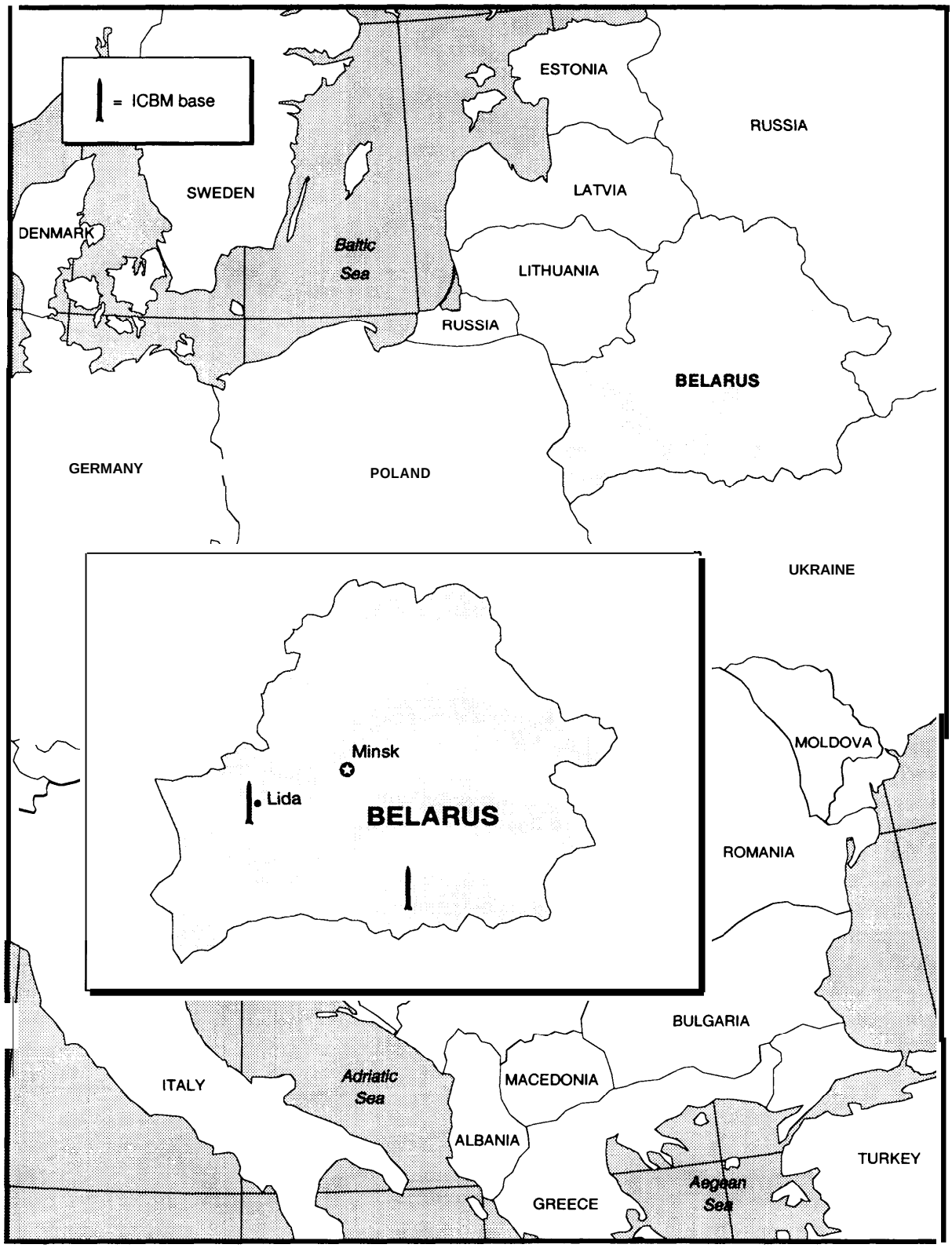
4 Belarus

Until the break-up of the Soviet Union, Belarus, formerly the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, had (with a brief exception just after the Russian Revolution) never before existed as an independent entity. In the past, it had been part of Poland, Lithuania, Russia, or Ukraine. It now borders on all these states as well as on Latvia. Belarus is known as White Russia (the translation of Belarus) because it is geographically situated beyond the influence of Mongol invasion and suzerainty from the 13th to the 15th centuries. Belarus has a relatively small population of about ten million, and a territory roughly the size of England and Scotland together. Figure 2 shows relevant facilities in Belarus.

Former Belarusian Supreme Soviet Chairman Shushkevich, Chairman of the Belarusian Supreme Soviet (parliament) since independence in late 1991, struggled for two years to promote political and economic reforms in the face of conservative inertia in the parliament. However, he was removed from office by a vote of the Soviet—which is dominated by conservative holdovers from the Communist era-on January 26, 1994. His successor, Mechyslaw Hryb, was also a reformer, but a more cautious and compromising one. Little economic or political reform has yet occurred in Belarus, although democratic forces have the freedom and capacity to argue actively for it.[1] Nevertheless, Belarus is calmer politically and less turbulent economically than many other of the former Soviet republics.

[1] However, the overwhelming election of a conservative pro-Russian figure, Alexander Lukashenka, as president in July 1994 has made economic reform less likely.

FIGURE 2: Selected Sites in Belarus



SOURCES: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Monterey Institute of International Studies, May 1994

On February 4, 1993, the Belarus Supreme Soviet recommended accession to both START I and the NPT, making Belarus the first of the three non-Russian nuclear inheritor states to do so. On October 26, 1992, Belarus, on instructions from Chairman Shushkevich, approved a schedule that would remove strategic nuclear weapons from its soil by the end of 1994; however, later indications are that the government will require until the end of 1996 to accomplish this.[2]

Belarus has a few civilian nuclear facilities with a small amount of nuclear material useful for weapons.[3] Belarusian and Western officials worry more about the transit through the country of contraband nuclear material from sources in Russia than they do about diversion from Belarusian nuclear facilities. Some cases of nuclear contraband passing through Belarus have been reported, but none of these involved plutonium or HEU.

The United States, after a few months delay, has begun to reward Belarus for its forthcoming behavior on the nuclear issue. In total, some $76 million were in the process of being obligated under the Nunn-Lugar program as of March 1994.[4] The money will go for purposes related to the nuclear weapon reductions, such as dismantling missiles, shipping nuclear warheads to Russia, and remediating environmental damage associated with missile deployment. In addition, some funds will go to training export control experts and providing assistance to improve Belarusian export control and customs capabilities.

Belarus has since requested an additional $210 million for aid related to nuclear disarmament. In a detailed memorandum to the State Department, the Belarusian government sought these funds for purposes such as establishing an effective customs system and providing housing for military personnel who will be retired once the nuclear-armed SS-25 missiles on Belarus' territory are dismantled.

The U.S. government has been interested in supporting Belarus to the maximum degree possible, both to encourage and reward its behavior thus far and also to indicate to Ukraine (and, until its ratification of the NPT, Kazakhstan) that significant benefits may follow the renunciation of nuclear weapons. U.S. Ambassador James Goodby, in charge of the Safe and Secure Dismantlement program, made it clear during a trip to Minsk and other parts of the former Soviet Union in April 1993 that Belarusian requests for aid related to the nuclear disarmament process would be looked upon favorably by the U .S. government. President Clinton made the same points during his January 15, 1994 visit to Belarus and announced the provision of an additional $50 million in assistance programs.[5]

Further, two non-governmental organizations, the Monterey Institute for International Studies and the Center for East-West Trade Policy at the University of Georgia, recently helped Belarusian counterparts establish the Center for Nonproliferation and Export Control in Minsk, Belarus, which provides training and advice for government officials in these fields.

U.S. POLICY OPTIONS REGARDING BELARUS

Since Belarus was the first of the non-Russian nuclear inheritor states to accede to the NPT and to

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[2] On the first point, see, for example, G. Allison et al., "Cooperative Denuclearization: From Pledges to Deeds" (Cambridge, MA: Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard University, January 1993), p. 46, and, on the second point, "Twenty-seven Belarusian SS-25 Missiles to be Dismantled in Russia," Agence France Press, Dec. 22, 1993, in FBIS, JPRS-TND-93-003, Jan. 31, 1994, p. 18.

[3] Belarus has two so-called critical assemblies in addition to two small experimental research reactors in Minsk, and a store of spent fuel, all of which contain HEU; see W. Potter, "Nuclear Profiles of the Soviet Successor States" (Monterey, CA: Program for Nonproliferation Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies, May 1993), pp. 7-8.

[4] U.S. Department of State Dispatch, Jan. 3, 1994, p. 6.

[5] Douglas Jehl, "Clinton Promises Help for Belarus Before Changing Focus to Mideast," *The New York Times*, Jan. 16, 1994, p. Al.

Findings Regarding Belarus

- Belarus has been the most forthcoming of the three non-Russian nuclear inheritor states of the FSU in terms of fulfilling its commitments to the international community in arms control and nonproliferation.
- Belarus presents the lowest proliferation threat of any of the nuclear inheritor states of the FSU because of the relatively small number of nuclear weapons on its territory, because of the small amount of other nuclear material there, and because the political situation is relatively calm, However, some smuggling has occurred through its territory.
- Belarus has asked the United States for a moderate amount of economic aid related to nuclear dismantlement and arms reductions. These requests appear intended to improve control over nuclear material on its territory, The United States government has begun to respond positively to these requests.

START I, and since it has relatively few warheads and little nuclear material apart from those warheads on its territory, Belarus is the least problematic of the nuclear inheritor states of the FSU. However, the United States could take steps that would further improve control over nuclear material in Belarus.

One option is to increase Nunn-Lugar assistance by granting all or part of the additional $210 million requested by the government of Belarus. Admittedly, arguing for increased expenditures on the FSU is difficult at a time when domestic budget constraints are severe. Moreover, the funds are no longer necessary to induce Belarus to accede to START I or the NPT, since it has already done so. Nevertheless, additional assistance might be desirable for several reasons. First, Belarus does not yet have adequate control over its borders, especially over the frontier with Russia.[6] The porosity of this border has permitted the smuggling of many commodities, including low-enriched uranium. Additional customs capability would be beneficial not only for Belarus, but also for Russia and the international community. U.S. assistance in this area, both in training and in helping fund the establishment of an effective customs system, could be productive. For example, Belarus currently lacks sufficient quantities of simple radiation detectors for customs use, which would be of great assistance. Further, Belarus also needs advice on setting up the institutional aspects of its export control system, as do all the other former Soviet republics.[7]

The material well-being of those in the FSU charged with the custody of nuclear weapons is very important, and not sufficiently appreciated in the West. The morale of the former Soviet Army is currently low, according to press reports and to academic and government experts who have traveled to the FSU. Part of the cause is a lack of housing for personnel, arising from the sudden return of hundreds of thousands of troops to Russia from the Soviet Union's former Warsaw Pact allies. In fact, beyond housing, there are problems of inadequate medical services, scant consumer goods, and other infrastructure deficiencies that render the quality of life poor. The request by Belarus for housing for the Russian (no longer Soviet) military nuclear custodians on its territory-included in its $210 million request for additional U.S. nuclear-related aid----confirms that the lack of amenities for these critical personnel is a serious concern in the FSU. It should be a serious concern for the United States as well.

A relatively small investment here would go a long way to restore morale among people in

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[6] If a customs union with Russia is achieved, this border will not need to be controlled to the same degree as Belarus' external borders.

[7] As noted above, the United States has, in fact, begun talks with many of the former Soviet states to this end. Through nongovernmental organizations, it has helped establish training in various ways, including a conference at Airlie House, Warrenton, VA, June 14-16, 1993, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Energy. Most of the republics were represented there, including all four of the nuclear inheritor states.

charge of a vital commodity, thereby serving to increase the integrity of the guard force. It would also allay the suspicions, widespread among the Russian military, that the United States is still acting as an enemy, trying to disarm and destroy it and, therefore, all of Russia.

In addition to assisting Belarus with housing for retired Russian officers, one possible option would be to provide some housing for active officers as well. However, it would be difficult politically and morally to justify paying for the maintenance of soldiers manning missiles that could be aimed at the United States.

The United States could provide advice in the area of privatization, which in Belarus has lagged behind Russia and some other FSU republics. It could also expand its assistance—beyond the $20 million or so that has already been obligated and earmarked for two factories in Lida—for converting Belarus's defense industry to peaceful purposes. For example, Belarus has large truck manufacturing facilities, some of which had been used to build mobile launchers for the SS-25 ICBM. It also has microelectronics manufacturing capabilities that might be modified for the civilian sector. Improving Belarus's economic performance, in part through successful defense conversion, would reduce economic stress and lessen the risk of widespread corruption that could threaten nuclear security and safeguards. Defense conversion assistance could also be used as a lever to persuade local authorities to implement economic reforms more rapidly. If the defense industry were shut down without civilian replacement, unemployment would increase considerably, stressing society still further and adding to proliferation dangers.

Improving Belarus's economic performance also has an importance for European stability that goes beyond nuclear proliferation, since instability in any of the former Soviet republics would have negative repercussions in Russia and in nearby parts of eastern Europe.

The question is, however, how useful more U.S. aid would be. As noted above, the Belarusian economy and political structure have remained largely in the hands of an old guard that has not, as yet, taken major steps in the direction of economic reform, decentralization, and privatization. The economic situation in Belarus is not much better than in Russia, although it is substantially better than in Ukraine. Giving large amounts of aid now would not be useful if it would tend to entrench the old guard, lend itself to corrupt and wasteful activities, or disappear into a system that has demonstrated considerable resistance to change.[8]

Another option, suggested by Allison et al. and by Potter,[9] is to establish a center for scientific and technical research similar to those being set up in Russia and Ukraine. Since there are not many weapon scientists in Belarus, such a center should not necessarily be focused on individuals with weapon expertise.[10] A1lison et al. suggested a center devoted to energy research, since Belarus is energy-poor, has no nuclear power (its two reactors are small and used only for research, not electricity production), and imports nearly all its fossil fuels. (Energy costs for Belarus have risen considerably now that Russia demands payment for its energy exports in hard currency.) In fact, despite the Chernobyl trauma, which actually affected more land in Belarus than in Ukraine, current governmental thinking is to reactivate plans for nuclear plants in the Minsk area.

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8 One suggestion for dealing with this issue, but not in a nonproliferation context, is to target assistance to those institutions or agencies that have demonstrated a commitment to reform. See U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment, *Fueling Reform: Energy Technologies for the Former East Bloc*, OTA-ETI-599 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, July 1994), esp. ch. 8.

9 G. Allison, et al., "Denuclearization," op. cit., footnote 2 and W. Potter, "Nuclear Export Controls From the Former Soviet Union: What's New, What's True," *Arms Control Today*, Jan./Feb. 1993, pp. 3-10.

10 While the International Science and Technology Center is aimed at weapon scientists, it is not restrictive: civilian scientists may also participate. See chapter 6.

Another focus for such a center, suggested by a Belarusian official, would be to study the effects of the Chernobyl disaster on the people, animals, and plants in the southeast part of the country that was most affected by the fallout.[11] Such studies, including epidemiological ones, would be of interest to the rest of the world as well, where better information on the effects of radiation would be helpful in formulating civilian nuclear policy and in developing and revising nuclear safety standards. An additional variation of this option would be to research technologies for cleaning up, as well as monitoring, some of the consequences of the Chernobyl accident.

Either of these options could be accomplished within or outside the Nunn-Lugar framework. In January 1994, an umbrella agreement on scientific and technical cooperation was signed between the United States and Belarus. While no funds have yet been specifically identified for projects under this agreement, it provides a legal structure under which an international research center could be established.

Although political problems delayed agreements establishing such a center in Moscow and still impede one in Kiev, such difficulties are less likely to occur in Minsk. In both Russia and Ukraine, the centers became part of wider power struggles between the president and the parliament. Such tensions are far milder in Belarus. Further, both Russian and Ukrainian nationalists fear that the purpose of the centers is to steal Soviet nuclear secrets and to help dismantle research abilities by co-opting individual scientists. In Belarus, since there are few weapon scientists, this would be less of an issue. Moreover, even in the case of the weapon scientists, the purpose would not simply be to keep them occupied and "off the streets" so that their expertise would not be exported: it would be to keep many other technologies and scientific capabilities alive, since they are vital components of any strategy for economic revival. Joint research projects with Western scientists to this end could be a major component of a Belarus center. **Such a strategy would be valid not only in Belarus but in any of the other nuclear inheritor states, since a long-term solution to the danger of nuclear proliferation in the FSU must include economic development and political stability.**

Arguing against such a broader mandate for these research centers, however, is the fact that saving Belarusian science as a whole (and, by extension, science in the other former Soviet republics) is far beyond their limited capabilities. Such a wide mandate would absorb funds that might arguably better be targeted to the specific task of preventing weapon scientists and engineers from working for proliferant states.

A dedicated center for Belarusian scientists is not the only possibility. Plans are now being considered to establish a Minsk branch office of the Moscow-based International Science and Technology Center, which is now operational (see chapter 6 for details). If this does not come to fruition, an alternate proposal would be for the Moscow center to set aside some money for Belarus. Belarus has become a member of the International Science and Technology Center, although it is not clear what this will mean in terms of funding projects involving Belarus scientists. Either option might satisfy the needs of Belarus without giving rise to the administrative and political delays that a new center and new agreement might entail.

A different approach to expanding scientific cooperation with the FSU would be a civilian research and development foundation, such as is being proposed for Russia under the FREEDOM Support Act of 1992. As noted, since there are not so many weapon scientists in Belarus, this type of mechanism might be more appropriate than funds under the Nunn-Lugar amendment, which is aimed at weapon scientists. Another approach would be to rely on laboratory-to-laboratory projects among U.S. government laboratories, private industry, and their counterparts in Belarus as a

11 V. Gontcharenok, Embassy of Belarus, personal communication, May 1993.

mechanism for assisting in the scientific development of the country. Department of Energy laboratories have proposed to use the funding allocated in the fiscal year 1994 Department of State appropriations, among other funds, for this purpose (see discussion in chapter 3 on U.S. cooperative programs).

POLICY OPTIONS SUMMARIZED

- **Provide further funding (up to $210 million) for assistance to Belarus in nuclear-related areas:**

1. Export control
2. Customs equipment and training
3. Housing and possibly other infrastructure improvements for military custodians of nuclear weapons
4. Environmental research and cleanup related to the Chernobyl disaster and to the removal of nuclear weapons

Rationale For: Provides additional security for protection of nuclear material and discourages nuclear trafficking; strengthens morale, loyalty, integrity of units in charge of nuclear forces; aids in financing compliance with arms reduction agreements and initiatives; gives positive example of potential rewards for NPT accession to Ukraine.

Arguments Against: Such assistance would be expensive at a time of limited U.S. resources and unnecessary for exerting political leverage on Belarus, which has already acceded to START I and the NPT. Questions might be raised about the ability of the Belarusian government and economy to absorb such aid effectively. Assistance to active nuclear officers would be difficult to justify politically and otherwise. Money spent on environmental cleanup activities might be better spent to remedy inadequacies in Belarusian export control and customs systems or to help bolster the economy.

- **Provide Defense Conversion Assistance**

Rationale For: Helps establish economic stability, resulting in less pressure to export weapon technologies; gives positive example of potential rewards for NPT accession to recalcitrant states; has potential to help hasten reform process.

Arguments Against: Would help conservative elements who still control economy and actually might act as a brake on decentralization, privatization, and reform.

- **Establish formal program of cooperation in science and technology focused on the following areas:**

1. Energy research
2. Chernobyl-related epidemiology
3. Environmental research

Rationale For: This might be done either under the science and technology agreement or under the Nunn-Lugar program. It would help Belarusian science and technology survive a difficult transition period, give a positive example of potential rewards for NPT accession to recalcitrant states, and create goodwill with the government of Belarus; if targeted properly, it could provide work for weapon scientists. A key issue, however, would be how broadly to target assistance beyond the scientists and engineers with direct weapon expertise.

Arguments Against: As in the above cases, this policy would require funds in a time of fiscal constraint in the United States. Such a policy might aid a conservative regime that is slow to reform; moreover, funds are not needed to placate Belarus, since the country has already acceded to the NPT. Further, such aid might be more effective in the long run if focused on economic development rather than on energy or environmental topics.

Alternative possibilities to achieve similar goals:

1. Establish a Belarus center for joint scientific and technical research in Minsk (under Nunn-Lugar), analogous to the one in Moscow, to fund joint research projects between weapon scientists in Belarus and the United States.
2. Open a branch of the Moscow-based International Science and Technology Center in Minsk, which would be easier and cheaper than

creating an independent center for Belarus, although possibly less pleasing to Belarusians anxious to preserve their own identity.
3. Use FREEDOM Support Act funding for an R&D center aimed at civilians, under auspices of the umbrella science and technology agreement between the United States and Belarus.
4. Rely on laboratory-to-laboratory interactions, together with the participation of U.S. industry, for cooperative science R&D with Belarus.

The last two mechanisms may be used together and may be more appropriate than Nunn-Lugar funds because there are relatively fewer weapon scientists in Belarus than in other states eligible to receive Nunn-Lugar support. However, if U.S. officials decide to concentrate on weapon scientists, an international science center (under Nunn-Lugar funding) or a branch office of the Moscow center could be established as well.