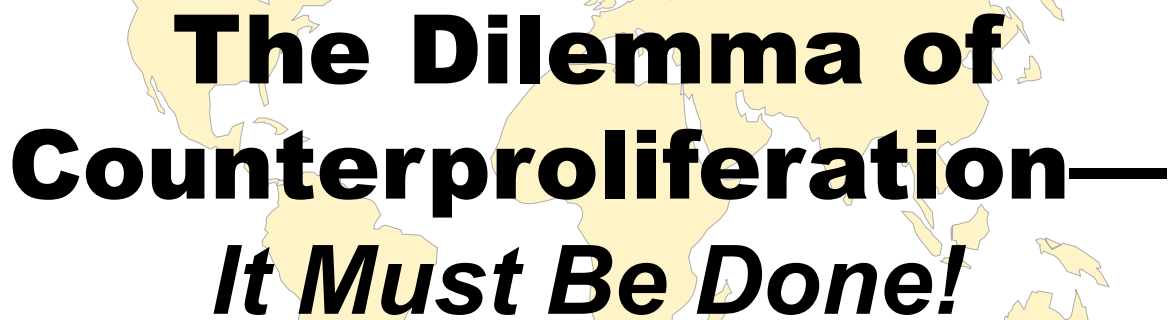




The Dilemma of Counterproliferation— *It Must Be Done!*

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Have you ever had to make a decision or take some action that you knew had a slim chance of success? Well, that is the dilemma those individuals entrusted with the counterproliferation effort to stop the spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) face. They are embarked on a vital crusade, but the chances of success are not good. Why?

There has been more success in the area of nuclear weapons than in biological or chemical weapons. There are several contributing factors for the success in this area of counterproliferation:

- Atomic weapons are very expensive to design and build. Hence only rich countries can afford them.
- Atomic weapons require delivery vehicles such as aircraft or missiles, which adds to the cost.
- Atomic weapons are normally produced in special buildings, which have a structure and outside equipment that can be seen and identified from the air.
- Certain parts of an atomic bomb cannot be used for anything else. There is no dual use, and parts can be more easily controlled, such as atomic triggers.
- Much of the technology for developing atomic bombs and reprocessing facilities to make weapons-grade plutonium are difficult to acquire, and the countries that have the capability have strict export controls that generally work.
- Atomic weapons draw more interest and concern from the most powerful countries than do chemical and biological weapons proliferation.
- Most nuclear countries, with the exception of China, have not been prolific in sharing nuclear technology.

As for biological and chemical weapons, the chances of stopping their proliferation lessen with each passing week. Chemical weapons are not likely to be used. While the

necessary chemicals to make nerve agents are easier to obtain, there are certain important chemical parts that **ONLY** have one use—nerve agent. The government strictly controls the export of these chemicals.

Also, chemical weapons are bulky to use and require large tanks to have the potency to be fully operational. While chemical weapons have some uses in small areas, they are less likely to cause widespread damage than biological agents. Given these factors, chemical agents can be controlled to some degree, but it is more difficult than with atomic weapons.

Biological weapons present the greatest danger and are the hardest to control. Their development is the hardest to retard because of the dual nature of biological research. Within the United States and other highly technical nations, certain biotech companies track and use some of the lethal biotechnology to develop defenses against such a weapon. Some cultures of dangerous agents such as smallpox must be retained to help develop a cure and/or a vaccine. Since the late 1960s, the United States has developed only defensive biological agents.

A few years ago, a white supremacist obtained a vial of anthrax through a biological supply house. (Many of these lethal-stock agents exist to assist in developing new forms of treatment.) If such agents can be sold, especially over the counter, this in itself thwarts counterproliferation.

Before its demise, the Soviet Union had the world's largest and probably most proficient bioweapons organization in the world. The civilian side of the biowarfare program (BIOPREPARAT) has been stopped, but the military side has not. To date, there is no hard evidence that the Russians are selling their considerable capability in this area.

Iraq has a capable WMD program, but there is no evidence that Saddam is sharing his expertise. China, however, seems to be the “fly in the ointment.” There is hard evidence

that China has sold and shared its atomic technology with other nations, and probably for profit. If this is correct, an intellectual assumption is that biological and chemical agents are being sold as well.

There are many nations pursuing atomic capabilities, and many more pursuing chemical and biological capabilities. The nations possessing nuclear capabilities are usually well-to-do and are largely in the Middle East. The amount of money a country can put into the development of such weapons is not always relevant. North Korea, by all accounts, has a very poor economy yet there is evidence that it possesses both the expertise and the facilities to produce WMD in masses. Lately, the North Koreans have been showing a willingness to halt nuclear development, if the price is right, but no such actions are forthcoming for biological and chemical WMD.

Iran has been suspected of working on nuclear as well as biological and chemical WMD capabilities. During the war with Iraq, the Iranians were the first soldiers since WWI to face massive use of chemical weapons. Clearly, this indicates that they do not intend to be caught unprepared in any future conflict.

Although it would seem that these problems of proliferation are not increasing, they are, and for the following reasons:

- Nations rarely develop WMD for offensive purposes, although they have the capability. WMD are acquired to ensure that the nation in question has the ability to reply, in kind, if threatened by a nation with similar capabilities. This allows a smaller nation to make, what

in business would be called, a “poisoned-pill defense.” In other words, attacking them would not be pleasant for any nation.

- The money to be made is too tempting. Even if the United States were to pass severe laws to stop such proliferation, there still would be those willing to take the risk.
- Counterproliferation treaties currently in force are good efforts, but they lack two important provisions—punishments for breaking the terms of the treaty and, in most instances, the nation’s agreement to adhere to the treaty. Currently, there is no punishment to withdraw from the treaty.
- There are several important nations that are not part of any treaty or are part of only a few nonbonding, nonproliferation treaties. Some of these nations are well financed and have been linked to the development of WMD. Unless they sign the treaty, they are not bound to follow the guidelines of nonproliferation. Therefore, any nation wanting to acquire WMD now has a source to contact that can provide it what it wants.

Efforts have to be made to counter proliferation, but they may be doomed to failure over time. There is too much money and influence to be made and to have with the development of WMD. As citizens, we can only hope that counterproliferation succeeds in halting the spread of WMD technology. If not, the world may face another Armageddon.

