

Russia Reacts To Cheney Nuke-War Policy Threat

by Jonathan Tennenbaum

The strategic insanity of Dick Cheney's Bush Administration, including the new U.S. doctrine of "pre-emptive" use of nuclear weapons, has triggered a far-reaching shift in military planning on the part of Russia, China, India, and other nations, that can have very nasty consequences for the United States and the world. Most explicit has been the response from Russia. For the first time since the end of the Cold War, decisions on development and deployment of new weapons systems are being moved by the realization, that in the event of a continuation of the present policy-course in Washington, the eventuality of a large-scale war involving nuclear weapons is becoming increasingly probable. The activities of the Russian military-scientific-industrial complex are being reshaped in accordance with the intention to develop an "asymmetric response" to this war threat, involving some crucial elements of technological surprise.

An indication of this shift, was given by Russian President Vladimir Putin's July visit to the Russian Federal Nuclear Center at Sarov—the nation's top nuclear weapons laboratory, famous in Soviet times as the "closed city" Arzamas-16. At a well-publicized roundtable discussion with the scientific leadership of the Nuclear Center on July 13, Putin declared: "The quality of our nuclear weapons is the basis of Russia's security. These weapons must fulfill the most stringent demands. . . . Your institute is the most powerful center of advanced science in the world. Here are concentrated the talents and knowledge of generations of Russian scientists. . . . We need the broadest possible spectrum of scientific investigation, experiment, construction, and testing. Now you are concentrated on perfecting the battle-readiness of nuclear weapons, both those already developed and those now in the process of development. . . . Russia is, and will remain, a great nuclear power."

Subsequent statements and actions by leading military and scientific officials made it clear that Putin meant business. On Aug. 26, a member of a leading strategic institute in Moscow commented to *EIR*: "For some time now, particularly in response to the declarations of preventive war, from President Bush in June 2002, and then the U.S. 'National Security Strategy' of September 2002, Russia has been moving to bolster its defensive capabilities in a very big way. The hard facts have been covered openly in the press, but the Americans prefer not to see it." The Russian expert emphasized the development of new types of nuclear weapons; the ongoing upgrading of Russia's multiple-warhead missile

force; and the construction of new, "ultra-quiet" types of submarines; and pointed also to the holding of large-scale naval and air maneuvers in the Far East region in late August.

These exercises involved the Pacific and Northern Fleets, the strategic and front-line aviation, and troops of the Far Eastern Military District ranging from the Sea of Okhotsk to the Bering Sea and Sea of Japan. Adm. Viktor Kravchenko, chief of the General Staff of Russia's Navy, called them "unprecedented in the history of the Russian Navy in terms of scale, range of participants, and area."

Meanwhile, in an interview with the military news service Itar-Tass, Adm. Vladimir Kuroyedov, chief commander of the Russian Navy, underlined a shift in strategy connected with the coming "fourth-generation" of submarines, that are to rejuvenate the Russian undersea forces. "We won't build giant submarines any more," he said, pointing to the example of the planned delivery to the Navy, in 2006, of the first submarine of the new 935 Borei series. The Borei class will be fast, half the size of the Typhoon-class, and will carry 20 sea-launched ballistic missiles of a new type.

Opening Up Nuclear Pandora's Box

Most far-reaching, however, is the unleashing of a qualitatively new "nuclear arms race." On Aug. 12, the 50th anniversary of the first Soviet hydrogen bomb test, former Atom Minister and now scientific director of the Federal Nuclear Center Viktor Mikhailov told the daily *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*: "The development of new thermonuclear weapons is now going on in several countries, including the U.S.A. and Russia. The spectrum of such weaponry is extremely large. . . . Up to 1953, we were behind the Americans in the development of nuclear weapons; but starting 1953, and up to today, *we are ahead of them*." Mikhailov dropped a bombshell by pointing to some revolutionary areas of nuclear research, now being pursued in Russian laboratories, that have the potential to change the entire "geometry" of warfare.

Nuclear weapons existing up to now, are based on fission—the splitting of nuclei of heavy elements, which provides the energy source of the atomic bomb, now mostly used as the "detonator" for the much more powerful hydrogen bomb—or, on fusion of nuclei of light elements, the energy source of the hydrogen bomb. But during the cold war, scientists also examined many alternative nuclear processes, including some very exotic and "devilish" ones; however, none of these were developed into operational weapons. But now, thanks to Cheney, a nuclear "Pandora's Box" is being opened, with unforeseeable consequences, Mikhailov said. "I just want to emphasize, that nuclear energy does not only mean the energy of fission or fusion, but can be, for example, the energy of transition of the magnetic moment of certain nucleons (neutrons and protons)."

Mikhailov meant changes in the physical-geometric configuration inside an atomic nucleus, leading to an array of states of the nucleus called "isomers." The transitions from one isomeric state to another, can be accompanied by intense

radiation in the form of ultra-short-wavelength gamma-rays, opening up the possibility of isomer-based “gamma-ray bombs” with very different characteristics than known nuclear weapons. “We have a very large field of work in nuclear energy,” Mikhailov said. “Isomers can be found in nature in an excited state that is capable of transition to a stable state. And this, in principle, is also nuclear energy. . . . The energy of nuclear fission exceeds that of chemical reactions by 10 million times, in terms of calories released per unit volume or mass. But who says we need such powerful weapons today? The transition of isomers releases an amount of energy exceeding that of chemical reactions by 1,000 times.”

An “isomer bomb” might not equal an atomic bomb in explosive power, but it would have other characteristics of potential military significance. One is possibly very small size and novel destructive effects; another, that such devices, before being detonated, would not emit any radioactivity and would be more difficult to detect than “conventional” nuclear weapons containing radioactive elements. Such devices might, for example, be deployed by super-quiet submarines as sea mines, in a manner that would defy conventional counter-measures.

But the isomer bomb—whose possibility has also been discussed in the United States—is just one small example of things to come, once the “nuclear Pandora’s Box” is opened. The development of nuclear shaped charges and nuclear-explosive-powered “directed radiation” devices, begun in the 1980s, is receiving renewed attention. Also, new categories of non-nuclear, but equally non-conventional, weapons are emerging, including new types of high-power electromagnetic-pulse weapons, capable of playing havoc with sophisticated “smart weaponry,” computers, and communications infrastructure.

A senior Russian military expert warned *EIR* that the policies of the Cheney crowd are forcing nations around the world to prepare for the eventuality of having to defend themselves from an imperial United States. “Of course this means an asymmetric approach to warfare, there is no other way. Those nations with technological potentials, will develop new weapons systems, while poorer nations will prepare to use age-old methods of passive and active resistance,” unleashing various forms of irregular warfare, he said. The Russian expert said that without an urgent change in U.S. policy, the world is headed for a “very dark period.”

In a recent article, Lyndon LaRouche emphasized the self-delusion of Cheney et al. in believing in a supposed invincibility of U.S. military power. On the contrary, LaRouche warned, there are many ways in which the apparent overwhelming military superiority of the United States could be made “relatively, asymmetrically obsolete: as by, in effect, by-passing it with warfare in a different technological space than it is designed to fight. This is not a matter of a particular weapons-system, but it could be a matter of a threatened adversary’s dreaming up a feasible technological dimension which you, perhaps, had simply not thought about.”