

Nuclear Terrorism and Counter Proliferation: Issues and Concerns

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How safe are your nuclear weapons and fissile materials from falling into the hands of terrorists and cult groups? How strong are your governments and its policies to prevent such a dreaded scenario? Do the governments have enough protective measures to keep those elements away from your nuclear weapons? Dr. Scott Sagan, Professor of Political Science and Director, Center for International Security and Cooperation, Stanford University, USA aired these chilling and disturbing questions in the presence of experts, intellectuals and academics in the field of national security and strategy. He was talking at the seminar on "Counter Proliferation and Nuclear Terrorism Issues and Concerns" conducted by the Centre on 8th March, 2003.

Dr. Scott Sagan an academic expert in counter nuclear proliferation issues revealed that terrorist organisations are very much closer to acquire the nuclear weapons or crude nuclear devices and there should be greater co-operation required to strengthen the counter measures between nations. Nuclear weapon states need to make policies and ensure that weapons of mass destruction do not go into the hands of non-state actors and instable states. One of the biggest problems in the nuclear terrorism is the safety of Pakistani nuclear weapons. The Al-Qaida presence in the Pakistani government and in its military has been causing great concerns among world countries. The issue lies in the matter of how to ensure the Pakistani nuclear weapons are kept in the hands of responsible officers and not stolen by the terrorists. Sagan observes 'if the Osama Bin Laden or some groups had already acquired such weapons that represented the worst case scenario'. If the terrorists could possess crude nuclear devices, they could use those weapons of mass destruction against innocent people anywhere in the world. They can use those weapons from many platforms like transport planes, cargo ships and missiles.

If Iran and Saudi Arabia pursue the idea of making nuclear weapons, counter proliferation measures in the Middle East would become problematic. That scenario would be more worse than the Iraqi programme of weapons of mass destruction. In the North Korean case there is no way to ensure the country would not sell its plutonium; it is a state which have already sold its military hard wares to other states.

US had offered help to store Pakistani nuclear weapons in more secure places to avoid undesirable events. But the Pakistani response wasn't encouraging. The first line of defence, should be to prevent these terrorists from getting anywhere near nuclear weapons and nuclear powers should co-operate more in this regard.