



Reducing the Risks of WMD Proliferation through Multilateral Initiatives
January 19-21, 2006

The Centre for Global Studies (CFGS) held two back-to-back conferences with the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory's Center for Global Strategic Research (CSGR) January 19-21, 2006, on the subject of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). The CSGR conference focused on WMD "latency" and the CFGS conference focused on multilateral approaches to block or at least constrain proliferation. Excellent papers were produced for the latter by Paul Heinbecker of CIGI and Michael Moodie, President of the Chemical and Biological Arms Control Institute.

There was no question that technology renders the proliferation of WMD easier, but the rate at which this happens is not as rapid as many people think. Nuclear weapons in particular remain technologically challenging and, unless turned over by a state in a manner in which they could be used, are unlikely to be in the arsenal of non-state actors any time soon. There are, however, fewer secrets and more accessible technology in the biological and chemical fields. With respect to the latter, microprocessing technology is now widely available and is changing the prospects for undetectable development of chemical weapons very rapidly; this technology is beyond the conception (and hence the controls) of the drafters of the chemical weapons treaty.

There was an interesting discussion of potential weapons not normally considered WMD. The important objective of terrorists is not destruction in the classical sense but rather large scale disruption. Breaking the will of civil society and incapacitating governments are often the main objectives of terrorist groups. While the potential is definitely considered serious, because the consensus of the group was that these are not effective area for multilateral co-operation, they will not be considered in any further detail in this report.

One significant area of contention was whether or not one needed to consider precisely who the likely perpetrators (state and non-state) are, what their objectives are and whether they could in at least some part be met or deflected. Some thought to do this would legitimate the perpetrators; others thought this was too narrow a view, at least a priori. No one suggested there were seriously threatening groups of non-state actors (i.e. terrorists) other than al-Qaeda plus their followers and copycats; surely this suggested more analysis was needed of their thinking. There was, however, acceptance of the utility in this field of a version of 'Red-Blue' war gaming to try to get into the heads of potential aggressors.

All of the presentations included both capabilities and intent. It was pointed out that this has always been the case in intelligence assessments. It was also pointed out that it is dangerous to use the analytic categories of capability and intent unless they are further “unpacked”. Nonetheless, it was clear, above all for non-state actors, the key is good intelligence about individuals. This is very challenging. Moreover, there is a “work flow” which, if properly understood, could facilitate the gathering of necessary intelligence. There would be “signatures” to such work flows which could include DNA. Intelligence about chemical and biological materials is much more problematic

There was considerable discussion of preventive attack by the United States on potential proliferators. Why should one have to wait until an attack happens? The issue of the legitimacy of such preventative attacks was raised. It was pointed out that, if the US was contemplating unilateral action, the acceptance of its action would be critically affected by the credibility of its intelligence. The abject failure of WMD intelligence in Iraq has had catastrophic effects on the global credibility of the US. It would take years to rectify this.

The role of education was briefly discussed, including issues such as the integration of WMD into specific classes at undergraduate and graduate levels. A strong need exists to better connect the technological people with the policy community (both at the academic and practitioner level). These issues were deemed important, however somewhat out of the scope of the meeting, thus not further discussed.

Discussions around the situation in Iran recurred throughout the three days. There was general agreement that the Iranians had and have a clear intent to develop nuclear weapons, although there might be some uncertainty about how close they were as well as all of the critical sites they were using.

Some argued that the three components of WMD must be treated separately. Nuclear weapons are certainly a case apart in their lethality. The good news was that it is clearer what to do in the nuclear field. Critical is the control of fissile material. Attempts to freeze the present situation – which meant acknowledging all the existing nuclear powers – could be an important step. Enrichment and reprocessing has to be stopped before it is completely out of hand.

It is important to distinguish between what needs to be done to deal with states as opposed to non-state actors. Different regimes need to apply even though there is a link as states could supply non-state actors. States inevitably want to survive, including the persons in the regimes that rule them. Non-state actors could be nihilists as well as indifferent to their own death. States could be worried about their own security and anxious to improve their prestige. Terrorist groups are different. The response to an attack from terrorist is different as well. Retaliation on a specific target or set of targets could often be impossible; hence, deterrence does not work.

In the perspective of some, US policies and actions are having the perverse effect of making the possession of nuclear weapons more desirable. That was certainly the lesson

potential proliferators could take from the differences in US policy towards Iraq on the one hand and North Korea on the other. Washington in this Administration is not interested in the kind of approach a L20 could take to these issues (although he liked the L20 in other areas).

Under-Secretary of State Robert Joseph was scheduled to make a major address but was unable to attend because of the latest developments in Iran, The speech was read for him. It emphasized the utility of multilateral approaches – when they worked. Such approaches are not an end in themselves in the view of the current Administration. The issue was how best to get the job done.

Emphasis was given by a number of participants to the need for networks, as distinct from international institutions. All who spoke favoured putting the UN Committee on Disarmament out of its misery; as it has accomplished nothing in years. These networks should be open and attract participants from all sectors and utilize various techniques to engage them (e.g. internet). Both top-down and bottom-up approaches to networks with an open architecture were seen to have value. These networks should attempt to develop measures of success and not simply be a means of exchanging information. The work of Anne-Marie Slaughter and Jean-Francois Rischard was cited in this regard.

With regards to the concept of the L20, some viewed the creation of another institution as unnecessary; however, the view was also expressed that the proposal is less of an institution and could more be considered a high level network. A discussion ensued about the relative merits of the Security Council compared to a L20. Most agreed that, with membership reform and changes in the criteria for setting the agenda the Council could be effective (issues of representation, performance, and legitimacy need to be addressed together). Leaders do have crucial roles with all WMD issues and serve to connect emotionally and politically with various audiences. Many of the failures in handling WMD issues are linked to a failure of leadership.

Norm creation is vital in the area of non-proliferation of WMD. These norms could but need not be reflected in international treaties. And the latter could but need not be accompanied by verification. The danger of verification regimes is that they could give a false sense of security and make action to deal with violations more rather than less difficult.

There was scepticism about the efficacy of export controls, at least as they function now, except in the nuclear area.

There was a sharp discussion of the differences in perception around the world, particularly the developing world. The latter have security concerns, but not the same as the US perceived its own. Internal wars, AK-47s and machetes have and are killing many more people than terrorists. Moreover there were also concerns about development – or the lack thereof – in many countries. Many Americans have argued these countries needed “to get with the program”. Many of the international people in attendance

emphasized what a difference there was in priorities; the US needs to understand better the different perspectives of other countries.

The need for risk management – as distinguished from risk “elimination” - was stressed. This should be done in a co-operative international manner.

Article 6 of the Non-Proliferation calls on Nuclear Weapons States to reduce their stocks, and over time to eliminate them. This is part of the “bargain” by which the Non-Nuclear Weapons States forswore not to develop their own. Most present doubted nuclear weapons would ever be eliminated, certainly not until any need for them had disappeared (however that might happen). A number of the US experts argued, however, that there could be a steep reduction in the total inventory of such weapons in US hands, with the number of 1,000 feeling about right. This was contested by other participants who indeed said the debate was in any event irrelevant to the purposes of the conference. This latter point was refuted in view of the commitments made in Article 6.

The quality and candour of the discussion, as well as that of the prepared material, was very high. The conclusion agreed by all was that better networks are needed. The necessity of the highest level political leadership was also stressed. Those closest to Washington made clear, however, that this did not lead to a L20.