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“Terrorism and the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction”

Law Enforcement & Intelligence Conference
Sponsored by the American Bar Association
Hotel Washington
September 19, 1996

Part Two: The Implications of a Changed World for a Set of Critical Decisions

I'm sure we all remember the day three and a half years ago when a group of terrorists exploded a van filled with explosives under the World Trade Center in New York and the realization it brought that American soil was not immune to the plague of terrorism. Following in the wake of that stunning realization was a chilling question asked by many: what if, instead of a mixture of fertilizer and fuel, the van had held a crude nuclear device containing a few kilograms of plutonium? The World Trade Center and everything for blocks in every direction would have been completely destroyed and the death toll would have been in the hundreds of thousands. Radiation would have hampered rescue efforts and much of New York City would have been contaminated by fallout.

Similar scenarios have been used in movies and books over the years, but only recently have we begun to understand how real the threat of a terrorist attack using weapons of mass destruction (WMD) -- nuclear, biological or chemical (NBC) weapons -- has become. I would like to share with you three reasons why I feel the threat of a terrorist group unleashing a nuclear device or other weapon of mass destruction upon the world has grown. The first involves the collapse of the Soviet Union, the second concerns the increased efforts by rogue states to acquire weapons of mass destruction, and the third reason is a change in the nature of

terrorism itself.

When the Soviet Union disintegrated in the early 1990's, it was not readily apparent that this historic transformation would pose such a potentially dangerous situation. However, the change from a police state, where crime was virtually non-existent and movement was tightly controlled, to an environment where organized gangs are a major societal force and some military officers engage in corruption has made the once unthinkable suddenly possible: the so-called "loose nukes" scenario wherein nuclear materials are stolen and sold to a pariah state, terrorist group, or organized crime.

The end of the Cold War left Russia with a huge surplus of nuclear weapons and material -- approximately 1,200 metric tons of highly-enriched uranium and 200 metric tons of plutonium, translatable into scores of thousands of potential nuclear weapons -- which can be expected to grow as Russia continues to dismantle nuclear weapons. Whereas this material was once kept under tight control, the reorganization of its armed forces and its struggling economy have left Russia's nuclear stockpile less well guarded than it should be. As a recent report by the GAO described the situation:

"Social and economic changes in the newly independent states have increased the threat of theft and diversion of nuclear material, and with the breakdown of Soviet-era MPC&A [Material, Protection, Control and Accounting] systems, the newly independent states may not be as able to counter the increased threat. Nuclear facilities rely on antiquated accounting systems that cannot quickly detect and localize nuclear material losses. Many facilities lack modern equipment that

can detect unauthorized attempts to remove nuclear material from facilities.”

GAO personnel who visited Russia in 1995 found that some facilities did not have a comprehensive inventory of their nuclear materials on hand and, incredibly, the visitors were in one instance able to gain access to fissile material without even showing identification to the lone unarmed security guard in the building. During the investigation in 1993 of a theft of enriched uranium used as fuel for naval propulsion reactors, a Russian military prosecutor was reported as saying that at the time of the theft, potatoes were guarded better than nuclear fuel. The danger of nuclear materials leaking out of the former Soviet Union has received much publicity over the last year, but this is not an over-hyped issue of interest only to academics and those of us in the arms control community. Preventing the theft of nuclear materials from facilities in the former Soviet Union is one of the most important problems facing the world today, and it is crucial that we keep uranium and plutonium from falling into the wrong hands.

While the collapse of the Soviet Union created new fears about nuclear materials leaking out to terrorists or criminals, the efforts of rogue states such as Iran and Iraq to acquire weapons of mass destruction is an old danger that has become more threatening in recent years. Few rational people fear that these states will develop a strategic missile force capable of threatening the U.S. in the foreseeable future, but their history of supporting and sponsoring terrorist activities makes the possibility of their possession of weapons of mass destruction troubling. It is easy to imagine Iraq or Libya, frustrated by their inability to defeat the U.S. militarily, deciding to smuggle a nuclear, chemical or biological weapon into the United States or near our armed forces abroad as a means of seeking revenge. Press reports of Iran’s attempts to buy

fissile material on the black market and their continuing efforts to develop nuclear technology are reason for alarm. We know now how close Iraq was to building a nuclear weapon just prior to the Gulf War, and Saddam Hussein continues to hide information concerning the Iraqi chemical, biological and nuclear weapon programs from UN inspectors. In Libya, construction has ceased for the time being on what we think is a massive chemical weapons plant at Tarhunah, but who knows how long this halt will last? These states, and several others, who have time and again shown that they operate outside the circle of civilized nations by supporting terrorism, must be prevented from acquiring weapons of mass destruction at all costs.

In addition to the two factors I have just described, the possibility of a terrorist group using a nuclear, chemical, or biological weapon has increased simply because terrorism itself seems to have changed. Terrorists no longer single-mindedly seek publicity, as they did in the 1970's and 80's. Many of today's terrorists remain anonymous and attempt to kill as many people as possible, with seemingly no rhyme or reason. Walter Laquer, writing in the most recent issue of *Foreign Affairs*, points out that, "the trend now seems to be away from attacking specific targets . . . and toward more indiscriminate killing." For example, the Aum Shin Rikyo cult in Japan, who last year unleashed sarin gas on unsuspecting subway passengers, was trying to bring about the deaths of thousands of innocent civilians and made no attempt to claim responsibility or publicity for their actions. The perpetrators of the Oklahoma City bombing had no compunctions about killing hundreds of innocents merely because they happened to work in a federal building. The modern breed of terrorist seeks only to kill. If such terrorists gain access to a nuclear device, or chemical or biological weapons, they will likely seek to use them.

Frighteningly, it is not difficult to gain access to these weapons. The complexities

involved in obtaining and handling fissile material put nuclear devices beyond the capability of all but the most advanced terrorist groups, but chemical and biological weapons are surprisingly easy to manufacture or buy. Law enforcement officials investigating the Aum Shin Rikyo compound after the subway attack found that this previously unknown group had a stockpile of chemical warfare agents and was attempting to develop biological weapons as well.

Investigators also discovered that the group had in fact actually staged several previous small scale chemical attacks that went unnoticed. Most frightening of all, it does not take a group as large or well-funded as Aum Shin Rikyo to gain access to such weapons. In March, 1995, a man with ties to the white supremacist group Aryan Nation purchased an organism that causes bubonic plague from a medical supply company in Rockville, Maryland. Fortunately, because of our domestic implementing law for the Biological Weapons Treaty, the company also notified the authorities and the vials were recovered unopened. Also in 1995, authorities apprehended and convicted two members of a Minnesota militia organization for the possession of ricin, a poisonous protein which they had produced themselves. The Oklahoma City tragedy proved to us that terror is as likely to come from individuals or small groups of people born and raised in this country as it is from a foreign band of religious extremists or political radicals.

To sum up, then, both the supply of weapons of mass destruction and the terrorist demand for them have increased over the last decade. Although the threat that terrorists will use these weapons is greater now than it has ever been, we are not helpless -- we can take steps to make such an occurrence less likely. Some important measures have already been taken, and include efforts to improve the safety and security of nuclear material in the former Soviet Union, international agreements aimed at eliminating weapons of mass destruction or preventing rogue

states from acquiring them, and improving our ability to deal with these threats if and when they occur.

The Cooperative Threat Reduction program (CTR), created in 1991 through legislation sponsored by Senators Sam Nunn and Richard Lugar, has already made progress in improving the safety of Russian nuclear materials. The United States has set aside roughly \$1 billion for CTR projects. The program faced some difficult obstacles in its first few years of existence in the form of lingering Cold War suspicions, but after reaching agreement with the Russian Ministry of Atomic Energy on access to Russian facilities in January 1995, the speed of implementation has improved dramatically and the program has been expanded to several new sites.

The international community has also worked together to prevent terrorists or rogue states from acquiring weapons of mass destruction. Last year's indefinite extension of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) was a significant step forward in fighting the proliferation of nuclear weapons to rogue states. With 182 countries party to the now permanent NPT, it is clear the international community has taken a stand against the further spread of nuclear weapons. Before the NPT entered into force in 1970, the acquisition of nuclear weapons capability had often been a point of national pride. The NPT has made it tantamount to a violation of international law and has added immeasurably to the security of the United States and of the entire world. The NPT is the cornerstone of the nuclear nonproliferation regime, which also includes international safeguards on nuclear materials and multilateral nuclear export control guidelines.

The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) will represent another barrier against

proliferation by making it more difficult for new states to develop nuclear weapons and by preventing nuclear weapons states from developing new ones. A CTBT is in the best interest of the U.S. because it will prevent a new arms race and keep other states from building nuclear arsenals, and it is in the interest of every other nation in the world for these same reasons. Much like the NPT, the CTBT is a “common sense” agreement.

While the fight against nuclear proliferation is extremely important, chemical or biological weapons are increasingly more likely to be used by a terrorist group. Fortunately, the international community has also taken steps to make it more difficult for terrorists to acquire such weapons.

The “Australia Group,” an informal forum of 30 states, including the United States, is chaired by Australia, and has as its goal to discourage and impede chemical and biological weapon proliferation by harmonizing national export controls on precursor chemicals, pathogens, and dual-use production equipment, sharing information on proliferation developments, and seeking other ways to curb the use of chemical and biological weapons.

The Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) entered into force in 1975, and has 138 parties who have pledged not to in any circumstances develop, produce, stockpile or otherwise acquire or retain microbial or other biological agents, or toxins whatever their origin or method of production, of types and in quantities that have no justification for prophylactic, protective or other peaceful purposes. Unlike other regimes, the BWC contains no provisions for on-site compliance activity, a source of increasing criticism in recent years. In an effort to strengthen the BWC, the United States is currently actively participating in an effort to draft a legally binding protocol that will enhance openness and transparency through, among other things,

on-site activities.

The Chemical Weapons Convention of 1993 (CWC), will ban the stockpile, transfer, and production of chemical weapons and will require parties to submit to intrusive on-site inspections. Due to its comprehensive verification regime, this treaty, which was drafted in consultation with representatives from our chemical industry, is a landmark in the struggle against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The Convention will make it tougher for rogue states like Iraq to acquire chemical weapons and will increase the safety of our citizens at home as well as our troops in the field.

I deeply regret that last week, the Senate had to postpone final debate on the CWC. This delays the day we protect America's soldiers and citizens by outlawing all chemical weapons -- poison gas, including highly toxic nerve gas and related chemicals. But rather than risk losing the treaty, it made sense to postpone debate while both elected branches and both parties seek to reach agreement on ways to secure the universal support the Convention deserves.

Fortunately, in the United States, we have a robust law enforcement and intelligence capability to combat terrorist attacks. Intelligence and law enforcement officials prevented attacks on the United Nations and the Holland Tunnel in New York and also prevented an attempt to bomb American passenger planes over the Pacific Ocean. Those responsible for the World Trade Center bombing were convicted and suspects in the Oklahoma City and Unabomber cases have been taken into custody. These successes send an important message to would-be terrorists: that the United States is ready, willing and able to fight them. However, despite these achievements, we must work even harder and make sure our law enforcement and intelligence communities continue to improve their capability to defeat terrorism in whatever form it takes. In

this regard, I am glad to note that under the leadership of Senators Nunn and Lugar, the Senate recently agreed to legislation mandating \$150 million to strengthen our ability to detect terrorist attacks before they happen and to improve our capability to deal with such attacks if they occur.

I must note that I find it somewhat ironic that while a very expensive national missile defense program has become a highly publicized political issue, less attention is paid to fighting the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, despite overwhelming evidence that a nuclear or chemical attack is more likely to come in the form of a suitcase or parked van than a ballistic missile. I would like to stress the importance of combating the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the need to continue to improve our capability to prevent, detect, and deal with the threat of weapon of mass destruction terrorism before we are forced to do so by an unimaginable tragedy. The attacks that occurred in New York, Oklahoma City and Tokyo were horrible, but they have given us some powerful lessons. I fervently hope it does not take yet another terrible incident to move us to action.

It was Edmund Burke who said the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing. If we do not redouble our efforts to prevent terrorists from acquiring and using weapons of mass destruction, then I am afraid it is only a matter of time before we will be witness to another triumph of evil.