, Russia will insist on creating measures to halt the illegal trafficking of nuclear materials and prevent the threat of nuclear terrorism. It will most likely suggest adopting some international rules that will make it possible to arrest violators, and the drafting of a protocol of cooperation between the

eight countries' secret services. In other words, Russia will agree that the problem exists and needs attention. It is difficult to disregard progress in military technology, including the development of compact nuclear explosive devices. This means the talks about nuclear smuggling and nuclear terrorism will only touch the tip of the iceberg. No country, be it the United States or Russia, can deal with the problem alone.

One ought to avoid pinning too much hope on the conference. Practical policy, particularly one con-

ected with nuclear technology, is not hammered out at short-lived summits. Yeltsin's and Clinton's election strategies force them to say the summit was "a complete success" or "a breakthrough." The Moscow summit is similar to the recent anti-terrorist meeting at Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. It is naive to think that the Chechen terrorists will quiet down after April 20, that unaccounted for kilograms of plutonium will disappear from Japan or that Israel will renounce its nuclear weapons. The meeting may improve cooperation between the Eight in accountability and safety of nuclear materials, at concrete facilities, and assist in the spread of advanced systems such as those already introduced at Obninsk and the Kurchatov Institute. But this will take more than one year to accomplish. Real life is nothing like a Hollywood blockbuster with its guaranteed happy ending.



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