



Progress on the nonproliferation front

by Brad Glosserman

UNITED NATIONS -- Since the terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, security planners the world over have lost considerable sleep contemplating the prospect of terrorists armed with nuclear weapons. In "At the Center of the Storm," his memoir as head of the CIA, George Tenet wrote "I am convinced that this is where [Osama bin Laden] and his operatives desperately want to go. ...They understand that bombings by cars, trucks, trains and planes will get them some headlines, to be sure. But if they manage to set off a mushroom cloud, they will make history."

The world has responded with an array of measures to fight this terrifying possibility. A handful of countries launched the Proliferation Security Initiative in 2003 to interdict the transfer of weapons of mass destructions (WMD) and materials; its supporters now number in the dozens, and it reportedly has a score of interdiction successes. In 2004, the United Nations Security Council passed resolution 1540, which requires all states to establish domestic controls to prevent WMD proliferation and their means of delivery. A year later, the UN unanimously adopted the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism (which languished since being first proposed in 1997); it has been signed by 115 countries and came into force July 7.

These initiatives target nonstate actors and terrorists. The prospect of North Korea and Iran building nuclear arsenals has reminded governments that equal attention must be given to ways that states proliferate. A number of proposals tighten controls over the spread of nuclear know-how and materials; most of them focus on the reprocessing and enrichment technology that is needed to build a bomb.

UNSCR 1540 is frequently held up as the most significant item in the nonproliferation toolkit. The resolution makes it mandatory for all states to take action to halt WMD proliferation. They are required to file reports that explain their compliance with the resolution. Those reports are analyzed by the 1540 Committee and its experts to ensure the resolution is fully implemented and safety better guaranteed.

Pacific Forum CSIS works through the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP), a multilateral security forum that we helped establish over a decade ago, to raise regional awareness of the threat posed by weapons of mass destruction, to encourage governments to work harder to combat this menace, and to help them build capacity to do so. Longtime support from the Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) allows us to hold meetings throughout the year that examine dimensions of the WMD threat and efforts to halt its spread. I, along with other nongovernmental organizations, visited

the UN last month to discuss our work, in particular efforts to support UNSCR 1540.

We are making progress. About three-quarters of UN member states filed reports and the 1540 Committee is trying to figure out how best to fill gaps in national nonproliferation efforts. It should come as no surprise that national capacity to fight this threat varies greatly. Nonetheless, some fundamental issues cut across all countries.

Virtually all governments face resource constraints – time, money, personnel – when trying to support nonproliferation efforts. Officials on the front lines of this work, such as customs agents and export control authorities, are especially hamstrung; meetings of CSCAP's Export Controls Experts Group, which I have the pleasure of chairing, have been punctuated by depressing presentations by customs officials throughout the Asia Pacific that demonstrate how overwhelmed they are by the sheer volume of trade as they try to do their job. Coordination among bureaucracies is poor. Similarly, most nations have not developed the legal infrastructure to fight this problem; UNSCR 1540 is designed to address this last shortcoming, among others.

The most powerful obstacles are attitudinal. Three are especially pernicious.

The first is the belief that WMD is someone else's problem. It is tempting to see this threat as a concern just for developed states, an attitude that is reinforced by governments that either think they aren't a target or they don't have components or materials that could be used to make such a weapon. Both views are dangerously short-sighted. Terrorist cells are ubiquitous and they have a long list of grievances, not just those related to Islamic fundamentalism; remember Aum Shinrikyo? Terror attacks in Indonesia, the Philippines, and even Japan should disabuse any country of the notion that it isn't at risk; indeed "soft targets" have become more appealing since military and diplomatic facilities have tightened security. Most countries have some nuclear materials in their territory, even if just radiological sources used for medical purposes, or they can make or assemble parts for a larger WMD assembly, or they can serve as transit points for shipments.

The good news here is that the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) last month agreed to set up a new forum to discuss disarmament and nonproliferation issues. CSCAP helped instigate and will closely support this governmental effort.

A second obstacle is the belief that there is tension between security and economic or business concerns and one comes at the expense of the other. This attitude is most pronounced among developing countries, which suspect the nonproliferation agenda is a way to deny them critical

technologies. They are wrong. Export controls are confidence builders and “trade enhancing,” not trade inhibiting. Governments are more willing to trade with countries that have systems that will prevent diversion or misuse of products. Singapore, for example, has adopted a robust export controls program and its trade is booming. A key component of the CSCAP program is getting Asia Pacific governments to understand this: we are making progress but there is a long way to go.

Misguided cost-benefit analysis is found in developed countries, too. Some governments worry that pressing the nonproliferation agenda may impose onerous burdens on their own companies or complicate relations with other states. Companies are often reluctant to closely scrutinize orders for fear of losing business. Most members of the A.Q. Khan network of illicit nuclear suppliers were in the developed world.

A final attitudinal barrier is the belief among nuclear weapons states – the U.S., Russia, China, France and Britain – that they can push a nonproliferation agenda without paying equal attention to their obligation under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) to move toward nuclear disarmament. Three decades ago, nonnuclear weapons states agreed to accept unequal status in the NPT only if the nuclear powers agreed to eventually disarm. Today, nonproliferation efforts mount as nuclear powers modernize their nuclear arsenals and insist on the utility of those weapons (while denying them to other governments). This seeming hypocrisy saps the will of nonnuclear states to embrace the nonproliferation agenda.

Fortunately, that last attitude appears to be changing. After several years insisting that disarmament obligations were not an issue, there seems to be growing recognition in the U.S. that nonproliferation and disarmament cannot be separated, and progress on the former depends on movement on the latter.

There was cautious optimism at this summer’s Carnegie International Nonproliferation Conference, an annual meeting that brings together hundreds of nonproliferation specialists from around the world. The starting point for this year’s discussion was a commentary in January by former U.S. Sen. Sam Nunn, former Secretaries of State Henry Kissinger and George Schultz, and former Defense Secretary William Perry calling for the U.S. to lead efforts to eliminate nuclear weapons. These four men, hard-headed realists, acknowledged that nonproliferation efforts alone are not enough to counter the threat posed by nuclear weapons and that progress toward eliminating nuclear weapon stockpiles is necessary.

Their article has galvanized the nonproliferation community, confirming the sense that the pendulum had swung too far and that disarmament issues must be put back to the table. Having these men make the case for disarmament is a weighty thumb on the scale: They provide serious

intellectual firepower to the argument and make it hard to dismiss disarmament advocates as naïve dreamers. Credible commitments to both nonproliferation and disarmament are needed to end the nuclear weapons threat.

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