

Editor's Note

The Fall 2009 issue of *Defence Against Terrorism Review* (DATR) places a special emphasis on discussing one of the most frequently asked questions in the field, particularly since the September 11 attacks: Is the prospect of terrorism with weapons of mass destruction (WMD) mere hype, or could it become reality? There are innumerable books, journal articles, op-eds, and blogs where people elaborate on the probability and possibility of such an incident and put forth divergent views. While some argue that the prospect of WMD terrorism is little more than speculation and that the chances of terrorist groups acquiring or building such weapons are slim, stressing the technical, scientific and institutional hurdles they would have to overcome, others forcefully contend that this issue must be given priority by governments and relevant institutions around the world due to the credibility of the threat, which should by no means be underrated.

Hence, the Academic Board of the Centre of Excellence - Defence Against Terrorism (COE-DAT) thought it would be appropriate to give the floor to leading world experts and scholars whose writings set the stage for all those involved in the debate. Prof. Dr. Peter Zimmerman, Professor Emeritus of Science and Security at King's College London, who has also served in US government agencies, is inarguably one such scholar, and his article "Do We Really Need to Worry?" provides a very lucid explanation as to why we should definitely worry about the threat of WMD terrorism, and particularly the possibility of the detonation of an improvised nuclear device or stolen nuclear weapon by terrorists. Prof. Zimmerman's article not only gives a detailed account of the scientific and technical dimensions of the threat, and in a very reader-friendly manner, but also refutes the arguments that the threat assessments are exaggerated, and substantiates his counter-arguments with facts and figures.

In the same vein, another renowned international expert, Charles D. Ferguson, set to assume the presidency of the Federation of American Scientists on January 1, 2010, and his colleague Michelle M. Smith, in their co-authored piece titled "Assessing Radiological Weapons: Attack Methods and Estimated Effects", shed light on problems associated with commercially available radioactive sources, as well as dispersal methods and exposure pathways that could be deployed in a radiological attack by terrorists. Ferguson and Smith argue that radiological terrorism is appealing due to its potential economic, social and psychological impact as a result of the high costs of decontaminating radioactive areas, the high economic losses in a large commercial area due to business closures, as well as subsequent job losses and stoppage of life in general in affected areas. The article draws on several case studies to assess the estimated effects of terrorist attacks with radiological dispersal devices. The authors conclude that it is necessary to limit or further regulate access to commercial radioactive sources of security concern, tighten security on existing sources, and alter the physical qualities of such sources in order to render them less able to be dispersed.

It is generally agreed among terrorism experts that the threat of nuclear or radiological terrorism would emanate mainly from political-religious, apocalyptic, right-wing, and national-separatist groups. As noted in Ferguson and Smith's article, some terrorist groups have expressed interest in radiological attacks, most notably Al-Qaeda. With numerous statements on the issue, Osama bin Laden has made no secret of his desire to acquire nuclear and radiological materials. Hence, Noam Rahamim, a doctoral student at the Herzliya Interdisciplinary Center's Institute for Counter-Terrorism, in his article "Doomsday Weapon for Doomsday Ideology: Al-Qaeda and Nuclear Weapons" deals with the probability of the use of WMD by terrorist organizations, especially Al-Qaeda. Noam's article shows that the capability to execute an attack including the use of WMD exists and is accessible to terrorist organizations, and that the players most likely to

use WMD, among their international counterparts, would be religious fundamentalist groups. Moreover, the author elaborates on the powerful motivational factors that make such attacks more probable “which lead to the death of more Muslims than foreign forces and personnel”, and concludes that as part of a defensive strategy, countries should include mechanisms of conflict resolution and tension reduction when interacting with local minorities and immigrant populations.

It is small wonder that the scale of terrorist attacks may go far beyond the capabilities of individual states to both prevent them and, if they take place, respond to their effects. The need for cooperation and collaboration among states to counter the threats posed by trans-national terrorism is a recurring theme in the articles published in this journal and elsewhere. The urgency of the matter is more explicit in the face of the dangers emanating from the threat of WMD terrorism. Hence, Charles Streeper, a nonproliferation expert from Los Alamos National Laboratories in New Mexico, in his article “Atoms for Peace and the Nonproliferation Treaty: An Unintended Consequence”, discusses the political and technical measures that must be taken in order to keep nuclear and radiological materials safe and secure so that they do not fall into the hands of terrorists. In this regard, Streeper suggests that the IAEA should continue to help states improve regulatory infrastructure, and that a methodology for the repatriation, disposal, and/or secure storage of all sources should be a priority.

While it is necessary to take non-military technical measures to keep nuclear and radiological materials safe and secure in their proper places, it is equally important to have military measures in place to fight terrorist groups and frustrate their plans to stage attacks. Dr. Haldun Yalçinkaya from the Turkish Military Academy and Dr. Dilaver Arıkan Açar, in their article “NATO Peacekeeping in Afghanistan: Expanding the Role of Counterinsurgency or Limiting it to Security Assistance”, discuss the scope and purpose of NATO operations in Afghanistan, meant to bring security and stability to the country. Citing how Afghanistan has long been the stronghold of both the members and leadership of Al-Qaeda, the authors focus on changes in methods of managing conflicts, in particular the evolution of peacekeeping, and how the international community and some states have toughened their stances and moved their approaches closer to counterinsurgency. They conclude that the presence of two military structures, namely the US-led Coalition Forces and the NATO-led ISAF, have made international efforts more complicated and not necessarily more effective.

Terrorism has become a global issue, especially since the 9/11 attacks, yet regional characteristics of the problem still rightly command a large share of the attention. Xiaohui (Anne) Wu, Special Political Advisor to the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force, analyzes the regional implications of the UN Global Counter-terrorism Strategy by detailing regional actions to support and implement it. The author stresses that while recognizing that the levels of commitment and resources, priorities accorded, and capacities available to implementation vary from region to region, it is necessary to establish systematic and comprehensive cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations in the fight against global terrorism.

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