

## Strengthening our strategy against WMD

By Ashton B. Carter and Robert G. Joseph

EVEN IN the highly charged political environment of the presidential campaign, one national security priority has gained strong bipartisan support: the urgent requirement to combat weapons of mass destruction from hostile states and terrorists. That priority must be put into immediate and sustained practice.

One guide for action is the independent, bipartisan review that we led for the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, the principal arm of the Defense Department for combating WMD threats. Our 14-member Review Panel represented a range of political views, but above all a recognition that meeting the proliferation challenge requires an approach that transcends partisanship. The report's findings were not only unanimous, but readily so. The next president must act with decisiveness to correct the deficiencies we identified in our review.

As we began our work, the Review Panel quickly discovered that we needed to broaden our focus from the agency to the government as a whole.

In 2002, President Bush issued a comprehensive National Strategy to Combat WMD. We found the guidance to be sound, but its implementation to be incomplete. While much progress has been made, performance has fallen short in all three pillars of the National Strategy: prevention, protection, and response.

Those three pillars levy three broad requirements on the Defense Department: It must be able to prevail in all WMD threat environments, from war to terrorist

attack; it must maintain a credible nuclear force to deter WMD use by hostile states; and it must make a strong contribution to government-wide efforts to prevent, protect against, and respond to WMD proliferation and terrorism.

Within the Defense Department, these activities are spread across a large number of civilian and military offices and commands. With so many factions, no one is truly in charge. While there is awareness within the Defense Department leadership of the importance of combating WMD, it is not given sufficient priority in practice or in budgeting.

Although the Defense Threat Reduction Agency has performed well, it has not been given the resources necessary to meet its full potential in contributing to a growing set of urgent tasks. These range from developing new protections against bioterrorism to responding to a potential nuclear attack on a US city, from developing detectors that could find a nuclear weapon entering this country to supporting the Proliferation Security Initiative and other international arrangements to curb WMD. Since Sept. 11, 2001, the Defense Department's overall budget has grown significantly, but the Threat Reduction Agency's funding levels have been only slightly over the inflation rate, and legislative and regulatory restrictions continue to hinder optimal allocation of its limited resources.

The agency's funding limitations reflect a broader issue of insufficient clarity, priority, and purpose in efforts to combat WMD. Powerful military and civilian advocates are needed in the Defense Department to recognize the importance of these

missions and the agency's unique potential to support them.

The Review Panel also identified areas where the agency's contribution should be expanded, such as conducting more inspections of nuclear weapons deployments to ensure their safety and security, and extending the Nunn-Lugar threat reduction program, which has been successful in the former Soviet Union, to a global program that might apply to Pakistan and other countries.

The Review Panel did not arrive at its conclusion to have the agency take on new tasks like these lightly, given the existing strains on the agency's budget. However, we were unable to identify other parts of the Defense Department or government that were as capable or willing to perform these missions as well as the Defense Threat Reduction Agency.

With its unique capabilities and exemplary dedication, the Defense Threat Reduction Agency has done much - within available resources - to advance national and international missions to counter WMD. However, it requires substantially more resources and senior-level support to realize its full potential in helping to confront the WMD threats of today and tomorrow. The new administration must not just say that combating WMD proliferation and terrorism is its highest national security priority; it must act accordingly.

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