
SPEECHES

Non-proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Search for Truth

HANS BLIX

I am happy to have been invited to speak at this great intellectual and educational institution. I associate universities with critical thinking and the need for critical thinking is my overriding message to you today.

Barbara Tuchman, the excellent American popular historian, wrote that in the 14th century a group of French professors were charged with the task of explaining why the plague had broken out. After much brooding, the learned gentlemen concluded that the cause had been a particular constellation of the stars. With avian flu around the corner, we are glad that our scientists and health institutions are working with more critical minds and more knowledge.

Yet our public arena is full of unsubstantiated or exaggerated assertions. At Madison Avenue, I am told they consider Lincoln's famous lines that: "You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you can not fool all of the people all of the time." As such, it is too pessimistic.

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In the hard sell of the political world, as in marketing, there are temptations to tend to exaggerate. There was a figure on Swedish television—not a politician but a teller of hunter stories—who said, “I never lie, but I admit that when the reality is not enough I add. In this way, however,” he said “you only get a little more truth than what you have in reality. . . .”

This is what we call hyping: extrapolations, innuendos, and suggestive interpretations designed to lead us by our noses. When the hyping gets too crude and comes from people who want to have our confidence in political life, we react.

The British government suffered a good deal of loss of confidence for asserting in 2002 that Iraq could deploy WMDs in 45 minutes. The alleged contract between Iraq and Niger for the import of uranium oxide—yellow cake—that was dangled before the public, and even before the U.S. Congress, deservedly cost the U.S. and UK governments a lot of public confidence when it was revealed before the Iraq war that this claim was a crude falsification.

Once this document, which had been in the hands of the world’s most accomplished intelligence agencies for months, was given to the IAEA, it took the agency less than a day to understand that it was a fake.

Where was the critical thinking of the intelligence agencies? And where was the critical thinking of the governments, which should have asked themselves why Iraq would seek yellow cake, when any capability of enrichment would be very far away?

It is now generally recognized that the principal assertion on which the war in Iraq in 2003 was sold to the U.S. public and Congress and to the UK parliament and on which there was an attempt to sell it to the UN Security Council—the continued presence of WMDs in Iraq—was false.

The fact was that UN inspectors had reported during more than 700 inspections at some 500 sites that they had found no evidence of WMDs. They also expressed doubts about some of the evidence that was being advanced, but they were ignored too and still seem to be ignored.

One might have expected that with the experience of the collapse of pre-Iraq war assertions about WMDs, it would have led to more caution and critical thinking before new assertions were made about the existence or possible emergence of WMD programs and about what should be done about them. I do not have the impression that this was the case.

Being the chairman of a commission on WMDs, I will not belittle the continued risk of these weapons as it is the task of the commission to search for ways of meeting these risks. However, I think we should assess the risks with critical minds and with a view not to scare but to search for remedies that are realistic and proportionate to the risks.

I suppose that one reason why we continue to see a lot of hype about WMDs is that the public craves its daily dose of angst, and the same public will reward the media and authorities with attention and votes if they deliver grounds for angst.

No sooner had David Kay and his Iraq Survey Group reached the conclusions that the allegations about the existence of WMDs in Iraq were wrong than he went on to say that there was nevertheless clear evidence of a weapons program.

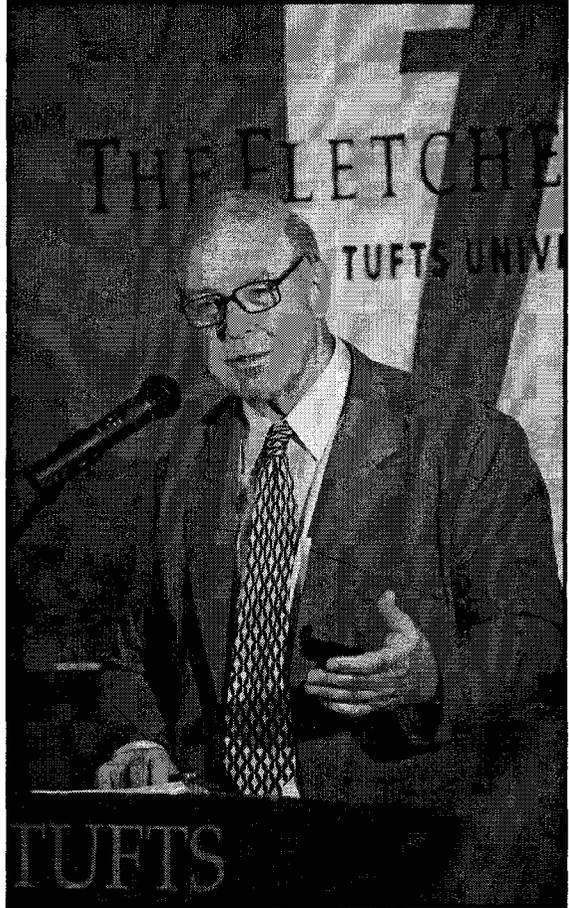
Then Charles Duelfer reported that he could not find evidence of any programs (except those which were known in the field of missiles), but nevertheless went on to report that interrogations of Saddam's lieutenants suggested that Saddam would have had the intention of rebuilding WMDs if and when sanctions were lifted.

President Bush has been reported as saying that September 11 was the Pearl Harbor of WWII. We are to

understand this, I think, to mean that the United States is engaged in a world war against terrorism, that this war is now fortunately fought away from U.S. soil, and that the ultimate threat is terrorists using WMDs.

In a recently announced reconfiguration of offices in the State Department, this view of the world seems to have been acted upon with the results being a reduction of emphasis on arms control agreements and increasing emphasis on WMD/terrorism, the Proliferation Security Initiative, counter-proliferation, interdiction, and threat reduction. It was a long time ago, I understand, that an office devoted to issues concerning disarmament existed.

Let me say straight away that I think programs on threat reduction,



on better accounting of fissile and other nuclear material, better locks on stores for such material and equipment, on better border controls, and on the conversion of research reactors to use LEU uranium rather than HEU are non-spectacular, prudent, and desirable measures, whether we think of the risks of state or non-state actors.

I also think that speeding up the destruction of chemical weapons stocks, control of export of many chemicals, and measures to protect many chemical installations against the risk of attack are similarly wise and prudent. But I think that we must have multi-pronged programs to reduce the risk that modern biological research and commercial activities raise.

However, I don't think these and other wise measures—notably increased cooperation between police and intelligence in different countries—amount to a third World War. Nor do I think that the vast counter-proliferation and antiterrorism action that the Iraq war was supposed to be has helped to influence Libya, Iran, or North Korea in stopping their various weapons programs. It certainly has not helped to reduce terrorism. If anything, new fertile soil for terrorism has been created where there was little before.

There was great gain in the toppling of Saddam, who was one of the more brutal dictators the world has seen, and I join in the hopes that the brutalized Iraqi people will succeed in coming together and avoiding a fate like that of Yugoslavia. However, I fear that Saddam's removal, which I think must have brought most Iraqis a sense of relief, occurred through a counter-proliferation operation that was seen as humiliating.

What is counter-proliferation? I am sure counter-proliferation may comprise the use of armed force whether or not there are any soft parts in it. It is prevention rather than preemption. It can be anything from the assassination of nuclear scientists to the destruction of a research reactor (as in the case of Osirak) to the waging of the 2003 war.

I am confident that any restraints existing in the UN Charter on the use of armed force—notably Article 51—are of no or marginal relevance to the doctrine. All options, we are told, are on the table and the idea of “permission slips” from the Security Council, we have also heard, is ridiculous.

It is not, I think, such restrictions that have held back counter-proliferation armed attacks on nuclear installations in North Korea and Iran but rather considerations of undesirable consequences.

It is evident that to a strong military power, the use of armed force is available as a matter of fact and may appear as a hopeful means of cutting Gordian knots. The question rather is the wisdom of such armed action, unless it is taken as a genuine case of self-defense or has obtained

legitimacy through the support of the Security Council. Based on poor intelligence—as it was in Iraq and in the case of the chemical factory that was attacked outside Khartoum—it can have very negative consequences.

It has been suggested that the United States is like an impatient Mars, quick to use its strong military force to solve problems, while Europe is like a patient Venus, eschewing force and endlessly negotiating towards solutions. Without denying that the use of force may be indispensable sometimes, I confess that my sympathies are with Venus. The whole world, including the United States, would do well, I think, to become a bit more feminist.

Let me touch on two other approaches to non-proliferation, which may not raise grave risks, but which I believe are oversold. I have in mind, first, the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), which is an arrangement under which states that are participating may intercept ships or planes suspected of illegal transport of items sufficient to enable the assembly of weapons of mass destruction. Ambassador Bolton praised the PSI as being an “activity” rather than what he contemptuously called “a treaty-based bureaucracy.”

As far as is known, it has only been applied with results in one case. It was the case of a German ship that was intercepted on the way to Libya with enrichment-related equipment. Nevertheless, PSI is hailed as a very major scheme, happily unrelated to any existing UN organization or treaty. In my assessment, its greatest importance may lie in the cooperation that is called for between intelligence agencies. In substance it appears mainly as a useful means of enforcing export restrictions on WMD-related items.

The other approach I want to comment upon relates to what is called the nuclear fuel cycle. It has been suggested that if nuclear power were to be expanded drastically to restrain the present reliance on CO₂ producing hydrocarbons, there would be need for many more enrichment plants to produce the low-enriched uranium fuel. More plants, it has been said, could pose a risk of a “cascade of new nuclear weapon states.”

Some proposals have been made in the past few years seeking restrictions on the building of plants for the enrichment of uranium and the production of plutonium fuel cycle activities. Several of these proposals would involve placing highly ambitious managerial functions on some international body, such as deciding whether a state was in good standing from the point of view of non-proliferation, before granting a request to deliver low-enriched uranium fuel for power reactors. Fuel that can now be purchased on the international competitive market would thus become subject to an international decision-making process, except for those states that have their own enrichment plants.



It seems clear that these proposals have been triggered as much out of concern for the cases of reprocessing in North Korea and enrichment in Iran than for the distant hypothetical risks of proliferation linked to more enrichment plants. However, it also seems clear that these general proposals will not be of any importance to influence the two countries in the ongoing negotiations to stop their respective activities. They are much more likely to be influenced by proposals to keep their specific neighborhoods—the Korean peninsula and the Middle East—free from fuel cycle activities.

At the present time the proposals appear to me almost as distractions from the two highly relevant and worrisome current questions, namely, how to dissuade North Korea and Iran from fuel cycle activities. Further negotiations on these cases and efforts to move toward peace on the Korean peninsula and in the Middle East are, in my view, more important than any search for further general restrictions on enrichment activities.

Accordingly, I look with some hope on the apparent increased determination of the United States to help settle the differences between the Israelis and the Palestinians. I also think that the latest U.S. proposals in the Korean affair have—at long last—moved the issue of security forward in a way that gives some hope. It may be less difficult to persuade North Korea to stay away from a military nuclear program by promising that the country will not be attacked rather than by threatening it with attack if it does not stop the program.

I further think that the negotiations with Iran, which do not seem to have contained any significant offers in the area of security, should contain

such elements rather than being accompanied by periodic statements that “all options are on the table.” They may produce precisely the effect they may be intended to prevent.

You may think that I am going too far in critique of the current nuclear non-proliferation approaches. Let me assure you that there are several approaches that I feel deserve much support. Verification is one of them.

The additional protocols strengthening IAEA safeguards still enjoy widespread support to become the modern standard of verification. The United States also seems to remain positive toward IAEA safeguards in general and the integrated safeguards in particular. It is clear that even with much stronger teeth, these may be insufficient in a zone free from weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East.

A hint that the protocols may also be deemed insufficient in the case of North Korea came a few days ago, when the U.S. negotiator suggested that the P5 in the Security Council might have a role in the verification of the denuclearization of North Korea. This is an intriguing idea, which reminds me of the fall of 2002 when a U.S. draft resolution on inspections in Iraq would have given the P5 dominant influence over the inspections. I did not at the time think it would be wise to submit international inspection to the guidance of five great powers with possibly five different views. I felt that it would have to be either an international inspection or an inspection carried out by some alliance of sorts. If it were to be the international inspection, then it should not be infiltrated or remote controlled by any individual state, as undoubtedly was the case with Iraq inspections in the 1990s. It would then lose its international legitimacy—as UNSCOM did.

If, as we may hope, the Security Council were to become generally more engaged in the issues of non-proliferation of WMDs, it might also be wise for it to transform the still existing UNMOVIC organization into a small technical advisory unit. The IAEA and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) are, of course, available to carry out inspections in their respective fields and could be asked to report more often to the council. However, for in-house technical advice and for possible challenge inspections in the fields of biology and missiles, a small unit with the accumulated experience of UNMOVIC and UNSCOM could be most useful. UNMOVIC still retains a roster of skilled staff that can be mobilized for inspections, and this staff is still being called in for training courses.

Resolution 1540 of the Security Council is an interesting innovation. Generally the Council uses its power to adopt binding decisions

under Chapter VII of the Charter for concrete actions or measures, like sanctions. This resolution, however, is used to oblige member states to adopt internal legislation, to implement treaty obligations (which they would be obliged anyway to implement) and to set up a commission to monitor and promote implementation.

In a world of very uneven effectiveness in state action to implement international obligations, for instance in the struggle against terrorism, the resolution should be welcomed. It also illustrates in a flash the power that exists in the United Nations to bring about measures throughout the whole world community of states. It is not only legitimacy that follows from decisions supported by UN organs representing the global community but by acting within the UN and in accordance with its rules, results can be attained that limited "alliances of the willing" cannot achieve. Cooperation in global institutions has potential benefits not available in such alliances.

The UN Summit declaration failed to contain even a single sentence about disarmament and non-proliferation. To the U.S. side, any mere mention of disarmament appears to have been unacceptable. To many others, references to further measures to prevent the spread of WMDs were unacceptable unless, at the same time, measures were urged under which the nuclear weapon states of the world would accept restraints, not least to confirm the commitments they had made in 1995 to secure the consent of non-nuclear weapon states to an indefinite duration of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. It seems like this deadlock may last for some time to come.

Most serious, in my view, is that the United States at present is determined not to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. In all likelihood, a U.S. ratification would trigger the Chinese to ratify the same and which would in turn trigger the Indians to ratify it, leading to a Pakistani ratification and so on. On the other hand, the informal moratorium, which is currently observed, might be broken. In the U.S., there are groups which want to develop nuclear weapons with new missions and to test them. The freedom of action seems to be valued higher than the risk that the moratorium would break.

The Fissile Material Cut Off Treaty, which would stop the production of highly enriched uranium and plutonium for weapons, is still supported by the United States, but it rejects any verification, claiming that it would not be reliable. It is perfectly true that there will be uncertainties in the amounts of HEU and plutonium that are produced in large installations but inspections of installations are not the only way to obtain confi-

dence about compliance. One is tempted to think that a reason for the newly developed objection might in reality be a wish to retain freedom and flexibility for the future.

In the area of arms control, the states of the world are still like a primitive community in which families, clans, and tribes have their own arms and use them to maintain peace by deterrence and blood revenge. Not long ago states also used their weapons to grab territory or to spread one faith or another.

A fundamental feature of the state community is that a monopoly has been secured on the possession and use of arms (apart from small caliber arms). In most cases some chieftain or king achieved it by martial means. The monopoly on power and arms—the King's peace—came first. The rule of law controlling the king came later. Democracy came in last.

The question that is now before the world is whether the monopoly on arms and the use of arms in the international community will be brought about by Mars or Venus. In Europe, Mars was at work from time immemorial but the job has eventually been done by Venus. I hope she will also prevail at the global level. ■

