

Keeping Watch on the New Russia

Sen. Sam Nunn of Georgia is the ranking Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee and was that panel's chairman for eight years (1987-95). He is widely regarded as one of Congress's foremost authorities on NATO and Russian military affairs. The Senator made the following remarks during a lengthy October 10, 1995, Senate floor speech about European security issues.

Europe's "Seismic" Change

"With the end of the Cold War, we have witnessed a heart-pounding, terrain-altering set of earthquakes centered in the former Soviet Union and in eastern Europe. These seismic events have ended an international era.

"The European security environment has changed. We have moved from a world of high risk but also high stability—because of the danger of escalation and the balance of terror on both sides—to a world of much lower risk but much lower stability.

"We are all aware of the dramatic change in the threat environment in Europe resulting from these seismic changes. The immediate danger is posed by violent terrorist groups, by isolated rogue states, by ethnic, religious, and other types of subnational passions that can flare into vicious armed conflict, as we have seen too well and too thoroughly in the Bosnian conflict.

"The lethality of any and all of these threats can be greatly magnified by the proliferation of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, as well as by the spread of destabilizing conventional weapons."

Number One Security Problem

"Russia currently possesses at least 20,000 nuclear weapons—in fact more than 20,000—at least 40,000 tons of chemical weapons, advanced biological warfare capability, hundreds of tons of fissile material, huge stores of conventional weapons, plus thousands of scientists and technicians skilled in manufacturing weapons of mass destruction.

"This is the first time in history that an empire [the Soviet Union] has disintegrated while possessing such enormous destructive capabilities.

Even if these capabilities are greatly reduced, the know-how, the production capability, and the dangers of proliferation will endure for many years. Even if we do our very best job, this is going to be our number one security threat—for America, for NATO, and for the world—in terms of decades, not simply a few years.

"As we contemplate NATO enlargement [expansion eastward into former Warsaw Pact nations], I believe that we must carefully measure [the] effect on this proliferation security problem, which is our number one security problem."

Stoking Russian Paranoia

"The advantages of NATO's current course toward enlargement cannot be ignored. . . . [However,] serious disadvantages must also be thought through carefully. If NATO's enlargement stays on its current course, reaction in Russia is almost inevitably going to be a sense of isolation by those committed to democracy and democratic reform, with varying degrees of paranoia, nationalism, and demagoguery emerging from across the current political spectrum."

Latent "Russian Threat"

"We cannot dismiss the possibility of a resurgent and threatening Russia. Russia not only has inherited the still-dangerous remnants of the Soviet war machine, but in its current weakened condition Russia contains potential resources by virtue of its size and strategic location. Russia exerts considerable weight in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. Meanwhile, Russia has inherited the former Soviet Union's veto power on the UN Security Council and, therefore, has a major voice in multilateral decision making.

"Russia will be a major factor, for better or for worse, across the entire spectrum of actual and potential threats that face us over the years ahead. Russia can fuel regional conflicts with high-technology conventional weapons along with other political and material support, or . . . Russia can cooperate with us in defusing such conflicts, particularly by preventing the spread of Russian weaponry to irresponsible hands.

"Russia can emerge as a militarily aggressive power. That is certainly possible. Or, Russia can assist the United States and the Western world and the free world in averting new rivalry among major powers that poison the international security environment. Russia can pursue a confrontational course that undermines the security and cooperation in Europe, or Russia can work with us to broaden and strengthen the emerging system of multilateral security in Europe.

"No one knows the answer to any of these questions at this juncture. Russia itself does not know the answer because it is in a period of economic stress and political challenge and turmoil."

"A Vast Reservoir"

"Russia is a vast reservoir of weaponry, weapons material, and weapons know-how. Thousands of people in Russia and throughout the former Soviet Union have the knowledge, the access, and the strong economic incentives to engage in weapons traffic. Thousands of scientists in Russia know how to make weapons of mass destruction, high-technology weapons that can shoot down aircraft in the air (including passenger liners), and missile technology to deliver these weapons of mass destruction across borders—and even across continents.

"They have this knowledge, but several thousand of them at least do not know where their next paycheck is coming from. They do not know how they are going to feed their families, and they are in great demand around the world from terrorist organizations and from rogue Third World countries."

Nuclear Equalizers?

"In next few years, Russia will have neither the resources nor the wherewithal to respond to any NATO

enlargement with a conventional military buildup. It simply does not have the resources to do that, even if it chose to. If, however, the more nationalist and more extreme political forces gain the upper hand by election or otherwise, we are likely to see other responses that are more achievable, and even more dangerous to European stability.

"For example, while it would take years for Russia to mount a sustained military threat to eastern Europe, it can, within weeks or months, exert severe external and internal pressures on its immediate neighbors to the west, including the Baltic countries and Ukraine. This could set in motion a dangerous action-reaction cycle.

"Moreover, because a conventional military response from Russia in answer to NATO enlargement is not feasible economically, a nuclear response in the form of a higher alert status for Russia's remaining strategic nuclear weapons and, conceivably, renewed deployment of tactical nuclear weapons is more likely.

"I recall very well when the United States and our allies felt we were overwhelmed [by the] conventional forces [of] the former Soviet Union. How did we respond? We responded by building up tactical nuclear forces. We responded by deploying thousands of tactical nuclear forces because we did not have the tanks, we did not have the artillery tubes, to meet the conventional challenge. . . .

"The security of NATO, Russia's neighbors, and the countries of eastern Europe will not be enhanced if the Russian military finger moves closer to the nuclear trigger."

Wait, Watch, Respond

"We should be candid with the Russian leadership and the Russian people. Above all, [we should] be honest with the Russian people by telling them, frankly, 'If you respect the sovereignty of your neighbors, carry out your solemn arms-control commitments and other international obligations, and, if you continue down the path of democracy and economic reform, your neighbors will not view you as a threat and neither will NATO. We will watch, however, and we will react to aggressive moves against other sovereign states, to militarily significant violations of your arms-control and other le-

gally binding obligations pertinent to the security of Europe, and to the emergence of a nondemocratic Russian government that impedes fair elections, suppresses domestic freedoms, or institutes a foreign policy incompatible with the existing European security system.'

"These developments would be threatening to the security of Europe and would require a significant NATO response, including expansion eastward."

Common Danger

"The threat in Europe now is not Russian invasion of one of the Visegrad countries [Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic]. The threat is the huge proliferation problem, with nuclear materials being smuggled across the borders to these countries, with Russian scientists under severe economic pressure, being in demand in various parts of the world. . . .

"The threat is terrorism, the threat is ethnic strife, the threat is religious strife. It could change in ten years. Ten years from now, Russia could reemerge as a real military threat to some of those countries. We have to be prepared for that. We have to make sure we are in a position to react to that, but now we have many mutual interests, and not just with Russians but with the east Europeans and others, in proliferation and working together against organized crime, which is one of the biggest challenges Russia has right now. Their organized criminal activity [is] devastating to confidence for investment, economic kinds of commitments by business people from all over the world."

"Difficult at Best"

"Even when we have a disagreement [with Moscow], we have to continue to work at this proliferation problem because we do not want to wake up in three years or five years and find that the kind of people who . . . blew up the federal building in Oklahoma or the kind of people who carried out a chemical attack in Tokyo . . . possess awesome weapons of mass destruction.

"Only by working with the elements in Russia willing to work on this are we going to be able to prevent this from happening. It will be difficult at best." ■