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Eye on a Worldwide Weapons Cache

By Dick Lugar
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The United States is engaged in a global war against Muslim religious extremists who seek to reorder the world by destroying our country and various other nations allied with us.

The war proceeds in a world awash with nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and materials of mass destruction stored principally in the United States and Russia, but also in India, Pakistan, Iraq, Iran, Libya, North Korea, Syria, Sudan, Israel, Great Britain, France and China and perhaps other nations.

Throughout much of the past decade, vulnerability to the use of weapons of mass destruction has been the number one national security dilemma confronting the United States, even as it received scant attention. The events of Sept. 11 and the subsequent public discovery of al Qaeda's methods, capabilities and intentions have finally brought our vulnerability to the forefront.

The terrorists have demonstrated suicidal tendencies and are beyond deterrence. We must anticipate that they will use weapons of mass destruction if allowed the opportunity. The minimum standard for victory in this war is the prevention of any of the individual terrorists or terrorist cells from obtaining weapons or materials of mass destruction.

The war effort in Afghanistan is destroying the Afghan-based al Qaeda network and the Taliban regime. It is a war meant in part to demonstrate that governments that are hosts to terrorists face destruction.

But as we prosecute this war, we must pay much more attention to the other side of the equation: making certain that all weapons and materials of mass destruction are identified, continuously guarded and systematically destroyed.

The Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program was enacted in 1991 to address the dominant international proliferation danger: the massive nuclear, chemical and biological weapons infrastructure of the former Soviet Union. The Nunn-Lugar program has devoted American technical expertise and money to joint U.S.-Russian efforts to safeguard and destroy materials and weapons of mass destruction in Russia.

During the first 10 years of Nunn-Lugar, 5,700 Russian nuclear warheads have been separated from missiles. Many of the warheads have been dismantled and the fissile material (highly enriched uranium or plutonium) safely stored. More than 30,000 tactical nuclear weapons have been collected and stored, and peaceful employment has been provided for thousands of Russian nuclear scientists.

Nunn-Lugar also has worked to contain chemical weapons in Russia, which has ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention requiring destruction of all of these weapons in 10 years. Forty thousand metric tons of chemical weapons have been stored in seven locations awaiting destruction. Progress has been made toward controlling Russian biological materials, though their status is less certain.

Unfortunately, beyond Russia, there are no Nunn-Lugar-style programs aimed at nonproliferation. We lack even minimal international confidence about many weapons programs, including the number of weapons or amounts of materials produced, the storage procedures employed, and production or destruction plans.

This must change. To restate the terms of minimal victory in the war we are now fighting, every nation that has weapons and materials of mass destruction must account for what it has, safely secure what it has (spending its own money or obtaining international technical and financial resources to do so) and pledge that no other nation, cell or cause will be allowed access or use.

This task will be expensive and painstaking. During the first two months of the war, many questions have been raised about the security of

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Pakistan's nuclear program, and similar questions will be raised about India's. With United Nations inspections of Iraq suspended for more than three years, the presence and status of Iraq's weapons and materials of mass destruction are unknown. Much the same could be said of Iran, Syria and Libya. Following agreement on the KFOR program in North Korea, which provides for internationally financed nuclear power facilities and a halt to North Korea's nuclear weapons development, the world has an improved, but still imperfect, vantage point from which to watch developments in that country.

Some nations, after witnessing the bombing of Afghanistan and the destruction of the Taliban government, may decide to proceed along a cooperative path of accountability regarding their weapons and materials of mass destruction. But others may decide to test our will and staying power.

Precise replication of the Nunn-Lugar program will not be possible everywhere. But a satisfactory level of accountability, transparency and safety must be established in every nation with a program for weapons of mass destruction. When nations resist such accountability, or when they make their territory available to terrorists who are seeking weapons of mass destruction, our nation must be prepared to use force, as well as all diplomatic and economic tools at our disposal.

The writer is a Republican senator from Indiana.

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