

**Freeing the World of Weapons of Terror:
Naïve Thinking or Realistic Proposals?**

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On June 1, 2002 UN Secretary General Kofi Annan received a special guest at his headquarters in New York, whom he must be very familiar with – Dr. Hans Blix. Having served as head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) from 1981 to 1997, and as Director-General of the UN Monitoring, Verification, and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) from 2000 to 2003, Dr. Blix is now leading an independent Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission (WMDC), set up at the end of 2003 at the invitation of the Swedish Foreign Ministry. This time, he came to the UN headquarters to formally hand over the final report that the WMDC had painstakingly worked on over the past two years to the Secretary-General.

The Commission was launched by the Government of Sweden in Stockholm on December 16, 2003 to respond to the recent, profoundly worrying developments in international security, and in particular to investigate ways of reducing the dangers from nuclear, biological, chemical and radiological weapons.

Chaired by Dr Hans Blix, the Commission comprises 14 eminent members, representing a broad and relevant geographical and political base with a vast reservoir of expert knowledge and political experience, spanning the governmental, academic and nongovernmental arenas. The Commissioners serve in their personal capacity. They meet periodically, discuss the issues, assess a range of expert studies and contribute their analyses, thoughts and proposals to the collective work of the Commission.

The WMDC report, thus crystallizing the collective expertise and wisdom of all the members of the group, is entitled “Weapons of Terror: Freeing the world of Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Arms”. The title itself unmistakably points to the primary focus of the Commission – the practical danger of weapons of terror, which, from its perspective, deserves most serious attention from the world community. The Cold War ended over a decade ago. During the early and mid-1990s, there had been impressive progress in the field of arms control and disarmament promising a better and safer world. However, for all the optimistic expectations for the future, the sad truth is that the situation for agreements on arms control and disarmament has actually deteriorated since then. In 2005, there were even two loud wake-up calls in the failure of the Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference and the inability of the World Summit to agree on a single line about any WMD issue. The post-Cold War window of opportunity seems to be closing. According

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to the report of the Commission, there are a number of major reasons why the present general standstill in global talks is unacceptable and why governments must refocus on WMD and revive efforts to achieve disarmament, arms control, non-proliferation and compliance:

--The development of chemical science and industry as well as the rapid expansion in biotechnology and life sciences create opportunities for important peaceful uses, but also for the production of chemical weapons and horrific uses of viruses and bacteria as weapons.

--The terror attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001 demonstrated to the world in a flash that, if terrorists succeed in acquiring WMD, they might use them.

--The 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), while recognizing the first wave of five nuclear-weapon states, succeeded in attracting a vast number of adherents. It did not, however, prevent India, Israel and Pakistan from forming a second wave of proliferation, and was violated by Iraq, Libya and North Korea in a third wave. If Iran and North Korea do not reliably renounce nuclear weapons, pressure could build for a fourth wave of proliferation of nuclear weapons.

--Thirty-six years after the implementation of the NPT, the five nuclear weapon state parties to the treaty have failed to achieve disarmament through negotiation. There is currently a risk for a new phase in nuclear arms competition through the further modernization of weapons. Many non-nuclear-weapon states feel cheated by the nuclear-weapon states' retreating from commitments made in 1995 in order to get the treaty extended to unlimited duration.

--The IAEA safeguarding system, created to verify that no nuclear material is diverted from peaceful uses, proved inadequate to discover the Iraqi and Libyan violations of the NPT. Iran failed for many years in its duty to declare important nuclear programs.

--The know-how to make nuclear, biological and chemical weapons and weapon-usable material – enriched uranium or plutonium, modified viruses and precursor chemicals – is available to a widening group of states and non-state actors.

--Rapid changes in the life sciences influence the availability of the information and expertise required to make toxins and genetically modified viruses and other pathogens.

--The existence of an illicit private global market where WMD expertise, technology, material and designs for weapons could be acquired is a special threat at a time of active worldwide terrorism.

--The expansion expected in the use of carbon-dioxide-free nuclear power will lead to the production, transportation and use of more nuclear fuel, increasing the risk that enriched uranium and plutonium might be diverted to weapons. Radioactive substances or nuclear waste not under full control might be acquired by terrorists and be used in dirty bombs – devices that disperse radioactive material to contaminate target areas or to provoke terror.

One may add more arguments to lengthen the list. But the above listed reasons are enough to justify the Commission's call to the international community to take urgent action in outlawing all weapons of mass destruction. The Commission focuses on three principal types of challenges posed by the existence of WMD in the current security

environment:

--The challenge of existing WMD arsenals.

Despite the fact that nuclear weapon states are all claiming to seek partnership relations among themselves, and that chances for major military conflicts (let alone a nuclear conflict) against each other are getting increasingly remote, these countries all continue to attach importance to the role of nuclear weapons in their military strategies, and take measures to upgrade their strategic capabilities. As a result, stocks of such weapons remain extraordinarily and alarmingly high: 27,000 in the case of nuclear weapons, of which around 12,000 are still actively deployed, a posture beyond any reasonable defensive calculation. Of all the nuclear weapon states, the US policy under the current administration is particularly worrisome as Washington not only contemplates developing new nuclear capability, but also backs down from its traditional arms control approach based on the establishment of international institutions and norms for the international peace and security.

--The challenge that additional states may acquire WMD.

The good news is that the world is not milling with states tempted to acquire WMD as soon as the opportunities are there. Some states have even voluntarily eliminated the nuclear weapons that they had. Iraq and the Libya were made to retreat on this path. Today, there are three key global WMD treaties that serve as the major pillars for the international non-proliferation regime, namely, Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction (BTWC), and Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and use of chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction (CWC). Each of the three treaties has an overwhelming majority of the international community as member states, which means that they have rejected any acquisition of these horrible weapons and are abiding their commitments. Thanks to the role of these three treaties, a certain stability in the non-proliferation regime still prevails, offering hope that mankind will eventually outlaw all weapons of mass destruction. That said, it remains a fact that as long as WMD exist, there is always an possibility to spread them to other states, and to use them.

There are many reasons for the acquisition of WMD. Some regimes may do so in the belief that this would enhance their prestige or standing. Others could pursue WMD in response to domestic political pressure or advocacy from within government bureaucracies or specialized weapons labs. But evidently, perceived security interests are the prime motivation for states to seek or to retain WMD. This is particularly so in regions which are plagued by domestic instability and international disputes and military conflicts. In this sense, it can be argued that the greatest challenge in the process of disarmament is to pursue political developments, globally and regionally, that make all states feel secure without WMD.

--The challenge that terrorists may get access to WMD.

Both terrorism and spread of deadly weapons are not new phenomena in the history of

international conflicts. But the coupling of these two categories of human scourge in an extremely devastating manner is a completely new threat that the international community has yet to learn how to tackle. A scenario of detonating a dirty nuclear bomb or spread an unknown lethal pathogen in a big city by a tightly knitted non-state actor (terrorist group or even organized crimes), killing thousands of innocent people is no longer a fancy story taken from a science fiction. Documents showing that these terrorists were studying how to manufacture a dirty bomb were found at the Al Qaida caves in Afghanistan. Although there was no evidence to prove to what extent they were successful, this discovery enough to alert the world that the danger is not far-fetched and cannot be ignored.

What compounds the matter even further is that 1) the rapid spread of science and high technology has played a particularly important role in facilitating the acquisition of WMD; 2) non-state actors could be the source as well as the potential users of the material, technology or know-how of WMD in proliferation; 3) the behavior of non-state actors is invariably linked with the role of certain government(s) in proliferation. In some cases, they even reinforced each other. The recent discovery of A Q Khan of Pakistan as a principle organizer of a secret network to supply nuclear related material and technology further proved how important these non-state actors can be in assisting countries like Libya or the North Korean DPRK to develop their nuclear programs; 4) the existing international nonproliferation regime so far only has been dealing with the behavior of states, and is thus insufficient to deal with the new challenges like nuclear- or bio-terrorism; and 5) nations unfortunately have enormous difficulty in forging consensus on a common strategy on how to fight against international terrorism.

Against the above backdrop, the Commission offers as many as 60 recommendations as short and mid-term steps that the international community is urged to take towards the eventual goal of freeing the world of all WMD. Half of the 60 recommendations are concerning nuclear weapons. This is quite understandable as nuclear weapons continue to pose the most dramatic threats, in terms of the use, effects, legal and strategic importance. For biological and chemical weapons, there are at least two international conventions to completely outlaw them. But not for nuclear weapons. Thus the central message that the Commission explicitly wishes to convey to the world through its recommendations is that all efforts should be made to achieve the goal of outlawing the use, production and possession of nuclear weapons in the same manner as has been done with the biological and chemical weapons.

To that end, the Commission focuses in the first place on the strengthening of the NPT, urging all parties to revert to the fundamental and balanced non-proliferation and disarmament commitments under the treaty. The NPT contains a basic bargain in which the states parties that do not have nuclear weapons promise not to acquire them and five nuclear weapon states parties – China, France, Russia, the UK and the US – promise to negotiate toward nuclear disarmament. To keep the NPT relevant, it is essential to ensure this bargain in force between the nuclear weapon states and non-nuclear weapon states. This means that all states possessing nuclear weapons should consider how they can manage their defense needs without nuclear weapons – just as the vast majority of the

world's states must do. The Commission holds that in the light of the current situation, it is high time the UN General Assembly convene a new World Summit to provide fresh impetus to negotiations on disarmament, non-proliferation and terrorist use of weapons of mass destruction. Other concrete proposals concerning the nuclear weapons in the report include speedy ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), further deep cuts in their stocks of strategic nuclear weapons of the two major nuclear powers – the US and Russia – non-deployment of nuclear weapons overseas, starting the negotiation on concluding a treaty to prohibit the production of more fissile material, and diplomatic solutions of the DPRK and Iran Nuclear crisis, etc.

In addition, the Commission also offers recommendations, covering the fields of biological and toxin weapons; chemical weapons; delivery means, missile defenses, and weapons in space; export controls, international assistance, and non-governmental actors; and compliance, verification, enforcement and the role of the United Nations, etc. All these measures, in the view of the Commission, constitute various essential links of an effective and sustained strategy of non-proliferation.

But the real value of the WMDC report may also be a vision the Commission offered that could serve as spiritual guidance to the issue of nonproliferation of WMD. The chief obstacle in the international efforts for the non-proliferation does not lie so much in the recognition of the importance of this issue as the difficulty with which nations reach agreement as how to pursue the task. It is in this context that the Commission provides a set of valuable general principles of action that could help establish the international consensus in fighting the proliferation of WMD. The vision can best be summarized into an approach towards outlawing weapons of mass destruction that is multilateral, cooperative, and comprehensive. The following are the highlights of this new vision as reflected in the final report of the Commission:

--Non-proliferation is essentially a political issue. While coercive measures under Chapter VII of the UN Charter could be taken as a last resort, the best solution to the problem of WMD proliferation should be that countries no longer feel that they need them; and that violators are encouraged to walk back and rejoin the international community.

--Non-proliferation can be effective and sustained only through a cooperative approach to collective security and a rule-based international order. Within this treaty-based, international legal framework, all states are stakeholders and must be included in the effort. In other words, international progress towards peace, order and the reduction of arms, including WMD, can best be attained through the participation and cooperation of all governments. At the same time, the great powers have special responsibility to contribute to the efforts to counter WMD.

--Efforts for non-proliferation even go beyond sovereign states. In fact everyone must contribute. Research communities, non-governmental organizations, civil society, businesses, the media and the general public all share ownership of the WMD challenges. They must all be allowed and encouraged to contribute to solutions.

--The UN Security Council-in close contact with the members of the UN-should be the focal

point for the world's efforts to reduce the threats posed by existing and future WMD, and should help harmonize, supplement and enforce the many efforts that are made.

--A combination of lofty idealism with reasonable realism. While there must be no compromise on the goal of outlawing WMD, one must recognize that reaching that goal will be a long march, and measures that are taken to that end must be adopted in a step-by-step way.

--The reduction and elimination of WMD must be pursued through measures at all stages of the life cycle of WMD—from their creation and deployment to their disposal and destruction.

All the above principles are of course in complete accordance with the United Nations Charter and the fundamental principles of the international relations. That explains why Koffi Annan explicitly welcomed the release of the report after its hand over. He stressed that this report will be an important contribution to the debate on disarmament and non-proliferation. The Secretary-General urged the international community to study the report and consider its recommendations.

The WMDC report has also received warm response from Canada, European and many developing countries. Many hold that the recommendations offered by the Commission are not naïve or far-fetched ideas, but realistic suggestions, aimed at coping with the most vital security issues of the world. The Swedish, Finish and Norwegian governments issued statements encouraging the world nations to adopt measures as proposed by the Commission. The German Foreign minister Steinmeier made a speech to an SPD Party seminar on "Peace through Disarmament: International law and nuclear non-proliferation" in Berlin on June 25, 2006, in which he particularly referred to the report: "After the golden age of the previous decade, everything has gone pretty silent around arms control policy. I would therefore like to associate myself most emphatically with the statement Hans Blix made in the context of the presentation of the report on 'Weapons of Terror': It is time for a revival". Steinmeier's sentiments are shared by the majority members of the international community. Only the United States have kept silent on the report.

Dr. Hans Blix made some remarks on the US role in the effort for non-proliferation in his preface to the WMDC report. He suggested the importance of progress in the two particular areas to transform the current gloom into hope. These are bringing the CTBT into force, and negotiating a cut-off treaty at CD. And then he emphasized: "In both these areas the US have the decisive leverage. If they take the lead, the world is likely to follow. If they do not take the lead, there could be more nuclear tests and new nuclear arms races."