

# THE TERRORISM RESEARCH CENTER

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## **STATE-SPONSORED WMD TERRORISM: A GROWING THREAT?**

State-sponsored terrorism seemingly reached its heyday in the 1980s. The conventional wisdom argues that without the support of the Soviet Union many sponsors of terrorism find the costs too high and are now seeking acceptance in the international community. But what if the conventional wisdom is wrong? What if continuing changes in the international system actually increase the chances of state-sponsored terrorism in the future? Will continued American hegemony coupled with the specter of a U.S. national missile defense system lead other nations to consider new forms of warfare? Will U.S. adversaries combine their weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their support for terrorism into a deadly new threat to America? And if so, what can the United States do to combat it? This paper seeks to simultaneously answer these questions and widen the debate on WMD proliferation, terrorism, and missile defenses.

### **The Historical Record**

To date there is no indication in the open literature of any nation ever sponsoring a WMD terrorist<sup>1</sup> attack against another nation. The uses of chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear weapons of mass destruction in this century have been limited to states in times of war<sup>2</sup> and states against their own citizens.<sup>3</sup> Thus far, no state has used its WMD capability in a terrorist manner against citizens of another country. It is

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worthwhile to explore the reasons for this seeming restraint in order to expose its glaring weaknesses.

A principal reason states have refused to sponsor acts of WMD terrorism is their own fear of WMD-armed terrorists. Even those states who see it as in their interests to employ terrorists cannot completely control the groups they supply and train. Without this control, states are unable to guarantee WMD given to a terrorist group would not be used against them at a future date. As David Rapoport has observed, “states have so much to lose by giving such power to agents they cannot control, that this is a very remote possibility, and not one that has been attempted.”<sup>4</sup> “Governments, however ruthless, ambitious, and ideologically extreme,” agreed Walter Laqueur, “will be reluctant to pass on unconventional weapons to terrorist groups over which they cannot have full control; the governments may be tempted to use such arms themselves in a first strike, but it is more probable that they would employ them in blackmail than in actual warfare.”<sup>5</sup> Providing terrorists with WMD seemingly violates every tenet of command and control procedures required of WMD-armed states, especially autocratic ones.

This obstacle is significant, but not insurmountable. As states sponsor terrorist groups over long periods of time significant relationships are being developed between financier and attacker. Some of these relationships are bound to create bonds of friendship and trust beyond the initial rationale of mutual need and ideological agreement. At times these bonds extend even into the familial. Osama Bin Laden, for example, benefits from the protection of the Taliban regime not least of all because the leader of Afghanistan, Mullah Muhammad Omar, is married to Bin Laden’s daughter, making the terrorist mastermind the Taliban leader’s father-in-law. These bonds of

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friendship and family will undoubtedly increase cooperation and trust between national leaders and terrorists. It is only a matter of time before such bonds are more fully exploited.

More importantly, states that do not wish to cede such power to terrorists can always employ their own forces in a WMD terrorist attack. State-sponsors of terrorism have regularly used their military and intelligence agents in training terrorist groups and even conducting important terrorist operations. In 1987 North Korean agents bombed a Korean Airlines flight near the Thai-Burmese border killing 115 people. Muammar Qadhafi allegedly used two Libyan intelligence agents to carry out the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland killing a total of 270 people in the air and on the ground. The following year Libyan agents also bombed a French UTA airliner over Niger killing 117 people.<sup>6</sup> Clearly, some states are not afraid of using their own forces to rack up a body count.

Fear of retaliation from the target country is most likely the greatest impediment to states contemplating WMD terrorism. The United States has already demonstrated its willingness to strike back at the sponsors of terrorism in Libya in the 1980s and Afghanistan and Sudan in the 1990s. Had the embassy bombings in East Africa been carried out with WMD, the response would have no doubt been that much greater. Thinly-veiled threats of American nuclear retaliation is widely credited with preventing Saddam Hussein from using his chemical and biological weapons against allied troops during the Gulf War.

Unfortunately, reliance upon such fears of retaliation is increasingly unfounded. Former Secretary of State James Baker has since admitted President Bush had privately

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ruled out the use of nuclear weapons against Iraq, thus weakening America's deterrent options in future conflicts.<sup>7</sup> The United States has denied itself many of its retaliatory options further weakening its deterrent capability. The Nixon Administration halted America's biological weapons program in 1969. The Bush Administration began the destruction of both the tactical nuclear weapons and the chemical weapons in the U.S. arsenal in the early 1990s. These decisions have created a wide gap between America's massive conventional power and its world-destroying strategic nuclear power. The only remaining response to a WMD attack is apparently to "break the post-Nagasaki taboo" and employ strategic nuclear weapons. This state of affairs has led at least one observer to ask, "Would the United States follow through and use nuclear weapons against a country or group that had killed several thousand Americans with deadly chemicals?"<sup>8</sup> The existence of the question itself reveals the weakness of America's deterrent threat.

No one knows for sure how the U.S. would react to a WMD terrorist attack. Would Washington immediately go nuclear or would America be satisfied with a massive conventional response? Either option runs the risk of setting a dangerous precedent. If the United States continues to argue its strategic nuclear deterrent is sufficient to counter all WMD, it runs the risk of seriously undermining its nuclear nonproliferation goals. As Ramesh Thakur, vice rector of the United Nations University in Tokyo, has argued, "If nuclear weapons come to be accepted as having a role in countering biological-chemical warfare, then by what logic can the United States deny a nuclear weapons capability to a country like Iran, which has actually suffered chemical weapons attacks within recent memory?"<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, if the United States fails to respond with sufficient force,

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how can America's deterrence strategy hope to survive? Perceived weakness under such circumstances is an open invitation to more attacks and greater bloodshed.

Even if nuclear weapons are eliminated as a retaliatory option, surely U.S. conventional forces can deliver a sufficient retaliatory blow to deter possible terrorist WMD attack. Not necessarily. A nation already under attack (i.e., Iraq during the Persian Gulf War or Serbia during the Kosovo crisis) is unlikely to fear a few more bombs. The escalation of bombing has a poor track record for defeating or deterring enemies from North Vietnam to Iraq. The threat of such bombings has also fared poorly in the post-Cold War world as a deterrent. Any action short of ground invasion and the removal of the opposing regime is unlikely to sway a determined leader (the very action which is most likely to spark the use of WMD by the "rogue state"). As U.S. Defense Secretary William Cohen has admitted, such deterrence strategies "may not deter rogue states whose leaders are indifferent to their people's welfare."<sup>10</sup>

Plausible deniability is the key to avoiding a retaliatory attack for such a state. Jonathan Tucker has observed,

To date, there are no known cases of state-sponsored CBW terrorism (at least in the public domain), probably because of the likelihood of severe retaliation against the sponsoring government if its involvement were to become known. Still, a state sponsor that believed it could shield its identity through proxies or intermediaries might take the risk, particularly in a crisis situation or wartime.<sup>11</sup>

Such deniability is all too possible with WMD terrorism because it offers an excellent opportunity to disavow the strike much easier than any other form of attack. Biological attacks, in particular, have the benefit of possibly being misdiagnosed by the target country as a natural disease outbreak for a considerable amount of time, possibly even indefinitely. America's only experience with biological terrorism is revealing:

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“(T)he major outbreak of *Salmonella* food poisoning in Oregon in 1984, caused by the deliberate contamination of restaurant salad bars by the Rajneeshee cult, was assessed by public health officials to be of natural origin until a member of the cult confessed what had really happened.”<sup>12</sup> Chemical weapons, too, can be missed. In June of 1994 Japanese police in Matsumoto dismissed evidence of sarin gas use, believing instead that a former chemical salesman had accidentally mixed the poison gas that killed seven people. This was one of twenty attempts made by *Aum Shinrikyo* with biological or chemical weapons between April 1990 and July 1995.<sup>13</sup> Only after the Tokyo subway attack in March 1995 and twelve more deaths did Japanese authorities finally close in on the cult’s operations.

The Syrian Defense Minister, General Mustafa Tlas, recently wrote of the difficulties of proving and responding to a biological terrorist attack:

In this case (use of a biological weapon), not only will the violated country not be able to discover the effects of infliction immediately, but also, international public opinion will not believe the claim of the violated country regarding the use of this weapon. Such a country also will have a hard time attracting the attention of world public opinion and international organizations. Also, it is rarely seen that the violated country takes action against the aggressor by using a nuclear weapon.<sup>14</sup>

**The Future Threat**

The states most likely to threaten America with WMD terrorism are, not surprisingly, those listed as “states of concern” by the U.S. government. These states formerly known as “rogues” share similar traits of sponsoring terrorism, proliferating WMD, and ruthlessly suppressing their citizens. These states and their leaders are dedicated to grasping, holding onto, and expanding their power. This quest for power is the driving force behind many of their actions, especially their desire to acquire WMD.

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As such, any loss of power—from losing control of their WMD to losing control of the country itself—is the situation most likely to lead to WMD use by these states. As the pressures of international condemnation, economic sanctions, and technology-driven democratization challenge the leadership positions of these men, WMD terrorism takes a step closer to reality.

Many of these states are unstable, corrupt regimes unable to provide reliable command and control systems for their WMD. As these states acquire WMD capabilities their inability to exercise command of their own assets becomes considerably more serious. In October 1999 Pakistan became the first nuclear-armed nation in history to suffer a successful military coup with surprisingly little fanfare in the West. North Korea reportedly prevented such a coup in late 1995. In January of this year Saddam Hussein executed thirty-eight members of his elite Republican Guards, including the commander of the second brigade, for planning his assassination. With power concentrated in a single man, autocratic regimes are especially prone to difficult transitions (the seemingly smooth transfer of power to Bashar Assad in Syria remains an open question). An autocratic leader fearing his demise is liable to lash out in an irrational manner. This instability can lead to unacceptable risks where WMD are concerned. The end of the Soviet Union and the control of its WMD arsenal have thus far been managed without catastrophe. Such success cannot be guaranteed in the future.

As more states approach and eventually cross the nuclear threshold the danger of state-sponsored WMD terrorism will increase not only quantitatively, but qualitatively as well. As Jessica Stern has observed, “New nuclear states with small arsenals are more likely to use these weapons against noncombatants—in other words, in terrorist mode—

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whether or not they are ‘rogue states’. Targeting noncombatants is, quite simply, the most efficient use of nuclear weapons”.<sup>15</sup> As evidence she cites the U.S. attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. With “only two nuclear weapons in its arsenal”, the United States knew “the most efficient (and most shocking) way to use them was to drop them on civilians in cities.”<sup>16</sup> With similarly limited arsenals, a state facing armed conflict with a superior foe will be tempted to use its WMD before it loses them. Once the decision on use has been made, there will be an understandable desire to get the most “bang for the buck” by striking the large, soft targets of unprotected cities.

The nature of the international system itself makes WMD terrorism appear as a viable option for many states. American hegemony is a fact of post-Cold War life that does not appear to be changing any time soon. The traditional path of alliance offers little relief in a world with such an overwhelming superpower, forcing states to seek other methods of counteracting American predominance. The Soviet Union no longer exists as protector and benefactor for the world’s outlaw states. As Walter Laqueur has argued, “state-sponsored terrorism is quietly flourishing in these days when wars of aggression have become too expensive and too risky. As the century draws to a close, terrorism is becoming the substitute for the great wars of the 1800s and early 1900s.”<sup>17</sup> These states, however, do not seek to defeat America in war, but to deter her just short of it. The United States in recent years has shown little stomach for sustaining casualties and many states see the ability to strike America a devastating blow as the best deterrent option available to them and their only protection against an increasingly Americanized world.

Most significantly, the development of a National Missile Defense system makes state-sponsored WMD terrorism a dangerous possibility. According to the 1999 National

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Intelligence Estimate, by 2015 the United States will face a ballistic missile threat “most likely” from North Korea, “probably” from Iran, and “possibly” from Iraq.<sup>18</sup> These states have invested considerable time, effort, and money in developing effective deterrents for American power. Ballistics missiles armed with WMD are supposed to provide this deterrent. As the Rumsfeld Commission Report states, “For those seeking to thwart the projection of U.S. power, the capability to combine ballistic missiles with weapons of mass destruction provides a strategic counter to U.S. conventional and information-based military superiority”.<sup>19</sup>

NMD threatens to short-circuit these efforts to develop an effective deterrent just as they are about to bear fruit. After spending millions of dollars and years of hard work developing an effective deterrent against potential U.S. aggression, these states will instead find themselves right back where they started. Many will perceive a security deficit on their part after having incorporated their new capabilities into their future defense plans only to see them nullified by the U.S. missile shield. Such nations are not likely to sit idly by and suffer through further weakness while they possess the means to prevent it. This loss of deterrent capability will lead these countries to explore new options to provide for their defense. The hardening of the American target negates only the usefulness of ballistic missiles—their WMD arsenals remain powerful and effective. Only the method of delivery must be changed. States seeking to protect their sovereignty may see WMD terrorism as their only option.

The National Intelligence Council (NIC) has argued that WMD terrorism attacks “do not provide the same prestige and degree of deterrence or coercive diplomacy associated with long-range missiles, but they might be the means of choice for

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terrorists”.<sup>20</sup> This statement is only partially correct. While terrorism, WMD or otherwise, does not offer much in the way of prestige for a state, the deterrent capability of WMD terrorism is considerable and should be a cause for greater concern. The NIC’s own report actually supports the case for greater vigilance against WMD terrorism by admitting that such attacks:

*Are less expensive than developing and producing ICBMs.*

*Can be covertly developed and employed; the source of the weapon could be masked in an attempt to evade retaliation.*

*Probably would be more reliable than ICBMs that have not completed rigorous testing and validation programs.*

*Probably would be more accurate than emerging ICBMs over the next 15 years.*

*Probably would be more effective for disseminating biological warfare agent than a ballistic missile.*

*Would avoid missile defenses.*<sup>21</sup>

It is hard to see how the NIC, in light of its own analysis, can focus greater concern on ballistic missiles than on WMD terrorism. Clearly, any nation willing to launch an overt WMD missile strike would be more than willing to launch a covert WMD terrorist attack.

WMD pre-deployed in the United States would also guarantee a second-strike capability should the U.S. or other nation launch a pre-emptive strike to take out a state’s WMD capability. A nuclear bomb sitting in a warehouse in North Carolina provides a far better deterrent option than a nuclear-armed missile sitting on a launch pad in North Korea. Even if such a deterrent gamble should fail to prevent a military strike, pre-deployed WMD may at least provide an opportunity for revenge on a devastating scale.

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The advocates of a National Missile Defense (NMD) are correct in identifying the threat of WMD-armed ballistic missiles and our need to prepare for it, but are slow to recognize its shortcomings. Ballistic missiles will be kept out, but their destructive payloads may still slip in. As Jessica Stern has pointed out:

(If terrorists or terrorist regimes do use nuclear weapons against Americans, they are more likely to employ crude delivery vehicles than sophisticated ones. Ballistic missiles are the least likely method of delivery, and yet Congress regularly allocates more money to ballistic-missile defense than the Pentagon says it can use—roughly ten times what is spent to prevent WMD terrorism. Ballistic missile defenses may turn out to be highly beneficial, but they cannot stop bombs brought into this country on cars, planes, or boats.<sup>22</sup>

The deployment of a national missile defense system is likely to make WMD terrorism more attractive to America's potential adversaries. However, it would be a mistake to use this fact as an argument against deploying NMD. It would be equivalent to arguing that police officers should not wear bulletproof vests because it will encourage criminals to aim for the head. Building defenses has always discouraged one avenue of attack only to encourage another. The key is to then prepare a defense against the new, more likely method of attack. The only alternative is to build no defenses at all.

### **Potential State-Sponsors of WMD Terrorism**

The nuclear, biological, and chemical arsenals of America's potential adversaries are well-documented and will not be repeated here.<sup>23</sup> The more important issue for our purposes is the extent to which these states are both willing and able to utilize their WMD in a terrorist attack on the United States. Have they developed WMD for covert delivery? Have they trained forces to carry out terrorist WMD attacks? Have they threatened covert WMD attacks in the past or planned for them in the future? By looking at the five

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states regularly cited as posing the greatest ballistic missile threat<sup>24</sup>—Russia, China, North Korea, Iran, and Iraq—it is possible to demonstrate that the threat from state-sponsored WMD terrorism by these states is at least equal to, if not greater than, the threat from their ballistic missiles.

***Russia*** Last year Russia held its largest military exercise since the fall of the Soviet Union. Subtly referred to as “West-99” (*Zapad-99*) this massive exercise involved 50,000 troops from fifty different units, bombers that approached Iceland and Norway, tanks on maneuver, and warships from the Barents to the Black Sea. Russian Defense Minister Igor Sergeyev’s analysis of West-99 is enlightening:

The exercise tested one of the provisions of Russia's military doctrine concerning a possible use of nuclear weapons when all other measures are exhausted. We did pursue such an option. All measures were exhausted. Our defenses proved to be ineffective. An enemy continued to push into Russia. And that's when the decision to use nuclear weapons was made.<sup>25</sup>

The failure of Russian conventional forces is thus complete. The only protection offered by the Motherland’s armed forces lies in her still massive nuclear arsenal. Official Russian military policy increasingly reflects this unfortunate reality. Russia’s new National Security Concept, signed by then-acting President Vladimir Putin in January, makes the following assertions about Moscow’s nuclear weapons:

*The most important task of the Russian Federation is to implement deterrence in the interests of preventing aggression on any scale, including with the use of nuclear weapons, against Russia and its allies.*

*The Russian Federation should possess nuclear weapons capable of guaranteed infliction of a predetermined damage to any aggressor state or coalition of states under any circumstances.*

*One of the principles concerning the use of force by Russia is the use of all forces and means at its disposal, including nuclear weapons, in case it needs to repel an armed aggression, if all other measures of resolving the crisis situation have been exhausted or proved ineffective.<sup>26</sup>*

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In his analysis of this new Russian military doctrine Nikolai Sokov of the Center for Nonproliferation Studies has pointed out several key differences between this doctrine and the one promulgated in 1993. Russian nuclear weapons can now be used “in response to other weapons of mass destruction” and “against any country or coalition—not necessarily one that includes a nuclear state—if the situation is critical to Russian national security”.<sup>27</sup> “This new provision hints at the state of the conventional armed forces: they are no longer considered *a priori* capable of coping with non-nuclear states.”<sup>28</sup> The new doctrine maintains the deterrent nature of Russian nuclear weapons, but lowers the threshold for use from global war to include regional wars as well. All together, this document makes clear Moscow’s increasing reliance upon its nuclear forces to prevent and deter any attacks upon its territory or sovereignty.<sup>29</sup>

Given its growing reliance upon its nuclear forces for its basic defense, Moscow is understandably concerned about an American NMD system. Although it is only meant to defend against a small number of missiles, NMD will nevertheless weaken the deterrent capability of Russia’s strategic rocket forces. Such a situation is liable to be found unacceptable within the Kremlin.

According to several former high-ranking Russian officials, Moscow considered using nuclear terrorism against the United States during the Cold War. General Alexander Lebed, former secretary of the Russian security council, made headlines in 1997 with his assertions that his country had developed, deployed, and subsequently lost a large number of nuclear “suitcase bombs”. According to General Lebed, he was able to account for only 48 out of 100 or more tactical nuclear weapons stored in “60-by-40-by-20-centimeter case[s]”. The devices, which he referred to as “ideal weapon[s] for nuclear

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terror”, could allegedly be transported and detonated by a single individual and deliver a one-kiloton explosion capable of killing 100,000 people.<sup>30</sup>

Both Washington and Moscow immediately denounced Lebed’s story as nonsense, but have since been forced to admit it did contain elements of truth. After initially denying the very existence of such weapons, the Russian government later assured the world that any “suitcase bombs” they may have developed were now safely under lock and key. The Defense Department also had to admit the striking resemblance between Lebed’s “suitcase bombs” and the atomic demolition munitions (ADM) developed by both the United States and the former Soviet Union. Although DOD disputed the “suitcase-size” label attached to these devices, a department spokesman admitted both sides in the Cold War had developed man-portable nuclear weapons. Washington asserts it has destroyed all of its tactical nuclear devices. Moscow, however, only claims to have decommissioned and stored its tactical inventory; it remains very much in existence.<sup>31</sup>

The potential use of these devices remains a matter of controversy. General Lebed believes the weapons were “deployed by special Soviet military intelligence forces in border regions of the former Soviet Union.”<sup>32</sup> Alexei Yablokov, one of former President Yeltsin’s environmental safety advisers, suggested the KGB developed the devices during the 1970s for “terrorist purposes”.<sup>33</sup> The highest-ranking defector from Russia’s GRU (the military counterpart of the KGB) adds an interesting wrinkle to this KGB angle. According to Colonel Stanislav Lunev, he personally scouted locations for “drop sites” for weapons caches inside the United States during the Cold War, but cannot confirm whether any such caches were created. “Popular sites include the Shenandoah Valley outside of Washington, D.C., and the Hudson River Valley outside of New York

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City. “‘Suitcase bombs’—nuclear weapons—could be stored in these areas and elsewhere.”<sup>34</sup> Lunev also claimed large amounts of chemical and biological weapons were pre-positioned for *Spetnaz* troops to use in mass poisonings of American cities.<sup>35</sup>

Whether or not one chooses to believe the claims of General Lebed or Colonel Lunev, one fact remains clear: Soviet military and intelligence officials at least contemplated using small, portable nuclear devices within the United States. As a hegemonic America develops its national missile defense system and as Russia continues its downward slide with a former KGB agent at its head, Moscow may consider dusting off the old plans (and the old devices) for a future conflict.

**China** During the 1996 Taiwan presidential campaign, Lieutenant General Xiong Guangkai, the People’s Liberation Army’s deputy chief of staff and its director of intelligence, informed Charles Freeman, a former American diplomat in Beijing and Assistant Secretary of Defense, that “America will not sacrifice Los Angeles to protect Taiwan.”<sup>36</sup> Beijing’s leaders were similarly abrasive before and after this year’s presidential election in Taiwan. In a pre-election article described as “unusually harsh” by Pentagon officials the official newspaper of the People’s Liberation Army, the *Liberation Army Daily*, reminded America that China “has certain abilities of launching strategic counterattack and the capacity of launching a long-distance strike”.<sup>37</sup> After the election of pro-independence candidate Chen Shui-Ban, the PLA issued a 16-page special issue of *Haowangjiao Weekly* threatening Taiwan and the United States once again. In it the Chinese military raised the ante from America’s second largest city to over 2/3 of the American people, “The United States will not sacrifice 200 million Americans for 20 million Taiwanese”.<sup>38</sup> The paper outlined a series of escalating steps designed to liberate

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Taiwan and scare off the United States. U.S. satellites and military bases in Asia would be the first target, then a nuclear warning shot in the Taiwan Strait and a nuclear threat against the United States, finally a neutron bomb might be deployed against Taiwan itself.<sup>39</sup> (Immediately after publication of this special issue, the newspaper was shut down by the Chinese government. An unidentified official would only say that, “Editors at Haowangjiao released something they were not supposed to release.”<sup>40</sup>)

Such tactics are designed not to defeat the United States, but to force America to “make a radical reevaluation of its goals and to acquiesce in a new status quo”.<sup>41</sup> To force such a “radical reevaluation” China depends on surprise and shock—surprise that an attack occurred and shock that the attack was so devastating. A WMD terrorist attack on a major American city combined with an assault on Taiwan would be well suited to achieving such goals.

Too often it is assumed long-range missiles are the only threat to the United States from China because Beijing lacks power projection capabilities much beyond its borders. This is a mistake. The Chinese leadership considers asymmetric attacks including the covert use of WMD a viable option against the United States, possibly a better option than an expensive arms race. Sha Zukang, the director of the Chinese foreign ministry’s department of disarmament, recently implied such a strategy when he said, “If NMD is established, China will not sit on its hands and do nothing while watching its security breached”, but “if established, China will not have a race with anyone, we have no capability to race with anyone.”<sup>42</sup> Instead Beijing may follow the advice found the 1991 book, “Unrestricted War”. In it two Chinese colonels argue the PRC should use all means at its disposal in a war with the United States. The authors, Qiao Liang and Wang

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Xiangsui, openly advocate the use of “terrorism, drug trafficking, environmental degradation and computer virus propagation” against America.<sup>43</sup> As a “weak country”, China does not have to follow the rules of war because “those rules are set by the West”.<sup>44</sup>

**North Korea** North Korea has the largest contingent of special operations forces anywhere in the world with approximately 100,000 highly trained troops organized into twenty-five brigades and five reconnaissance battalions.<sup>45</sup> These men represent roughly ten percent of the North Korean Army’s total peacetime strength. The most elite of all the special operations forces at Pyongyang’s disposal are the three sniper brigades within the Reconnaissance Bureau. According to Joseph Bermudez, author of the definitive work on North Korean special forces, these brigades have among their missions “(t)he seizure and destruction of...NBC warfare assets”, “(t)argeting reconnaissance for [North Korean] weapons of mass destruction”, and “(c)overt delivery of biological weapons”.<sup>46</sup> These units are also the primary forces for global special operations including operating within the continental United States in wartime.<sup>47</sup> Clearly, these men are prepared to carry out WMD terrorism against the United States if so ordered.

Recent peace overtures to the South notwithstanding, Pyongyang remains a dangerous regime and a threat to U.S. allies and interests in Asia. A nation so recently accused of laundering money, running drugs, kidnapping foreigners, starving its own citizens, sponsoring terrorism, and proliferating WMD can hardly be expected to change overnight. In fact, the rapidly changing situation on the peninsula may lead to a dangerous instability. In a moment of crisis the WMD under Pyongyang’s control and the plans to use them may be called into action.

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*Iran* Tehran possesses a frightening capability in its Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). According to Paula DeSutter of National Defense University, the IRGC “has the lead in Iran for the production and employment of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery” and is “the primary advocate within Iran for the funding of terrorist groups”.<sup>48</sup> This is obviously a deadly combination, but it gets worse. The IRGC also has a well-deserved reputation for being the most virulently anti-U.S. and most ideologically pure segment of Iranian society. As a result, the IRGC has undertaken numerous operations because of their ideological correctness rather than their military effectiveness. This extremism has also led the IRGC and its commander, General Rezaei, to take positions and engage in operations in contrast with the political and religious leadership in Teheran. If Iran were ever to sponsor WMD terrorism, the responsibility would rest squarely on the IRGC.

The results of the most recent elections for the Majlis are encouraging, but do not necessarily diminish the threat. As the political leadership attempts greater liberalization throughout the country the gap between its political leadership and its military forces is likely to grow wider still. A senior administration told the Washington Post shortly after the reformist victory in the Iranian elections, “The...important question is whether the reformers can translate this into control over the instruments of state security”.<sup>49</sup> General Anthony Zinni, commander of U.S. Central Command, made this even more clear in testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, “What concerns us is the fact that the hard-liners still control the military, the weapons of mass destruction program, the ballistic missile program, and still control the intelligence services which still support terrorism groups.”<sup>50</sup>

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*Iraq* Although the Iraqi Republican Guards failed to live up to their reputation during the Gulf War, there is little reason to believe these units do not continue to pose a significant threat to the United States. With between 60,000 and 80,000 men still under arms the Republican Guards represent a sizeable force within Iraq. Despite the efforts of the United Nations to the contrary, Baghdad maintains a significant WMD arsenal that remains at the disposal of these forces. Republican Guard forces have been directly involved in Sudan's civil war with rebels in the south including the alleged use of old Iraqi mustard gas stockpiles against opposition forces. Baghdad conducts terrorist operations through its military intelligence services and trains and sponsors terrorists through its General Intelligence Service (GIS sponsored the attempted assassination of former President George Bush in 1993 bringing American cruise missiles down on its headquarters building in retaliation). Within GIS, the Special Bureau's Office Sixteen "trains Iraqis and foreigners for covert operations, including terrorism, and may supervise some operations."<sup>51</sup>

Saddam Hussein threatened WMD terrorism during Desert Shield and Desert Storm, but apparently failed to carry out any such attacks. The assumption that this was just an empty threat, however, would be a serious mistake. Before the outbreak of the Persian Gulf War, Saddam Hussein famously threatened the United States with terrorism by stating, "You can come to Iraq with aircraft and missiles, but do not push us to the point where we will cease to take. If you use pressure, we will deploy pressure and force. We cannot come all the way to you in the United States but individual Arabs may reach you."<sup>52</sup> David Kay, the former chief weapons inspector for the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM), has expressed concern about Iraq's ability to carry out WMD

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terrorism. “One shouldn’t focus entirely on missile warheads as the means of delivery,” he says.<sup>53</sup> According to Kay, the possibility that Saddam Hussein would respond to a new round of bombing by threatening to use pre-positioned WMD against the West is “highly likely”.<sup>54</sup>

**Recommendations**

Shifting the emphasis of U.S. defense efforts to focus on the threat of WMD terrorism sponsored by these states will not be easy—battling the conventional wisdom never is. Fortunately, many of the necessary changes reinforce efforts in other areas to combat the proliferation of WMD, prepare cities and states to better manage the consequences of WMD terrorism, and to defeat terrorist groups, conventional or otherwise.

*Coordinate Federal Response* Throughout the 1990s the U.S. government has been operating in crisis mode, believing the threat of WMD terrorism is swiftly increasing. Billions of dollars have been expended and numerous programs have been created or expanded in response. As the Government Accounting Office (GAO) has repeatedly warned, this effort lacks any notion of a threat assessment that would permit a coordinated effort.<sup>55</sup> Such a threat assessment needs to be performed and the policy of the federal government should be designed to meet that threat. The disparate programs of the Departments of Defense, Justice, Health and Human Services, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and many others need to be coordinated to avoid duplication of effort and ensure the most efficient use of resources.

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Finally, the efforts in nonproliferation, missile defense, and counterterrorism need to be addressed as a coherent whole in our attempt to defend against WMD.

***Make Domestic Preparedness Program Permanent*** The Domestic Preparedness Program (DPP) that uses federal assets to train first responders to deal with WMD must be made permanent. Created in 1996 as a five-year emergency program, DPP has been a major success in getting cities, counties, and states to begin thinking about their response to WMD terrorism. The training of local responders and the purchase of equipment cannot be allowed to go to waste when the DPP ends (after having trained all 120 cities) in 2001. Making the DPP permanent will move America from crisis mode to a more reasoned, better prepared state of mind.<sup>56</sup>

***Maintain Pressure on State-Sponsors of Terrorism*** The U.S. government's condemnation of states that sponsor terrorism has played an important role in delegitimizing such action on the world stage. Although the value of economic sanctions can legitimately be questioned, the stigma attached to the countries that appear on the State Department's annual list of sponsors of terrorism is considerable. In recent years, however, there have been indications of American willingness to drop the terrorist label for the sake of politics regardless of actual reforms. North Korea is desperate for U.S. economic assistance and is using the threat of its WMD program to get itself removed from the list. Syria is looking to negotiate away its status as part of a peace deal with Israel. Pakistan represents the other side of the story. Due to its strong support for the United States during the Cold War, Pakistan has managed to keep itself off of the State Department's list despite its support for terrorist groups operating in Jammu and

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Kashmir, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. America must condemn the sponsors of terrorism based upon their actions, not their politics.

***Improve HUMINT Capability*** The U.S. intelligence community remains far too focused on the nuclear threat of the Cold War. Nuclear weapons capability requires a massive infrastructure that is relatively easily detected and monitored by American satellites, listening posts, and high tech collection efforts. Chemical and biological weapons require far fewer outward signs of production and are, therefore, much harder to detect through purely technical means. Detecting and monitoring chemical and biological weapons production requires more than the latest technowizardry, it calls for people on the ground. The collection of human intelligence (HUMINT) is both more intensive and more expensive than other forms of collection, but its value cannot be overstated. There is simply no other way to acquire the kind of insider information America needs for its defense. HUMINT provides intimate knowledge of the capabilities of our potential enemies that will help America prepare the necessary defenses. More importantly, HUMINT provides the best information on our potential enemies' intentions and could offer us the only warning of an impending attack or the only clue as to a devastating attack's perpetrators and sponsors.

***Prepare for Counterproliferation*** Such knowledge of intentions and capabilities will be the key to a successful counterproliferation strategy. Emulating Israel's attack on the Osirak nuclear plant in Iraq in 1981, the U.S. government has steadily increased preparations for a similar attack on an opponent's WMD infrastructure should the need arise. The Department of Defense has prepared the plans and clearly has the capability to take out an opponent's WMD capability. What is lacking from our current

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counterproliferation strategy is a clear enunciation of policy and the will to back it up. Washington needs to state unequivocally that the U.S. military will strike unilaterally and decisively anytime the WMD threat to American lives is deemed imminent. A clearly articulated policy will prepare public and world opinion for American action. Once an enemy's intentions are clear, the United States cannot hesitate to act. A WMD attack would be far too devastating to wait until after the fact to retaliate or to rely upon the threat of such retaliation alone. America must be prepared to strike first. The deterrent capability of such a clear statement should not be underestimated.

*Eliminate Ambiguity of Retaliation* If U.S. intelligence should fail to provide advance warning of a terrorist WMD attack and if the fear of an American attack (either preemptive or retaliatory) should prove ineffective, America must strike back in the manner in which it was attacked. Responding to a nuclear, chemical, or biological attack with conventional weapons alone is insufficient. While it is true that conventional weapons can be just as destructive and deadly as unconventional ones, there remain important differences between them. The international community has expended considerable effort to make the use of WMD illegitimate, illegal, and immoral. The creation and maintenance of this taboo have played a significant role in limiting the use of WMD throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Failing to punish WMD use sufficiently will only lower the threshold for and weaken the prohibition against future use.

A proper response to state-sponsored WMD terrorism requires the United States to make a choice. If America wants a perfectly commensurate response it should restart its chemical and biological weapons programs. This approach, however, is unacceptable. The United States has made a stand on principle that chemical and biological weapons

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are illegitimate forms of warfare and should stand by that decision. If America should once again restock its biological and chemical arsenals, it would single-handedly destroy the international nonproliferation regime and touch off an international arms race in the very worst weapons of war.

America must settle for an imperfect, but necessary response. The United States relied upon its nuclear arsenal to prevent Saddam Hussein's use of chemical weapons during Desert Storm and it will have to rely upon those same weapons in the future. America has agreed to limit its arsenal to strategic nuclear arms and it must abide by its agreements, but it need not feel impotent to respond to a terrorist WMD attack. Nuclear weapons are a legitimate response to a major WMD attack. Washington will have a choice of targets and the ability to strike any or all of them. Such choices permit America to deliver a commensurate response in terms of casualties and damage if not in terms of weaponry. Making a nuclear response a clear and unambiguous retaliation to any WMD attack is the best way to ensure the deterrent value of America's military.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The somewhat loaded term "terrorist" rather than "covert" is used here purposefully. A covert attack implies that there are parallel overt attacks also taking place with the intention of defeating the enemy through a combination of such attacks. "Covert" leads one to believe that hostilities are about to occur or already are occurring. "Terrorist" by contrast is meant to imply a more isolated incident intended to cause fear and shape public opinion. The intent is to accomplish a political goal short of defeating the enemy on the battlefield. There is no implication of parallel overt hostilities.

- <sup>2</sup> Including, but not limited to, British and German use of chemical weapons along the Western Front in World War I, American use of atomic weapons against Japan, and Iraqi and Iranian use of chemical weapons in the Iran-Iraq War.
- <sup>3</sup> Namely, Saddam Hussein's gassing of the Kurdish citizens of Halabja.
- <sup>4</sup> David Rapoport, *Terrorism and Weapons of the Apocalypse*, National Security Studies Quarterly V, No. 3 (Summer 1999): 59.
- <sup>5</sup> Walter Laqueur, *Postmodern Terrorism*, Foreign Affairs 75, No. 5 (September/October 1996): 34.
- <sup>6</sup> For the record, Qadhafi has since turned over the suspected agents in the Lockerbie bombing and paid \$31 million dollars in compensation to the victims in the French UTA attack.
- <sup>7</sup> James Baker III with Thomas DeFrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995): 359.
- <sup>8</sup> Richard Betts, *The New Threat of Mass Destruction*, Foreign Affairs 77, No. 1 (January/February 1998): 31.
- <sup>9</sup> Joseph Cirincione, *Asian Nuclear Chain Reaction*, Foreign Policy 118 (Spring 2000): 134.
- <sup>10</sup> William Cohen, *Rogue States Cannot Hope to Blackmail America or Her Allies*, London Times, 1 March 2000.
- <sup>11</sup> Jonathan Tucker, "Lessons from the Case Studies" in Jonathan Tucker, ed., *Toxic Terror: Assessing Terrorist Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000): 267-8.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.
- <sup>13</sup> David Kaplan, *Aum Shinrikyo (1995)* in Jonathan Tucker, ed., *Toxic Terror: Assessing Terrorist Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000): Table 12.1, page 221.
- <sup>14</sup> General Mustafa Tlas, Syrian Defense Minister, "Biological (Germ) Warfare, A New and Effective Method in Modern Warfare", SAFF, Issue No. 235, 22 November-21 December 1999. Translated by First Lieutenant Mohammad Motahhari. Available at <[www.geocities.com/yaelharan/tlas.htm](http://www.geocities.com/yaelharan/tlas.htm)>.
- <sup>15</sup> Jessica Stern, *The Ultimate Terrorists* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999): 109-110.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>17</sup> Walter Laqueur, *Postmodern Terrorism*, 34.
- <sup>18</sup> National Intelligence Council, *Foreign Missile Developments and the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States Through 2015* (September 1999).
- <sup>19</sup> Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States (Rumsfeld Commission), Executive Summary of the Report (15 July 1998): <[ftp://fedbbs.access.gpo.gov/gpo\\_bbs/cia/bmt.htm](ftp://fedbbs.access.gpo.gov/gpo_bbs/cia/bmt.htm)>.
- <sup>20</sup> National Intelligence Council, *Foreign Missile Developments and the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States Through 2015*, September 1999.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>22</sup> Jessica Stern, *The Ultimate Terrorists*, 128-129.
- <sup>23</sup> For a somewhat dated example, see U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment (OTA), *Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction: Assessing the Risks* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office [U.S. GPO], August 1993), 83. A more recent example is Edward Spiers, *Weapons of Mass Destruction: Prospects for Proliferation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).
- <sup>24</sup> As the Rumsfeld Commission states, "These newer, developing threats in North Korea, Iran and Iraq are in addition to those still posed by the existing ballistic missile arsenals of Russia and China, nations with which we are not now in conflict but which remain in uncertain transitions".
- <sup>25</sup> Michael Gordon, *Maneuvers Show Russian Reliance on Nuclear Arms*, New York Times, 10 July 1999.
- <sup>26</sup> *Nezavisimoye voyennoye obozreniye*, No. 1 (174), 14 January 2000 as cited in Nikolai Sokov, *Russia's New National Security Concept: The Nuclear Angle*, Center for Nonproliferation Studies, February 2000, <<http://cns.miis.edu/pubs/reports/sokov2.htm>>.
- <sup>27</sup> Nikolai Sokov, *Overview: An Assessment of the Draft Russian Military Doctrine*, Center for Nonproliferation Studies, October 1999, <<http://cns.miis.edu/pubs/reports/sokov.htm>>.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>29</sup> Moscow has denied the lowering of Russia's nuclear threshold. In attempting to dispel such talk the Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Ivanov said, "Russia has never stated the possibility of being the first to use nuclear weapons. At the same time, Russia does not make a commitment to not being the first". Such doubletalk is an important component of strategic ambiguity. The net effect remains a lowering of

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the threshold for use of Russia's nuclear weapons. Ivanov quoted in Reuters, *Russia Says No Lowering of Nuclear Threshold*, 17 February 2000, <<http://www.russiatoday.com:80/news.php3?id=135424>>.

<sup>30</sup> David Hoffman, *Suitcase Nuclear Weapons Safely Kept, Russian Says*, Washington Post, 14 September 1997.

<sup>31</sup> Captain Mike Doubleday, USN, Department of Defense News Briefing, 2 October 1997, <[http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Oct1997/t10021997\\_t1002asd.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Oct1997/t10021997_t1002asd.html)>.

<sup>32</sup> David Hoffman, *Suitcase Nuclear Weapons Safely Kept, Russian Says*.

<sup>33</sup> CNN, *Lebed: Small nuclear weapons may be in wrong hands*, 1 October 1997, <<http://cgi.com/WORLD/9701/01/russia.lebed/>>.

<sup>34</sup> Stanislav Lunev with Ira Winkler, *Through the Eyes of the Enemy* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 1998): 25.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-30.

<sup>36</sup> Karsten Prager, *China: Waking Up to the Next Superpower*, TIME, 25 March 1996.

<sup>37</sup> Bill Gertz, *China Warns U.S. of Missile Strike*, Washington Times, 29 February 2000.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Dorgan, *Chinese Military Paper Warns Taiwan and U.S.*, Philadelphia Enquirer, 21 March 2000.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Michael Dorgan, *Chinese Paper Shut After Issue on Taiwan*, Philadelphia Inquirer, 22 March 2000.

<sup>41</sup> Robert Kagan, *How China Will Take Taiwan*, Washington Post, 12 March 2000.

<sup>42</sup> *China to Counter U.S. Missile Defense, But Not With Arms Race*, Inside China, July 13, 2000, <[www.insidechina.com/news.php3?id=178325](http://www.insidechina.com/news.php3?id=178325)>.

<sup>43</sup> John Pomfret, *China Ponders New Rules of 'Unrestricted War'*, Washington Post, 8 August 1999.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Joseph Bermudez Jr., *North Korean Special Forces* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1998): 1-12.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>48</sup> Paula DeSutter, *Denial and Jeopardy: Deterring Iranian Use of NBC Weapons*, National Defense University, Chapter 3, *The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps*, <<http://www.ndu.edu/inss/books/dajd/ch3.html>>.

<sup>49</sup> John Lancaster, *U.S. Sees Hope for Dialogue with Iran*, Washington Post, 23 February 2000.

<sup>50</sup> Associated Press, *Iran Called Top Threat to U.S. in Gulf Area*, Washington Times, 1 March 2000.

<sup>51</sup> Anthony Cordesman, *Military Balance in the Middle East X: The Northern Gulf: Iraq*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 28 December 1998, 45.

<sup>52</sup> Lawrence Freedman and Efraim Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict, 1990-91* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995): 52.

<sup>53</sup> Steve Macko, *The WMD/Terrorist Threat From Iraq*, ERRI Daily Intelligence Report, 10 February 1998, Volume 4-041, <<http://www.emergency.com/chembio9.htm>>.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Government Accounting Office, *Combating Terrorism: Spending on Governmentwide Programs Requires Better Management and Coordination*, GAO/NSIAD-98-39 (1 December 1997); *Combating Terrorism: Observations on Federal Spending to Combat Terrorism*, GAO/T-NSIAD/GGD-99-107 (11 March 1999); *Combating Terrorism: Issues to Be Resolved to Improve Counterterrorism Operations*, GAO/NSIAD-99-135 (13 May 1999); *Combating Terrorism: Observations on Growth in Federal Programs*, GAO/T-NSIAD-99-181 (9 June 1999); *Combating Terrorism: Need for Comprehensive Threat and Risk Assessments of Chemical and Biological Attacks*, GAO/NSIAD-99-163 (7 September 1999); *Combating Terrorism: Issues in Managing Counterterrorist Programs*, GAO/T-NSIAD-00-145 (6 April 2000).

<sup>56</sup> Gavin Cameron, *WMD Terrorism in the United States: The Threat and Possible Countermeasures*, The Nonproliferation Review 7, No. 1 (Spring 2000): 174.