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Volume VIII, No. 1

Significant Issues Series

Nuclear Risk Reduction Centers

*by Barry M. Blechman
and Michael Krepon*



Center for Strategic
and International Studies

Georgetown University
Washington, D.C.

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Foreword

During 1983 and 1984, the Center for Strategic and International Studies of Georgetown University organized a working group on practical means of reducing the risk of nuclear war. The group was cochaired by Senators Sam Nunn and John Warner.

Among the several excellent proposals that emerged from the Nunn-Warner group, one has received particular attention. The concept of Nuclear Risk Reduction Centers (NRRCs) seems to be gaining a wide hearing among interested private citizens and by governments. These national centers in Moscow and Washington, linked by modern means of communications, would maintain a 24-hour watch on situations that could lead to nuclear incidents and carry out a variety of discussions and information exchanges in normal times to help avert nuclear crises. In November 1985, at the Geneva summit, President Ronald Reagan and General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev agreed "to study the question of establishing centers to reduce nuclear risk at the expert level, taking into account the issues and developments in the Geneva negotiations."

In view of this official interest in the concept, the Center for Strategic and International Studies undertook additional work on the concept. In addition to individual consultations, two meetings of experts—from within the government and from the scholarly community—were held at the Center in December 1985 and February 1986 to discuss various aspects of the concept, including the potential functions of the centers, their relationship to existing governmental organizations, Soviet perspectives on the idea, and certain technical questions. The results of these discussions are recorded in this monograph. Nuclear risk reduction centers potentially offer a practical means of reducing the risk of nuclear confrontation; the idea deserves careful study and evaluation.

Amos A. Jordan, Jr.

President

The Center for Strategic and International Studies

Georgetown University

March 1986

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Executive Summary

Despite their many areas of contention, the United States and the Soviet Union have one overriding common interest—the avoidance of nuclear war. No single institution in either country, however, has the dedicated responsibility to build on this common interest by developing the means of reducing nuclear risks. Steady progress toward this end can best be served by the creation of separate, nationally staffed, nuclear risk reduction centers in Washington and Moscow, linked by advanced means of communications. Otherwise, existing bureaucratic responsibilities and other near-term concerns will continue to deflect attention from useful measures that can decrease the likelihood of inadvertent conflict and nuclear war.

Nuclear risk reduction centers are a natural extension of the 1971 “Accidents Measures” agreement. Their creation could facilitate the negotiation of institutional and procedural arrangements, as well as technical measures, intended to reduce nuclear risks; create a buffer to protect those measures from the vicissitudes of U.S.-Soviet relations; provide more latitude to national leaders during crises; provide a means of instantaneous communications between technical experts in the event of extraordinary contingencies; provide a mechanism for training skilled interagency crisis prevention teams; and reassure concerned publics that the two great powers are acting to reduce the risk of nuclear war.

Annual meetings of the U.S. and Soviet foreign and defense ministers would establish the year’s agenda for the two centers’ directors and staffs. Initially, the centers would probably best concentrate on “clearinghouse” functions—exchanges of information and data that can help to reduce suspicions and avoid the development of inadvertent crises. Notifications of certain types of military activity required by existing arms control agreements are one example of the type of information that could be cleared through the centers. The annual review of the 1972 Incidents at Sea Treaty also could be held at the centers, as could additional diplomatic and military exchanges on risk reduction and confidence-building measures. Over time, the staffs of the centers could begin to explore possible future situations that might entail nuclear threats from terrorist organizations and other sub-national groups. Such joint contingency planning could facilitate effective cooperative actions in the event such

situations actually occurred. Through such uses of the centers and their staffs in periods of normal relations, the United States and the Soviet Union could create a potentially important buffer around their one common interest for periods of rising tensions.

It is difficult to predict the character of crises that may arise in the future. In case of extraordinary events, such as incidents involving nuclear terrorism or the destruction of civilian nuclear power reactors, the centers could provide the means for experts, under the direction of national leaders, to communicate important technical and operational information rapidly and comprehensively. Skilled interagency crisis management teams associated with the centers could provide national leaders with the kind of information needed to make wise decisions during tense situations. During such crises, national leaders would continue to rely primarily on regular diplomatic channels and, if necessary, the "Hot Line"; it would not be wise to use the centers to resolve any substantive issues in dispute. Nuclear risk reduction centers would, however, provide a supplementary channel to convey information that is technical in nature, thus permitting more far-reaching and timely exchanges between U.S. and Soviet military experts and technical specialists.

In its initial phase of operations, the separate centers in Washington and Moscow could be linked by modern means of communications comparable to arrangements for the Hot Line, as upgraded in 1984. The advantages and disadvantages of direct audio, visual, and teleconferencing hookups also should be evaluated and, if found favorable, could be instituted at a later date. Each center, staffed by its own core group of specialists on a full-time basis, would maintain a 24-hour watch on any events that could lead to nuclear incidents. Designated liaison officers from the other power's embassy could be given access to the centers under controlled escort.

Soviet commentaries express uncertainty about the centers' concept and functions, as well as skepticism about U.S. motives for proposing this initiative. The Kremlin might well endorse the initiative, however, if the United States presents it in ways that alleviate Soviet concerns over potential misuse of the centers and in the context of substantive improvements in U.S.-Soviet relations.

Creation of the centers may risk increasing Soviet opportunities for spreading disinformation, gaining sensitive U.S. intelligence information, adding confusion or mixed signals regarding Soviet

intentions, and complicating U.S. relations with third countries. All these risks are inherent in the U.S.-Soviet relationship and not intrinsic to the centers' concept itself, however; all can be managed successfully with a high degree of professionalism by U.S. officials. The potential benefits associated with the centers clearly outweigh these risks.

It seems evident that the United States and the USSR should move rapidly, through private negotiations, to complete the study of nuclear risk reduction centers, agreed to by President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev at their November 1985 summit, and to begin serious negotiations to establish the centers in the very near future.

Nuclear Risk Reduction Centers

Reducing the risk of war is by far the United States and the Soviet Union's most important mutual interest and has been an enduring concern of U.S. and Soviet leaders. Bilateral discussions of the means of accomplishing this objective have, however, been infrequent and have produced only minimal results. The first concerted effort at a dialogue on this topic ended with failure at the Surprise Attack Conference in 1958. A direct communications link between Washington and Moscow was not established until after a most serious U.S.-Soviet confrontation—the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. The resulting Hot Line has been subsequently upgraded twice, but there is still no “real-time” official link between the United States and the Soviet Union.¹

The Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) process produced several minor agreements to help reduce nuclear risks and also a forum to discuss selected issues in the Standing Consultative Commission (SCC). Another step to reduce nuclear risks, those stemming from incidents at sea, also was taken in 1972, with the conclusion of an agreement pertaining to naval activities.

In 1971, the two great powers concluded an “Agreement on Measures to Reduce the Risk of Outbreak of Nuclear War,” in which they pledged to take unilateral steps to improve safeguards against accidental or unauthorized uses of nuclear weapons, to notify one another in the event of such incidents, and to consult further on additional measures to further the purposes of the agreement. Little has been accomplished in fulfillment of that final undertaking.

The episodic nature of these discussions and their only modest results have long been of concern to executive branch officials, members of Congress, and informed citizens. With the difficulties in U.S.-Soviet relations experienced in the late 1970s and early 1980s and the growing complexities associated with negotiating reductions in nuclear forces, attention has again returned to the need for a continuing dialogue directed solely and specifically at reducing the risk of nuclear war.

Senators Henry M. Jackson (D-Wash.), Sam Nunn (D-Ga.), and John Warner (R-Va.) first suggested the idea of a U.S.-Soviet “crisis control center” in 1980. This concept was subsequently refined by a working group cochaired by Senators Nunn and Warner, which

included James Schlesinger, Brent Scowcroft, Richard Ellis, Bobby Inman, William Hyland, William Perry, Don Rice, and Barry Blechman. The working group issued an interim report in November 1983 recommending the establishment of linked nuclear risk reduction centers (NRRCs) in Washington and Moscow to perform a variety of functions that could contribute to a reduced danger of nuclear conflict, with a particular emphasis on means of reducing the risk of nuclear terrorism. The centers, it was proposed, would maintain a 24-hour watch on any events with the potential to lead to nuclear confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union and carry out a variety of negotiations and discussions to prevent such situations from ever developing.

Also in 1983, the Department of Defense released a report on measures to enhance stability. In this report, Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger proposed several initiatives, but stopped short of supporting nuclear risk reduction centers. He did endorse the following:

- The addition of a high-speed facsimile capability to the Hot Line.
- The creation of a Joint Military Communications Link (JMCL) between the United States and the USSR.
- The establishment by the U.S. and Soviet governments of high speed data links with their respective embassies in the other's capital.
- Agreement among the world's nations to consult in the event of a nuclear incident involving a terrorist group.

Although supporting these initiatives, Congress has expressed consistent interest in more far-reaching measures. In 1984, the Senate endorsed the concept of nuclear risk reduction centers by a vote of 82-0; the measure subsequently was added to the fiscal 1985 Defense Authorization bill and received House endorsement as well. Discussions between Senators Nunn and Warner and executive branch officials produced an official endorsement of a specific concept for nuclear risk reduction centers in August 1985. Later that month, the two senators discussed the idea with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and received a favorable evaluation. At the Geneva summit, President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev agreed "to study the question of establishing centers to reduce nuclear risk at the

expert level, taking into account the issues and developments in the Geneva negotiations.”

Clearly much more work remains to be accomplished before nuclear risk reduction centers could become a reality. The two sides must gain a mutual understanding of the purposes of the centers, how they would operate, their relationship to existing government organs and means of U.S.-Soviet communications, and the specific functions with which they might be charged. Each of these topics is addressed in this paper. We begin by laying out the basic reasons for establishing the centers; a clear focus on the centers' purposes and rationale could greatly facilitate answers to the questions just noted.

Why Create Nuclear Risk Reduction Centers?

Agreeing to create the centers would mean, in effect, that the United States and the Soviet Union recognized a mutual need to create a separate channel of communication and autonomous institutional arrangements dedicated to reducing the risk of nuclear war. Operating under the instructions of national leaders, the centers are needed for several important reasons:

1. **To facilitate the identification, negotiation, and implementation of additional institutional and procedural arrangements, as well as technical measures, intended to reduce nuclear risks.** Both governments are more likely to devote the attention and resources necessary to develop an effective nuclear risk reduction system with the NRRCs than without them. If directed by individuals of stature who have the confidence of the two leaders, the NRRC channel could provide the impetus, political incentives, and technical expertise necessary for sustained progress that has been lacking in the past. The NRRC directors, of course, would operate as arms of their governments, receiving negotiating guidance and support from interagency policy committees. Still, with the establishment of the NRRCs, the incremental development of nuclear risk reduction measures would be given greater prominence and legitimacy amidst competing demands for the time and attention of the nations' political leaders and senior officials. The centers could generate an institutional interest dedicated

solely to progress in this area, equipped with the resources and expertise necessary to carry out their mission effectively.

2. **To create a buffer around nuclear risk prevention measures and to protect them from the vicissitudes of U.S.-Soviet relations.** A dedicated channel of communications, together with appropriate institutional arrangements, also could provide a useful buffer during those periods of strained political ties that arise inevitably in the competitive U.S.-Soviet relationship. A dedicated, private channel of communications on nuclear risk reduction would be critical during such times of strained relations, yet, establishing one during such a period could be particularly awkward. It makes sense to establish the risk reduction channel during a period of normal relations and to provide an opportunity for the two sides to develop some confidence in the link, so that it potentially could be used to provide a measure of reassurance during periods of high tension.
3. **To provide more latitude to national leaders during crises.** Direct communications by national leaders during crises could come too soon, as well as too late. The establishment of nuclear risk reduction centers could permit the rapid exchange of lengthy messages between high-ranking officials and experts whose actions and undertakings would not unalterably lock their nation into a specific course of action. During periods of deep crisis, national leaders could utilize the NRRCs for preliminary exchanges of information and assessments of mutual intentions, prior to committing their governments to a specific response. In other words, nuclear risk reduction centers could provide the benefits of real time communications without their potential liabilities. Exchanges at this level also would pose fewer risks associated with misstatements or misinterpretations. National leaders could therefore have more latitude and more information with which to make wiser decisions during crises, prior to their personal negotiation of a solution.
4. **To provide a means of instantaneous communications among technical experts in the event of unusual contingencies.** Extraordinary events have already, and could well again, occur in U.S.-

Soviet relations, for which the existence of NRRCs could prevent the loss of lives and reduce the danger of inadvertent conflicts. KAL-007 strayed over Soviet territory for two hours before being shot down; had the real-time communications channels and patterns of expert relationships envisioned for the risk centers existed at the time, loss of the aircraft conceivably could have been prevented. (It would be difficult to use the Hot Line for such fast-breaking developments.) In the future, one could imagine incidents involving space operations, for example, or nuclear threats by sub-national groups, or the destruction of civilian nuclear facilities, any of which might require the rapid transmission of technical information and consultations among experts. Such contingencies could be handled effectively through NRRCs, particularly if the directors and staffs of the centers had established good working relations in normal times.

5. **To provide a mechanism for training skilled interagency crisis prevention teams.** The creation of a dedicated nuclear risk channel of communications could help both governments develop the expertise needed during crisis situations. Without a sustained dialogue on this subject, U.S. and Soviet political officials could be poorly equipped to deal with contingencies for which there are few, if any, precedents. The need for cooperative action could be particularly acute in defusing potential crises involving nuclear terrorism. In such an event, U.S. and Soviet political leaders could be well served by multidisciplinary staffs in NRRCs who have a well-developed sense of each other's concerns and with at least a notion of how to deal with such contingencies derived from prior planning and joint analyses. As crises build, established procedures worked out in advance at the centers could be as important in resolving the situation as the ability of political leaders in each nation to act unilaterally.
6. **To reassure the publics in both nations, and in third countries, that the two great powers were acting to reduce the risk of nuclear war.** Creation of new institutions dedicated to the sole purpose of reducing nuclear risks could have beneficial political effects and help to calm the fears that sometimes arise in both countries and hinder effective negotiations.

What Would the Centers Do?

The concept of nuclear risk reduction centers has evolved over time. As currently conceived, the NRRCs would be established in Washington and Moscow, maintaining a 24-hour watch on any events with the potential to lead to nuclear incidents. In its initial phase of operations, the centers would be linked by communications equipment at least equivalent to that agreed to in the 1984 understanding to upgrade the Hot Line, meaning a high speed data facsimile transmission link. Careful consideration also should be given to the possible benefits and risks of installing real-time communications between the centers—audio, video, and data links—to enable the instantaneous transmission of large amounts of information in a variety of formats.

A core group of diplomatic, military, and intelligence personnel would be detailed to the U.S. center from other government departments and agencies, along with civilian experts who worked for the NRRC on a permanent basis and technical specialists on temporary duty, as needed. This staff would operate under agreed instructions and would be directed by a senior individual with the confidence of the president, who would report to the president's national security adviser. The director should preferably be a civilian with prior experience in security negotiations. The center staff would be backed up by an interagency committee to formulate negotiating guidance, agenda proposals, and so forth. Comparable arrangements would presumably be worked out in Moscow. Designated liaison officers from the Soviet Embassy in Washington would be given access to the U.S. center under controlled conditions on a periodic basis, and vice versa.

A wide range of functions potentially could be performed by the staffs of the nuclear risk reduction centers in normal times, in periods when tensions were building, and during crises themselves. At the outset, it probably would be best to establish only modest, task-oriented functions geared to the prevention of crises. The functions assigned to the NRRCs could be increased gradually, however, through negotiations, as the two sides gained confidence in the channel. These functions can be conceptualized by a matrix that distinguishes between technical and political discussions, and between normal ("pre-crisis") periods and actual crises, even though these dividing lines will not be clear-cut in all cases:

	Technical	Political
Pre-crisis	I	II
During crisis	III	IV

Most of the centers' activities would take place in Quadrant I. All such activities would be established within a framework set by the two sides' foreign and defense ministers, who would meet annually to review the centers' work and to establish a yearly agenda.

Pre-crisis, technical activities of the nuclear risk reduction center could include a clearinghouse function for notifications of certain military activities required by agreements between the two sides, such as advanced notice of certain missile flight tests and military exercises.² Under the instructions of their two governments, the centers could also identify, negotiate, and implement additional institutional and procedural arrangements, as well as technical measures, intended to reduce nuclear risks. If agreed by both nations, for example, the staffs of the two centers could establish and periodically update data on the two sides' military and nuclear forces. Additional notifications could include the detection of seismic activity, reports of nuclear detonations or disturbing activities related to the potential use of nuclear weapons, and confidence-building measures related to military activities of potential concern. The centers could also serve as the location for annual meetings of the two sides' naval officials required by the Incidents at Sea Agreement.

Additional pre-crisis, technical activities of the centers' could include discussions of technical measures associated with joint planning for nuclear contingencies. For example, staffs of the centers could draw up an agreed check list of procedures to be followed in the event of receipt of information concerning the potential threat or use of nuclear weapons. The purposes of discussions along these lines would not be to reach mutual agreement mandating specific courses of action for specific contingencies, but to provide mutually accepted guidelines for action. Even if agreed guidelines could not be drawn, prior discussions in the centers could help instruct each side about which types of actions the other might find most useful and which most harmful under various contingencies.

To assist joint planning for nuclear contingencies, the centers should maintain a 24-hour watch on events for which common action might be needed. For example, the centers could become the central point of contact for transmitting information regarding nuclear terrorism. The trained, multidisciplinary staff officers of the two centers could draw on previous discussions about such contingencies to help advise national leaders on how best to respond.

Quadrant II activities could build on these technical discussions while addressing topics that incorporate a greater political element. Under the guidance of a work program authorized by both countries, high-level military officers and civilian defense officials could meet with personnel at the centers to discuss subjects relating to reducing the risk of nuclear war, such as nuclear doctrines or military forces and activities of particular concern to either side. Discussion of any such topic, of course, would have to be approved by both nations.

A broad dialogue on doctrines governing the use of nuclear weapons, as well as exchanges of views about military activities of potential concern, such as multiple missile launches, launches from operational silos, and certain bomber exercises, could help dispel suspicions that create tensions and contain some risk of prompting unnecessary reactions. These discussions in the NRRCs eventually could lead to agreements to forego certain types of military activities on a reciprocal basis. Only limited concrete results can be expected from these discussions in view of the continuing political differences between the two sides. Nevertheless, some progress might be possible since discussions in the centers relate directly to the shared objective of avoiding nuclear war.

Looking to the long term, into the twenty-first century, it seems clear that international terrorism will become even more of a problem and may take on more extreme forms; it also seems clear that additional nations, some in the most unstable part of the world, will acquire nuclear capabilities. As part of their Quadrant II activities, Washington and Moscow may wish to initiate an extended dialogue in the nuclear risk reduction centers on how each might act upon receipt of information concerning the actual or prospective theft of special nuclear materials or operable nuclear weapons, the receipt of nuclear threats, or in response to the actual or threatened detonation of a nuclear device. Discussions concerning nuclear terrorism prior to such events could help both nations think through the

means available to deal with possible contingencies. Although such discussions would not commit either side to a specific course of action, they would help to identify the possibilities and limits of cooperative endeavors and possible mechanisms for constructive joint actions.

The NRRCs also would carry out technical functions during actual crises (Quadrant III). Neither the extent nor the character of these activities can be predicted in advance; they would depend on the nature of the crisis and the degree to which national leaders had confidence in the NRRC channel. This, in turn, might depend on the overall political relationship and the character of prior discussions on topics of mutual concern in the centers.

In short, the centers would be tools for national leaders to use as each saw fit. They might choose not to engage the centers at all during nuclear contingencies, relying exclusively on diplomatic channels of communication. Alternatively, national leaders could use this technical channel of communications to carry out a wide range of specific operational tasks under their overall guidance.

In the event of a terrorist nuclear threat, for example, the centers' staffs could be tasked to carry out a check list of actions and procedures to be followed, if one had been agreed to in prior discussions. Experts of the two countries could use the centers' communications facilities to develop a composite joint picture of the organization making the threat and of the broader situation. The centers' staffs could coordinate technical details of joint initiatives agreed to by national leaders during the crisis.

The centers also could be used during more traditional U.S.-Soviet crises. Their staffs could convey messages prior to, or coincident with, unilateral military actions not directed at the forces of the other side, but that might be interpreted as such. The centers also could be used to request explanations for military actions taken by the other side that had not been explained and that caused concern or to warn the other side of specific military actions that, if taken, would greatly complicate the situation. Finally, the centers could be used to assure effective implementation of the technical details of military disengagements, once a political resolution of a crisis had been achieved.

Nuclear risk reduction centers are no panacea for crisis management. That burden will continue to fall on political leaders and

established diplomatic channels. In prior crises, however, one can reconstruct incidents in which opportunities for technical exchanges could have helped to support broader diplomatic objectives. During the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, for example, an American U-2 reconnaissance aircraft strayed over Soviet territory during a routine air sampling mission, raising considerable concern among Soviet leaders who, according to Nikita Khrushchev's memoirs, believed the mission might have been intended to identify targets prior to a strike. During the 1973 Middle East crisis, the United States was concerned about the potential for nuclear escalation. In both cases, the opportunities for exchanges of technical information provided by NRRCs could have helped to defuse the crisis.

Cool heads prevailed during both these incidents, of course, even without the existence of nuclear risk reduction centers. Still, it makes sense to take steps to increase the likelihood that cool heads will prevail in future crises. During such crises, the United States and the Soviet Union continue to make full use of their military forces and intelligence collection assets both for routine operations and in response to the specific developments at hand. Indeed, the higher states of alert that typically accompany crises mean that local military commanders could have greater freedom of action; the risks of incidents rise during crises because the rules of engagement are relaxed and because the tempo of military and intelligence operations rise and, with it, the possibility of a needless and provocative response to an unintended action.

The movements of military or intelligence gathering platforms can send important signals. It is sometimes difficult, however, to convey the intended message with any precision; the messages transmitted may appear too muted, overdrawn, or may be entirely misinterpreted by the other side. Use of nuclear risk reduction centers might be helpful in some instances in clarifying the intended message behind the movement of military assets. NRRCs would be a particularly appropriate channel to clarify intent to avoid the escalation of a local conflict into a nuclear confrontation.

The benefits of having the rapid, technical communications channel of the NRRCs at hand, to be used only if necessary and desired, are particularly evident in view of the unpredictable character of future crises. The world is a turbulent and tumultuous place. Each year witnesses extraordinary events that require quick decisions

and rapid actions—often by more than one nation. It is only a matter of time until one or more such incidents involve nuclear dangers, dangers that might be dealt with most effectively through cooperative U.S.-Soviet actions. The establishment of NRRCs now could make such cooperation feasible and effective.

Nuclear risk reduction centers should not become involved in substantive negotiations during crises; Quadrant IV is a null set. Crisis resolution is the job of trained diplomats and should be conducted through normal diplomatic channels or between the heads of state. Nuclear risk reduction centers could complement diplomatic channels during crises only when political authorities believe that technical exchanges about military activities could be useful supplements to the main diplomatic discourse.

Are the Soviets Interested in NRRCs?

There appears to be considerable uncertainty about the concept and functioning of risk reduction centers in Soviet commentaries. Moreover, Soviet officials have expressed some skepticism about their utility, citing several reasons. The U.S. interest in nuclear risk reduction measures generally strikes some Soviet officials as a “typically American” mechanistic and technical approach to problems that are essentially political in nature. And Soviet officials have been particularly skeptical about the Reagan administration’s motivation in raising this specific proposal. Although it appears far-fetched, some Soviets have stated that they detect a possible linkage between risk reduction centers and U.S. interest in limited nuclear options. Recent Soviet writings reject the notion that crises can be controlled through external mechanisms, just as they reject the notion that nuclear war can remain limited. Recent writings also repeat long-standing Soviet concerns over the possible use of technical mechanisms like the centers for legalized espionage, a concern reinforced by suspicions about the Reagan administration’s emphasis on verification measures with regard to other negotiating initiatives. Finally, Soviet writings have expressed some wariness that the administration intended the NRRC initiative to serve as a substitute for more substantive measures to improve U.S.-Soviet relations.

Soviet commentaries stop well short of rejecting the concept of nuclear risk reduction centers, however. Indeed, some Soviet actions

and current policy objectives suggest a certain receptivity to the concept—most important, Mr. Gorbachev's action in Geneva in November 1985. And the Kremlin has been willing to take practical, technical steps in the past to reduce nuclear risks, such as the Hot Line agreement, its technical upgrades, and the common understanding relating to nuclear terrorism worked out in the summer of 1985 in conjunction with the Accidents Measures agreement. Nevertheless, the Kremlin clearly prefers "political" agreements of a more substantive nature to additional technical measures. Those occasions when the Kremlin has been receptive—at times eager—to reach cooperative arrangements relating to nuclear risk reduction, have come in conjunction with progress on substantive arms control agreements. For example, the Accidents Measures agreement and the 1973 Agreement on the Prevention of Nuclear War were associated with the SALT process, as was the Incidents at Sea Agreement.

Thus, despite expressions of Soviet skepticism, there is reason to expect that the Soviets may be willing to consider seriously the creation of nuclear risk reduction centers, depending on the specifics of the proposal. Particularly in the context of continuing improvements in the broad U.S.-Soviet political relationship and in an effort to lend some concrete form to such an improvement, agreement in principle to establish the centers is possible in the near term. These prospects would be strengthened, however, to the degree that the United States can present its ideas in ways that alleviate expressed Soviet concerns while building on prior accomplishments in this field. Specifically, Soviet interest is most likely to be peaked and Soviet concerns over espionage alleviated if the NRRCs are cast as adjuncts to existing political and diplomatic links, rather than as new communications channels that would link the two military establishments autonomously. Soviet receptivity also would be heightened if the rationale for establishing the centers were cast in broad political terms—as part of a larger fabric of improved relations and as a follow-up to (or even extension of) the Accidents Measures agreement.

Although the Kremlin appears to be moving toward greater openness on several fronts, the Soviet Union will continue to be sensitive about sharing military information with the West. With or without NRRCs, Soviet leaders view secrecy as an important asset in the

continuing competition with the United States. It has been possible to conduct sensitive, technical discussions with Soviet officials in the past, but only when certain conditions have been met—when bilateral relations have been generally satisfactory, when Soviet leaders have had confidence in the private channel in which the discussions were taking place, and when discussions were held in the context of what the Soviets perceived to be serious problem-solving efforts by the U.S. government. If these conditions were to exist in the future, it is reasonable to expect the Soviets to be as forthcoming in future nuclear risk reduction center discussions as they have been in SCC discussions in the past.

Finally, the Kremlin is likely to be more receptive to the creation of nuclear risk reduction centers if one of their primary initial tasks is to help guard against the dissemination and use of nuclear weapons. The United States and the USSR already have a reasonably good working relationship on nonproliferation matters. Substantive, private bilateral discussions have taken place on this subject even during tense periods of U.S.-Soviet relations, and a common understanding elaborating the Accidents Measures agreement as it relates to nuclear terrorism was concluded in the SCC in June 1985. Moreover, there is the precedent of U.S.-Soviet cooperation in 1977 when it appeared that South Africa was preparing to detonate a nuclear device. Cooperative measures included the exchange of information and jointly planned actions toward third parties.

In summary, a foundation for U.S.-Soviet cooperation to reduce nuclear risks already exists. Suggestions by the United States to build upon this foundation to create nuclear risk reduction centers may elicit a positive response if Washington can alleviate Moscow's concerns over its functions, privacy, and potential misuse, and as long as there is not a new deterioration of the broad U.S.-Soviet relationship.

Do the Benefits Merit the Risks?

Several potential drawbacks are inherent in the creation of nuclear risk reduction centers that must be assessed alongside their potential benefits.

1. *Creation of the centers may increase Soviet opportunities for spreading disinformation and deception, particularly in times*

leading up to and during crises. In some crisis situations, the U.S. and Soviet interests in resolving disputes may be more overlapping than conflicting; in others, such as regional disputes in the Middle East and Southwest Asia, each of the great powers may perceive strong incentives to push for settlements favorable to its local ally at the cost of increased friction between them. In the latter type of situation, NRRCs conceivably might be used to convey false or misleading messages, rather than to defuse crises. Difficulties also may arise in cases of potential or actual nuclear terrorism when the perpetrators have been, or may even still be, supported in some way by the USSR, although this support did not extend to the nuclear threat.

Nuclear risk reduction centers clearly would provide a new opportunity for the Kremlin to spread disinformation or deception, thus exacerbating an already tense political situation. A decision to misuse a private channel for nuclear risk reduction, however, would itself convey an important message regarding Soviet intentions. Thus, the issue is not whether the Soviets would resort to disinformation and deception tactics, but whether U.S. experts and political leaders are apt to recognize when the Soviets resorted to such tactics (through whatever channel) and make the appropriate responses.

In another sense, NRRCs can provide a further check against Soviet disinformation techniques by establishing a mechanism through which U.S. experts on Soviet disinformation techniques could receive additional training and an opportunity to practice their skills. Selective rotations of duty assignments could help to promote a balance of personnel with experience and fresh perspectives and provide a check against the centers' personnel becoming stale or biased. In other words, creation of the centers could result in the development of a highly trained coterie of multidisciplinary personnel with considerable experience in U.S.-Soviet dialogues on technical subjects. These personnel would be in a position to advise U.S. political leaders when information transmitted through the NRRC channel appeared to be unhelpful or disingenuous. The Soviet Union's ability to misuse the risk centers for disinformation depends as much on the shrewdness and sensitivity of U.S. officials as it does on the manipulative skills of Soviet propagandists. There is no intrinsic reason why

the potential for misuse of the centers should prevent the creation of this potentially useful tool.

Moreover, in cases of nuclear terrorism directed against the United States or its friends or allies, the Soviet Union may have better private means of communicating with the perpetrators through third parties and greater leverage to affect the outcome of the incident than the United States. Although channels of communication can often be created on an ad hoc basis as a crisis unfolds, Washington might be able to gain valuable time by using an established channel, particularly if a prior dialogue had yielded some agreed procedures for dealing with the situation.

Again, establishment of such a channel would not ensure its proper use. The Soviets would always have the option to choose not to cooperate fully with the United States in the event of nuclear terrorism directed at this country or its friends or allies. But this would be an extraordinarily dangerous game. If the Soviets wished to play it, the United States could not coerce the Kremlin to act otherwise. But terrorism is a two-edged sword, as the Kremlin has begun to find out, which perhaps explains why the Soviets have begun to cooperate somewhat in this area. This trend should be encouraged; nuclear risk reduction centers would offer an opportunity to do so.

2. *The centers could offer opportunities for the Soviets to gain important intelligence information, including sensitive information on sources and methods.* This risk lies strictly within the exclusive power of the U.S. government to control. Indeed, due to the asymmetry of access to information in the two societies, the Soviets have more to be concerned about than the United States about the disclosure of information through this channel.

The U.S. government would in this event decide what information the Soviets would receive through this channel, just as it controls any other official communications. In another sensitive channel—the SCC—intelligence community officials provide guidance on all questions of sources and methods. Similar procedures would undoubtedly be used for nuclear risk reduction centers to guard against unauthorized disclosure of potentially damaging intelligence information.

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3. *By providing an additional channel of communications, creation of the centers could lead to confusion and mixed signals regarding U.S. policy as well as interpretations of Soviet actions.* During periods of normal relations and especially during crises, the signals emanating from a potential adversary are rarely uniform. Experienced political and intelligence analysts must help elected officials to discern real intentions from the noise of mixed messages. The creation of nuclear risk reduction centers could not ensure that U.S. experts would be prescient or correct in their evaluations of current intelligence, but they can offer the possibility that U.S. analysts would have access to more information, leading to better assessments of Soviet intentions.

Similarly, it is important during crises to present a clear and uniform stance to the opponent lest he either react unnecessarily strongly to an unintended signal that appeared provocative or erroneously perceive weakness in what was intended to be a posture of resolve. The creation of NRRCs admittedly would introduce some added potential for mixed signals in U.S. crisis behavior. Again, however, the degree of this risk would be within U.S. control. There is nothing intrinsic to the concept that would create this effect. It would be strictly a question, as is always the case, of how well-coordinated and effectively implemented would be U.S. policy.

4. *Creation of the centers could prompt concerns by allies, friends, or third parties that the great powers would discuss problems in which they had a stake without adequately considering their interests.* Our NATO partners have long been concerned about the vicissitudes of U.S. national security policies. Their recent concerns over the breakdown of detente were preceded by worries about too close U.S.-Soviet cooperation—there was, for example, some question in the mid-to-late 1970s that the SALT II treaty might place unwise constraints on nuclear weapon systems that they believed were essential for stability in Europe. Such concerns might arise again, and the positive allied response that might be expected to accompany creation of nuclear risk reduction centers might later turn to anxieties over their exclusion once the subjects under deliberation there touched on their

direct interests—such as terrorism directed at European targets. China's reaction might be even more harsh, as the Chinese have stated a more extreme concern in the past—the possibility of a “superpower condominium”—an anxiety derived in part from Soviet initiatives directed against China during the Nixon administration.

The United States cannot remove these concerns, but it can ameliorate them through the effective use of other diplomatic channels. For example, our NATO partners are routinely advised on the progress of bilateral negotiations over strategic and intermediate-range nuclear forces—negotiations in which they have a direct stake but in which they do not participate directly. Existing consultative mechanisms have appeared to work well in this regard, and European friends of the United States have clearly had an impact on positions taken by Washington in the negotiations. Moreover, NATO countries have understood the importance of a private bilateral channel on sensitive arms control issues, as evidenced by their support for the Standing Consultative Commission. By extension, it is likely that the NATO allies would appreciate the utility of a private channel for nuclear risk reduction, as long as there were sustained consultations on these matters, similar to those that exist for the current Geneva talks.

As for China's concern, the most effective means of amelioration would be the continued improvement of U.S.-Chinese relations. Indeed, the Chinese are now indicating an interest in improving relations with both the United States and the USSR. To the degree that the Chinese succeed on one or both fronts, their stated concerns over a U.S.-Soviet condominium would appear increasingly implausible.

To sum up, although there are legitimate problem areas associated with nuclear risk reduction centers, these problems are inherent in the U.S.-Soviet relationship and not intrinsic to the NRRC concept itself. Although creation of the centers might add marginally to some of these problems, the centers also could offer considerable benefits that would far outweigh their associated risks. Primary among these benefits is the reassurance that functioning centers could provide to concerned publics by fulfilling a need not presently met by other institutional arrangements, particularly their potential to facilitate

the development of procedures to help prevent crises and reduce the risk of nuclear war; to provide more latitude, better professional expertise, and more useful information to political leaders; and to create a useful buffer between the great powers' mutual interest in avoiding nuclear war and the vicissitudes of U.S.-Soviet relations.

How Should the Centers in Moscow and Washington Be Linked?

Nuclear risk reduction centers should possess modern means of communicating large amounts of information rapidly, accurately, and independently of national intelligence systems so as not to compromise intelligence sources. The centers' communications systems should also be distinct from the existing Hot Line and from normal diplomatic channels, so as to make clear the special functions of the NRRCs and to provide redundancy in the overall means of communicating officially between the two superpowers.

At the outset, the centers could be given communications facilities at least as sophisticated as those available between the two heads of state, as established by the 1984 upgrade of the Hot Line agreement. This ability to transmit whole pages of text and other visual material instantaneously is a major improvement over the old teletype system. Still, it does not provide the flexibility and rapid transmission of real-time systems, such as telephone links or even tele-conferencing capabilities. In some unusual situations, such as when the KAL-007 wandered over Soviet territory, such communications in real time could possibly avert tragedy or defuse a crisis. But there are potential problems with real-time systems as well.

It seems clear that such systems are not desirable for communications between heads of state in crises. At this level, the consequences of a misstatement, a misinterpretation, or even a hasty and ill-considered reaction to the adversary's position could be catastrophic. Expert professional staff could employ real-time communications without the same degree of risk, if for no other reason than because these designated professional staffs would not be in a position to commit their countries to a specific course of action. Still, there could be problems. The language used in direct real-time communications may not convey the intended messages as precisely as a prepared written message. The content of verbal com-

munications may be subject to misinterpretation because of the tone and imagery of its presentation; emotion and personal idiosyncrasies are more likely to harm than to aid the peaceful resolution of crises. For these reasons, it seems most prudent to initiate the centers with the same type of communications links used in the Hot Line, adding real-time systems on an experimental basis only as the two sides gained experience and confidence in the NRRCs. Over time, the means of communicating between the centers would be upgraded to gain the potential to transmit greater amounts of information in a variety of useful formats.

It also has been suggested that the centers might be manned jointly. This does not seem prudent, as it would make it difficult for them to operate as arms of their governments; there would be concern about compromising intelligence information and so forth. At most, as has been suggested previously, liaison officers could be assigned from the other side's embassy. Even such visits would be relatively infrequent, however, and tightly controlled.

Where Would the NRRCs Fit in the U.S. Government?

Both nations would be free to implement whatever institutional arrangements they believed appropriate for the proper and effective functioning of their respective nuclear risk reduction centers. Some bilateral discussion of institutional settings seems unavoidable, however, since these arrangements should reflect the broad political role and specific functional tasks of the centers. The U.S. government has four basic options in this regard: establishing the U.S. center as a part of the Defense Department, the Department of State, the National Security Council apparatus, or in a new setting separate from existing bureaucratic institutions.

There would be several advantages to establishing the U.S. center in the Pentagon, essentially as an elaboration of Secretary of Defense Weinberger's proposed Joint Military Communications Link. A Pentagon setting would facilitate achievement of the objective of engaging the military leaderships of both sides in an extended dialogue on nuclear risks; it also would be in keeping with the center's charter to focus on technical and military issues. A Pentagon location also could facilitate the utilization of existing military communication

links for crisis management—including those relating to the command and control of nuclear forces—if needed.

A disadvantage of a Defense Department location for the center is that it could become subsumed in the bureaucracy housing it. This would defeat two of the purposes behind the creation of the NRRCs: to address needs not now being met by existing bureaucracies and to provide an impetus for additional risk reduction measures. These objectives would be unlikely to be met if the center simply became another layer in a large bureaucracy with numerous tasks, many of which would have far higher institutional priorities than nuclear risk reduction. A Pentagon location also might increase the likelihood that center functions could be misused at times of tense U.S.-Soviet relations to demonstrate U.S. displeasure with Soviet activities, as was the case with the Incidents at Sea talks in 1985. This would defeat the center's objective of creating a buffer for the development of nuclear risk reduction measures during the inevitable ups and downs of U.S.-Soviet relations.

Two more reasons argue against a Defense Department location. It would be awkward for a center located in the Pentagon *not* to report to the president through the secretary of defense, yet it would be inappropriate for a center staffed by several government agencies performing crisis prevention functions to do so. Finally, insisting on a DoD location for the center could make it more difficult to negotiate any institutional arrangements with the USSR, given the Kremlin's stated resistance to establishing a military to military communications channel and Soviet skepticism regarding the centers' true purposes.

Locating the U.S. center at the Department of State would have the advantages of alleviating the above Soviet concerns while making it easier to draw on Department of State resources and communications channels, when needed. But this venue poses the same sorts of problems as a Pentagon location: Which bureau within State would be responsible for the center and how would interagency views be vetted? How could nuclear risk reduction measures be developed and institutionalized with a high priority in this bureaucratic setting, given the Department of State's existing priorities and responsibilities? Where would the requisite technical experts come from and how would they receive a sympathetic hearing? And, finally, if the center were located at State and its director reported

to the president through the secretary of state, how would it serve interagency interests?

Many of these jurisdictional problems could be alleviated if the center were located in the Executive Office of the President and staffed both by designees of other departments and agencies and by specialists assigned to the National Security Council staff. The director could be a senior member of the NSC staff who reported to the president through his special assistant for national security affairs. This organizational arrangement could facilitate coordination among national security bureaucracies, help to ensure that the U.S. center was not subsumed by separate bureaucratic interests, and facilitate the subsequent development and growth of risk reduction measures. The venue of the NSC also could convey the reassuring message that the U.S. government attached a high degree of importance to nuclear risk reduction. Location within the Executive Office of the President also would be logical in that primary responsibility for crisis management has always been assigned there.

The disadvantages of locating the center within the Executive Office of the President relate to the myriad functions already performed there, many of which are extremely demanding, and its relatively small staff. Thus, the work of the center to prevent crises could be sidetracked by the press of daily business already accorded high priority; in crises, the problem would worsen. Existing NSC staff may thus not have time to work at crisis prevention on a routine basis, and additional staff dedicated to the center could make the overall size of the NSC staff unwieldy.

These problems could be alleviated by establishing a new institution dedicated exclusively to work on nuclear risk reduction measures. Personnel attached to such a new institution would likely have more incentive to succeed than with other institutional arrangements—a clear advantage. The director of the center could report to the National Security Council, thus establishing the interagency character of the organization, through the special assistant for national security affairs. The center could either be located in an existing building housing personnel attached to the Executive Office of the President or in a new facility. The dedication of a new facility to house the U.S. center might have some value in reassuring concerned publics about the priority the U.S. government attaches

to nuclear risk reduction. The center's staff would consist of personnel on loan from existing agencies and professional technicians.

Although there is no ideal solution to these organizational choices, the most sensible approach is to locate the U.S. center within the Executive Office of the President as part of the NSC apparatus. This location is essential for any crisis role and it would best promote interagency coordination. A special interagency NSC working group would oversee the center's operations, provide negotiating and policy guidance, and generally back up the operation. The actual communication hardware associated with the center could be located in the Pentagon alongside the Hot Line, with terminals in the Executive Office of the President, at State, and elsewhere, as needed.

How Best to Promote the Centers?

At this point, a highly public presidential initiative in support of creating nuclear risk reduction centers might be reassuring and helpful in drawing public attention to, and support for, the initiative, but it could generate the opposite reaction in the Kremlin. Given the Soviet allegation that technical proposals like the NRRCs are intended primarily to divert attention from more substantive arms control negotiations, a low key, private initiative may be more likely to elicit a favorable response.

Such private, diplomatic messages supporting the creation of nuclear risk reduction centers are likely to be most successful with the Kremlin if keyed tightly to the great powers' common interest in preventing nuclear war. The centers should be characterized as a government-to-government, rather than a military-to-military, channel. The creation of the centers and their initial work should be further characterized as a natural extension of prior cooperative work in this field—the Accidents Measures agreement and, most recently, the SCC common understanding related to nuclear terrorism. The proposed initial functions of the centers should be focused narrowly on technical exchanges and dialogues on dealing with nuclear contingencies. If both sides are satisfied with the operation of the centers during periods of normal relations, more substantive tasks can be added incrementally over time, geared to activities during crisis situations, as described earlier in this paper. Indeed, one might look for a steady stream of U.S.-Soviet agreements

over a considerable period of time—both to expand the functions and arrangements of the centers and as a consequence of the successful completion of their assigned tasks—all of which can help build mutual confidence in the relationship and reduce the risk of nuclear war.

Notes

1. The 1964 film, "Fail Safe," which features a prolonged attempt by the American president to persuade his Soviet counterpart that a bomber attack on Moscow was a mistake, assumed that telephonic links existed between both heads of state and between the two sides' military headquarters. Even so, characters in the film lament the absence of means to transmit electronic displays between the two capitals.

2. Some such notifications are already given in the Standing Consultative Commission established by the SALT agreements, but the SCC usually meets only twice per year. Other notifications are now provided through normal diplomatic and defense attache channels.

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The concept of Nuclear Risk Reduction Centers (NRRCs)—national centers in Moscow and Washington linked by sophisticated communications systems maintaining a 24-hour watch of potentially dangerous situations—was on the agenda at the 1985 Geneva summit.

President Reagan noted in his report to Congress that the agreement to begin work on these centers is “a decision that should give special satisfaction to Senators Nunn and Warner, who so ably promoted this idea.”

This monograph results directly from the Reagan-Gorbachev agreement “to study the question of establishing centers . . . at the expert level, taking into account the issues and developments in the Geneva negotiations.” It further refines the working group’s proposal, reflecting ongoing meeting held in late 1985 and early 1986.

The Concept of the NRRCs was developed by a working group of high-level experts chaired by Senators Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) and John Warner (R-Va.) The Nunn-Warner Working Group on Nuclear Risk Reductions—one of several bipartisan CSIS Congressional Study Groups—was formed in 1983 to develop, evaluate, and promote specific, pragmatic, and politically feasible means of reducing the risk of nuclear war. Its recommendations were published in 1985 in *Preventing Nuclear War: A Realistic Approach* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press), edited by Barry M. Blechman.

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