

Additional View of Commissioner Henry Sokolski

Report of the Commission on the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation and Terrorism

I have lent my name to this report. It has many sound recommendations. However, I believe that the report is imbalanced since it places a primary emphasis on nuclear and biological terrorism threats rather than on preventing nuclear proliferation to new states and the ramp-up of nuclear bomb capabilities in several existing nuclear armed states. I believe that such proliferation is the main danger and the area that deserves the most emphasis. Hence my additional views below:

The Commission rightly notes that an act of biological terrorism is more likely than an act of nuclear terrorism. Certainly, we have to take both seriously. Neither possibility, however, should distract us from the nuclear headaches we know the next administration will be forced to deal with almost immediately. These have to do not with radical fanatics, but with states. Israel's military, fresh from bombing Syria's reactor last year, might well attempt a strike against Iran. Failing such a strike, Iran will press to be allowed to enrich under one or another scheme, come to the very brink of acquiring bombs, and set an egregious precedent that others might follow. India and Pakistan, which nearly came to nuclear blows in 2002, are now building up their nuclear weapons production capacities; resumption of nuclear testing and the possibility of new nuclear crises must be concerns.

Then there is North Korea, which continues to reject thorough inspections and could resume nuclear weapons production or testing. As a result, U.S. accommodation of Pyongyang is straining U.S.-Japanese security relations -- a friendship whose strength is critical to keeping most of Asia non-nuclear. Finally, there is the prospect of large reactor programs spreading to unstable regions like the Middle East, which is especially worrisome, as they would remove most of the technological barriers to nuclear weapons. Ironically, exporters who should be more security conscious are actually subsidizing the exports that could threaten them in the future.

None of these pressing issues received nearly as much of the Commission's time as did biological and nuclear terrorism. Some of this imbalance was a result of limited information. When it came to North Korea a single classified intelligence brief was given to less than half of the Commissioners. The same was the case with Iran. In other instances, the Administration was decidedly unhelpful by denying access. With regard to intelligence on Russia's assistance to Iran's nuclear weapons program, the Administration refused the full commission access to detailed classified studies done for the State Department and the Defense Intelligence Agency. The Administration also blocked a similar request to gain access to the classified Nuclear Proliferation Assessment Statement that the State Department forwarded to Congress with the signed U.S.-Russia Nuclear Cooperation Agreement.

Straining to meet urgent deadlines, the Commission went with the conventional wisdom on nuclear energy, much of which is now outdated. The Commission report suggests that sharing nuclear reactor technology with countries that pledge not themselves to make nuclear fuel would be safe. But the U.S. and most other countries continue to make the mistaken, self-defeating argument that states have an inalienable right recognized by the NPT to make nuclear fuel. As such, any country that chooses not to exercise this

"inalienable" right can just as easily change their minds and legally get to the very brink of making bombs.

Also, countries can cheat on pledges not to make nuclear fuel by exploiting the International Atomic Energy Agency's inability to detect in time a covert nuclear fuel making plant under construction or even military diversions from one already operating. As such, it does not make sense to share large reactor technology with any country that we cannot trust to stay out of the bomb making business. This would include many countries in the Middle East. However uncomfortable the issue might be in view of the push to expand nuclear energy use, the commission failed to seriously assess the economic and security suitability of new nuclear power plants not just for developing states, but for any country.

One of the statutorily-mandated missions of this Commission was to assess and provide "concrete recommendations" on "efforts to prevent, stop, and counter" the "spread of nuclear weapons capabilities" to "states of concern." I believe that the Commission would have produced a sounder and more balanced report had it focused more on this tasking.