

Science diplomacy to build up confidence and raise awareness on threats of third generation

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Month ago, I had a discussion with a friend who is scientist working in the CBRN field regarding the miscommunication between the scientific community and the policymakers.....

This is what he said: “ This is the problem with decision makers....they never listen to scientists because they all have hidden agenda! Scientists give solutions to many issues but because these solutions do not comply with decision makers' interests.....they go with their agenda! I know that there are interfering factors! But decision makers do not share this with the scientific community! Thus, the picture is VAGUE!!! ”

The Landscape

It is broadly admitted that CBRN is a threat of third generation which is not only very serious but also needs to be given far higher attention by governments.

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 groups and associate movements as terrorists is growing.

Biological & Chemical weapons are easy to make, easy to transport, and difficult to detect the source – they make the perfect terror weapon.

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, Al Qaeda is engaged in a long term, persistent and systematic approach to developing weapons to be used in mass casualty attacks.

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 challenges

As a result of complex and regional relationships there is virtually no security framework or organisation in the MENA, 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 region to work towards a common aim of prohibiting production, development, and stockpiling of CBRN weapons is not an easy task.

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, but from which there is no going back.

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 NGOs and NGIs

The upside of the new world that is emerging is greater freedom of speech and indeed a much greater role for NGO's and NGIs.

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?

To ensure the success for a MENA initiative to create a WMD Free Zone, it requires the following:

- ▶ Work on confidence building measures and rethink the whole issue from the bottom up.
- ▶ Trust and Transparency have to be the foundation of the whole process.

In Conclusion

- Dialogue, communication and PR are key to raise awareness of the importance of the 3 S (Safety, Security, Safeguard) bearing in mind that CBRN involves safety considerations which are new for law enforcement and criminal forensic personnel.
- Develop cooperation in intelligence sharing, and exchanging experiences in terms of combat CBRN terrorism.
- Develop a regional cooperation through existing frameworks or innovative ones in:
 - Crisis management, in response to a potential terrorist attack of CBRN type.
 - Setting up global CBRN forensic analytical and response capabilities
- Develop cross links between communities such as scientific, business, industry, intelligence, NGOs, NGIs in order to build up confidence and promote a culture of security and safety.
- To raise awareness among policy makers, science diplomacy is strongly needed.