



The Origin of U.S. Counterproliferation Policy

The origin of U.S. counterproliferation policy stems largely from our experience in the Gulf War. The potential threat posed by the Iraqi possession of nuclear, biological, or chemical (NBC) weapons and their delivery means (NBC/M), often referred to as weapons of mass destruction (WMD), demonstrated that NBC proliferation had profound implications for U.S. defense planning.¹ Indeed, many argue that the demonstration of U.S. conventional military prowess during the Gulf War has increased the possibility of WMD use against U.S. forces. Because of current U.S. conventional military dominance, potential adversaries are likely to challenge the United States by employing unconventional means, including the use of WMD. In his discussion of the dangers of WMD to the United States in a recent Foreign Affairs article, Richard Betts writes, "In the strategic terms most relevant to American security, they have become primitive. Once the cutting edge of the strong, they have become the only hope for so-called rogue states or terrorists who want to contest American power. Why? Because the United States has developed overwhelming superiority in conventional military force—something it never thought it had against the Soviet Union."²

Indeed, the overwhelming superiority of U.S. conventional military power, combined with the proliferation of WMD around the world, may cause future U.S. or U.S.-led coalition military campaigns to be fought on an "asymmetric battlefield" because a potential enemy might view it as necessary to employ WMD to gain strategic, operational, or tactical advantage over U.S. forces. Such an asymmetric advantage exists because of the constraints on U.S. retaliatory capability to such threats which may increase the likelihood of their use against U.S. forces.³ Therefore while the United States' primary goal is to stop or reverse the proliferation of such weapons (nonproliferation), the primary goal of DoD counterproliferation policy is to address this asymmetric threat to U.S. and allied forces, territories, and interests should deterrence fail.

What is Counterproliferation?

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Counterproliferation is primarily an American doctrinal concept. For example, the European view of counterproliferation, while recognizing the necessity for military options and preparedness, places a greater emphasis on diplomatic, economic, and political means of countering weapons of mass destruction. Indeed, French and German officials insist that counterproliferation is not an acceptable NATO term because they believe that the U.S. focus on retaliation and preemptive strikes could undermine nonproliferation efforts.⁴

The CJCS Counterproliferation Charter defines Counterproliferation as the following: "Counterproliferation (CP) refers to the activities of the Department of Defense across the full range of U.S. Government efforts to combat proliferation, including the application of military power to protect U.S. forces and interests; intelligence collection and analysis, and support to diplomacy, arms control, and export controls; with particular responsibility for assuring U.S. forces and interests can be protected should they confront an adversary armed with WMD."⁵ The Charter establishes a distinction between counterproliferation from nonproliferation, in that nonproliferation is defined as having a stronger political, diplomatic and economic dimension or emphasis. In addition, while counterproliferation is generally defined solely as the Department of Defense's effort to limit the spread of weapons of mass destruction, nonproliferation activities are not limited to the Department of Defense. Rather, nonproliferation refers to the full spectrum of foreign policy agencies and tools available to the U.S. Government to prevent the proliferation of WMD. The definitions employed by the National Security Council (NSC) are similar to those of the Department of Defense. However, the NSC definition mentions missiles along with nuclear, biological and chemical weapons.⁶

In U.S. doctrine, counterproliferation may be viewed as the military component of nonproliferation, in the same way that military strategy is a component of foreign policy. Counterproliferation refers specifically to Department of Defense activities, both in the actual employment of military force to protect U.S. forces, and in their support of overall U.S. nonproliferation policies and goals.

The Formation of U.S. Counterproliferation

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Much of the rationale for U.S. counterproliferation policy was a result of lessons learned from the Gulf War. Indeed, deficiencies in the U.S. capability to deal with the NBC threat were noted in the after-action report on the war made to Congress. The 1993 Bottom-Up Review also supported these findings.⁷ However, the impetus for a formal U.S. counterproliferation policy was really initiated in the summer of 1992, when a Defense Science Board study was conducted to examine ways to counter WMD proliferation. In response to the findings of this study, and to implement guidance contained in a Presidential Directive, Secretary of Defense Les Aspin launched the Defense Counterproliferation Initiative (CPI) in December 1993. Primarily, the initiative calls for the development of capabilities needed to deter or defend against the use of WMD should prevention fail.⁸

The goal of the CPI is to make clear that U.S. forces are prepared to operate in an NBC environment, and consequently, the threat of use of WMD against U.S. forces will not deter the United States from applying military power in defense of its national interests.⁹

By May of 1994 the Department of Defense had a DoD Counterproliferation Policy in place, with the issuance of the "Deutch Report." Congress also passed legislation that year which created a chemical-biological defense program to consolidate all DoD passive defense efforts.¹⁰ In July of 1996, a DoD directive on counterproliferation delineated specific responsibilities, formalized relationships between organizations, and established common terms of reference.¹¹ According to Jeffrey Larsen, "This last act showed that, in accordance with the wishes of two Secretaries of Defense, CPI was becoming broadly accepted across the appropriate government agencies, rather than being kept apart as a separate program. Secretaries of Defense Aspin and Perry resisted the impulse to set up CPI as a separate and distinct program and organization, as had been done for the strategic defense initiative. They wanted to instill concern over proliferation across missions and services, rather than make it just an acquisition program."¹²

Also in April of 1996, the Secretary of Defense established the DoD Counterproliferation (CP) Council chaired by the Deputy Secretary of Defense. Focusing on the themes of "institutionalizing" and "internationalizing", the Council monitors departmental progress in developing the strategy, doctrine, and force planning necessary to execute counterproliferation objectives effectively. In addition, the Council monitors DoD-wide efforts in training, exercising, and equipping U.S. forces for the counterproliferation mission, and also oversees DoD counterproliferation activities in interagency and international fora.¹³

DoD counterproliferation responsibilities also include the application of military force. In 1995, the Secretary of Defense approved the findings of the *Missions and Functions Study*, which was aimed at facilitating future CINC counterproliferation planning. The key findings of the study were that:

1. each geographic CINC would be responsible for executing U.S. counterproliferation policy within his area of responsibility (AOR); and
2. implementation of counterproliferation policy within each AOR would be executed via each CINC's standard deliberate planning process. This process included the development of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff's (CJCS) overarching counterproliferation plan, *CONPLAN 0400*, prior to each CINC developing an AOR-specific counterproliferation CONPLAN.¹⁴ However, the Secretary of Defense directed that a Counterproliferation Charter be written prior to the development of CJCS's CONPLAN. This Charter was developed as a supplement to the Missions and Functions Study and the *CONPLAN* to provide more of a military focus with respect to the counterproliferation mission.¹⁵ These three key documents serve as the prerequisites for beginning the CINCs' formal planning process to execute U.S. counterproliferation policy.¹⁶

Objectives and Responses

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According to the Counterproliferation Review Committee's (CPRC) 1997 Annual Report to Congress, the major objectives of DoD policy are:

- Support overall U.S. government efforts to prevent the acquisition of NBC weapons and their associated delivery systems;
- Support overall U.S. Government efforts to roll back proliferation where it has occurred; Deter and prevent the effective use of NBC/M against the U.S., its allies, and U.S. and allied forces; and
- Adapt U.S. military forces, and their associated planning, doctrine, and training, to operate effectively when confronted with the presence, threatened use, or actual use of NBC/M.¹⁷

DoD's counterproliferation response to WMD proliferation takes three forms:¹⁸ The first form is international proliferation prevention, which includes activities such as The Cooperative Threat Reduction Program, cooperative programs with the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the U.S. Customs Service, the Missile Technology Control Regime, the Nuclear Suppliers Group, the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC) and the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).

The second form of DoD response is the protection of U.S. civilians, military forces, and those of its allies. In addressing this issue, the May 1997 Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) underscored two key challenges that the Department of Defense must meet to ensure future preparedness.¹⁹ The first challenge was to institutionalize counterproliferation as an organizing principle in every facet of military activity. In support of this goal DoD is developing an integrated counter-NBC weapons strategy that includes both offensive (counterforce) and defensive (both active and passive) measures, as well as regular individual, unit, joint, and combined training and exercises. The second challenge was to internationalize counterproliferation efforts to encourage allies and coalition partners to train, equip, and prepare their forces to operate under NBC conditions. For example, non-uniform capabilities for dealing with WMD among deployed out-of-theater NATO coalition forces would not only leave coalition forces militarily vulnerable, but could also offer an adversary a political opportunity to disrupt alliance cohesion because civilian reaction to WMD use could negatively impact on NATO resolve or ability to conduct operations.²⁰

DoD efforts include improving U.S. (and NATO) capabilities in the following areas: Strategic and operational intelligence, including early warning data; Automated and deployable command, control, and communications (C3); Continuous, wide-area ground surveillance; Standoff and point BW/CW detection, identification, and warning; Extended air defenses, including theater

ballistic missile (TBM) defense for deployed forces; and NBC individual protective equipment for ground forces.²¹

The third and final form of DoD response is counterforce capability to eliminate NBC targets. Such capabilities must include the ability to interdict an adversary's biological and chemical capability at each step of an agent's employment.²² According to the Department of Defense, counterforce operations include, but are not limited to, attacking agent production facilities, storage complexes, and deployed mobile weapon platforms.²³ DoD is in the process of developing agent defeat weapons, hard-target defeat weapons, and tunnel defeat weapons in order to improve its counterforce capability against such targets.

In addition to these three main programmatic responses, the Department of Defense is developing capabilities to prevent, disrupt, and defeat terrorist attacks before they can carry out the threat to employ WMD, as well as a response capability should such an attack occur. The DoD is also working closely with other agencies such as the Department of State and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to deal with such threats.

Conclusion

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The lessons drawn from the U.S.-led coalition's stunning victory in the Gulf War are of a mixed nature. What the United States learned from that conflict was that U.S. capabilities to deal with the threat of such attacks were inadequate in terms of training, doctrine and equipment. What our potential adversaries learned from the conflict was that they could not hope to compete with superior U.S. conventional military power in a conflict and that other, asymmetric means of challenging the United States might have to be employed should a conflict arise. Such means include the possible use of weapons of mass destruction against U.S. forces.

The Department of Defense's response to this threat has been to provide full support to U.S. nonproliferation efforts to prevent the proliferation of such weapons. However, should prevention or deterrence fail the DoD is making a strong effort to improve its protective and counterforce capabilities in our forces and in those of our allies.

In a Presidential Decision Directive (PDD) on nuclear arms strategy which President Clinton issued in November of 1997, the President employed language that would permit U.S. nuclear strikes after enemy attacks using chemical or biological weapons. The wisdom of this policy has been hotly debated by arms control experts, and indeed, many argue that the threat is too disproportionate to be credible. In effect, the United States faces the same problem that it did in the early 1960's. Because the policy of launching a strategic nuclear attack against anything less than a massive Soviet nuclear attack on the West was viewed as being neither credible nor appropriate, the United States and NATO required the development of a strong non-nuclear (or conventional) deterrent to deal with lower level Soviet threats. The strategy of flexible response was therefore developed to provide options up to (but short of) the strategic nuclear level. In a sense, U.S. counterproliferation policy is an effort in much the same vein. By improving U.S. conventional military capabilities against biological or chemical weapons, the United States will have more proportionate, non-nuclear options to deter and counter such threats short of escalation to the nuclear level.

Notes:

¹"Proliferation: Threat and Response", Office of the Secretary of Defense, November 1997, p.53.

²Richard Betts, "The New Threat of Mass Destruction", Foreign Affairs, January/February 1998, Volume 77, Number 1, p.28.

³Joint Doctrine for Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical (NBC) Defense", Joint Pub 3-11, 10July 1995, Chapter I, p.3.

⁴See Larsen, NATO Counterproliferation Policy: A Case Study In Alliance Politics, INSS Occasional Paper 17, Proliferation Series, November 1997, p.11.

⁵CJCS Counterproliferation Charter, 3 September 1996.

⁶See NSC Memorandum for Robert Gallucci and Ashton Carter, February 18, 1994.

⁷See Jeffrey A. Larsen, "NATO Counterproliferation Policy: A Case Study In Alliance Politics", INSS Occasional Paper 17, Proliferation Series, November 1997, p.15.

⁸"Proliferation: Threat and Response", Office of the Secretary of Defense, November 1997, p.53.

⁹"Proliferation: Threat and Response", Office of the Secretary of Defense, November 1997, p.53.

¹⁰Report on Nonproliferation and Counterproliferation Activities and Programs (the Deutch Report), Office of the Deputy Secretary of Defense, May 1994.

¹¹See 1997 DoD Report to Congress, p.50.

¹²Larsen, pp.15-16.

¹³ 1997 CPRC Report to Congress, Chapter 5, p.2.

¹⁴ 1997 CPRC Report to Congress, Chapter 5, p.3.

¹⁵ 1997 CPRC Report to Congress, Chapter 5, p.3.

¹⁶ 1997 CPRC Report to Congress, Chapter 5, p.3.

¹⁷ 1997 CPRC Report to Congress, Chapter 5, p.2.

¹⁸ "Proliferation: Threat and Response", Office of the Secretary of Defense, November 1997, p.53.

¹⁹ "Proliferation: Threat and Response", Office of the Secretary of Defense, November 1997, p.6.

²⁰ See Jeffrey A. Larsen, "NATO Counterproliferation Policy: A Case Study In Alliance Politics", INSS Occasional Paper 17, Proliferation Series, November 1997, p.32.

²¹ "Proliferation: Threat and Response", Office of the Secretary of Defense, November 1997, p.61.

²² "Proliferation: Threat and Response", Office of the Secretary of Defense, November 1997, p.71.

²³ "Proliferation: Threat and Response", Office of the Secretary of Defense, November 1997, p.71.

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