

***Q: How credible is the danger that terrorist groups might access and use WMD?***

Introduction

Over the past decades, sophisticated wars have challenged security in many ways, and some of them have become more complicated and uncertain. In the Cold War era, weapons of mass destruction (WMD) were one of the most serious threats to peace and the stability of the world; however, it is interesting to note that both the US and the USSR never actually used WMD to fight against each other during the Cold War. However, a number of states have sought to develop WMD in order to use them as strategic weapon. At the same time, the international community has realized that the terrorism is one of the most dangerous threats to peace and security in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Moreover, since September 11, 2001, the likelihood of the terrorists groups using WMD as their means to conduct mass casualties in fighting against the power of the US on their asymmetric warfare has increased. However, there is a continuing debate that the possibility of a terrorist attack using nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons as whether the prospect is realistic or exaggerates.

This essay will argue that terrorists are most likely to use WMD, which will be a threat to world security. It will define WMD definition and the possible impacts. It will examine the reasons they want to use WMD, and then the possibility of accessing WMD. It will present evidence that terrorists have already tried to access and use WMD. Finally, groups likely to use WMD and places and times of use will be considered.

Definition and the impacts of WMD

According to the UN reports, the weapons of mass destruction are defined as including types of weapons, such as radiological weapons or conventional weapons causing mass casualties. It also includes that nuclear weapons are the most potent of the Nuclear, biological and chemical and contaminate large areas with radioactive fallout. Biological and chemical weapons, on the other hand, do not destroy infrastructure Biological agents can potentially kill as many people as nuclear weapons, though they act more slowly than chemical or nuclear weapons and are difficult to deliver effectively. In contrast to Biological weapons, chemical weapon is well known as toxic weapons, which are made from materials that are usually readily and legally available in industrial sectors. Karasik (2002:11) define that “The most common types of dangerous materials used in toxic weapons are irritants, choking agents, flammable industrial gases, water supply contaminants, oxidizers, chemical asphyxiates, incendiary gases and liquids,

industrial compounds, and organophosphate pesticides. Various forms of toxic waste (e.g., petroleum spills, smoke, refuse, sewage, and medical waste) can also be used in toxic warfare.”

### **The reasons terrorist want to use WMD**

Many experts argue that using of WMD by terrorists groups is exaggerated. For example, O’neil (2004:99) point out that using WMD will be a lot problematic for terrorists. Meanwhile, Bowman and Barel (2003: 1) state that the possibility of causing greater numbers of casualties is likely to be desire not only by the extremist religious groups but also small terrorist cells. This can be achieved with WMD attacks. The international communities have recognized that the result of using WMD by terrorists will be disaster.

The nature and magnitude of the threat of terrorists using weapons of mass destruction are in terms of mass casualties’ desire, representing of new terrorism, fighting in reaction against American policies and globalization. Many scholars observe that the most significantly factors to influence terrorist seeking to acquire and to use such weapons are the mindset of leadership, opportunity and technical capacity. However, this essay will focus on the most important factors: the new terrorist groups and the anti-American policies and globalization aspect.

### **New terrorist groups**

Many experts have argued that since the 1980s, politics has been replaced by religion as the main motivation of terrorists. “This could lead some terrorist groups to have less constrained by society’s values and more willing to cause greater levels of violence than the traditional, politically motivated terrorists of the past.”(NTI, 2004) the newest terrorist groups are likely to consider the large-scale use of mass-casualty weapons in order to establish themselves.

As Rapport’s study (2003:13) states, the terrorist today is the fourth wave in which Islam is at the heart of the wave. Islamic groups have conducted the most significant deadly and frequency international attacks. Hudson (1999) argued that the groups most likely to use WMD are indeed religious groups.

Hudson (1999) stated that Psychologist B.J. Berkowitz (1972) describes six psychological types who are most likely to use WMD: paranoids, paranoid schizophrenics, borderline mental defectives, schizophrenic types, passive-aggressive personality types, and sociopath personalities. Hudson also pointed out that Berkowitz considers “sociopaths the most likely actually to use WMD.” Moores (2002:2) observes that current terrorist adversaries have no such psychosocial limitations, and it can be assumed that opportunities to own of weapons imply willingness to use it.

These days, it seems that the new terrorists seek more result by violence than the negotiation at the table. As Morgan (2004:30) cites the National Commission on Terrorism which quoted R. James Woolsey: "Today's terrorists don't want a seat at the table; they want to destroy the table and everyone sitting at it."

O'Neil (2004:99) and Daniel (2002:100) add that it is desirable for the new terrorist group to use WMD because they need more violence and mass casualties than those in the past. "These terrorist groups may still produce, possess, and disseminate weapons that are preferred for asymmetric warfare (biological or chemical)." (O'Neil: 105)

It is interesting to note that some terrorist groups believe that the more they can commit mass destruction, the more awareness there will be from the international community. It is very important to terrorists to influence the world audiences and make them aware of terrorist goals. They need to gain a successful objective so that the audience will receive and understand their messages. WMD would attract even more attention and help convey their messages to the world. (Gressang: 8)

#### Anti-American policies and globalization

In the context of anti-American policy, according to the US national security strategy in 2002, the preemptive policy of the US that came from a buildup of WMD of rogue states increased tensions in international security. The 2002's National strategy of the US allows the US to conduct preemptive strike anytime and anywhere to prevent attacks from enemy; for example, in Afghanistan and Iraq. (Guoliang, 2003: 138) Therefore, to react against the preemption policy from the US motivates terrorist groups to use WMD before the US conducting preemptive strike.

Cronin (2003:34) states that a characteristic of modern terrorism has been the relationship between political or ideological concepts and levels of terrorist activity internationally. He says that the broad political aim has been against "[1] Empires, (2) colonial powers, and (3) the U.S.-led international system marked by globalization."

Cronin (2003:38) also observes that the international community has to deal with two modern terrorist types: "the religious fanatics who are the terrorists and the far more politically motivated states, entities, and people who would support them because they feel powerless and left behind in a globalizing world." Morgan (2004:37) states that the process of globalization has introduce a self-interested and corrupting market culture to traditional communities. Many people, particularly the Muslim world, notice these changes as threatening their way of life.

It can be argued that globalization has provided a motivation for terrorism and has also facilitated methods for terrorist groups.

Believing that the Americanization has undermined Islamic way of life, terrorists wish to give message of anti-Americanism by conducting more violence. Gressang stated that;

“The dead among the terrorist’s victims are not the core audience, since their death eliminates their ability to act in accordance with the terrorist’s wishes. The terrorist’s core, or primary, audience is that group or entity which the terrorist believes he is ‘speaking’ to. Osama bin Laden might, for example, refer to Allah’s will and the need to liberate holy Muslim lands from occupation by infidels in justifying an attack on American facilities.” (Gressang:8)

### **Is it possible to access WMD?**

Knowledge of ‘how to build WMD’ is now freely available on the Internet. Furthermore, the collapse of USSR may allow terrorists to find the specialists and material on the black market. It is important to note those biological and chemical agents, which are the key ingredients, can be easily found in private industry sector. O’Neil (2004: 102) and Bowman (2002:9) point out that Toxic industrial chemicals such as chlorine or phosgene are easily available, and these agents do not require specialists to adapt for chemical weapons. It is interesting to note that “The more widely knowledge has been disseminated the more easily radical groups have found the information they would need to develop and implement their own WMD capability.” (Gressang, 2002:8)

Although the material is hard to find even in rogue states as they attract the preemption from the US if they are labeled as sponsor states, nuclear weapons are the preferable weapons of terrorist in term of mass destruction, and they are still seeking to acquire. It is also very difficult to hide stockpile and processing of WMD from the most powerful intelligence agencies like CIA. However, in terms of chemical and biological weapons, some scholars argue that there are several ways to produce and store such weapons. Moores (2002:1) states that it is possible to keep secret the production of biological and chemical weapons by use the “dual-use” concept. He maintains; “Biotechnology facilities used for lawful scientific projects can be reconfigured to produce biological weapons.”

WMD terrorism is not a new phenomenon. The use of WMD by terrorists has only been only four significant attacks in the last 25 years. Firstly, the incident was in 1984 in Oregon. A religious cult sought to depress voter turnout in a local election by contaminating salad with salmonella, and making at least 751 people were sick . In 1990, in northern Sri Lanka, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) attacked a Sri Lankan Armed Forces (SLAF) base with chlorine gas, so more than 60 military personnel are injured. Significantly, an attack on the

Tokyo subway with sarin gas occurred in 1995. Finally, anthrax attack was took place in the United States in 2001. (Parachini, 2003:6)

Most importantly, the use of CW by terrorists groups has provoked serious concern twice. The first was Aum shinrikyo used sarin gas in attack on Tokyo subway in 1995. (O'neil, 2004:102) Another incident was the 2001 anthrax attack in the US. As Moore's study (2002:1) found that:

In *Scientific American* it was reported that Dr. James Tour ordered enough chemicals to create 280 g of sarin, the nerve agent used in the Tokyo subway attack.<sup>3</sup> The chemicals were ordered from commercial chemical supply houses and shipped to Dr. Tour's home by overnight mail.

Perl (2005:11) show that media reports of varying credibility that Osama bin Laden has connected the WMD procurement game: a London Daily Telegraph (12/14/01) cites "long discussions" between bin Laden and Pakistani nuclear scientists concerning nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, The Hindustan Times (11/14/01) claims that a bin Laden agency tried to buy radioactive waste from an atomic power plant in Bulgaria and cites the September 1998 arrest in Germany of an alleged bin Laden associate on charges of trying to buy reactor fuel.

According to Bowman and Barel (2003:6), Bin Laden's motivation to use WMD appears obvious, and he has been seeking them for several times. In February 1999, National Security Advisor Sandy Berger stated that "We knew that Bin Laden was seeking chemical weapons," ...[and]... "We know that he worked with the Sudanese government to acquire chemical weapons." Bin Laden has also made some statements that prove his motivation to cause mass casualties. "In 1996 he said that the enemy should be fought with one's "best abilities" and in 1998 he said he did not differentiate between the military and civilians." Even though there is no strong evidence indicating that he and his group have already acquired WMD, his statements may assume that they intended to access to WMD. (Bowman and Barel, 2003:6) Holt and Carl (2005: 4) also present al Qaeda which shown in taped interview had initially planed to attack a nuclear plant in 2001. Sabotage to the nuclear facilities may result significant threat to the general public.

It is likely that the terrorist groups will gain access WMD in the future, particularly al-Qaeda groups.

### **Who, where and when terrorist will use WMD**

In order to estimate the likelihood of terrorists using WMD, the equation between capabilities and intentions or motivations equal probable threat and opportunities is also the most

important driving force of terrorists. (Capabilities + Intentions/Motivations + (Opportunities) = probable threat) Thus, the possibility of using WMD by terrorists is very high.

Capability consists of terrorist potential factor to acquire and store. As evidenced above, it seems that the terrorists have now achieved to find the ways to buy or to learn how to acquire substances and how to keep them. However, Gressang (2002:6) points out that the potential for terrorist use of mass-casualty weapons is unlikely for most terrorists groups. Yet, these days, it is likely that the terrorists have a potential way to produce WMD. In terms of intentions, it is obvious that new terrorism is an attempting to express their opposition to Americanization and globalization.

According to the equation between capabilities and intentions equal probable threat and opportunities is also the most important driven force of terrorists. Clearly, of the new terrorist groups, which are likely to use WMD, the al-Qaeda groups are most likely because they have a potential means to acquire and keep them secret. Also they gave many signals that they would use WMD to fight against the west, particularly the US. In addition, the U.S. intelligence community has long reported that al-Qaeda is attempting to acquire this type of weapons capability. Importantly, it is a little doubt that terrorists would use WMD attacks the US if they could get them.

Next, the US soil may not target of using WMD by terrorists because they are well cooperation and protection. It is likely that terrorists may change targets to others countries or the US interest, where they do not have means to protect themselves or lack experience to deal with sophisticated terrorist groups. Apart from soft targets as it seems that everywhere around the world are vulnerable. Gressang (p.8) argues that terrorist attacks are not random, and each attack serves a purpose both tactically and strategically. The potential targets by terrorists may be vulnerable to nuclear Power plant because the intermediate damages, the releasing of large amount of radioactive fission products, which cause both short-term and long-term illness and death directly.

Chemical and biological weapons are a reality. There are many signals that terrorists recognize that they are in possession of a potent new weapon as a viable weapon for achieving their goals. According to Schwartz and Falk (2003:10), the use of chemical weapons provides many advantages to terrorists including the limited ability to detect such weapons; the low cost required to develop them, the terrifying psychological effect on the population, and potential damage. They state that:

Chemical weapons have long been considered "the poor man's atomic bomb" for their relative low cost and ease of manufacture compared to an atomic bomb.

Attacking by chemical weapons can be potentially very harmful. Although these weapons depend on some factors: location, weather conditions or material employed, the range is very wide from a few injured or dead to as many as thousands. Schwartz and Falk (2003:11) also claim that biological agents and infectious diseases will bring the panic, disorder and mass casualties that characterize modern terrorism.

### **Conclusion**

The likelihood of the smaller independent terrorists groups using WMD as their means to conduct mass casualties in fighting against the west is small. However, it is very credible that the al-Qaeda groups will be able to use WMD on their asymmetric warfare. Due to the probable threat is to be considered in terms of terrorist capabilities to acquire WMD and the motivation and intention of new terrorist groups. The attackers are also less likely to be controlled by moral issues of warfare. Also, the attackers have wider windows of opportunity than defenders. Thus, it is more likely that terrorist groups might access and use WMD if they could get the chances. Although, in general, WMD are expensive, complex, and difficult to produce and use, which means in the next few years, the world still secure from the terrorist using WMD, in the future, it is likely that terrorist groups will have the capability to strike with such weapons causing millions of casualties, and various scale in countries, which have close relationships with the US. Also, time is not matter, whenever al-Qaeda already has WMD and whenever they can find the unprotected target. This terrorist group will do to achieve their aims in term of mass casualties.

## References

Andrew O'Neil, 2003, '*Terrorist use of weapons of mass destruction: how serious is the threat?*', Australian Journal of International Affairs, Vol. 57, No. 1, pp. 99–112

Audry Kurth Cronin, '*Behind the Curve: Globalization and International Terrorism*', International Security Vol.27, No.3, Winter 2002/3, pp.30-58

Daniel S. Gressang, 2002, '*Audience and Message: Assessing Terrorist WMD Potential*', TERRORISM AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE, vol. 13, no. 3, Summer, 2001, p. 83-106

David C. Rapport, 2003, '*Generation and Waves: the Keys to understanding Rebel Terror Movements*', Conference Paper, p.13

Gu Guoliang, 2003, '*Redefine Cooperative Security, Not Preemption*', The Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, The Washington Quarterly Vol.26, No.2, pp. 135–145

Leon E. Moores, 2002, '*Threat credibility and weapons of mass destruction*', Neurosurg. Focus Vol.12, p.2

Lugar, Richard G., '*Redefining NATO's Mission: Preventing WMD Terrorism*', The Washington Quarterly Vol. 25, no. 3, summer 2002, pp.7-14

Matthew J. Morgan, 2004, '*The Origins of the New Terrorism*', Parameters, Spring 2004, pp. 29-43.

'*Nuclear Terrorism*', The Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies, <[http://www.nti.org/f\\_wmd411/f1a6\\_4.html](http://www.nti.org/f_wmd411/f1a6_4.html)>, [Accessed May 20, 2005]

Raphael Perl, 2005, '*Terrorism and National Security: Issues and Trends*', CRS Report for Congress, p.11

Rex A. Hudson, 1999, '*The Sociology and Psychology of Terrorism: Who Becomes a Terrorist and Why?*', A Report Prepared under an Interagency Agreement by the Federal Research Division, Library of Congress

Steve Bowman and Helit Barel, 2003, '*Weapons of Mass Destruction — the Terrorist Threat*', CRS Report for Congress, USA, pp.1-6

Steve Bowman, 2002, '*Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Terrorist Threat*', CRS Report for Congress, USA, p.9

Theodore Karasik ,2002 , '*Toxic warfare*', Prepared for the United States Air Force, Approved for public release, RAND, USAF, pp.11-13