

Terrorists, Trafficking, and WMD Still the Greatest Danger

Debate about the intersection of terrorism and illicit nuclear materials is often bleak and holds a disconcerting outlook for international security. However, Sonia Ben Ouagrham-Gormley's article in the July/August *Arms Control Today* ("An Unrealized Nexus?: WMD-related Trafficking, Terrorism, and Organized Crime in the Former Soviet Union") offers a more sanguine view of the problem. She draws inferences from a 2001-2006 data set of 183 trafficking incidents within the former Soviet Union generated by the Monterey Institute's Center for Nonproliferation Studies (CNS). Her parse of such data focuses on the minuscule quantities of fissionable material in these 183 cases, the rarity of highly enriched uranium among them, and the limited involvement of terrorist organizations and patron-client relations associated with organized crime. Ouagrham-Gormley thus sees an absence of proliferation-significant trafficking, with suppliers seeking clients and transactions frequently uncovered via police work. Things, she seems to say, could be a lot worse.

Ouagrham-Gormley appropriately notes that this collection of reports contains troublesome nuances, such as potential chemical and biological weapons materials making their appearance, greater variability in post-

2001 trafficking routes, a link of nuclear trafficking with small arms and drug dealing, and the suggestion of emerging organizational sophistication. She is also careful to observe that there is too little information, export control, or legal bases on which to regulate trafficking, implying that there may be more "weapons of mass destruction" trafficking than meets the eye.

One does not take away from "An Unrealized Nexus," however, either a sense of urgency or recommendations that are more than incremental. Unfortunately, efforts to prevent terrorists, private actors, or rogue states from using such materials are either misguided, uncoordinated, or not making adequate progress.

Despite imprecise data that make longitudinal and cross-sectional findings questionable, we ought not rest with suggesting fixes such as improved equipment and training for border monitors, stronger export controls, more savvy police and investigatory agencies, and information sharing. Such recommendations are worthy but fall short. We should instead ask deeper questions and seek broader indictments. For instance, with numerous institutions already in place to address the threat created by illicit trafficking of WMD, how can interstate and interdepartmental reporting and cooperation be

improved? Why, in many states, is the criminalization of the possession and trafficking of these materials not yet consistent with international sentiment?

The Bush administration's counter-trafficking efforts have centered on the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), which emphasizes the interdiction of WMD shipments, i.e., identifying, tracking, and forcibly boarding ships with suspicious cargo. At the same time, the administration by, among other things, moving on a dangerously flawed nuclear accord with India has eviscerated a far more useful multilateral arms control regime laboriously fashioned over decades. That regime sought to control WMD materials at their source or prevent trafficking before transborder shipment is attempted.

Of this wider indictment, one sees nothing in Ouagrham-Gormley's essay. We do not expect her to write a different article. Rather, let us simply note that her rather optimistic portrait of the link between terrorists and WMD, and of illicit trafficking of WMD writ large, evince at once academic detachment and political naiveté—a failure to see the proverbial forest because of empirical trees. We appreciate her efforts and those of the CNS, but hope for much more.

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Sonia Ben Ouagrham-Gormley Responds:

I am not sure what purpose it would serve for me to have broadly indicted the Bush administration for eviscerating the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty or allowing multilateral arms control to fall prey to U.S. unilateralism. Although I may agree that this issue deserves its own treatment, I would hope that any criticism flowed directly from sound and detailed analysis of specific nonproliferation challenges. On the two problems Nelson and Roslycky mention, I refer them to the extensive work of my Center for Nonproliferation Studies (CNS) colleagues on the U.S.-India nuclear deal and controlling nuclear materials at their source, available on the CNS website.

As for my task in "An Unrealized Nexus" of seeking to understand signs of an emerging nexus among weapons of mass destruction trafficking, organized crime, and terrorism, there is general agreement in the nonproliferation community that finding better ways of coping with new proliferation networks is among the most important challenges we face. Asked to identify the top upcoming challenges to the

nonproliferation regime, participants at the 2007 Carnegie International Nonproliferation Conference identified concern over the emergence of new or modified proliferation networks in the aftermath of A. Q. Khan's nefarious dealings. Detecting the emergence of such networks necessarily flows from empirically based spadework and academic detachment because the devil indeed lies in the details. It is not showing naiveté or optimism to highlight the weaknesses of former Soviet Union border control or to urge finding better ways of collecting more useful information that sheds light on such a complex issue. There is also virtue in incremental policies, as they induce a deeper and long-lasting change in behaviors and mindsets. It would be a mistake to be so fixated on designing broad nonproliferation policies that we forget that their value depends on the analysis of the data that informs them and the people who implement them on the ground.

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