

# Arms Control & Disarmament

## Disintegration of Nuclear Power Viewed

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[Commentary by A. Gerasimov; introduced by correspondent Irina Mishina; from the "TV Inform" newscast]

[Text] [Mishina] For many years the downfall of the Soviet Union was an American dream. However, Robert Gates, the new director of the CIA, said on 10 December that this dream is turning into a nightmare. The biggest cause for concern for the Western strategists is the control of the 30,000 units of the Soviet nuclear arsenal.

[Gerasimov] The text of the agreement on the creation of the commonwealth of independent Slav republics claims that the member-states of the commonwealth will preserve and maintain a common military-strategic space under a unified command including unified control over nuclear weapons. It does not clarify specifically by whom and how the nuclear button can be pressed.

This is the first time in human history that the disintegration of a nuclear power has occurred, and quite understandably the world's inhabitants are concerned over the question of guarantees of their strategic safety. Until 8 December the whole world was aware that only Mikhail Gorbachev could order the launching of the ICBMs located in Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and the Ukraine.

Then on 9 Decembere at a news conference on the results of the Belovezhskaya Pushcha meeting, Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk stated that another system had been created for the launching of missiles and that three buttons, each under the control of the leaders of the Slav republics, needed to be pressed simultaneously. There was no mention of the fourth Kazakh button.

It is for military strategists and politicians to judge whether the security of the peoples of the former Soviet Union is increasing and whether world nuclear confrontation is decreasing, but those who have to eliminate the missiles are becoming dismayed. Refuting what the Ukrainian president had said, Gen. [General] Maksimov, the guardian of the missile potential, stated that both prior to and following Belovezhskaya Pushcha only the USSR president is in charge of the nuclear console. This was confirmed by Russian President Boris Yeltsin in a telephone conversation with U.S. President George Bush.

Let us add that alongside the button with Gorbachev are the Defense Council and Defense Ministry of the Soviet Union, a state that to all intents and purposes no longer exists. In short it is a fine muddle in the best traditions of the USSR.

**The out-of-favor Chief of the General Staff Lobov, who was recently sacked by the country's president, has brought further refinement to the situation. Today he expressed perplexity over his retirement and at the same time stressed that his credo was the impossibility of the constantly changing political situation having an influence on the Armed Forces.**

**At present events are developing in such an unexpected way that it is virtually impossible to predict the future, and certainly it is essential to have precise guarantees from all leaders involved with nuclear weapons so that we do not feel like hostages of the button.**

**[Mishina] And so, up to the present moment Mikhail Gorbachev is the commander-in-chief of the Soviet nuclear arsenal. For the time being the politicians are waiting and assessing the situation. Meanwhile it has been learned that the United States, the EC and NATO have sent their representatives to the Ukraine to clarify the nuclear weapons situation on the spot.**