

**National Defense University Symposium:
Implementing the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR)**

***Panel 4: Preventing Acquisition and/or Use of WMD by Hostile State or
Non-State Actors***

Remarks by Dr. Ashton B. Carter

Co-Director, Preventive Defense Project
Ford Foundation Professor of Science and International Affairs
John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University

March 17, 2006
Washington, DC

The Department of Defense has come a long way from 1993, when the Counterproliferation Initiative was introduced. At that time even the word counterproliferation was controversial, as some saw dealing with Weapons of Mass Destruction as entirely a diplomatic responsibility. But we felt that when nonproliferation failed, as it does rarely but on occasion, the consequence is a Defense problem. Therefore Defense must be involved in combating the threat.

Dr. Dale Klein has explained very well the myriad of activities in DOD that have emerged since that time, ranging from the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program to the Proliferation Security Initiative. As Dale has said, there is no silver bullet in counterproliferation. One must use every tool in the toolbox and fight on every front one can.

This panel is about the Quadrennial Defense Review and the decisions it made and role it prescribed for combating Weapons of Mass Destruction. As Brad Roberts' careful analysis demonstrated, there is not much to discuss if we confine this panel to that subject. The QDR is mostly silent on both the budget for combating Weapons of Mass Destruction and the management structure for doing so. Both of these, in my judgment, must be addressed. I am glad that DOD put combating Weapons of Mass Destruction into the mainstream rather than cordoned off in a separate nuclear posture review. However, when it got into the mainstream, it quickly submerged.

Therefore there is little to say about the QDR and Weapons of Mass Destruction because the QDR says very little about Weapons of Mass Destruction. Allow me to use my time, therefore, to address the context under which this QDR was written. First I will address the budget context, and secondly the overall counterproliferation context.

Since 9/11 the Defense budget has increased 50 percent from roughly \$300 billion per year to \$450 billion per year. On top of that there have been large supplemental appropriations. Where has that money gone? To a remarkable extent, the new top line authority given to the Department of Defense after 9/11, which I welcome, has been used

to fund the Program of Record that existed on September 10, 2001. That Program of Record, which the Bush Administration inherited from the Clinton Administration, was under-funded. The new money since 9/11 has not been used, in the main, for the new capabilities relevant to the new era that the QDR says so much about.

There has, however, been innovation since 9/11. Much of this has been fueled by the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and against terrorism. War, as is common, has been much more of a source of innovation in defense than any study or top level guidance. And much good learning and innovation has occurred.

However, most of the innovation since 9/11 has been funded in the supplementals. At some point, the supplementals will end. In fact, we all hope that occurs before long because we all hope that the war in Iraq is soon brought to a successful conclusion. But whether it is two years or five years or seven years from now, the supplementals will eventually go away. At that time the innovative activities that are war-and-terrorism-related, and that were funded in the supplementals, will attempt to make their way into the baseline program. When they do, they will compete with the Program of Record. Experience shows they will have a difficult time dislodging the Program of Record. Therefore, when the war ends and the supplementals die, a lot of transformation is threatened as well.

To this budgetary risk to transformation, and to all the fine words included in the QDR, must be added the possibility of a downturn in the top line. Barring another attack on the United States or other dramatic national security event, the public may force the Department into one of its cyclical downturns in budget. When that occurs, there will be further pressure on innovation.

In a climate where money has flowed freely since 9/11, Defense has not been forced to exhibit good management principles or discipline. The QDR therefore did not have to make difficult choices, and so it didn't. A related phenomenon is the fact that capabilities-based planning, which has been much in vogue in recent years, is showing itself to be a failure at generating guidance precise enough for good DOD budget management.

Turning now to the context in which one should view Weapons of Mass Destruction today, I will focus on nuclear and biological weapons as they are by far and away the most threatening.

Nuclear and biological proliferation in terrorism are very different in terms of the response they require. Imagine the response to Weapons of Mass Destruction as a timeline. The left-hand side of the timeline contains a proliferator's pre-acquisition or pre-attack activities and the US makes progressive attempts to dissuade or deny the proliferation path. The right-hand side includes the post-proliferation or post-attack activities meant to deal with the consequences of proliferation or an attack. The important activities for combating nuclear weapons are on the left-hand side of that timeline, and the important activities for combating biological weapons are on the right-hand side.

For nuclear weapons, we must be concerned about both state and non-state possession and use. But they are not independent phenomena. Non-state or terrorist use depends upon state production of fissile materials. No one thinks Al Qaeda is capable of enrichment or reprocessing. Al Qaeda must get these materials from governments. On the other hand, once a terrorist group is in possession of fissile materials, very little stands in the way of use. Terrorists can easily configure a bomb and we will have great difficulty discovering it on its way to its target – and those directly affected and those downwind have limited options to protect themselves. Much of the activity that's going on to combat nuclear weapons is useful. The Proliferation Security Initiative, the DNDO in Homeland Security, various adjustments to our deterrent posture including nuclear weapons, deployment of missile defenses, discussion of how to attribute the origin of a bomb by examining its residue and retaliating against those complicit in its use are all being discussed in DOD. These are useful but they are all at the back end of the timeline. If we're living at the back end of the timeline, we're in trouble.

At the front end of the timeline, we are doing very poorly indeed. The United States has allowed North Korea's nuclear program to run amok for five years. For the first few years after Iran was caught enriching uranium against its Non-Proliferation Treaty promises, our government did not even join the effort to stop them. So amongst the so-called rogues, or "Axis of Evil", the United States has in fact shown itself in recent years to be toothless. By allowing alliance relationships to degrade, at the same time, we are causing countries that have long lived happily under the U.S. nuclear umbrella in East Asia, the Middle East and Europe to begin to reconsider their own posture.

So in summary, our recent performance in combating nuclear weapons has focused almost exclusively on the latter, less effective stages of the timeline. At the front end of the timeline, where the key to nuclear safety exists, the U.S. has been as asleep at the Weapons of Mass Destruction switch as it was asleep at the terrorism switch before 9/11. We will live to regret this.

With respect to bio-weapons, all action takes place after the attack. You have to know you are under attack and rapidly mobilize public health and other assets to contain and smother an outbreak before it can truly become an attack of Mass Destruction. So if the name of the game in nuclear weapons is to eradicate the threat at the front end, the objective in bioterrorism is to smother the attack at the back end. It is very difficult to control the front end of the bio-weapons chain because the materials and technologies are dual use and widespread. Here DOD's problem is how to fit into the overall national public health response, which includes the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Homeland Security and others. Until the US government provides clear national guidance for DOD's role, we will continue to founder in this field.

President Bush has rightly said that keeping the worst weapons out of the hands of the worst people is an American president's highest priority. Since 9/11 we have done a lot about the worst people. But we're not doing nearly enough about the worst weapons, and the QDR does not do much to advance that cause.

Thank you.