



Foreword

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As I write these words, the US-Russian cooperation designed to assure that nuclear weapons and bomb-making materials in Russia were safe and secure has been suspended. Other international cooperative activities in nuclear security will hopefully continue. However, the extraordinary cooperative security program that was initiated following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War appears to be at its end.

This is an appropriate time to look back at the events and the people who took the first steps to make these two decades of history possible. This book is about the lab-to-lab program, which, following the recovery of Russia's strategic and tactical nuclear weapons from the far reaches of the Former Soviet Union, became the most critical nuclear security component of the broader threat reduction initiative.

What follows is a story of heroes and fateful decisions. It is a story of the fellowship of rivals in the world's most deadly armament race coming together in a new deadly race to protect the world from a catastrophic and unexpected danger that arose from the cessation of hostilities. It is a story of building trust where there was none—a story of courage and necessity, a story of overcoming dangers that were understood in their full measure by only those who had worked in the secret worlds of both Cold War adversaries. It is a story of those who knew what they had wrought and who intently understood the urgency of the situation and what was required to contain the danger.

The efforts of the scientists, engineers, and government officials on both sides can be measured empirically in tons of fissile materials and thousands of weapons secured, but the true import of this work can be understood only by the absence of things, by noting what didn't happen.

I have no doubt that thousands and perhaps hundreds of thousands of lives depended on the success of this 20-year labor. And labor it was, involving harsh conditions, constant travel, and the conscientious acts of many more people in government service and in the Russian nuclear institutes and the US national laboratories than are, or could be, acknowledged in this telling.

The focus here is on the beginning, without which there would have been no program at all. We refer to this as “the lab-to-lab program” for a reason. For it was the mutual respect and early agreement among the scientists in our national laboratories and in the Russian institutes that gave credibility to the threat and a basis for building the trust essential to program design and execution.

It was the free involvement of our scientists who held our nation's most sensitive secrets that made it possible for Russia to grant our scientists open access to their scientists who, likewise, had the trust of the state in nuclear matters. It was the joining together of both that gave a sense of destiny to the undertaking, and it seemed right that those who built the arsenals that kept the peace during the Cold War should inherit the obligation to make the peace safe in the war's aftermath. Without this scientific underpinning, nothing could have been accomplished with the speed or scale the initiative was able to achieve over these last twenty years.

At any time numerous officials on either side could have stopped this effort or stopped activities under the foundational Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program or the follow-on Nunn-Lugar-Domenici Act, concluding that the security risks or the program execution costs were too high. But they did not.

In retrospect, it is a remarkable testament to all those involved over the years that this essential work survived as long as it did, despite multiple changes in presidential and legislative leadership and a continuous ebb and flow of political tension between our two nations. This continuity of effort, and the deeds it fostered, materially reduced nuclear and other dangers and made the world safer for present and future generations.

All who participated in this extraordinary history, Russians and Americans alike, should take pride in what was accomplished.