Prevent, combat and suppress the use of CBRN weapons by non-state actors

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The landscape (1)

It is broadly admitted that Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) materials are a threat of 3rd generation which is not only very serious but also needs to be given far higher attention by governments.

The proliferation and the use of Weapon of Mass Destruction (WMD) by non-state actors presents a clear danger for global health security. The Covid-19 pandemic gave us a flavour of what could be an effect of global contamination by chemical or biological agents.

To date deaths and injuries from biological and chemical warfare have not been overwhelming, but there is a very serious risk of all that changing.

The reality is that governments have tended focus on nuclear weapons, at the expense of biological or chemical warfare.

The threat of wide scale use by determined non-state actors and associate movements as Violent Extremist Organisations (VEOs) is growing.

Biological & Chemical weapons are easy to make, easy to transport, and difficult to detect the source – they make the perfect terror weapon in an era of uncertainties.
The landscape (2)

Definitely plans exist, but policy makers usually says “The biological & chemical weapons threat is not going away. We are not ready for it.”

According to some intelligence reports, VEOs as Al-Qaida (AQ) affiliated or Islamic State (IS) are engaged in a long term, persistent and systematic approach to developing weapons to be used in mass casualty attacks.

In 2004, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1540, with the intent of keeping WMD out of the hands of non-state actors. Many developing states fear that implementing the types of export controls required by UNSCR 1540 will smother their nascent industries.

All the more imperative we look at arms control and biological warfare. Admittedly they can only go so far in reaching out to governments to respond. The only way to deal with non-state actors and associate movements is through top level and committed intelligence and cross link between communities.
The landscape (3)

Societies often change when confronted with: Wars; Recessions; Pandemics; Similarities associated with Pandemics and Terrorism

Non-state actors as Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) and Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs) often use opportunity space when available.

TCOs and VEOs are adapting in the Era of Covid-19:
- From global to local crime
- Medical supplies trafficking
- Illicit trafficking of WMD and related materials
- Counterfeit goods
- Cybercrime
- Kidnapping and Extortion
- Corruption
- Alternative Governance
- More violence intending to use CBRN weapons
The challenges (1)

As a result of complex and regional relationships there is virtually no security framework or organisation in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and the Sahel (ungoverned space of five bordering countries), much less an arms control culture.

The danger with today is that science is constantly changing. Agent deliveries are growing with new long and short range missiles, drones can deliver. To be complacent is not an option.

Bring together countries in our MENA and Sahel region to work towards a common aim of prohibiting production, development, and stockpiling of CBRN weapons is not an easy task.
The challenges (2)

All being well with highly disparate parties involved ranging from a nervous Iran on the one side to the absence of Israel on the other, it requires a huge balancing act to all concerned. Driving the debate were divergent views over the proper balance between sharing technology and non-proliferation obligations as well as ideological differences over the function of the CBRN Weapons Convention.

CBRN could be predictable as far as verification remains the hot-button issue.

There is little trust. Parties are suspicious, nervous, proud, hostile and deeply reluctant to open up their secrets.
Look ahead!

The whole MENA region is politically distracted with major changes already in process, often painfully. The Sahel region is undermined by Low Intensity Conflicts.

To reach the goals, political and strategic realities do make achievement elusive. The impasse stems from contentious disagreements regarding actual implementation.

From my perspective, working groups has to focus on the examination of threats posed by non-state actors, and on the importance of facilitating regulated yet unobstructed peaceful applications of dual use bio-technology.

For all that, verification remains key.

Relationship building between communities networking are key to ensure the momentum is not lost.

The most contentious policy challenges are unlikely to move the discussion beyond political grand-standing.
Role of Civil Society

The upside of the new world that is emerging is greater freedom of speech and indeed a much greater role for Non-Government Organisations (NGO) and Non-Government Individuals (NGI).

The dedicated people might be disconnected from civil society who can support and develop the case. To be effective, low key discussions must take place at all levels, with more public awareness of what is being done. This would then make it much easier for the policy makers and indeed the politicians to accept the recommendations.

Dialogue is a long and painstaking process especially at a time like this. It requires the 3 P rule: Presence, Patience, and Perseverance. Only then with the ground work done can the politicians take over and achieve the final results with formal and binding agreements.
How do you break through?

As the enemy is common, to ensure the success to create a WMD Free Zone in MENA and Sahel regions, it requires the following:

- Work on confidence building measures.

- Trust and Transparency have to be the foundation of the whole process.
Conclusion

- Dialogue and communication are key to raise awareness of the importance of the 3 S (Safety, Security, Safeguard) bearing in mind that CRBN involves safety considerations which are new for law enforcement and criminal forensic personnel.

- Develop cooperation in information and intelligence sharing, and exchanging experiences in terms of combat CBRN crimes.

- Develop a regional cooperation through existing frameworks or innovative ones in:
  - Crisis management, in response to a potential CBRN terrorist attack.
  - Setting up global CBRN forensic analytical and response capabilities
  - Reinforce the Civil Defence capacity building to respond to a CBRN attack.

- Develop cross links between communities such as scientific, business, industry, intelligence, NGOs, NGIs in order to build trust and confidence and promote a culture of security and safety.

- Use of Science Diplomacy and Key Opinion Persons (KOP) to raise awareness among policy makers and decision makers.