

by Manne Wängborg

Wake Up Call

A recent report, issued by the WMD Commission, outlines sixty proposals on how the world could be freed of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons.

The title of the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission report “Weapons of Terror” is meant to be an alarm bell and an eye-opener. As is immediately made clear by the subtitle, “Freeing the World of Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Arms,” the report is not primarily about terrorism in the current, conventional, narrow sense of the word, but about the possession of weapons of mass destruction—or weapons of terror—by governments, not only tolerated but generally respected and quite influential in the international community.

Chaired by former IAEA Director General Hans Blix, the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission attempts to tackle the seeming paradox that the key category of weapons of mass destruction—the roughly 27,000 nuclear weapons—in the hands of the established major powers are generally regarded as a legitimate source of military strength and political prestige and largely a stabilizing force, while in the hands of others are seen as an existential threat to the international community.

The 14-member Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission advances the opposite perspective. Contrary to the currently fashionable rhetoric about *rogue States*, it takes the view that weapons of mass destruction are inherently dangerous, irrespective of whose hands they are in. Echoing the 1996 *Report of the Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons*, the WMDC affirms that “so long as any State has such weapons—especially nuclear arms—others will want them. So long as any such weapons remain in any State’s arsenal, there is a risk that they will one day be used, by design or accident. Any such use would be catastrophic.” This is the basic credo of the independent Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission.

The Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission was established in 2003 by the late Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, Ms. Anna Lindh, acting on a proposal by Jayantha Dhanapala, then United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament, who was subsequently appointed a member of the Blix Commission. The other Commissioners, all invited by the Chairman Hans Blix to serve in their personal capacity, were Dewi Fortuna Anwar, Alexei

In the ten years that have passed since the Canberra Commission report was published, global economic interdependence has accelerated. All States of the world have come to face the same environmental threats and risks of contagious diseases. There have been no serious territorial or ideological conflicts between the major military powers. Yet, amazingly, the climate for agreements on arms control and disarmament has actually deteriorated.

— WMD Report, Chairman’s Preface

G. Arbatov, Marcos de Azambuja, Alyson J. K. Bailes, Gareth Evans, Patricia Lewis, Masashi Nishihara, William J. Perry, Vasantha Raghavan, Cheikh Sylla, Price El Hassan bin Talal, and Pan Zhenqiang.

The *raison d'être* for establishing the Commission was a growing unease at the stagnation in global disarmament efforts in the late 1990s and first years of the 21st century. Since 1996, when the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty was signed, there have been several setbacks, but hardly any successes. The case could and still can be made that, counter-intuitively, there was more progress during the Cold War than after it ended.

Confronting this deadlock, the Blix Commission presents 60 recommendations—30 related to nuclear arms, and 30 to other weapons of terror and various cross-cutting issues—with a view to breathing new life into the global disarmament efforts and consolidating the rule of law in the field of arms control and disarmament.

While in no way belittling the fundamental differences between nuclear, biological and chemical arms, the report is based on the premise that they are all rightly called weapons of terror. Designed to terrify as well as destroy, they are the most inhumane of all weapons. Whether in the hands of States or terrorists, they can cause destruction on a vastly greater scale than any conventional weapons, and their impact is far more indiscriminate and long-lasting. This is the point of departure of the international Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission.

While there already exists a total ban on biological and chemical weapons—the 1975 *Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction (BTWC)* and the 1997 *Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction (CWC)*—there is no corresponding ban in force on nuclear weapons. On the other hand there is the 1970 *Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)*, initially of 25 years' duration, then in 1995 extended indefinitely, which requires its parties to negotiate nuclear disarmament and which is far closer to universal membership than either the BTWC or the CWC.

The Blix Commission, accordingly, argues for the strengthening and universalization of both the BTWC and the CWC, while presenting a number of mutually reinforcing partial measures to limit and reduce nuclear weapons, with a view to their eventual outlawing. Topping its list of nuclear-weapon recommen-

dations is the entry into force of the now ten-year-old *Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT)*.

Opened for signature in 1996, it was first signed by then President of the United States Bill Clinton. By April 2006, it had been signed by 176 States and ratified by 132. However, 10 of the required 44 ratifications required for its entry into force remain, including those of the nuclear-weapon States China and the United States. The report is under no illusion that entry into force of the CTBT is to be expected in the near future, not least in view of the current US administration's staunch opposition to it and consistent rejection of pursuing its ratification by the US Senate that once already turned it down.

In today's rapidly integrating world community, global treaties and global institutions, like the UN, the IAEA and the OPCW, remain indispensable. Even with their shortcomings they can do some important things that States acting alone cannot achieve. They are... essential instruments in the hands of the State community to enhance security, to jointly operate inspection systems and to reduce the threat of weapons of mass destruction.

— WMD Report, Chairman's Preface

While focussing on arms control and disarmament, the Blix report realistically places this issue in a broader perspective, demonstrating that progress in disarmament, including the eventual outlawing of nuclear weapons, requires the emergence of a world order where countries will no longer feel dependent on weapons of terror for their security.

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