

Response from the Department of Defense

ASHTON B. CARTER

Thank you for your letter . . . to President Clinton concerning J. Michael Waller's article, "To Russia with Cash" in the June 1996 *Reader's Digest*. Much of what was said in the article is either incorrect or misleading. While many of the areas the article addressed are outside my purview, I would like to set the record straight about one set of allegations, those involving DoD's Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) program.

The CTR program provides assistance to eligible states of the former Soviet Union in order to dismantle weapons of mass destruction, reduce the threat of proliferation, and demilitarize their societies. Forty-three projects are underway in Russia, Belarus, Kazakstan, and Ukraine to dismantle strategic nuclear launchers, missiles, and associated infrastructure; to secure and safely store nuclear warheads and materials; to eliminate chemical weapons; and to convert excess defense industrial capability to commercial production. For these projects, CTR provides technical assistance and equipment. In total, over \$1 billion in assistance has already been provided.

The CTR program is perhaps the least expensive method for the U.S. to enhance its security. Instead of spending tax dollars to defend against a threat, CTR reduces it, by helping Russia and other former Soviet republics dismantle and destroy their weapons of mass destruction. It is important to note that much of these funds go to U.S. contractors who then carry out the CTR programs in these countries.

CTR furthers national security interests by accelerating the pace of strategic weapons dismantlement efforts. These countries face severe financial difficulties, and most likely would not place weapons dismantlement over modernization of weapons as a high priority for funding. CTR assistance ensures that weapons systems targeted by the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties (START I/II) are destroyed, rather than still being in existence when new weapons are brought on-line.

Mr. Waller's statement regarding U.S. money aiding the transfer of warheads from Belarus, Kazakstan, and Ukraine to Russia was a misrepresentation of the

Ashton B. Carter, a professor at Harvard University, was assistant secretary of defense for international security policy until September 1996. This response was a public letter dated 9 September 1996.

facts. Because of these transfers, only one country, as opposed to four, has access to these weapons, thus achieving one of our most important nonproliferation goals. Waller also neglected to mention that nearly all of the weapons transferred are slated for dismantlement, and the resultant nuclear material will be held in a new, secure storage facility which has state-of-the-art protection and transparency measures.

The U.S. has a wide range of means to assure these funds are used for their intended purposes. There are six to seven visits each year to Russia by Auditing and Examining teams; on-site inspections by U.S. project officials; regular contacts by U.S. contractors with Russian officials and contractors at project sites; official visits by senior officials; and our own intelligence sources. While isolated instances of diversion or misuse may arise in a program of this size and scope, we are confident to date that CTR assistance is serving the purposes we intend. Were diversion or misuse to be identified, we would of course take appropriate remedial steps.

I hope this alleviates your concern that CTR aid to Russia is being misdirected. I truly believe that this program is a solid investment toward our national security interests.