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Homeland Security Podcast Series

Welcome to the Homeland Security Podcast Series. This unique series of discussions on various aspects of Homeland Security will allow you to hear from subject matter experts regarding; terrorist activity in the Middle East and Asia, the potential of biological and nuclear attacks on US soil, US Government resources assigned to Homeland Security and the Weapons of Mass Destruction scorecard.

Please join our discussion with Brian Finlay as we talk about how the US Government is aligning resources to ensure safety at home and abroad and the WMD scorecard. Brian is a Senior Associate and Co-Director of the Cooperative Nonproliferation Program at the Henry L. Stimson Center. He currently works on issues of weapons proliferation, illicit trade networks, economic development, and private sector engagement.

Brian,
Would you start by providing us an historical perspective on the genesis, purpose and key elements of the score card?

In 2004 the 9-11 commission issued its final report to the Congress and to the President and they found that al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups continued to seek to commit major terrorist attacks against the United States. And in the future they and other terrorist groups would likely try to acquire and use a weapon of mass destruction; a nuclear, a chemical or a biological weapon.

Now to that end the Commissioner's advised that the President and the Congress should seek to prevent the proliferation of these weapons and that those activities warranted what they referred to as a maximum effort. Now in so doing they proposed a multi-step plan which included efforts to cooperatively secure nuclear, biological and chemical weapons materials and expertise in order to prevent their acquisition both here in the United States and more importantly in foreign countries whose controls were viewed as excessively lax.

And second, as a failsafe effort they proposed a series of measures to prevent the movement of materials if, in fact, terrorists successfully acquired a nuclear or,

or a biological or in deed a, chemical capability. Now in 2005 the commissioners revisited the 44 recommendations of their original report and concluded that the U. S. Government had made what they referred to, again, as insufficient progress in implementing the WMD recommendations of their original report and gave the U. S. Government efforts an overall grade of “D”.

In 2008, the 9-11 co-chairman governors came and Congressman Lee Hamilton invited me and two others to re-visit the grade of “D” seven years after the 9-11 attacks and this led to the formulation of what we now have as the second WMD report card.

How has the US government done over the past 4 years in preventing terrorists from acquiring WMD’s and what metrics are being used to measure the progress?

Well our measurements of the U. S. Government’s progress in implementing the original 9-11 commission recommendations were judged against four basic metrics. And those are prevention which is essentially attempting to prevent the initial acquisition of either weapons, fabricated weapons or the materials necessary to build weapons and keep them out of terrorists’ hands. So, for instance, fissionable material, highly enriched uranium, plutonium, that are the necessary components of, developing a nuclear weapon or alternatively especially dangerous and infectious pathogens such as plague and anthrax.

Second we measured them against efforts to interdict and, and indeed detect the movement of materials across international boundaries. That’s a series of very, politically popular measures including cargo screening, port security and so forth.

Third, we measured them against the broad integration of U. S. government efforts and fourth against the sustainability of these programs. And in doing so we concluded that U. S. government efforts have seen an improvement over time but unfortunately they continued to receive, a still inadequate grade of “C” for their efforts.

In the area of prevention we know that Russia possesses approximately 90% of the weapons and materials that are outside of U. S. government control on the nuclear side. Now this has been the case since 1992 and since 9-11 we have seen an acceleration of efforts to help the Russians insure that weapons and materials do not fall into the wrong hands. However, at the current state the United States may not reach the goal of securing all excess weapons and materials until the time frame of 2020 to 2030 and that's a giant window of opportunity that terrorists have in order to acquire weapons of mass destruction.

On the interdiction and, and detection side we have certainly seen measurable increases in port security. In fact, it is probably the area of greatest improvement over the course of the past four or five years. However, we do have continued questions over the ethnicity of much of the technology that is being used to detect materials as they come across U. S. borders and, and other international borders. More importantly on the biological side which another U. S. WMD commission has concluded has a much higher probability than nuclear terrorism in fact area attempts to insure that those materials are detected and ultimately stopped are lagging quite far behind in comparison to the nuclear side.

On integration of U. S. government programs we count more than 100 separate U. S. government agencies that are dedicated in some fashion to preventing the delivery of a terrorist nuclear, chemical or biological weapon. Over 100 agencies that are each pursuing, in many cases, different and often competing agendas and we concluded that there is no central coordinating authority within the White House or any other of the U. S. government departments dedicated to this effort to, to broadly coordinate efforts across these various portfolios.

What indications do we have that WMD's will be a priority in the Obama administration?

Well the Obama campaign stated repeatedly throughout the past year that the goal of an Obama administration would be to accelerate U. S. Government efforts to prevent interdict and detect nuclear, chemical and biological weapons

materials and prevent them ultimately from proliferating into terrorist's hands. Their paramount goal as they had stated repeatedly since the campaign is to isolate all nuclear, chemical and biological weapons particularly in the states of the former Soviet Union, the region of most acute threat within the next four years.

Now that is an extremely, extremely ambitious agenda. Recall that we have been working with the Russian government since the end of the Cold War, since 1991 to insure that their excess nuclear, biological and chemical weapons are identified, are isolated, secured and ultimately destroyed. That's a 17 year period that we have had, and we're only half way there. The Obama administration wants to do the other half of the job within the next four years so an incredibly ambitious agenda that is going to require three things.

One, it is certainly going to require increased coordination within the U. S. government and to that end the Obama administration has stated and, and congress has in fact mandated that a central coordinator be hired by the White House to insure that this mission is on the front page of every government agency working on this issue over the course of the next four years.

Second, it is going to require increased collaboration with governments abroad. As we know, this is not a mission that any government, U. S. government or otherwise can accomplish solo. It is going to require deep collaboration with governments from an intelligent sharing standpoint, a collaborative efforts from a pragmatic standpoint in so far as the U. S. government requires efforts to, in fact, encourage, foreign governments to erect higher fences to account for nuclear or biological materials and to ensure that law enforcement and, and other agencies are, are adequately staffed and, and trained in order to prevent the diffusion of these dangerous materials. That is an effort that we can see some promise at least insofar as the statements that have been made from foreign governments with the exception potentially of Russia over the course of the past year or so and certainly since the election of President Obama.

Third, we are going to need increased resources likely in order to achieve each of these goals. Now in the midst of a financial crisis it is, it is highly unlikely and, and or at least unclear as to whether or not the administration can deliver on this last critical point.

What is the threat of WMD proliferation and terrorism to private enterprise and how can companies avoid unwittingly-supporting terrorism?

Well the most obvious way that this issue is impacting private enterprise in this country and around the world is, of course, the physical impact of an actual incident and the resulting disruption to business operations. But more importantly or as importantly and perhaps more likely the proliferation debate has an impact on business by affecting individual companies up to the point of and before even an incident could occur.

In 1972 there was a young engineer from Pakistan who earned a PHD and began a career with a European consortium, a nuclear fuel fabricator located in the United Kingdom called Uranco. Now this individual worked at the facility that enriched uranium for use in civilian nuclear fuel reactors and in 1976, four years after graduation, A. Q. Khan returned to Pakistan where he was put in charge of that country's offensive nuclear weapons development program using the information that he gleaned from this western nuclear fuel fabrication company. By the late 1980's and into the 1990's it became clear that Uranco, the European company was the victim of corporate espionage and that Khan had utilized his knowledge to boost Pakistan's flaggingly offensive nuclear weapons program and as we know, Pakistan subsequently detonated a nuclear device and proved that it was the now seventh nuclear power to enter the world stage. By the time the Bush administration came to town in 2000 A. Q. Khan had incubated a massive one-stop shopping black market nuclear network that was servicing offensive weapons programs in at least North Korea, in Libya, in Iran, and there are questions as to whether or not al Qaeda itself had connections with the Khan network. Now this network was massive. It involved technology companies,

manufacturing companies, shipping companies, freight forwarders, ports, all of these various private sector actors knowingly or unwittingly were involved in a massive proliferation chain that was feeding offensive nuclear weapons programs in, again, North Korea, Libya, Iran, and so forth. And, and it was occurring, in fact, in countries well beyond those that we assumed throughout the cold war were part of the proliferation chain.

Are there specific industries that can be part of the solution in preventing proliferation and terrorism?

Well virtually every segment of industry can play a role in one fashion or another in proliferation prevention. Let me just give you an example of a few. First and most obvious are technology companies and let me give you a hard case to illustrate the point. In 1991 while searching a remote out post in the Iraqi desert, U. N. weapons inspectors; this is in the immediate wake of the first Gulf War, stumbled upon a small number of vacuum pumps that had been supplied to the Iraqi's by a German multinational manufacturing firm. Now, the company produces vacuum technologies for use in air conditioning and in TV tubes for various automobile applications for high tech processes like the coating of microchips and CD's and DVD's as well as in the manufacturing of optical glass and various analytical instruments. Now, at that time none of these that were discovered in the desert were found on any export control or a dual use item list. Those are lists, as you are aware, that the government monitors to insure that they do not fall into nefarious hands.

Now, upon closer study the U.N. inspectors realized that the vacuum pump was attached to a cyclotron which can be used to enrich Uranium through a process called, electromagnetic isotope separation. Thus, this company, this German company as well as their competitors who also had products found in the desert of Iraq after the war had knowingly while innocently supplied the pumps to the Iraqi government and unwittingly advanced its nuclear weapons program.

In another case, a European pharmaceutical company that markets a drug that contains trace amounts of Botulinum Toxin Type A, now this is a substance that is known as the most deadly substance known to man and it is being called by a U. S. terrorism expert as a prime candidate for use as a biological weapon by terrorists. This company which uses this toxin for beneficial therapeutic use in its product is not only sharing that product with government of Iran, a government that the State Department here in the United States has called a states sponsor of terrorism but it is also conducting clinical trials of the drug in Tehran. Now this means the sharing of sensitive, what we call dual use information with the government in Tehran that it, in turn, could use to develop a biological weapon.

The moral of these stories are that you have bad companies sometimes, but you can also have legitimate companies that are making, bad decisions such as the two companies that we just discussed.

Now, of course, once these articles and technologies are produced you need to actually get them somewhere. The bad guys need to move bad stuff in order to deliver it as a weapon of mass destruction and this involves quite clearly the shipping industry.

How can the insurance industry help?

The insurance industry could play a critical role, I think, in mitigating WMD terrorism risks not only by sharing capacity with government but also in tailoring their policies in such a way that they encourage mitigative behavior on the part of their client base and we've seen organizations such as Lexington Insurance actually having a very important impact on the way property owners and private enterprise is preparing in the face of arising WMD terrorist case. This is the sort of behavior that the U. S. government should be incenting private insurer's to do more of which would have ultimately a backend effect of erecting higher walls to terrorists in perpetrating a successful nuclear or biological attack.

Brian,
Thank you for sharing your expertise on this very timely and complicated topic.

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