



A CLOSER LOOK INSIDE THE NATIONAL COUNTERPROLIFERATION CENTER

THE NATION'S INTEGRATED LINE
OF DEFENSE AGAINST THE
WORLD'S SCARIEST THREATS

“The American people face no greater or more urgent danger than a terrorist attack with a nuclear weapon. That is why reversing the spread of nuclear weapons is a top priority.”

Those dreadful words appeared in the 2010 U.S. National Security Strategy.

In 2014, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper explained to Congress how the situation had grown more frightening in just four years: “The time when only a few states had access to the most dangerous technologies is past. Biological and chemical materials and technologies, almost always dual use, move easily in the globalized economy, as do personnel with scientific expertise to design and use them.”

The Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) threat continues to grow every year. That’s why, since 2005, the National Counterproliferation Center has served as the U.S., and the world’s, line of defense to counter the threats that stem from the development, spread and possession (aka proliferation) of chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons and their delivery systems. NCPC leads the Intelligence Community’s efforts to identify and close critical intelligence gaps

from shortfalls in collection, analysis or exploitation. In other words, the Center ensures that the counterproliferation community provides key analysis on existing WMD programs around the world and monitors over-the-horizon threats from states or terrorist organizations that are believed to be actively working to acquire them. Policymakers use this information to shape vital decisions that impact United States foreign policies, initiatives and diplomatic relationships around the world.

“NCPC’s number one goal is to reduce the threat that WMD pose to the United States,” said NCPC Director Maja Lehnus. “My job is to integrate and synchronize the efforts of the various elements of the CP community.”

Lehnus, who is departing from her post this month, has spent more than 20 years serving in a wide range of technical and management positions within the CP and WMD mission areas. According to her, the increase in demand for greenhouse gas emission-free power has made it increasingly more difficult to detect WMD, or the intent to develop WMD.

“An increasing number of nation states are seeking the use of nuclear power technology to generate electricity,” said Lehnus. “The challenge is detecting or knowing when these states move from an agenda of developing civil nuclear-energy capabilities to developing nuclear weapons.”

Yet, given this challenge, Lehnus added that NCPC has made significant progress in detecting and monitoring foreign WMD-related activities, and has used insights gained from those activities to support WMD crisis-related efforts and to inform CP initiatives and decisions. In fact, NCPC’s efforts in support of the elimination of Syria’s declared program was one of the most significant CP successes of the past decade.

When it became clear that Arab Spring-related unrest could radically change the security situation in Syria, NCPC started to oversee the IC’s efforts to monitor the security posture and track Syria’s chemical warfare-associated materials. When the first reports of regime preparations to use chemical weapons began to emerge in 2012, the IC surged efforts to detect and attribute the alleged use of chemical weapons, while supporting the administration’s bilateral, multilateral and public outreach efforts.

The IC’s intelligence activities in the region were put to the test in the days following Aug. 21, 2013—the day the IC concluded with high confidence that the Syrian regime conducted an attack in the Damascus suburbs with the nerve agent sarin.

As a result of the pressure applied by the U.S. and other nations, the Syrian regime ultimately declared and agreed to destroy its chemical weapons. NCPC assumed leadership over Community efforts to support international inspection, verification and elimination activities. In June 2014, the last shipment of Syria's declared stockpile was removed, and in August the most dangerous components were destroyed aboard a U.S. ship.

“The elimination of Syria’s declared program was made possible, because of the close partnership and integration with members of the IC who worked closely to support WMD security, attribution, inspection and destruction monitoring efforts,” said Lehnus. “The end result of these activities was the successful removal and/or destruction of more than 1,300 tons of chemicals, hundreds of empty chemical weapons and numerous production facilities.”

NCPC’s work on the Syrian chemical weapons threat is not complete, however. The U.S. and its allies continue to support international organizations to verify the completeness and accuracy of Syria’s Chemical Weapons Convention declaration, and the IC (with the leadership of NCPC) continues to support investigations into ongoing allegations of regime’s use of toxic chemicals including chlorine.

“Our country remains vigilant in our determination to eliminate the threats caused by the development, spread and possession WMD, along with the risk they pose if these weapons fall into the hands of non-state actors,” said Lehnus. “And without significant notoriety or fanfare, the men and women of NCPC will continue to work in virtual anonymity each day to lead the Community’s efforts to reduce that threat.”

For more information about NCPC visit CounterWMD.gov.