



wmdcenter.ndu.edu

PROCEEDINGS

The Proliferation Security Initiative in 2017: U.S. Interagency Perspectives

July 2017

By Joanna M. Gabryszewski

In 2003, President George W. Bush unveiled the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) in a speech in Krakow, Poland. The initiative was announced as a commitment among endorsing nations to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their delivery systems. What started with 11 like-minded nations that endorsed the PSI Statement of Interdiction Principles had grown to 105 endorsers in 2016. This was achieved without treaties, ratifications, or other formal agreements as a basis for membership. The initiative continues to be based on a political commitment rather than on legal obligations. In the United States, what started in a Republican administration under President Bush continued to be supported by a Democratic administration led by President Barack Obama. With his Prague speech in April 2009, President Obama reiterated U.S. support of the PSI as an essential tool in U.S. foreign policy for fighting WMD proliferation.

After 14 years and with a new administration, it is an ideal time to assess the PSI and consider its future in U.S. nonproliferation foreign policy. Key questions include whether and how PSI engagement with other endorsers has helped in the fight against WMD proliferation and whether it is useful to continue conducting PSI exercises and workshops. Is it time

to take a different direction in the PSI? Is the PSI adequately resourced, and does it have sufficient support from the White House, senior leadership, and Congress? This whole-of-government study assesses the health, status, and impending future of the PSI from the perspective of the implementers. Findings from this study are intended to inform the U.S. Government PSI community on the current status of the PSI and possible options for advancing the initiative in the future to more effectively adapt to increasing and evolving challenges of international WMD proliferation. The findings are also intended to inform early preparations for the U.S. participation at the 15th anniversary of the PSI in France in 2018.

The purpose of this study was to gain a whole-of-government assessment of the PSI from the perspective of U.S. implementers. The work and analysis for this study were conducted at the National Defense University, Center for the Study of WMD (NDU/CSWMD), which facilitated direct engagement with experts and operators involved in the PSI as well as other interagency partners and outside experts. The CSWMD perch provided an impartial vantage point from which to conduct research, analyze the data, and make recommendations. One-on-one interviews were conducted to collect baseline responses to a series of survey questions

Joanna M. Gabryszewski is a Senior Foreign Affairs Officer at the U.S. Department of State. Previously, she was a Senior Fellow in the Center for the Study of Weapons of Mass Destruction, Institute for National Strategic Studies, at the National Defense University.

pertaining to the PSI and respondents' experiences with the initiative. The interviews were conducted on a nonattribution basis and at the unclassified level. The accompanying textbox lists participating U.S. Government agencies in the study.

Observations

The PSI is widely supported by the U.S. interagency and the combatant commands. Support is evident at all levels within agencies—from program planning and implementation to the policy and leadership/decisionmaker levels. The PSI is regarded as a relevant and important tool to help fight WMD proliferation that should continue into the new administration.

Despite acknowledging its value, the interagency does not credit the PSI for directly curbing WMD proliferation. Rather, the PSI builds partner capacity and is considered one of many nonproliferation tools that the United States should continue to support. While it is just one of the tools available, the PSI provides a “big bang for the buck,” given its relatively low cost to implement (in the sense that there is no dedicated funding, which can be argued as both a virtue and a vice for PSI), ease for participation, and its wide base of international support.

The PSI is a diplomatic endeavor and, as such, it is difficult to assign metrics for and measure its successes. PSI accomplishments cannot be measured by typical Government Accountability Office forms of measurements. Interdictions, for example, are not a measurement of PSI performance. While the PSI helps build interdiction capacities and capabilities and the willingness of partners to respond to interdiction requests, the PSI cannot directly be linked to or be credited for any given interdiction.

Leadership and Focus

Challenges to the PSI are both internal and external and come in many forms. For the U.S. Government, a perceived lack of clear direction and objectives for the future of PSI by some interagency representatives is a fundamental issue. Nondedicated funding for PSI activities sometimes precludes full U.S. interagency participation in events, complicates planning, and threatens sustainability

U.S. Agencies Participating in This Study

National Security Council: WMD Terrorism and Threat Reduction

State Department: Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation

Department of Defense: Office of the Secretary of Defense/Policy/Transnational Threats, Defense Threat Reduction Agency, Joint Staff (J5); U.S. Southern Command

Department of Homeland Security: Customs and Border Protection, U.S. Coast Guard

Department of Commerce: Bureau of Industry and Security

Department of Treasury: Terrorist Financing and Financial Crimes

Federal Bureau of Investigation

National Defense University: Center for the Study of WMD

of future activity. Externally, increasingly complex methods of proliferation challenge PSI endorsers to stay current on effective approaches and techniques to help impede WMD proliferation. Proliferation finance, additive manufacturing, intangible transfers, and cyber threats increasingly pose challenges to WMD nonproliferation. PSI dialogues and workshops must propose methods to address these challenges. For the PSI endorsers who are not major transshipment hubs or do not have robust ports, maintenance of a ready posture on PSI—both bureaucratically and tactfully—is difficult. Reliance on those countries for a possible interdiction can be uncertain.

A number of misconceptions about the PSI have not dissipated even after 14 years of the endorsers' efforts to do so. The number-one misconception is that the PSI operates outside of international and national laws. There is also mistrust

that the PSI community is targeting nonendorsers for possible misdeeds. A misconception about PSI operating as a block, like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and being led by the United States also continues to resonate among key nonendorsing states. Some U.S. Government agency representatives and PSI-endorsing nations wrongly believe that consistent, annual funds for PSI are available from dedicated appropriations funds. Another misconception that some potential endorsers have is that involvement in the PSI will be too expensive for their country. Some misunderstand the PSI as a military-focused initiative, while others believe that the PSI is restricted to marine-related activities.

While the interagency supports the informal and flexible nature of the PSI and credits that nature with its success and endurance, the lack of defined long-term objectives or distinct U.S. strategic goals for the PSI is a disconcerting factor. For Department of Defense PSI implementers in particular, the lack of PSI strategic guidance complicates long-term exercise and workshop planning and execution. Some interagency members proposed building a degree of structure into the current PSI while keeping it an “initiative” versus a formal organization as a way to help guide its future. The Operational Experts Group is the likely place to initiate those changes.

The following recommendations are proposed:

- ◆ Reaffirmation of White House support for the PSI as a Presidential Initiative within the first months of the new administration is imperative for the PSI to maintain its relevance and importance in both the U.S. Government and in the international community. White House affirmation will help keep the PSI a priority for existing and potential PSI endorsers.
- ◆ Without a clear U.S. strategy and defined objectives for the PSI, sustenance may be in question. The United States needs to define the policy and justification for emphasizing the PSI as a component of U.S. nonproliferation foreign policy in the new administration. Clear objectives for the PSI will help clarify roles and actions to be undertaken by the interagency and the combatant commands and will help yield more fruitful PSI dialogues, exercises, and workshops.

- ◆ While certain PSI endorsers have stepped up their activity in recent years—namely Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, Italy, and France—the burden of leadership for the initiative will likely to continue to fall disproportionately upon the United States. With this understanding, Washington must be prepared to offer assistance to both endorsing and nonendorsing states to participate in the PSI dialogues and activities.
- ◆ Regionally focused PSI efforts may provide the next phase of PSI expansion. Leveraging the initiative on a regional basis could result in increased nonproliferation awareness and dialogue not previously realized. Conducting regional exercises and workshops would lower costs, facilitate a venue for regional discussion of nonproliferation challenges and vulnerabilities, help build on regional PSI capabilities and capacities, and assist countries to fulfill their United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1540 nonproliferation commitments and obligations. The United States, along with other PSI endorsers, should continue to encourage regional leadership roles to help further PSI activities on a regional basis.

Funding

The availability of dedicated funding for the PSI is a divisive issue for the U.S. interagency implementers. The division is based more on the rank of the official rather than the agency. Policy and leadership/decisionmaker-level representatives do not favor dedicated, annual appropriations for the PSI. This group supports the status quo of funding PSI activities from existing non-PSI-specific monies and argues that easier access to funds does not in itself justify a regular PSI appropriation. Moreover, this group believes that dedicated funding would bring greater undesirable scrutiny to the PSI and could threaten the initiative’s survival if program cuts were to be made by the new administration.

Those supporting dedicated annual funding believe that appropriated PSI funds would raise the perceived importance of the initiative in the fight against WMD proliferation. To justify funding, clear objectives for the PSI would need to be defined—providing welcome clarity for the interagency and combatant commands that support it. References to

“taking out of hide,” “PSI beggars,” and “passing the tin cup” were made when describing challenges the agencies experienced when determining whether to support a PSI activity. Any PSI-related expense incurred by the U.S. interagency is currently taken from another funding appropriation. Consequently, the U.S. interagency has the choice of taking funds from another program at the expense of that program, requesting funding for its participation from another agency (for example, Defense Threat Reduction Agency), or not supporting the PSI activity. Program planners find the uncertainty of available funding difficult and stressful for planning PSI events with other endorsing nations. A near consensus of those supporting dedicated PSI funding believes PSI appropriations should be divided between the State Department and the Department of Defense. The funds would be managed by both agencies and provided on an ad hoc basis to the interagency when requested to support PSI activities.

The following recommendations are proposed:

- ◆ While it is a divisive issue, dedicated annually appropriated funds for the PSI should be given thoughtful consideration by senior leadership and Congress. Regularly available funding would help facilitate reliable long-term PSI planning, assure proper U.S. interagency representation at PSI activities, provide for targeted PSI outreach, and assure U.S. assistance to countries to help build PSI capacity and capability.
- ◆ Given the financial burden, the United States should explore minimizing costs for PSI activities by adopting innovative methods for conducting activities. Alternative approaches may include conducting PSI dialogues through webinars or on the sidelines of other nonproliferation dialogues, and through regionally-based exercises and workshops.

Activities

There is no set formula for increasing PSI activity among endorsers. The United States must be clear about why the PSI is important and what we hope to gain from other countries' endorsement of it. The original intent for the PSI was to help make countries receptive and ready to do an interdiction when the need arose. While that intent continues

to be the basis for the PSI, the initiative has evolved to provide a greater platform for WMD nonproliferation dialogue and engagement across interagency and military avenues. Understanding an individual endorsing country's priority would be helpful for the United States to assess how to engage it with regard to the PSI—capacity building, assisting to fulfill UNSCR 1540 obligations, and so forth. Above all else, countries need to believe the PSI is relevant to them and that they benefit from it. The United States and partnering PSI endorsers must be prepared to assist nonactive PSI endorsers by providing assistance both in funding and in sharing expertise for greater participation. Promoting regional partnerships between current and potential PSI endorsers may also increase participation and the number of new endorsers.

There is no value in pursuing a PSI “name and shame” tactic (public censure for an endorser state's inactivity in the PSI or for its unfulfilled PSI activities or tasks). Possible fallout of this approach may result in further decreases in participation and act as a deterrent for potential future endorsers. Diplomacy behind the scenes conducted in a less public manner to help reorient and reinvigorate an endorser's participation is a preferable and more professional method to engage and “nudge” nonperformers.

The following recommendations are proposed:

- ◆ Evolving cyber and technology advances will continue to challenge the nonproliferation community. In order for the PSI to play an impactful counterproliferation role, it must also evolve by staying current on potential threats and methods for combating them. A possible avenue for achieving that goal is to leverage related counterproliferation knowledge, expertise, and resources across the interagency. Infusing PSI exercises and workshops with up-to-date security assessments and sharing best practices from lessons learned from law enforcement, customs, finance, and technology experts would help assure that the PSI stays current and effective.
- ◆ While being conscious of U.S. and host PSI nation security interests, placing a greater spotlight on PSI international dialogues, exercises, and workshops would help bring greater awareness of the initiative's value in fighting WMD proliferation to nonendorser states. It also would help dispel misconceptions about the

initiative. Ultimately, a more inclusive and stronger PSI community would help better achieve PSI objectives to fight WMD proliferation.

Summary

The U.S. interagency community considers the PSI an important and enduring tool to help fight the proliferation of WMD. The Statement of Interdiction Principles is as relevant today as it was in 2003. The PSI's longevity has helped send a message to would-be proliferators that WMD proliferation will not be tolerated. The basis of PSI's support can be largely attributed to its guiding principles—a voluntary, political commitment to an activity that aims to counter the proliferation threat but operates without a formal structure or designated leadership.

In its 14-year tenure, the PSI has proven itself to be of value and an important policy salient to interdictions with other nations. More countries are now participating and leading PSI events than in recent years. The United States has been a major contributor to that effort. However, the PSI is only one of several ongoing activities and actions in the big interdiction window. Endorsers must perceive a continued value in the PSI to warrant ongoing involvement in it. Given the evolving WMD threat, the future of PSI's value must include an assessment of threats for enhanced readiness and capability for conducting interdictions.

While important and relevant in 2017, the PSI finds itself at a crossroads at the beginning of a new U.S. administration. It is unclear what support the PSI will receive from Donald Trump. A defined U.S. strategy that articulates PSI's role in U.S. security policy objectives would be helpful to capture the new administration's backing for the initiative. Without White House support, PSI's prominence in the future is likely to wane and lead to a loss of its momentum and importance with the U.S. Government and in the international community. PSI membership and endorsement are simple ways for a nation to play its part in fighting the proliferation of WMD and for helping it comply with its requirements under UNSCR 1540. We need to maximize every tool we have to fight the WMD proliferation war. The PSI serves as one important component of that effort.

The mission of the Center for the Study of Weapons of Mass Destruction is to prepare U.S. national security leaders to address the challenges posed by weapons of mass destruction through its education, research, and outreach programs.

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

Mr. Charles D. Lutes
Director

The Proceedings series presents key discussions, ideas, and conclusions from National Defense University symposia, workshops, strategic exercises and other research, and occasionally those of international counterparts. The opinions, conclusions, and recommendations expressed or implied within are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Defense or any other agency of the Federal Government. For information on NDU Press, visit www.ndu.edu/press.

