

Junkyard dogs of war (Ukraine)

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At a sprawling, run-down industrial complex in Donetsk, Ukraine, weeds grow along a rusty rail spur that winds among World War II-era warehouses and factories. Little security is evident, and the facility looks like a giant junkyard.

In a way, it is - except the "junk" consists of thousands of tons of live military munitions. When we went there last summer, we saw mortar rounds, land mines and artillery shells of all sizes stacked in huge piles and strewn carelessly about.

Sold on the black market, these conventional weapons could end up in the hands of terrorists or militant extremists anywhere in the world. Donetsk is only one of several ill-secured stockpiles of conventional weapons in Ukraine, a major dumping ground for weapons, and there are perhaps scores more in dozens of countries around the world.

These vast numbers of unused conventional weapons, particularly shoulder-fired antiaircraft missiles that can hit civilian airliners, pose a major security risk to America and democracies everywhere. That's why we have introduced legislation to seek out and destroy surplus and unguarded stocks of conventional arms in Asia, Europe, Latin America, Africa and the Middle East.

Our bill would launch a major nonproliferation initiative by addressing the growing threat from unsecured conventional weapons and by bolstering a key line of defense against weapons of mass destruction. Modeled after the successful Nunn-Lugar program to dismantle former Soviet nuclear weapons, the Lugar-Obama bill would seek to build cooperative relationships with willing countries.

One part of our initiative would strengthen and energize the U.S. program against unsecured lightweight antiaircraft missiles and other conventional weapons, a program that has for years been woefully underfunded. There may be as many as 750,000 missiles, known formally as man-portable air defense systems, in arsenals worldwide. The State Department estimates that more than 40 civilian aircraft have been hit by such weapons since the 1970s. Three years ago terrorists fired missiles at - and missed - a jetliner full of Israeli tourists taking off from Mombasa, Kenya. In 2003 a civilian cargo plane taking off from Baghdad was struck but landed safely.

Loose stocks of small arms and other weapons also help fuel civil wars in Africa and elsewhere and, as we have seen repeatedly, provide ammunition for those who attack peacekeepers and aid workers seeking to stabilize and rebuild war-torn societies. The Lugar-Obama measure would also seek to get rid of artillery shells like those used in the improvised roadside bombs that have proved so deadly to U.S. forces in Iraq.

Some foreign governments have already sought U.S. help in eliminating their stocks of lightweight antiaircraft missiles and millions of tons of excess weapons and ammunition. But low budgets and insufficient leadership have hampered destruction. Our legislation would require the administration to develop a response commensurate with the threat, consolidating scattered programs at the State Department into a single Office of Conventional Weapons Threat Reduction. It also calls for a fivefold increase in spending in this area, to \$25 million - a relatively modest sum that would offer large benefits to U.S. security.

The other part of the legislation would strengthen the ability of America's friends and allies to detect and intercept illegal shipments of weapons of mass destruction or material that could be used in a nuclear, chemical or biological weapon. Stopping weapons of mass destruction in transit is an important complement to our first line of defense, the Nunn-Lugar program, which aims to eliminate weapons of mass destruction at their source.

We cannot do this alone. We need the vigilance of like-minded nations, and the existing Proliferation Security Initiative can enlist their help. But while the Proliferation Security Initiative has been successful in creating cooperative arrangements, many of our partners lack the capability to detect hidden weapons and interdict shipments. Our bill would address that gap.

The legislation would create an office at the State Department to support detection and intervention regarding weapons of mass destruction. It would set aside \$110 million to start up the program and proposes an innovative use of our current assistance to other nations: The president would ensure that countries receiving foreign military financing to purchase U.S. equipment use 25 percent of the funds on interdicting weapons of mass destruction. This offers a potent but flexible tool to build a robust international network for detecting and interdicting weapons of mass destruction.

A thorough, multifaceted nonproliferation strategy is essential to fully defend the American people. The Nunn-Lugar program has provided a solid foundation, valuable experience and measurable results. With the Lugar-Obama legislation, we could take the next critical step forward to reshape, refocus and reinvigorate our country's nonproliferation mission.

Richard G. Lugar is a Republican senator from Indiana and chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. Barack Obama is a Democratic senator from Illinois.

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