



Letter to U.S. President Bill Clinton and Russian President Vladimir Putin on Plutonium Disposition

William Jefferson Clinton
President of the United States of America

Vladimir Putin
President of the Russian Federation

cc: Albert Gore, Jr., Vice-President of the United States of America

Dear Presidents Clinton and Putin,

As a contribution to permanent arms reduction and disarmament, the United States and Russia have declared about 50 tons each of military plutonium surplus to their requirements. It is generally acknowledged that this commendable step must be followed by measures to put this plutonium into a form that cannot easily be diverted or reused in weapons.

There are several proposals that have been discussed and studied in the last many years in both governmental and NGO circles as to how this problem is to be addressed. The plan that the US and Russian governments have been negotiating involves the conversion of most of this plutonium into a mixed oxide (MOX fuel) for use in commercial nuclear power reactors, mainly light water reactors, in both Russia and the United States. The use of Canadian reactors is also being considered as an option.

This proposal has many drawbacks. It raises many unresolved safety questions and could increase the risk and severity of nuclear reactor accidents. Unless steps are taken to militarize security at these nuclear power plants, the risk of diversion of weapons grade plutonium will increase with time.

We believe that the other option of immobilization of plutonium, which Russia and the US have adopted for only a small proportion of the plutonium, should be extended to cover the full amount. This is a safer, faster, and more economically efficient option. It involves putting plutonium into a non-weapons usable form by mixing it with other materials and making the resultant waste form proliferation resistant. The MOX option should be discarded.

A considerable amount of discussion has also revolved around the financing of the Russian portion of the plutonium disposition plan. This is because Russia has agreed to the current plan, which is dominated by the use of MOX in light water nuclear power reactors, largely at the suggestion of the West. One financing plan has been put forward by a US corporation known as the Non-proliferation Trust, Inc. This would involve importation of up to 10,000 metric tons of foreign spent nuclear power reactor fuel for storage in Russia, a complete halt to commercial reprocessing, and a payment to Russia for building storage facilities, a nuclear waste repository and other purposes. Such a plan is currently illegal under Russian law and hence attempts are being made to amend the law. However, the Russian people are overwhelmingly opposed to such a plan, as is demonstrated by polling and by the firm opposition of environmental NGOs in Russia. Many US NGOs and those in other countries also oppose this plan.



In recognition of the reality that a plutonium disposition plan is needed, we, the undersigned, would like to offer the following proposal based on immobilization.

1. The same disposition plan in terms of the disposition technical details would be carried out in parallel in the United States and Russia.
2. It would include all separated commercial and surplus military plutonium.
3. Reprocessing of commercial spent fuel would be halted.
4. All separated commercial plutonium in US and Russian stocks, as well as all surplus military plutonium would be immobilized. There would be some flexibility regarding the specific immobilization method.
5. The immobilized plutonium of each country would be stored in that country and put under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards.
6. The West would lease Russia's plutonium for 50 years or would purchase it outright. Since plutonium has no commercial value as a fuel, some means has to be found to determine the price to be paid for the non-proliferation benefit. Since Russia regards plutonium as a potentially valuable fuel, the upper limit to the purchase price would be the value of the fuel normally used in light water reactors – low enriched uranium (LEU) – equivalent of the MOX that could be made out of the plutonium disregarding all fuel fabrication costs or any other additional costs associated with the use of MOX. In other words, the maximum amount Russia would be paid would correspond to the LEU fuel value as if the plutonium had already been made into MOX.
7. The payments to Russia could be stretched out over a time period comparable to the deal that Russia and the United States have made for the purchase of surplus Russian military highly enriched uranium—that is about 20 years—or to the time that it takes to immobilize the plutonium and to put it under IAEA safeguards.
8. The West would also pay for the immobilization of plutonium in Russia (in addition to the payment described in Item 6 above).
9. There are a number of ways in which this plutonium disposition plan could be financed. For instance: (1) The G-7, as the group of wealthy western countries is known, could fund it. (2) The European Union could create a Russian plutonium fund. (3) A small tax on natural gas imported from Russia into Europe could finance the plan. (4) The United States could supply part of the funds as the wealthier party to the agreement. (5) NATO could earmark funds for the plan, since this will enhance security for all its members. These financing mechanisms are not mutually exclusive.

In view of the widespread concerns relating to the use of MOX fuel in reactors, and the liabilities that it entails, we urge you not to adopt a plutonium disposition plan that includes the use of MOX but rather to endorse this alternative. We want to thank you for the time and consideration that you have given to this letter and wish you success in your deliberations.

(Read the letter [?? ?????? ?????](#) / [In Russian](#))

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