Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction: Current Challenges and New Approaches

Panel II: New Approaches for Addressing the Threat of WMD Proliferation

Remarks by Dr. Ashton B. Carter, adapted for publication

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ASHTON CARTER: I'm going to confine myself initially to the problem of nuclear proliferation and state possession, not because I think state possession is the principal problem, but because state possession is the route to non-state possession. The only way that you can make a nuclear weapon is to have plutonium or highly enriched uranium, which are not materials that occur in nature. They have to be made by people and, thank God, it's quite an effort to make both of those materials. So far in human history, only governments have been able to marshal the resources over time to do that. It's well beyond the reach of even well-organized terrorist groups, and certainly not Al Qaeda today given the pressure it is facing. So, the only way terrorists are going to get nuclear materials is from a government; hence my focus on governments. It's not at all that I don't take seriously the non-state threat; we did take seriously the non-state threat in the early history of the Nunn-Lugar program. One concern was a rogue military officer or some disgruntled post-Soviet faction.

The danger doesn't come from eroding global regimes. Proliferation doesn't happen in global regimes; it happens in particular places. So let's walk around the world to real places and see how all of this applies. Let me start with the toughest case of all, which is North Korea. I've had some dealings with the North Koreans. My first encounter with the North Koreans – which Bill Perry and I have written about – involved planning an air strike on Yongbyon in 1994, which fortunately we didn't have to carry out. If we had carried it out, we would have destroyed the reactor, the fuel fabrication facility, the reprocessing facility, and the two reactors under construction in North Korea all in a short period of time. We would have destroyed the operating reactor – a graphite moderated reactor – without causing a radiological problem, which is no mean feat.

Although nobody wanted to strike the reactors, we were prepared to because the risk of North Korea getting nuclear weapons seemed so grave. Nuclear weapons in the hands of the North Korean government would have been a direct military threat to us, to the Japanese, and to the South Koreans. North Korean nuclear weapons could have catalyzed a domino effect of proliferation across East Asia. Japan, Taiwan, South Korea and others would have looked around and said, "If the North Koreans develop nuclear weapons and get away with it, maybe we ought to rethink our own stand." Many at this conference have talked about the integrity of the non-proliferation regime. What does it mean to the integrity of the non-proliferation regime if the world's zaniest, Stalinist throwback gets nuclear weapons and nobody does anything about it?

And that's just if nuclear weapons stay in the hands of the North Korean government. North Korea appears to be willing to sell everything it makes. And North Korea is not going to be around forever. This regime is going to toddle off the cliff of history at some point, and who knows whose hands its plutonium will come into at that moment? For all these reasons, what's happening in North Korea is a disaster.

Now, war was averted in 1994 by the negotiation of something called the Agreed Framework, which was far from perfect but at least it stopped the fuel rods at Yongbyon from being reprocessed for eight years. Over the last five years the Agreed Framework has unraveled. As you probably know, the biggest disaster in non-proliferation history has unfolded in the last five years in North Korea. And, believe me, the North Koreans don't care about the NPT. I've talked to the North Koreans. If you talk about the NPT or the United Nations or anything like that to the North Koreans, their eyes just glaze over. The PSI also is useful to talk about in other contexts, but it is not going to help us with the North Koreans. If you're talking about North Korea exporting a softball-sized piece of plutonium, there's no way we're going to catch that with PSI. So, none of the things that have been talked about today as general solutions to the problem of WMD proliferation are going to work with North Korea. I'm not denigrating them at all. They're terribly important things, but the North Koreans are masters at making themselves an exception to every rule.

What to do? We're trying to talk the North Koreans out of their nuclear program rather haltingly, but they've gotten away with murder for the last five years. So, I don't know whether it's now possible to talk the North Koreans out of their nuclear weapons program. Now we need to ask ourselves: What if we can't negotiate a solution? What do we do then? That's what I call Plan B for North Korea. Plan B is very serious business. Bill Perry and I hosted a workshop in Washington of experts involved in North Korea, as well as general diplomatic and military experts, to think about that. I'll just tell you a little something about the results of that meeting.

There are things you can do, and are going to have to do, if you can't talk North Korea out of its nuclear weapons program. They are not just military things, although military options figure in. I believe it's incumbent upon our government to have a Plan B, even as it is incumbent upon us to give Plan A (diplomacy) a shot because it might work. Plan A and Plan B play off against one another. If you have a good Plan B and the North Korean's know it, that may clarify their thinking a little bit about accepting a diplomatic outcome. Likewise, Plan B is a plan of pressure and coercion and maybe elimination of the North Korean regime. It is not something the United States can do unilaterally because the Chinese, the South Koreans, and others are able to provide relief to North Korea from just about any kind of pressure short of military pressure that we can apply. Therefore, it's important to have the support or at least the acquiescence of those other countries for a strategy of pressure. You're never going to get that unless you've tried diplomacy and it has failed. And so Plan A is essential to Plan B and Plan B is essential to Plan A. We need both for dealing with North Korea. At any rate, the NPT and the PSI, wonderful as they are in other contexts, don't apply.

Let me go to Iran. Iran is a very different case, and the bad news is that the Iranians are playing us and the Europeans like a violin. They know exactly how to walk up to the line and walk along the line. The good news is that the Iranians seem to actually care what the rest of the world thinks (i.e. they actually *see* the line). They do so for both economic and political reasons.

Therein lies the germ of possible diplomatic success. That germ does not exist in the case of the North Koreans; they don't care what anybody thinks of them. But the Iranians do. That means that, over time – and Iran is a much less time-urgent situation from a technical point of view than the North Korean situation – we may be able to turn Iran around diplomatically.

In order to do so, we're going to have to address two facts. One is that the Iranian nuclear program is not a love affair of the mullahs with the bomb. It's a love affair of Iranians with the bomb. It's a widely shared view in Iranian society. Reformers and mullahs alike think that it might be a good idea for Iran to have a bomb.

The other thing is that Iran wants a civil nuclear fuel cycle. I think that was discussed this morning – the fuel cycle issue. I'm the co-chairman of Richard Lugar's Policy Advisory Group. He is Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He asked us to look into the fuel cycle issue, and we wrote a report to him, which he conveyed to the President, on how the President could follow up on initiatives that he proposed in February 2004 in a speech at National Defense University. That's a very important issue. It is related to Iran and is an example of how what happens globally actually applies locally. That principle applies much more in the case of Iran than in the case of North Korea.

The last place I want to mention is India. A significant deal was made between Prime Minister Singh and President Bush in July 2005. I have to testify in two weeks to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee right after Under Secretaries of State Bob Joseph and Nick Burns, and I don't yet know exactly what I'm going to say. So I can't really share that with you because I'm still thinking it through. In effect, what we're doing there is granting the Indians something they've wanted for thirty years in return for something we get back. And the question is: What is the something? The answer to that question is going to be a big story in the strategic world, never mind the non-proliferation world. I think the principal significance of the deal is seen if you look beyond its nuclear piece to the deal as a whole.

Let me close. The point is that if you look at locations of nonproliferation concern around the world today, none of the situations I have covered – North Korea, Iran, and India – is close to being under the control of U.S. policy. All of what DoD calls the eight D's (dissuasion, diplomacy, disarmament, denial, defusing, deterrence, defense, and destruction) are in play in different ways in each of these cases – from the threat of military action to simply defending ourselves against a nuclear North Korea or a nuclear Iran, right forward to the front end where you're talking about regimes and agreements and negotiations. So it's not an either/or. This is a problem that's so important that there's no silver bullet. You have no choice but to play every instrument in your orchestra. I want to make the point that the debate should not focus on whether this or that, one policy or approach or another, is most important to nonproliferation. I'm not of that view. I'm of the view that I'll take anything I can get. And as I go around the world, I see different circumstances that require somewhat different approaches in which all of these policy approaches play a role, but with different weights. We can't afford to have theological debates amongst ourselves. We need to get on with the job of working these problems, because proliferation doesn't happen in global regimes; it happens in particular places.

None of the eight D's can work unless you have intelligence that supports our understanding of proliferation, and the Iraq case illustrates that we're far from being in a good situation with

respect to WMD intelligence. That's a whole other subject. I happen to be optimistic in that regard. There are a number of things in the world of technology and analytical processes that I think can make a material difference in our ability to detect, characterize, and counter nuclear proliferation. That's a subject of another panel sometime. Thank you.

IAN JOHNSTONE: Thank you, Dr. Carter. We started a little late and so we'll go a little late. One of our panelists has a plane to catch, and has to leave no later than five past four. Ms. McNerney, I'm going to take advantage of the chair and ask one question for which I'm curious what your answer might be. We've talked a fair amount today about the Proliferation Security Initiative and Resolution 1540. My question is simply: Is it worth taking the Proliferation Security Initiative to the Security Council with the aim of adopting a 1540-type resolution, which would in effect make the PSI obligatory for all states in the world under Chapter 7 of the UN charter?

PATRICIA MCNERNY: Thank you. Actually, when we were negotiating 1540, PSI had already been created. Certainly that was one of the intents, one of the most debated paragraphs that we had in our original draft. In the end, this is what happens when you take things to the Security Council: You don't always get what you want. We did get a paragraph – operative paragraph ten – which calls on states to take cooperative action consistent with national legal authorities and international law. We negotiated with the Chinese, but they didn't want to have the words PSI in the text. I think it gives you a good sense of where the Chinese are in taking that kind of effort to the Security Council. The Chinese are obviously a huge source for technical items that end up in the Iranian and other programs. There's a lot of interest there, obviously with their own shipments.

One other point to make is that PSI is designed to be flexible and fast moving. Information comes, and you work with the small number of states that can take action. If the entire Security Council got the information and decided the action, it just wouldn't work. It wouldn't be PSI anymore. You have to be careful about what it is you're trying to do.

There is one area where you might have some options. Let's say that Iran eventually does get to the Security Council. Perhaps there are some country-specific actions that can be enumerated along the lines of PSI, within resolutions, if you're ratcheting up the pressure on a government like Iran. Those can be some options along the road. There's another area in the terrorism context. Resolution 1373 and some of the other terrorist resolutions have some more specific requirements regarding financing. You can list entities and terrorist organizations, and all countries have to take certain actions with respect to their financial institutions. This is a little tricky in the proliferation world where dual-use items exist. They're not legal *per se*, but there could be some potential for strengthening some of those financial requirements of 1540 that you could look to the Security Council to do.

IAN JOHNSTONE: Anyone else on this? Can we open it up to the floor? All right. Questions? If you could use the microphones, please. Thank you.

ANTHONY QUAINTON: In this morning's panel and this afternoon it seems to me that everyone recognized the paradigm shift for non-state actors and the fact that deterrence doesn't address that threat. It still seems to be received wisdom that deterrence, nuclear deterrence in

particular, is applicable against state threats. I'd like to argue that a little bit and see what the panel thinks. The real strategic threats that have been talked about – Iran and the usual suspects – have undemocratic, unrepresentative ruling cliques that rule over their countries. In order for a deterrent threat to be legitimate it has to be credible. And I wonder, today, if it's really credible for us to think about whether, if there was a nuclear strike from one of these regimes, the US would retaliate in kind, potentially killing hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of innocent Iranians or North Koreans because of the transgression of the top clique. In this day of mass communications, people would be swarming into those countries, projecting to the world at large the suffering and the death that was caused by U.S. retaliation and the precipitous loss of legitimacy and influence that the US might suffer because of that act. So with that scenario, I wonder if we've recognized the paradigm shift for non-state actors. If we're missing the paradigm shift for state actors, we should be really rethinking whether or not the nuclear piece is even valid in the 8 D's or whatever that Dr. Carter was talking about. I thought it was interesting that Dr. Carter talked about a kinetic approach to North Korea in 1994. It would be interesting to hear what they thought about a nuclear option in that case.

ANTONIA CHAYES: What makes you think that we have to have a nuclear response to a nuclear act? The one advantage in the deterrence scheme is that we're talking about relatively small countries, so it's possible to mount a conventional response. I think the real difficulty with deterrence comes when there's some question about the state's role, and it's a big question given the kind of nuclear incident that might occur. It becomes very unclear or hard to prove - even if it were clear from the superior intelligence that Ash is hoping for – that it was Iran or another country. A strike against a state, even a conventional strike, would be very problematic in terms of enhancing legitimacy, especially if it were the United States that did it unilaterally. That's the question – fixing the blame for the kind of nuclear strike or nuclear incident that's likely to happen.

IAN JOHNSTONE: Anyone else on this one?

ASH CARTER: Just to add one thing. I think everything Tony says makes perfect sense. You're absolutely right. It's an entirely different game. The real problem in a case like North Korea is: Who gets deterred? They know we don't need nuclear weapons to destroy them. They know that if they start a war on the Korean peninsula, we will end it with the elimination of their armed forces in three or four weeks. We'll destroy the North Korean armed forces and we'll destroy their regime. We've had that war plan for fifty years, and it just gets better and better and better. And it doesn't require nuclear weapons. The North Koreans know that.

The dynamic in the North Korean case is whether we will be scared away or chased away from defending our own interests or defending our allies because they have nuclear weapons. That's where deterrence comes into play. That's what their fervent hope is. Then you have to go back to 5027, the war plan for the defense of South Korea, and ask: What could four or five North Korean nuclear weapons do? We'll still defeat them, but it makes for tougher slogging. The North Korean move would be against the Japanese, for sure. If the North Koreans use nuclear weapons, I'll bet my boots that they will launch a NoDong on Japan. They can't reach the United States yet. They'll go after Japan. So you're absolutely asking the right question in the North Korean case. The question is: Who gets deterred?

It ought to be an additional incentive for countries to safeguard the fissile material that they have because they know that, if a nuclear bomb goes off, it could be traced to them. I don't know what this country will do if a nuclear weapon goes off, but I would say to Musharraf or anybody else that the American President is going to be in a terrible situation. We will know with high likelihood – radiochemical forensics are very good in this case – we'll know after a few days or weeks where the bomb came from. It doesn't mean that a particular country did it. It does mean that it the bomb can be traced back there. The reaction of any President to that fact is hard to calculate, and I think creates a funny deterrent effect in stimulating people to keep secure custody of the materials they have.

MARY BETH NITIKIN: All right. I'm always for more justifications for getting people to secure their nuclear materials as soon as possible. I think part of the interesting thing about this debate in Washington, and part of the shocking part of it is – in talking to a wide variety of thinkers with different points of views on utility of the US nuclear deterrent – how many people say that, if a nuclear bomb went off in the US, it wouldn't matter. We would have to nuke somebody. You know. It's this gut reaction, American thing. And very serious people are arguing this in very serious ways more so than I just did. It's kind of like, "If we have it, then we could use it" is sort of the highest utility. Are we just crazy enough to do it? Are we going to go along with that argument?

Another interesting aspect is, is nuclear deterrence more effective in preventing an attack on your soil by the smaller rogue nuclear states rather than, for example, one of the P5?

IAN JOHNSTONE: I think we have time for one more question.

MALE AUDIENCE MEMBER: I just have a question for Dr. Carter. I listened with great interest to his analysis of the DPRK and the uranium situation and this question of Plan B and Plan A, but somehow you didn't mention the Six Party Talks, which are at present a reality. As far as Iran is concerned, there has been an attempt at negotiation by the European countries which did not succeed, basically due to the fact that there is a new administration in Iran. I wanted to ask you what you think of the prospects of these negotiations. Thank you.

ASH CARTER: Thank you. I'm sorry. I should have mentioned the Six Party Talks. The Six Party Talks are Plan A at the moment. But they haven't gone anywhere for four years. We've been congratulating ourselves for having Six Party Talks, while the North Koreans have been reprocessing plutonium. That is the history of the Six Party Talks. The Chinese have been congratulating themselves on renting a room where we can meet, and the South Koreans have been congratulating themselves that there hasn't been a war. And so it's been wonderful, except that the North Koreans have been making plutonium the whole time. I'm very hopeful, but it's hard to be optimistic, that the Six Party Talks will produce a diplomatic outcome. So that is Plan A. I should have made that clear.

In the case of the EU initiative with respect to Iran, belatedly backed by the United States, it's fashionable to criticize it and say the Iranians are playing games on us. But as I said, there's a good side to that. At least they'll play the game, and therein lies the hope that something might come out of the negotiations. The Iranians have other fish to fry. They have economic and political fish to fry. Iranians of all stripes including the mullahs are trying to deliver prosperity

to their people, and if it looks like they're going to get seriously hung up on this nuclear issue, then that will make them slow down. In the world of proliferation, that's about the best you can hope for. You never shut it down entirety. All these programs bubble up again. The best you can do is a delaying game, and it may be that we'll be able to delay it until some kind of change happens in Iran which makes having a bomb compromise so many other things that the Iranians want from the world that they'll say, "To heck with it, we won't do it." That's the hope. Fortunately, in their case we have time because Iran's program is on a much slower fuse than the North Korean one.

IAN JOHNSTONE: Anyone else? Tony? Mary Beth? No. That leaves it to me to conclude the conference and to make a few thank-yous. First of all to the panel for what was an extraordinarily rich and well-informed and thought-provoking discussion that covered an awful lot of territory. Thank you all very much. I also want to mention a few people. We have a reception waiting for us outside, so I don't want to hold anyone back from that. There are a few people who were very involved in pulling this together. Thank you to Tony Quainton and the American Academy of Diplomacy for their co sponsorship, financial and other kinds of support. It is deeply appreciated. Than you to Dean Sheehan, who you heard from earlier today, and his staff. Many of the Fletcher staff were involved in this and you've bumped into an awful lot of them. Natasha [Bajama], who I mentioned once already, was really the intellectual force behind all of this and also the logistical force. She is not here, unfortunately, but hopefully you'll see her outside. And she organized many of the student volunteers who have been so actively involved in this. So, thank you all. Please join us outside. Dr. Blix will be there for the reception.