

CRS Report for Congress

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Expanding Threat Reduction and Nonproliferation Programs: Concepts and Definitions

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Summary

President Bush, Members of Congress, and analysts outside government have suggested that the United States provide threat reduction and nonproliferation assistance to nations outside the former Soviet Union. Some propose expanding assistance to contain proliferation; others support programs to stop terrorists from acquiring weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Some support assisting only those nations with WMD programs; others support assistance for any nation with WMD materials or knowledge. Some support assistance with the storage or elimination of weapons; others believe the United States should “lock down” all WMD materials. Some believe the United States can fund expanded programs from the existing budget for nonproliferation and threat reduction assistance; others support large increases in the existing budget. The report of the 9/11 Commission called for continued support for threat reduction assistance. H.R. 10, the 9/11 Recommendations Implementation Act, calls for a review of U.S. policy in this area. This report will be updated as needed.

Background

In November 1991, Congress passed the Nunn-Lugar amendment authorizing the use of \$400 million in DOD funds to provide threat reduction assistance to the former Soviet Union. The United States now spends nearly \$1 billion per year on threat reduction and nonproliferation programs administered by the State Department, Department of Defense, and Department of Energy.¹ Together these programs seek not only to contain and eliminate nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and materials in the former Soviet

¹ The amendment was attached to the implementing legislation for the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty, P.L. 102-228. For detailed descriptions of these programs, see CRS Report RL31957, *Nonproliferation and Threat Reduction Assistance: U.S. Programs in the Former Soviet Union*, by Amy F. Woolf.

states, they also seek to limit the risk that these weapons, materials and knowledge needed to produce them, might leak out of the Soviet Union to other nations or groups.

In recent years, concerns have grown about the possible acquisition of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons by “rogue” nations and terrorist groups. Nations such as India, Pakistan, and North Korea have actively pursued nuclear weapons; others possess materials and knowledge that could support a weapons program. Still more have chemical and biological materials that could be used in weapons of mass destruction (WMD).² Many analysts have argued that assistance similar to that provided to the former Soviet states could help reduce the risk of terrorists acquiring and using WMD.

In February 2004, the President praised the programs that have evolved from the Nunn-Lugar amendment and stated that the United States should “expand this cooperation elsewhere in the world.”³ He suggested that the United States “retrain WMD scientists and technicians in countries like Iraq and Libya” and “help nations end the use of weapons-grade uranium in research reactors.” Congress has also endorsed this idea. The FY2004 Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 108-136, Sec. 1308) allows the Administration to use up to \$50 million in unobligated funds from DOD’s Cooperative Threat Reduction Program (CTR) in nations outside the former Soviet Union. A similar provision (sec. 3124) permits the President to use up to \$50 million in unobligated funds from DOE’s international nuclear materials protection and cooperation program (which seeks to secure and eliminate nuclear materials in the former Soviet states) for projects in other nations. These funds can be used for projects that will “assist the United States in the resolution of a critical emerging proliferation threat or permit the United States to take advantage of opportunities to achieve long-standing nonproliferation goals.” The report of the 9/11 Commission called for continued support for threat reduction assistance to keep WMD away from terrorist groups. In the 9/11 Recommendations Implementation Act (H.R. 10) the House calls for a commission to review U.S. policy on the proliferation of WMD and the control of strategic weapons.

The proposals for the expansion of threat reduction and nonproliferation assistance do not all contain the same ideas for how, why, and where the United States should expand this assistance. Many analysts who advocate this approach have published few details about which nations should receive assistance and what types of programs the United States should fund in these nations. Others have offered more specific suggestions, although they do not always agree with each other.⁴

² For a summary of nations with WMD capabilities see CRS Report RL30699, *Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Weapons and Missiles: Status and Trends*.

³ The White House, “President Announces New Measures to Counter the Threat of WMD,” remarks at Fort Lesley J. McNair — National Defense University, Feb. 11, 2004.

⁴ See, for example, Lawrence J. Korb, “Six Steps to a Safer America: National Security and the 2005 Budget,” *Center for American Progress*, Jan. 29, 2004. Dr. Korb states, without elaboration, that the Bush Administration should support “an international program that secures and destroys weapons of mass destruction-related materials and technology, and makes provisions for relevant scientists.” Ashton D. Carter, in contrast, offers a detailed list of proposals for expansion, including “the collection of all significant caches of highly enriched uranium worldwide” and “complete and verifiable elimination of WMD programs in Iraq, Libya, Iran, and
(continued...)

This report highlights the differences between proposals for expanding U.S. assistance by dividing them into four key areas — objectives for expanded assistance; nations to receive assistance; programs to provide assistance, and funding levels and priorities. The report does not suggest that the ideas in these proposals are contradictory or mutually exclusive. Instead, this characterization seeks to identify the range of views evident in the proposals to help Members and staff in Congress understand the proposals and identify those ideas that they may support or oppose in the future.⁵

Differing Objectives

Proposals calling for the expansion of U.S. threat reduction and nonproliferation assistance generally identify two objectives — containing or reversing weapons proliferation in nations and containing WMD materials and knowledge to keep them away from terrorists. Some proposals do not distinguish between the objectives and many do not choose one over the other. Further, choosing to pursue one objective does not necessarily preclude pursuit of the other. Nevertheless, the two objectives can lead to differing suggestions for which countries might receive what types of assistance.

Containing Proliferation. Some analysts suggest that the United States offer assistance to nations that agree to contain, reduce, or eliminate their programs for or arsenals of weapons of mass destruction — in essence, freezing or reversing proliferation that has already occurred. These proposals often focus on nations such as India, Pakistan, North Korea, Iran, Iraq, and Libya. The proposals also point to programs with the former Soviet Union as an example of how the United States can help destroy delivery vehicles, provide secure transportation and storage of weapons, and help eliminate materials removed from nuclear and chemical weapons. Proponents argue that this assistance might serve as either an incentive for a nation to secure or eliminate its weapons and materials, or as a reward to a nation that has already decided to give up its weapons programs.

There are doubts, however, about whether these programs could effectively contain or rollback WMD proliferation, however, because the recipient nation would have to conclude that it would benefit from reducing or eliminating its weapons programs. The United States probably could not provide enough assistance to reverse a nation's political or security interests in acquiring weapons of mass destruction.⁶ Consequently, efforts to expand threat reduction and nonproliferation assistance to support counterproliferation are more likely to succeed if they are included in a broader package of military, economic, and political incentives that address the broader concerns of the recipient nation.

⁴ (...continued)

North Korea as circumstances permit.” Statement of Ashton B. Carter, in U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Overhauling Counterproliferation*, hearing, Mar. 10, 2004.

⁵ This report does not review the mechanics of implementing these proposals or the possible impediments to expanding threat reduction and nonproliferation assistance. This information is available in a longer report, CRS Report RL32359, *Globalizing Cooperative Threat Reduction: A Survey of Options*.

⁶ Pakistan's ambassador to the United Nations stated that “Pakistan will not accept any demand for access, much less inspections, of our nuclear and strategic assets, materials and facilities.” See Colum Lynch, “Weapon Transfers Targeted,” *Washington Post*, Apr. 8, 2004, p. A21.

Keeping WMD Away From Terrorists. Recent concerns focus on the possibility that terrorists might acquire nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons or materials. The report of the 9/11 Commission noted this concern. Russia has vast stocks of materials that many fear could be lost or stolen, then sold to terrorist groups. Many programs funded by U.S. assistance seek to improve security, accounting and control at military and research facilities and to tighten export and border controls so that it would be more difficult for individuals or groups to acquire these materials. Many other nations also house nuclear materials and chemical and biological agents at military or research facilities. Hence, many proposals for expanded assistance suggest that the United States might take steps to “lock down” these stocks of deadly materials by providing these nations with assistance in securing their vulnerable facilities and borders.⁷

Nations Receiving Assistance

Many analysts believe the United States should expand threat reduction and nonproliferation assistance to those nations that have already acquired WMD and those that are suspected of seeking such weapons. India, Pakistan, Iran, and North Korea are often mentioned as potential recipients for assistance as an incentive for them to reduce or eliminate their weapons programs, in spite of the low probability that these nations are likely to respond to such an incentive. Libya and Iraq are cited as cases where assistance might serve as a reward for the elimination of those weapons programs.

These nations also appear on the lists of those who believe the United States should use these programs to keep significant, and possibly insecure, stocks of WMD materials and knowledge away from terrorists. These, and other, nations might serve as a marketplace for individuals or groups seeking to buy or steal the ingredients for WMD. But the list of nations with these types of materials goes far beyond those known to have WMD programs. Any nation with a nuclear research reactor, a chemical industry, or a pharmaceutical industry has materials that might be of interest to terrorist groups seeking WMD. Historically, the international community has not viewed these programs and industries as part of the proliferation problem. But, they have attracted growing attention in recent years. Consequently, some of the proposals for expanding threat reduction and nonproliferation assistance envision cooperative programs that extend to dozens of nations around the world.⁸

⁷ Former Senator Sam Nunn has noted that “large amounts of civilian highly enriched uranium exist in the world....A wide alliance of nations must work together to identify it all, account for it all, and secure it all...” Keynote Remarks, 2002 Carnegie Nonproliferation Conference, Nov. 14, 2002.

⁸ Some analysts have also suggested that the United States expand its assistance “beyond the problem cases” to “widen the international understanding of the benefits ... from threat reduction cooperation.” See Rose Gottemoeller, *Cooperative Inducements, Crafting New Tools for Nonproliferation*, in Janne E. Nolan, Bernard I. Finel, and Brian D. Finlay, eds., *Ultimate Security: Combating Weapons of Mass Destruction*, The Century Foundation Press, New York, 2003, p. 151.

Assistance Programs

The United States has helped Russia and the other former Soviet states secure and eliminate retired weapons systems from the old Soviet arsenal. Some proposals suggest that the United States extend these types of programs to other nations with WMD. However, programs that seek to secure and eliminate weapons presume that the recipient nation is willing to eliminate its weapons and to accept U.S. assistance with this effort. India, Pakistan, and North Korea might be candidates for this type of program, but none of these nations has, thus far, indicated an interest in eliminating its weapons.

The United States might also offer nations assistance in securing materials removed from weapons or other weapons-useable materials. As it does in Russia and the other former Soviet states, the United States could offer fences, gates, and alarms for storage facilities, training for personnel, and accounting systems to help track the location and quantities of materials. This type of assistance could help those nations with weapons programs, without requiring access to active weapons, or nations with civilian research and commercial materials that might be vulnerable to theft. These nations would still have to admit they have these materials and that they cannot secure them on their own.

The United States could also support programs that redirect or retrain scientists and engineers so that they would not be tempted to sell their knowledge to others. The United States has offered this type of assistance in Iraq and Libya.⁹ Some question, however, whether these programs are needed to stem proliferation. Scientists who had worked in the Soviet weapons infrastructure are highly skilled, and they suffered significant financial losses when the Russian economy collapsed. U.S. assistance provided them with a basic level of resources that their own government could not provide. In other nations, this type of assistance is not likely to lure scientists away from ongoing weapons programs if they remain fully employed. Further, some have questioned whether scientists in these nations have enough skills or knowledge to pose a significant proliferation risk.

The United States has also begun to provide export control and border security assistance to many nations as part of the effort to stop individuals or groups from removing weapon-useable materials from those countries.¹⁰ Supporters argue that new monitoring equipment and better training for border guards can help detect smuggling and discourage terrorists from seeking these materials. Critics agree that these programs can be useful, but they argue that they will be of marginal effectiveness in nations with long borders and large numbers of border crossings.

⁹ Michael Roston, "Redirection of WMD Scientists in Iraq and Libya: A Status Report," *Russian-American Nuclear Security Council (RANSAC)*, Apr. 29, 2004.

¹⁰ Undersecretary of State John Bolton noted that the State Department's Export Control and Related Border Security Assistance program, which had "initially focused on the former Soviet Union and nearby transit states" had expanded to over 40 countries "from the Mediterranean, to the Middle East, to Southeast Asia." U.S. Congress, House Committee on International Relations, hearing, Mar. 30, 2004.

Funding Levels and Priorities

Under the G-8 Global Partnership Against Weapons of Mass Destruction, the United States has pledged to spend \$10 billion over 10 years on threat reduction and nonproliferation programs in the former Soviet Union.¹¹ The United States already allocates around \$1 billion per year to these programs, so this pledge represents constant funding into the future. The Bush Administration considers U.S. funding for assistance to other nations a part of its commitment under the G-8 Global Partnership. It has not suggested that the United States increase its expenditures; instead, it has called for other nations to join the global partnership to increase total funding for all recipients. With its own funding held constant, U.S. assistance to Russia and the other former Soviet states could decline as the United States expands its programs to other countries. This shift could occur as the United States completes projects in Russia. Alternatively, the Administration's approach could reflect a shift in priorities away from efforts to secure and eliminate weapons and materials in Russia and towards efforts to secure materials and knowledge in other nations. This appears to be the case in at least one instance, where the United States has reduced funding for materials protection, control and accounting in Russia — in spite of the fact that the program has completed security upgrades at facilities that house only 38% of Russia's nuclear materials — and increased funding for the Megaports program, which seeks to provide nuclear detection equipment to port facilities around the world.

Many analysts outside the U.S. government have suggested that the United States increase sharply its funding for threat reduction and nonproliferation assistance as it expands these programs to other nations.¹² Supporters argue that this increase in funding would allow the United States to accelerate its programs in the former Soviet Union and initiate new programs in other countries. Others, however, have questioned the need for more funding, noting that bureaucratic problems, not a lack of funding, have slowed efforts in Russia, and that the types of programs that are likely to be acceptable to other nations, such as those that improve security at existing facilities and controls at borders, do not require large sums of money to achieve visible results.

To date, Congress has not supported calls for added funding. As noted above, when it approved legislation permitting the expansion of these programs to other nations, it stated that the Administration could use unobligated funds from existing budgets. However, if the United States continues to expand threat reduction and nonproliferation programs outside the former Soviet Union without expanding funding, Congress may eventually have to address tradeoffs and set priorities among the programs.

¹¹ The other members of the G-8 have also pledged to spend a total of \$10 billion over 10 years, for a total of \$20 billion, on programs in Russia and the other former Soviet states. See Statement by the Group of 8 Leaders, "The G-8 Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction," Kananaskis, Canada, June 27, 2002.

¹² The proposals vary, but many suggest the United States spend \$2 billion to \$3 billion per year. See Testimony of Joseph Circincione, in U.S. Congress, House International Relations Committee, Mar. 30, 2004.