



Summary Notes of the Center for Contemporary Conflict Conference on WMD Proliferation in the Middle East: Directions and Policy Options in the New Century

Naval Postgraduate School
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Introduction

Sixty academic, policy, and intelligence community professionals from around the world met at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California from June 28-30 to take an in-depth and systematic look at the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in the Middle East region and policy conundrums facing the United States and the international community in combating this problem.

The conference specifically addressed the status of WMD programs in Iran, Syria, Libya and the potential for WMD proliferation in Saudi Arabia. Coupled with this country-specific and regional focus, topics of discussion included a review of the contemporary threat environment; current proliferation policy parameters, including supply and demand policy issues; an analysis of different ideas for threat reduction on a country-specific and region-wide basis; and an examination of strategies available to the United States and the international community to address these programs. The resulting interaction between the participants and assembled experts proved invaluable in helping the conference to further the collective understanding WMD proliferation in the Middle East and the policy options available to address the issue.



Regional Overview and Individual Country Cases

The first panel focused on proliferation, asymmetric war and the contemporary threat environment in the region, including a look at Israeli threat perceptions after regime change in Iraq.

Dr. Stephen Blank of the Army War College argued that in order to fully grasp the nature of existing and developing strategic threats we must reconsider the regional threat environment, which has transformed itself with new actors employing asymmetric threats and strategies. Three key points emerged from the discussion. States increasingly are relying on WMD as a component of political and military strategies. Secondly, as technologies become more advanced and accessible the threats from regional non-state actors increases. Thirdly, in this environment, intelligence collection, operations and capabilities combined with information dominance become critical to US WMD counter-proliferation strategy. "Traditional" threat

assessments are inadequate to the task at hand. Information about threats is not enough. Participants generally agreed that the United States must improve its capability for assessment and understanding of the implications of threats stemming from a variety of proliferating capabilities, such as missiles, chemical, biological, nuclear, radiological and cyber.

Dr. Avner Cohen of the University of Maryland discussed current Israeli threat perceptions after Operation Iraqi Freedom. Cohen argued that historically Israel's nuclear capability has not been a central issue in its politics. It has not used its nuclear arsenal to compel any state to action, and only sees its nuclear force as a deterrent that guarantees Israel's survival. Israel will consider any regional state with emerging or extant WMD capabilities a direct or existential threat. Participants discussed the threat from Iran's WMD program, and Cohen argued that the Iranian programs very existence poses a threat to Israel. Most participants agreed that Iran will continue to support terrorism, but some argued that Iran would probably not provide WMD to terrorists, and would try to create an aura of calculated ambiguity surrounding its nuclear program. The dilemma now facing Israel is that it has a vested interest in retaining its nuclear capability for deterrence and an overall interest in devaluing WMD throughout the region. The problem is that Israel's nuclear program is in itself a motivating factor in the desire of other states to acquire WMD. Participants concluded that it is important, particularly for the region, that Israel publicly declares it does not possess or develop a biological weapons program.

Iran

Another panel focused entirely on Iran. Dr. Ray Takeyh from the National Defense University presented his perspective on Iran's nuclear ambitions. Takeyh argued that Iran's desire for nuclear weapons is based on practical, defensive needs as opposed to ideological reasons such as an "Islamic bomb." In this respect, according to Takeyh, Iran's desires are the same as Israel's in that they want them for a deterrent effect, but that Israel is not the reason for Iran's nuclear program. Iran's motivations stem from nationalistic and cultural factors, as well as a desire to be seen as a dominant regional power, according to Takeyh. Some participants disagreed with Takeyh, contending that Israel *is* a factor in Iran's continued nuclear program development. Additionally Iran's tactics related to the attention focused towards its program reflect a tendency to play the "pity card" in the international community. The state is controlling IAEA inspections and access to information related to its program. Takeyh noted that that Iranians believe a democratic Iraq will have more divisions and internal problems, which will lead to a weak central government that will be less threatening to Iran. In the post-9/11 environment, Iran finds itself in a paradox. The threat from Iraq has decreased since Hussein's removal. Likewise, strikes in Afghanistan have removed the Taliban, and Iran has begun improved relations with President Hamid Karzai. Despite all this, the perception by Iranian policy-makers is that their security has decreased.

This panel also included a discussion about Iranian threat perceptions and policy options. Greg Giles from SAIC described Iran's motivations for developing it nuclear program, and the internal divisions within Iran over the program's direction. Mr. Giles also presented possible U.S. policy options in a worst-case scenario. These included continued coercive ambiguity, U.S. military action, invasion, and building a case in the international community for more heavy-handed tactics against Iran. Participants generally agreed that all of these options must be done in parallel with continued pressure from the IAEA and the international community.

Discussion following the presentations conceded that an inverse relationship exists between the United States and Iran. The number of carrots the United States is willing to offer Iran is decreasing while the number Iran wants is increasing. This polarizing in stances has



decreased overlap in potential negotiated outcomes. Some participants speculated that Iran will try to get as much mileage out of the NPT as possible, and when it no longer can it will withdraw from it altogether, and then declare and test a nuclear weapon. The lively discussion left many questions unanswered. Conversations continued well into the break. A key question was raised, assuming Iran already has nuclear weapons, what steps should the US take in the Gulf, Iran, and other places to deal with the situation? Much debate

centered on the idea that it was easier to manage a friend's WMD program than it is to stop or contain an enemy's.

Syria

The panel on Syria focused on Syrian WMD programs, as well as threat perceptions and strategic objectives. Dr. Ahmed Hashim from the Naval War College discussed the priorities and options for a Syrian WMD program. Hashim argued that Syrian WMD programs need to be seen in the context of Arab historical conventional military weakness, both a cause and effect of the Arab defeat in the 1967 War. A weak Syria benefits Israel. Since Syria aims to deter a continually stronger and nuclear-armed Israel, it is difficult for U.S. policy to impact Damascus's calculations. Additionally, the opacity of the environment makes developing strategy and policy problematic.

Dr. Murhaf Jouejati from George Washington University discussed Syria's threat perception and strategic objectives. Jouejati contended that Syria's WMD program must be dealt with at the state level, while also simultaneously taking steps to integrate Syria globally. Syria's WMD program is a response to Israel's nuclear program and its seemingly invincible conventional military forces. Syria's strategic objectives are to contain Israel within its 1967 boundaries and to establish an eastern Arab front against Israel. Participants added that Syria's threat perceptions are shaped by the presence of U.S. forces in Iraq and a NATO member (Turkey) along its northern border. For Syria, a WMD program establishes security in this precarious environment. Jouejati made an important point from the Arab perspective, stating that if the al-Assad regime bowed to US pressure to rid itself of WMD, it would lose what little internal legitimacy it has left. Thus, Syria's WMD programs must also be seen in the context of a complicated internal political environment.

Saudi Arabia



The panel on Saudi Arabia focused on Saudi Arabia's strategic problems and the issue of nuclear weapons in Saudi developing security calculus.

James Russell from the Naval Postgraduate School presented an argument that the strategic problems facing Saudi Arabia are causing it to consider acquisition of nuclear capabilities in the context of upgrading and/or replacing its CSS-2 missiles bought from China in the late 1980s. Russell outlined a set of changing strategic circumstances, which are combining to bring the issue of

nuclear and/or WMD proliferation into play in Riyadh. First, the U.S. relationship upon which Saudi Arabia's security has been founded is in an uncertain state. Second, the region environment is becoming more threatening due to Iran's nuclear aspirations and the prospect of a Shi'a-dominated state in Iraq. Third, internal politics in Saudi Arabia complicate and reduce the maneuver room available to the royal family in addressing its security conundrums. A decision by Saudi Arabia to go nuclear would cause a cascade of regional proliferation. Potential internal instability within the Kingdom also makes Saudi Arabia a particularly dangerous proliferation case. Rumors of Saudi involvement in Pakistan's nuclear program, in addition to the existing relationship with China through the CSS-2 program are all suggestive of an interest in nuclear capabilities. Finally, U.S. policy options appear limited—the United States cannot push Saudi Arabia too far away or hold it too close. Discussions of the issue raised the question, "Are Saudi nuclear noises used as a means to ensure U.S. engagement?"

Dr. Glenn Segell from the Institute of Security Policy in London made the point that Saudi Arabia would be willing to agree to a Nuclear Free Zone, but that no regional agreement on WMD proliferation is on the horizon. He also discussed the role of the House of Saud in strategic discussions. He stressed the importance of the fact that Saudi Arabia and its neighbors are not at ease with each other nor is there a clear succession in the House of Saud. Segell argued that the Saudi nuclear conundrum rests on the following considerations: struggling arms control approaches by states within the region and by the global arms control regime; the geo-political location of Saudi Arabia; such location vis-à-vis American military forces; the ability of Saudi Arabia to deliver and target nuclear weapons should it acquire it; the ability of America to negate such nuclear capability; the positive steps that Saudi Arabia has taken towards the NPT Treaty and a Middle East Nuclear Free Zone; the apprehensions of slow progress towards biological and chemical weapons prevention in the Middle East; the domestic vulnerability of the House of Saud; the threat of the Saudi State to global stability through the relevance of oil; and specific scenarios/actions that need to be considered should Saudi decided to acquire nuclear weapons. Discussion generated the question: Could a NATO-like custody agreement in the region be permissible under the NPT? Additionally participants

argued that the House of Saud will be supported and maintained because it provides a semblance of security in the region, and is therefore not in danger. In addition, a democratic regime in Saudi Arabia likely could be anti-U.S., so the United States and others have vested interests in maintaining the regime.

Libya and Iraq

The final country-specific panel focused on Libya and Iraq. It compared the cases of Libya and Iraq in the context of coercive diplomacy. Dr. Robert Litwak from the Woodrow Wilson Center presented his view of the two alternative nonproliferation models which were manifested in these 2003 cases: in Iraq, a change *of* regime; in Libya, a change *in* a regime. Litwak emphasized that the Iraq and Libya cases set important



nonproliferation precedents and proposed that the case of Libya indicates that reintegration is possible—though Qaddafi's assassination antics also identify limitations. Discussion focused on regime change which participants agreed must be viewed carefully. Litwak asserted that type of regime does not affect proliferation as much as regime intent. The open questions remained during further discussion whether the United States could win multilateral support for punitive measures in the event of Iranian non-compliance and whether the Tehran regime, as a member of the "axis of evil," would find credible a U.S. assurance of regime survival.

Dr. Wyn Bowen from the Joint Service Command and Staff College, U.K. specifically addressed the case of Libya, pre- and post-December 2003. Bowen presented a study comparing what was known about the country's nuclear program through open sources prior to December 2003, with the information that has since entered the public domain. Bowen concluded that, even in relatively closed and non-transparent societies, open sources can provide useful insights into the political, strategic and economic context in which national decisions are taken on nuclear-related issues in both the civil and military sectors. Bowen also concluded, however, that while it is possible to generate pertinent information on legitimate 'civil' capabilities and activities that may underlie a nuclear weapons program, most key proliferation-relevant transfers and activities are likely to be buried too deeply and therefore beyond the scope of open sources. On-site verification and unrestricted access to all potentially relevant sites are the only ways to reach conclusive assessments of peaceful intent in the nuclear or broader WMD fields.

Current Proliferation Policy Parameters

Additional panels addressed policy issues including the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) and the regional proliferation landscape. Dr. David Cooper from the Nonproliferation Office of the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense discussed the proliferation policy parameters of the PSI initiative. Cooper argued that interdiction must be enhanced. The PSI serves as a deterrent but there must still be plans to directly combat those who illegally proliferate WMD

and related technologies. Better, more focused analytical frameworks and threat identification is required. Further discussion centered on the dilemma posed by the threat of use of force against proliferators enhancing U.S. options: will it dissuade adversaries or amplify the security dilemma?

Mr. Michael Friend, a research fellow at the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, discussed the topic of counterproliferation vs. nonproliferation in the Middle East after the removal of Saddam Hussein. Friend evaluated how well the U.S. "comprehensive nonproliferation strategy" is working, and what lessons can be drawn for policy in the cases of Syria and Iran. Strategic policy and control operations are difficult to formulate because of the malleability of WMD. Friend



argued that counterproliferation efforts stand to gain effectiveness and legitimacy if the United States acts to strengthen multilateral nonproliferation instruments. Traditional nonproliferation has not failed, but it does need serious attention from the international community.

Supply and Demand Policy Issues

Another panel addressed supply and demand policy issues. Mr. Christopher Clary presented a dynamic brief on the A. Q. Khan network, a timely issue which had come up several times already in previous discussions. Clary stated that A.Q. Khan network represented the first time in history all of the difficult components of a nuclear weapon program were outside of state control. Clary argued that new WMD proliferants are uniquely prone to secondary proliferation and that, as was the case with Pakistan, bureaucratic conflict can determine the timetable, type, and size for nuclear acquisition and proliferation. The global diffusion of WMD information and the globalization of manufacturing have reduced the effectiveness of supplier regimes.

Dr. Michael Kraig of the Stanley Foundation addressed demand-side policy options, and argued that security architectures are necessary in the Middle East to constrain regional threats, the primary drivers of proliferation. Kraig discussed ways of structuring different security institutions, ensuring they worked with existing bilateral and multilateral arrangements, and bringing difficult parties to such discussions.

The last panel concentrated on country-specific and region-wide threat reduction as well as strategies available to the United States and the international community.

Threat Reduction and the Middle East

Dr. Peter Lavoy from the Naval Postgraduate School discussed how effective the United States has been in influencing the motivations for WMD proliferation in the Middle East and Asia. Lavoy argued that we need a comprehensive WMD proliferation influence (i.e. threat reduction) strategy which includes allies, friends, neutrals, adversaries, and new WMD-armed states and consists of counterproliferation, nonproliferation, security cooperation, and arms control. Counterproliferation efforts will gain effectiveness by strengthening multilateral nonproliferation instruments. Lavoy added that supply-side policies are necessary but insufficient, stating that the United States can have significant influence, but only if it is able to understand and influence nuclear myths and mythmakers. Discussion during this time focused in part on where interdiction rested in relation to U.S. policy. Some believed it rested as a result of nonproliferation justification and enforcement action, others believed it was part of counterproliferation strategy in which it was the active arm of policy.



Dr. Rose Gottemoeller, from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, discussed issues of threat reduction in the Middle East. Gottemoeller proposed that when we are considering the challenges of threat reduction there is an applicability of lessons elsewhere around the globe, particularly in the Former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. These lessons can provide a model to control dangerous materials. The participants generally agreed that threat reduction in the region is dependent on confidence; it must be a two-way street.

The conference concluded with a classified government-only session, during which some topics were addressed in greater depth. Participants were very satisfied with the conference and expressed a desire to return to the Naval Postgraduate School for more conferences which could address other issues on the topic of WMD proliferation.