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Intelligence Report

Office of Russian and European Analysis

2 July 1999

Russia: Developing New Nuclear Warheads at Novaya Zemlya?

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The Russian Security Council in late April approved a nuclear test program at Novaya Zemlya for 1999 that is considerably more ambitious than the one conducted last year, according to press reports. *In mid-May, citing "informed sources," the newspaper Nezavisimaya gazeta reported that "far more money" would be spent on the 1999 experiments than was allocated in 1998 and that the new tests would be conducted "on a completely different qualitative level and as a matter of priority."*

- Although the Security Council refused to disclose the most sensitive aspects of its meeting, Security Council Secretary Putin emphasized to the press after the meeting that Russia needed to conduct additional nuclear experiments, *implying that the Council agreed to a test plan. Increased resources, if they materialize, would permit Russia to carry out more than the five experiments it conducted last year and to broaden the objectives of the tests.*

Public Russian statements suggest that one of several probable objectives of this testing effort is the development of low-yield warheads. The development of low-yield warheads that could be used on high-precision tactical weapon systems—long advocated by former Minister and now First Deputy Minister of Atomic Energy Mikhaylov—would be consistent with Russia's increasing reliance on nuclear weapons to deter conventional as well as nuclear attacks, especially given widespread perceptions of a heightened threat from NATO and the reduced capabilities of Russian conventional forces.

- *Defense officials also would be interested in low-yield warheads because of fears that a future conflict could be waged on Russian soil.*

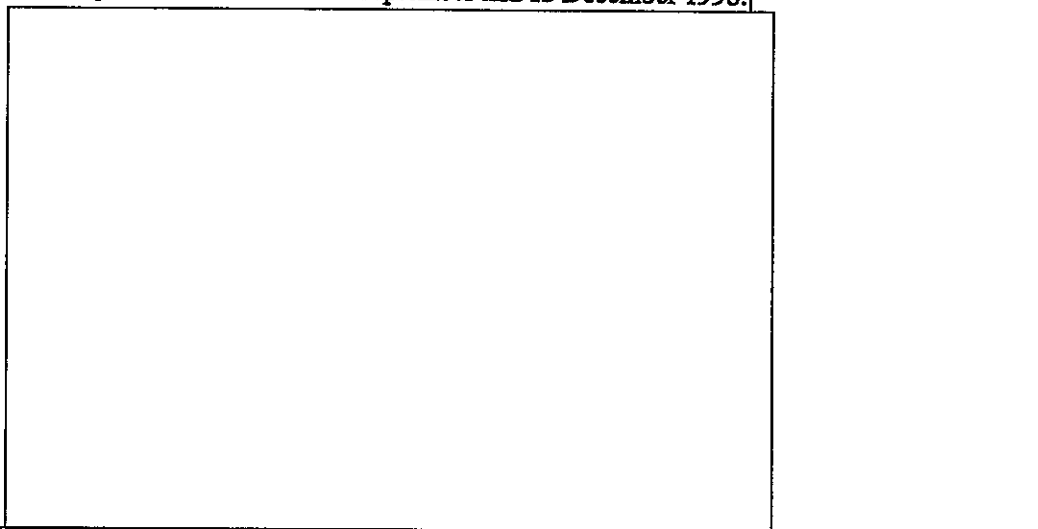
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[redacted] Last Year's Nuclear Test Program [redacted]

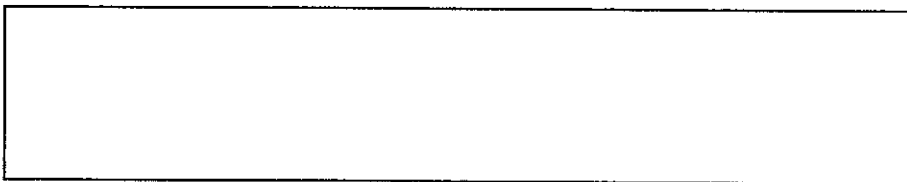
Citing First Deputy Minister of Atomic Energy Ryabev, a 12 May 1999 *Nezavisimaya gazeta* article reported that five nuclear experiments were conducted at the Novaya Zemlya test site between 14 September and 13 December 1998.



[redacted] Ryabev was quoted by *Nezavisimaya gazeta* as stating that the 1998 tests—conducted in special containers cemented into the rock—were carried out “in strict accordance with the requirements of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).” [redacted]

It is not clear how the Russian Government views hydronuclear tests under the CTBT. Hydronuclear tests are not explicitly prohibited nor is the term “zero yield” ever used in the CTBT text or in any other document approved by the Russian side. Following the most recent test campaign, statements in the Russian press used the US term “subcritical” to characterize the experiments, evidently to assert equivalence with the US program at the Nevada test site. [redacted]

The *Nezavisimaya gazeta* article implied that the Russian test program included [redacted] two [redacted] objectives [redacted]. According to the article, the main objective of recent experiments in both Russia and the United States was to certify the stability of

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existing warhead types and noted that the experiments were also used to check out the characteristics of new-generation chemical explosives, *presumably for use in either remanufactured or new warheads*. The article noted that last year's experiments included tests of models of warheads that were being rebuilt after having been in service for 13 or 14 years.

- The article cited the head of the Defense Ministry's 12th Main Directorate—responsible for the storage and maintenance of nuclear warheads—as saying that Russia planned to “modernize” these warheads. []

Press reporting suggests that the 1998 test program was conducted on a fiscal shoestring, which may have limited the number and scope of the tests. The 12th Main Directorate's head told *Kommersant* in December 1998 that the test site had received during the previous year only 10 percent of the funds that it needed for maintenance and might cease to exist altogether because of insufficient funding. []

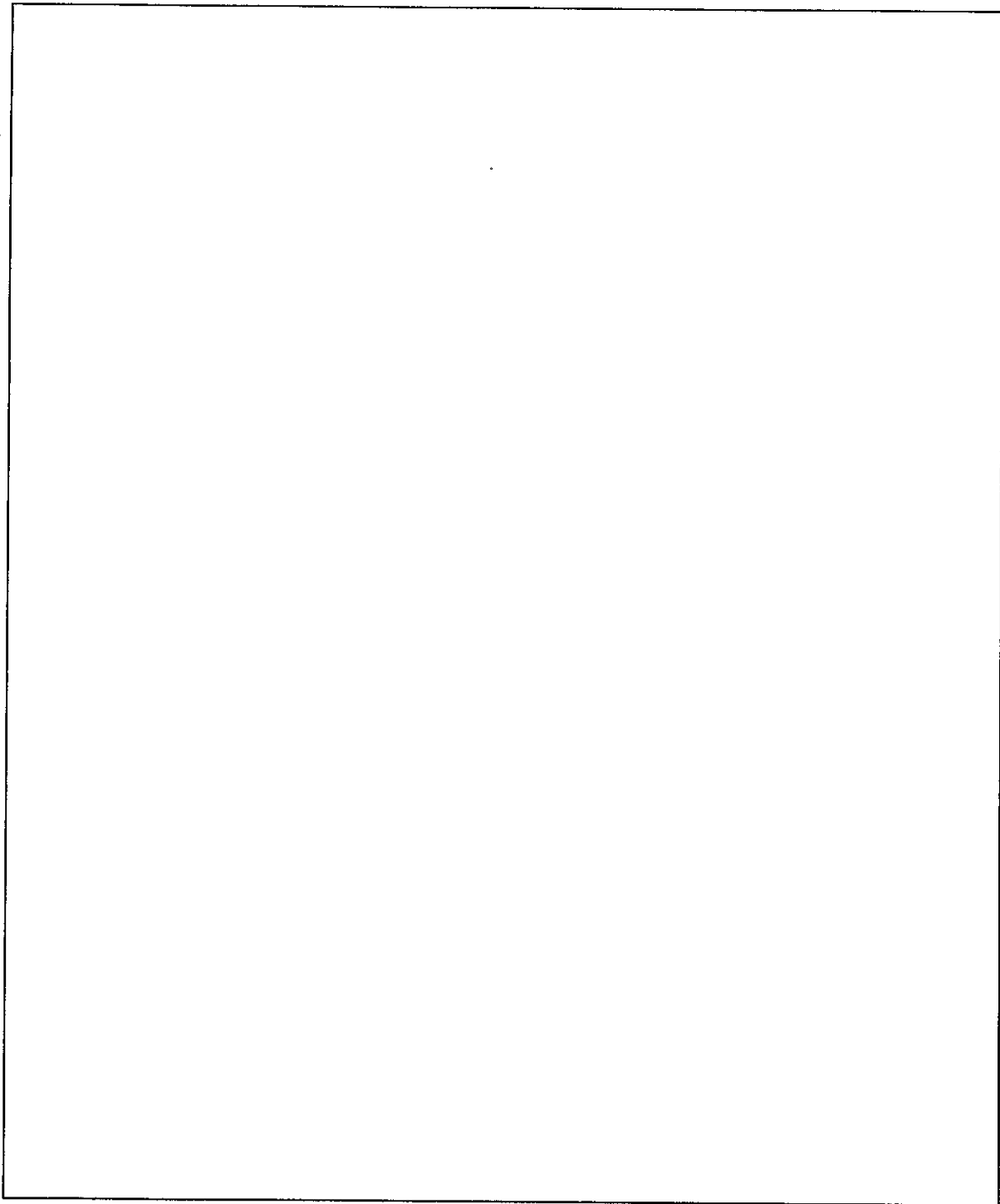
More Ambitious Program Planned for 1999 []

“Informed sources” stated that “far more money” will be spent on the nuclear experiments planned for 1999 at Novaya Zemlya than was allocated for the 1998 test program, according to the *Nezavisimaya gazeta* article. The new tests will reportedly be conducted “on a completely different qualitative level and as a matter of priority.” The same article cited Minister of Atomic Energy Adamov as saying that a document on this year's experiments at Novaya Zemlya had been “agreed in practice by everyone” and was awaiting President Yel'tsin's signature.

- *The enhanced priority and funding were probably agreed to during the 29 April meeting of the Russian Security Council. Council Secretary Putin emphasized to the press after the meeting that Russia needed to fund a way to conduct nuclear tests without violating international agreements, suggesting that the Council approved a general program for future nuclear testing. The document referred to by Adamov is probably a detailed test plan for the 1999 experiments.*
- *If the additional funds materialize, they could make possible a more ambitious test season this year involving more numerous or more complex experiments. Such an expansion would permit covering some of the objectives of last year's program in greater depth.* []

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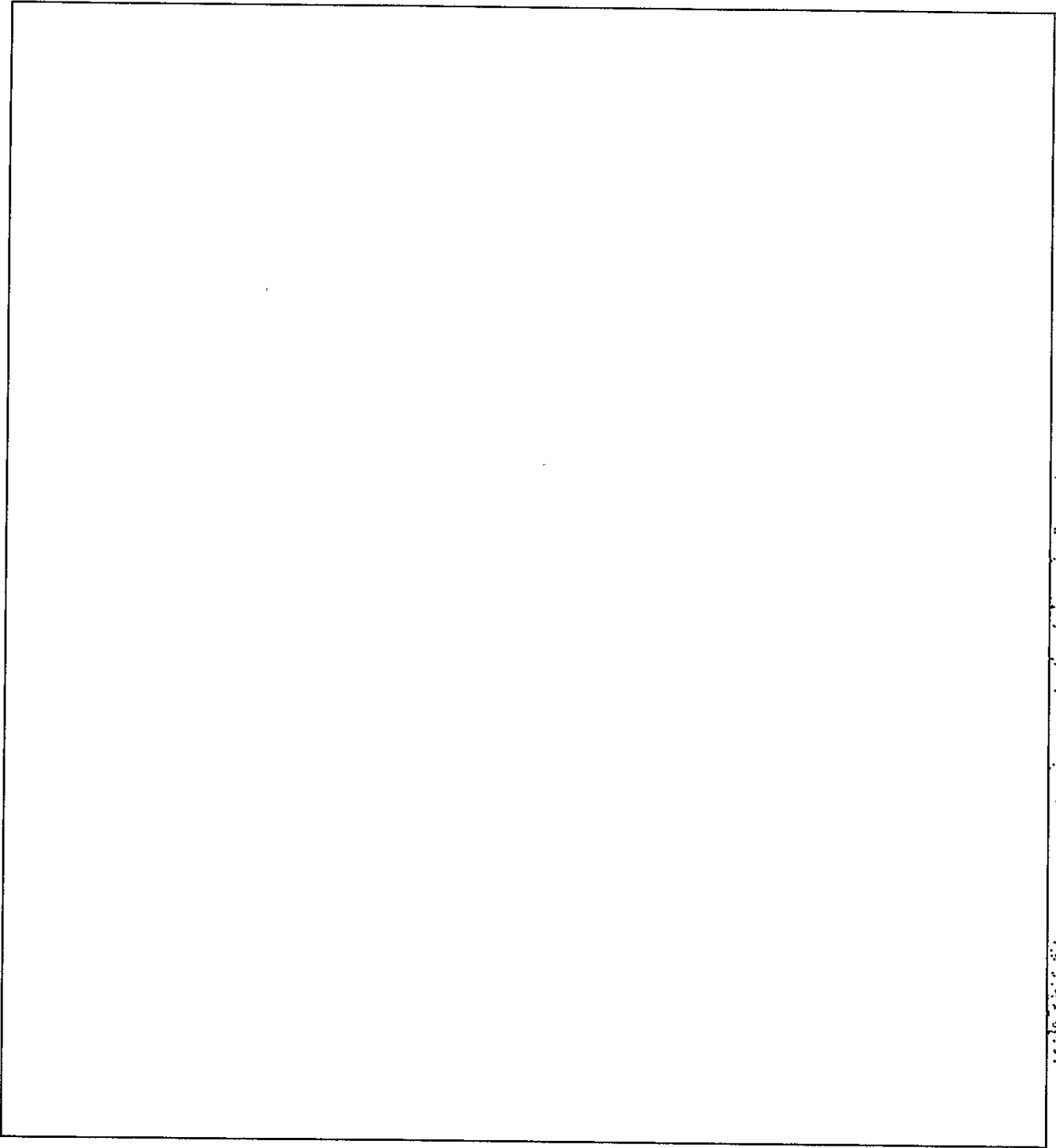
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- During his speech, Chernyshev also addressed critics who had accused Minatom of conducting unwarranted experiments, asserting that VNIIEF had worked closely with the Defense Ministry (MOD) through military representatives in its recent experiments. [Redacted]

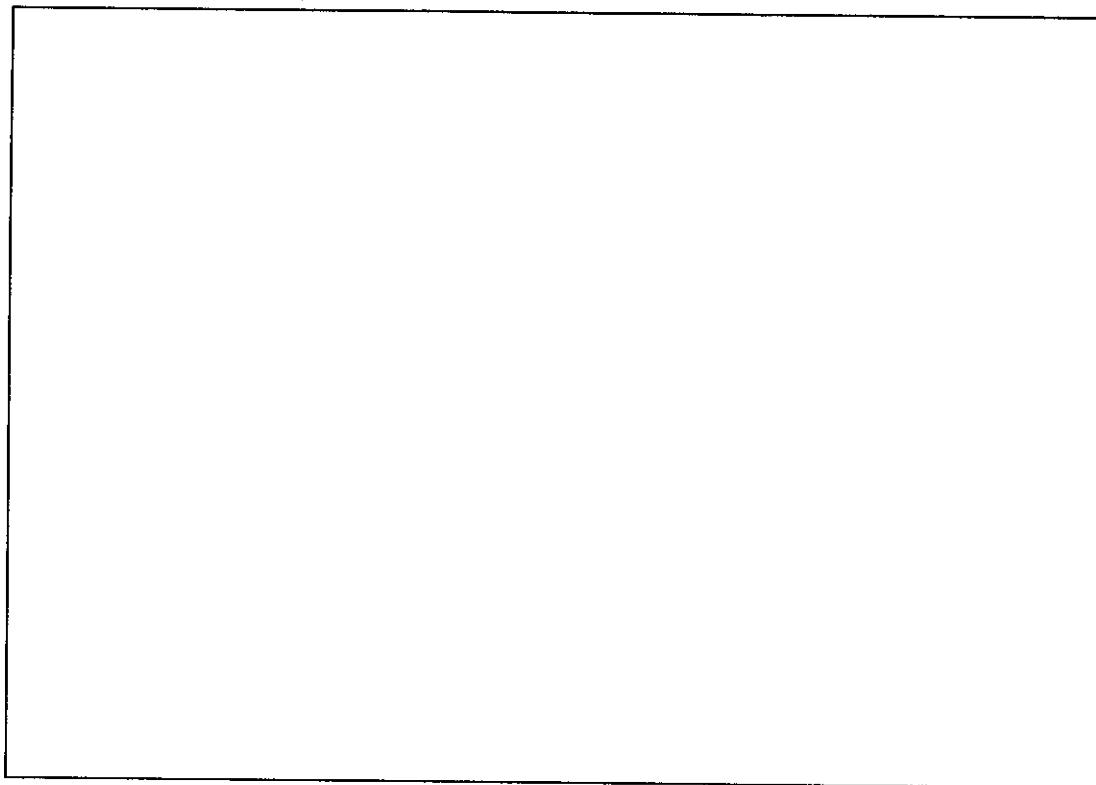
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In addition, Russia would have to test these new warheads in a more restrictive—and thus more costly—environment under the CTBT. Subcritical (zero-yield) experiments would be unlikely to fully meet Russia's test objectives. Russian spokesmen are arguing for a broader interpretation of permitted activities under the CTBT, and Mikhaylov has explicitly advocated permitting hydronuclear (low-yield) experiments within sealed containers—which we judge are far more useful for Russian weapons development.

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