

Perspectives on Disarmament and International Security

The continued relevance of the recommendations of the Blix Commission report:

“Weapons of Terror: Freeing the World of Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Arms”

High-Level Panel, United Nations New York: 21 October 2015

Report by Tariq Rauf



United Nations, New York: On 21 October 2015, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sweden in collaboration with the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) organized a High-Level Panel discussion with *Ms Margot Wallström, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden; Dr Hans Blix, Chairman of the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission (WMDC)*, IAEA Director General Emeritus, and former Chairman of the United Nations Monitoring and Verification Commission in Iraq (UNMOVIC), *Ambassador Henrik Salander, Secretary-General of the WMDC*, former Ambassador for Disarmament of Sweden; and *Dr Irma Arguello, Founder and Chair of the Non-Proliferation for Global Security Foundation*, Head of the Secretariat for the Latin American and Caribbean Leadership Network for Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation. *UN Under-Secretary General Kim Won-soo*, Acting High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, provided brief comments. *Ambassador Olof Skoog, Sweden's Permanent Representative to the United Nations*, introduced the High-Level Panel to the audience of some 200 delegates. The moderator for the High-Level Panel was *Tariq Rauf, Director of SIPRI's Disarmament, Arms Control and Non-Proliferation Programme*.

Foreign Minister Wallström recalled that this year marked twelve years since her great friend and predecessor, Foreign Minister Anna Lindh, was assassinated.

Three months before her death, Anna Lindh asked Dr Hans Blix to set up a commission to generate proposals for weapons of mass disarmament (WMD) disarmament and non-proliferation. Many of the Commission's proposals are still on the table, and they can and should still serve as impetus for action. And, there need to be mechanisms for implementation.

Minister Wallström highlighted a few important points:

- First, the humanitarian imperative (regarding the consequences of the use of nuclear weapons) should underpin all of the work that is undertaken in order to eliminate weapons of mass destruction. Focus should be on human beings and on the equal participation of women and men. This is one of the most fundamental principles in Sweden's foreign policy.
- Second, it is high time to sit together and elaborate proposals to eliminate nuclear weapons in a way that is effective, structured and concrete. Earlier this year, Sweden proposed to establish an open-ended working group to move forward on nuclear disarmament. This proposal is on the table here in the First Committee, and it is Sweden's hope that it will be possible to agree on a strong mandate with broad participation.
- Third, it is unacceptable that banned weapons of mass destruction are being used repeatedly and systematically with impunity in the Syrian conflict. Sweden welcomes the establishment of a UN/OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism to determine who is behind these inhumane attacks, and is considering how we can contribute. This will surely continue to be on top of the agenda as Sweden joins the OPCW Executive Council next year.
- Fourth, collaborative work is needed to address threats to global health security, whether natural, accidental or deliberate. Sweden supports the Global Health Security Agenda, and will continue to take a leading role in the fight against antimicrobial resistance. An important priority will be to agree on an effective and constructive way to strengthen the biological and toxin weapons convention at next year's Review Conference.
- Fifth and last, it is Sweden's conviction that today's worsening security environment makes it more urgent than ever to eliminate weapons of mass destruction. It is high time to take action and redouble efforts to achieve the shared goal of a world free of weapons of mass destruction.

Dr Hans Blix recalled how a dynamic and constructive Swedish Foreign Minister, Anna Lindh, asked him to form an international commission to explore how the threat posed by WMD could be tackled. The WMDC presented a unanimous report in 2006, the recommendations of which are still relevant today due to the sad reality that its ideas and proposals have not been taken up governments.

Blix noted some of the important successes of the Security Council acting in unison: the WMD disarmament of Iraq in 1991-1998; Syria's chemical weapons disarmament in 2013; and working to resolve the Iran nuclear file this year. He also noted some of the failings of the Security Council, notably its limitations regarding Iraq in 2003 and in dealing with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). He pointed out that the Security Council is a much criticized institution, especially with regard to its (non-representative) composition and the veto residing with five (nuclear-weapon) States. But its creation in 1945 (at the end of World War II) marked tremendous progress in establishing a new international security system based on the UN Charter that empowered the Security Council with powers listed in Articles 41-43 and 25 of the Charter. A role for the Council in disarmament was contemplated in Article 26, but was never activated. And, during the Cold War, the Council was (mostly) paralyzed due to a lack of consensus among the five permanent members (P5).

Blix noted that in the post-Cold War era the interests of the P5 have tended to converge. Examples include Security Council resolution 687 (1991) on the WMD disarmament of Iraq and reversal of Iraq's aggression against Kuwait. UNSCR 687 gave strong powers to the UN Special Commission on Iraq (UNSCOM) and to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to ensure the destruction of Iraq's WMD potential along with monitoring and verification. UNSCOM and the IAEA essentially effected Iraq's WMD disarmament by the end of 1992.

An important point made by Blix concerned the independence of international verification organizations, such as UNMOVIC and the IAEA. He also noted the challenges of proving the negative, i.e. that all WMD capabilities have been eliminated—this being an attractive goal but difficult to achieve in practice. Blix enumerated examples of how the independence and authority of the IAEA was negatively impacted in Iraq by intelligence agencies of some of the P5 States. He was critical of the practice of States providing inspectors who were in fact extensions of intelligence agencies and in some instances might have provided targeting information. In particular, he noted some recent statements regarding the implementation of the recent agreement concerning Iran's nuclear programme that

alluded to the possibility of IAEA inspections facilitating targeting in the eventuality of military attacks. Blix emphasized the importance of the sanctity of inspectors as independent international civil servants as provided for in Article 100 of the Charter.

Blix concluded his remarks by commenting on the legislative powers exercised by the Security Council, for example resolution 1540 (2004) that provides for controls on WMD and their components to prevent access by non-State actors or terrorists.

Ambassador Henrik Salander recounted several of the recommendations made by the WMDC and noted their continued relevance. He recalled the establishment of the commission which quickly became known as the Blix Commission. Swedish Foreign Minister Anna Lindh made a point of selecting as WMDC Chair, a former Foreign Minister from the opposite block in Swedish politics, a bi-partisan move in order to strengthen Swedish support of international disarmament efforts. The Commission was funded by the Swedish Government and a few private sources, especially the very generous Simons Foundation in Canada. Nonetheless, it was fully independent, and all Commissioners served in their personal capacity, not under instructions from any government or organisation.

The task was to come up with realistic proposals aiming at reversing the slowdown and stalemate, at the time, in the fields of non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament, and for the greatest possible reduction of the dangers of weapons of mass destruction. The WMDC proposals became 60 so-called “recommendations”, 30 about nuclear weapons and the rest about not only biological and chemical weapons but also means of delivery, export controls, and a number of institutional issues. Together with a 200-page analysis, these were presented in June 2006 under the title “Weapons of Terror” which was hotly contested both within the Commission and outside of it. In the end, all recommendations were underwritten by consensus among all commissioners.

The Commission did not claim to present only, or even mainly, original ideas. Several were mainstream thinking already in 2006. And they are so even more today, since they have not been realised. Several have been advocated in similar terms by other commissions and panels, both before and after the Blix Commission. This does not make them any less interesting or important, of course, rather on the contrary.

Salander noted four strong undercurrents which permeate most of the recommendations of the Blix Commission, and almost all of the analysis underpinning them:

- the paramount value of multilateralism;
- the importance of treaties and international law;
- the firm belief that outlawing nuclear weapons is not beyond reach; and
- the need for a strong and fair Security Council in the United Nations.

He highlighted recommendation 60—it conveys a strong belief in the powers and good intentions of the UN Security Council. This belief has not been met by reciprocal response. In fact, there have even been instances of a permanent member threatening others with nuclear weapons. Some critics nine years ago thought that the Commission had overestimated the utility and powers of the Council. But, now nearly a decade after the report, it is thought that the Commission was a bit too optimistic. Some thought, and hoped, that the Council could pull itself together and meet its responsibility. They were proven wrong. The situation got worse, not better, with one or two exceptions: Syrian chemical weapons, recently, being the clearest.

Recommendations 59 and 58 are examples of institutional deficits and different ways to overcome them: the former advocating a World Summit on WMD, and the latter proposing a concrete change in the operation of the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva. The proposals are concise, but the reasoning behind them is elaborated and still valid. Regarding existing nuclear weapons among the five NPT possessors, there are a number of very clear recommendations which are even more urgent today than nine years ago. This relates both to non-first-use (number 15) and the diminishing role of nuclear weapons (number 16), as well as lowered alert levels and strategic reductions, also equally necessary today. Number 16 is a surprisingly lucid illustration of how many of these recommendations could have been written about today's state of affairs, instead of about things happening ten or fifteen years ago:

- All states possessing nuclear weapons should review their military plans and define what is needed to maintain credible non-nuclear security policies. States deploying their nuclear forces in triads, consisting of submarine-launched missiles, ground-based intercontinental ballistic missiles and long-range bombers, should abandon this practice in order to reduce nuclear-weapon redundancy and avoid fuelling nuclear arms races.

Recommendation 30 on nuclear weapons deals with their elimination—it is the only one doing that. This does not mean that the Commission neglected the issue, on the contrary; it is a recurrent theme in many of the report’s chapters. It is expressed rather guardedly, which illustrates what was possible among the Commissioners, many of them coming from nuclear-weapon States, but the text develops this goal quite clearly:

- All States possessing nuclear weapons should commence planning for security without nuclear weapons. They should start preparing for the outlawing of nuclear weapons through joint practical and incremental measures that include definitions, benchmarks and transparency requirements for nuclear disarmament.

Dr Irma Arguello spoke on the theme of “Reduction of Global Security Risks: Strategies and Priorities”. She noted that the WMDC report had made 60 recommendations covering: preventing proliferation; preventing nuclear terrorism; reducing the numbers of and threats from nuclear weapons; steps to outlaw nuclear weapons; chemical weapons; biological and toxin weapons; delivery systems; export controls; and compliance, verification and enforcement.

Arguello noted the continued risks of nuclear weapons, such as accidental use, trafficking in weapon-usable nuclear materials (highly enriched uranium and plutonium) as well as radiological materials, and cyber-attacks. She noted possession of nuclear weapons by nine States, nuclear weapons modernization, and the existence of weapon-usable nuclear materials in some 25 States. International regimes and multilateral diplomacy remained in disarray, for example the failure of the 2015 Review Conference of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the failure to establish a WMD-free zone in the Middle East, the lack of entry-into-force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and of the 2005 Amendment to the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material (CPPNM), and no negotiations on prohibiting weapon-usable nuclear material (FMCT).

On the positive side of the ledger, Arguello noted the three successful Nuclear Security Summits (Washington, 2010, Seoul 2012, The Hague 2014), the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) regarding Iran’s nuclear programme, and the overwhelming support of the international community for the Humanitarian Initiative on the consequences of nuclear weapons.

Arguello suggested “out-of-the-box” thinking to reframe the international security paradigm to focus on “insecurity” as opposed to “containment” (of WMD) or “security”. She noted that focusing on “global insecurity” emanating from WMD could lead to action, because talking about “security” tends to lead to complacency. Greater awareness of insecurity and risks could influence decision-makers to focus on the longer term impact of their policies and decisions regarding “security” and possibly spur them to accept innovative and inclusive approaches to WMD disarmament.

