

# WMD Proliferation Trends and Challenges

Presentation by John Sullivan  
Assistant Secretary, Arms Control  
and Counter-Proliferation Branch  
Department of Foreign Affairs and  
Trade, Canberra

# Introduction

Spread of WMD and their delivery systems a major threat to international peace and security.

- Challenge of WMD proliferation recognised by UN Security Council in Resolution 1540
  - and by APEC Leaders in 2003.

# Key proliferation trends

- A number of states have sought to assert power by developing weapons of mass destruction or the capacity to produce such weapons.
  - North Korea declared in February 2005 that it has produced nuclear weapons
  - Iran has failed to meet its NPT safeguards obligations
- Some counter-proliferation successes
  - South Africa, Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan renounced nuclear weapons in the early 1990s and joined the NPT.
  - Libya renounced its clandestine nuclear weapons program in December 2003.

- But proliferation risks continues through
  - Weak physical security for nuclear facilities and materials
  - Expanding industrial and technological capacities
  - North Korea and Syria are suspected of maintaining stocks of chemical weapons

# Missiles

- Delivery systems increase the threat of weapons of mass destruction, especially ballistic missiles.
- 11 states currently possess medium-range, intermediate range and/or intercontinental ballistic missiles.
- Another 13 states possess short-range ballistic missiles.

# Impact of export controls

- Multilateral arms control regimes are essential to non-proliferation
  - But are not completely effective in stemming illicit trade in WMD-related materials
  - Export controls fill this gap.

# Secondary proliferation

- Globalisation and industrialisation are challenging export controls
  - And the number of potential suppliers of dual-use goods is increasing
  - Leading to proliferation activity outside the reach of existing export control frameworks.

# Terrorism and WMD

- Terrorists have shown an interest in chemical, biological and radiological weapons
  - So far, few groups have the specialist knowledge or resources
  - But the ready availability of dual-use chemical and biological agents means that such attacks cannot be ruled out.

# Intangible technology transfer

- Knowledge of WMD-related technologies can be accessed through postgraduate study and research
  - Usually extremely difficult to distinguish between genuine research and 'knowledge shopping'
  - The Internet has also increased the availability of WMD-related information.

# Covert break-out capability

- Defensive chemical and biological weapons research presents a 'break-out capability'.
- This is of particular concern in regions of instability.

# Circumvention of Export Controls

- Proliferators seek to exploit weak links in export controls.
- Potential for diversion through transshipment and re-export.
- Proliferation Security Initiative one means for disrupting weapons of mass destruction trade.

# Conclusion

- Main proliferation challenges:
  - Non-compliance with international non-proliferation obligations
  - Weapons of mass destruction and terrorism
  - Illicit WMD trade and secondary proliferation
  - Balancing the peaceful use of nuclear technology with proliferation risks.

- To remain effective, export controls will need to address these challenges
  - Proliferation is a global challenge
  - The success of export controls will depend on the combined commitment of as many countries as possible.