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Lugar Warns of Nuclear Threats

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By CAROLYN SKORNECK, Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON - The United States must expand its fight against nuclear proliferation far beyond the former Soviet Union, Sen. Dick Lugar says, contending the West faces a real threat that terrorists will obtain, and use, weapons of mass destruction.

"As horrible as the tragedy of Sept. 11 was, the death, destruction and disruption to American society was minimal compared to what could have been inflicted by a weapon of mass destruction," the Indiana Republican told the Council on Foreign Relations.

During Lugar's unsuccessful 1996 bid for the presidency, three of his TV ads "depicted a mushroom cloud and warned of the horrible threat posed by the growing danger of weapons of mass destruction in the hands of terrorist groups," he recalled.

"At the time, those ads were widely criticized for being far-fetched and alarmist," he said, but now they are viewed differently. The Sept. 11 terrorist attacks "graphically demonstrated how vulnerable we are."

Lugar, a senior member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and co-sponsor of the Nunn-Lugar program to dismantle and secure the former Soviet Union's weapons of mass destruction, said he has little doubt Osama bin Laden or al-Qaida would have used such weapons if they had them.

The counter-proliferation program should be expanded to all countries in the coalition against terrorism that are willing to work with the United States on safe storage, accountability and planned destruction of the dangerous weapons and materials, he said.

Lugar said he has been working with the Bush administration to give it the authority to launch emergency operations to prevent a proliferation or weapon of mass destruction threat from "going critical."

Pakistan and India, nuclear neighbors that have fought two wars in the last half-century over Kashmir and appeared this year to be on the brink of conflict again, might be future partners in that effort, he said.

The United States has spent about \$5 billion on counter-proliferation in the former Soviet Union, an effort launched 11 years ago as the U.S.S.R. was breaking up.

The Nunn-Lugar program — named in part for former Sen. Sam Nunn, D-Ga. — has deactivated nearly 6,000 nuclear warheads, found legitimate jobs for Soviet weapons scientists to preclude them from selling their expertise to rogue countries or terrorists, and started to control Soviet stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons.

The United States is spending \$400.2 million this year on the effort, known officially as the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program. The Bush administration is seeking \$416.7 million for next year, a 4 percent increase, said Pentagon spokeswoman Susan Hansen.

President Bush's reference to an "axis of evil" — North Korea, Iraq and Iran — did not go far enough in expressing today's dangers formed by "the intersection of weapons of mass destruction," Lugar said.

America must lead the fight, but it also needs allies and alliances, creating a chance for NATO to reinvigorate itself if it uses its upcoming Prague summit to focus on that threat, he said.

"If NATO does not now help tackle the most pressing security threat to our countries today ... it will become increasingly marginal," he said.

Wading into the argument over how to determine when the war on terrorism is won, Lugar suggested making two lists of nations: those that, willingly or not, contain terrorist cells, and those that possess materials, programs or weapons of mass destruction.

The anti-terrorism coalition would go nation-by-nation through the first list, sharing intelligence and cutting off illicit financing to root out each cell. All countries on the second list would have to account for all materials and weapons of mass destruction and make them secure.

"The war against terrorism will not be over until all nations on the lists have complied with these standards," he said.

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