

International Affairs Forum Interview

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By Erik Brattberg



Alyson J.K. Bailes is the Director of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). Before that she served 32 years in the British Diplomatic Service, many of the positions involving arms control, security policy and defense related matters. In 1994-1996 she was head of the FCO Security Policy Department and from 1997 to June 2000 Political Director of the Brussels-based European defense institution, Western European Union. In 2002, she resigned from the Diplomatic Service to take up her current position at SIPRI. Apart from her work there, Alyson Bailes have also served as a commissioner for the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission (WMDC).

International Affairs Forum: You have served as the Director of Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) since 2002. Could you start by telling us a bit about your organization and its areas of research?

Alyson J.K. Bailes: Okay, SIPRI is one of the older peace research institutes and it was founded 40 years ago, in 1966. It has a mission of what was originally called “scientific research” on peace and international security, and the way that has always been interpreted is that we tend to look at concrete aspects of the problems rather than philosophical ones. We look at things out here in the world that can be quantified such as military budgets, military expenditure, arms transfers, the number of conflicts in the world and the cost of those conflicts and so on. We also look at very political topics like the development of the EU, NATO, UN and individual peace interventions and how they work out. Another big aspect of our work is looking at every aspect of arms control and disarmament but also non-proliferation and export control. In that field of arms control research, our approach is also really quite pragmatic and based on what works rather than a devotion to any particular treaty or mechanism.

IA-Forum: SIPRI recently launched its annual yearbook, which contains data and analysis of the developments in the areas you just mentioned. Could you tell us about what some of the main findings in the 2006 edition were?

Bailes: Sure, what always catches the attention of the media is the figure from military spending, and they actually continue to be quite dramatic. Last year we went over the 1 trillion dollars mark for the entire global military spending. If you look at it as a curve on a graph, we have actually got that pretty near the Cold War level of spending and just about half of that is accounted for by the United States. It

is also the very rapid rate of growth in the US military budget that is causing this appearance of global growth. Although it is fair to say that other powers like China and Russia are also increasing their spending and there has been an increase from some Middle Eastern and Latin American countries as well, which we think is partly caused by their recent growth in oil revenues.

Of course, there is a lot more behind that; one of the interesting findings of this year was that arms production and arms trade have now also started to show a clear upward trend for the first time in quite a while because they were considerably depressed by the end of the Cold War, and I think it is fairly obvious that this is a delayed response to the increased amount of money actually being spent for warlike purposes. Some of that, of course, is going on operation but some of it is going to the further buildup of arsenal, and that does seem to be stimulating arms production.

IA-Forum: Apart from your position at SIPRI, you have also served as one of the 13 commissioners of the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission (WMDC) led by former UN chief weapons inspector, Dr. Hans Blix. Could you briefly tell us about the commission and your work there?

Bailes: The WMDC was set up two and half years ago as a unilateral initiative by the Swedish government. It was about the same time as the EU was developing its strategy against WMD, and I think the Swedes felt that they would like an independent group to come up with some ideas, perhaps more ambitious and far-reaching than what the EU collectively were likely to go for. I thought myself that was a very useful thing to do, partly because the mandate of the group were so comprehensive. It was not just to comment on nuclear non-proliferation, but it was supposed to look at all types of WMD, such as chemical, biological, missiles, means of delivery. It was also meant to look at the so-called recognized nuclear powers and what is going on with their nuclear weapons and not just cases like Iran or North Korea.

IA-Forum: Recently, in its final report, *Weapons of Terror*, the WMDC also presented 60 recommendations for making the world more secure and for fastening the process of achieving global disarmament. Which ones out of all these recommendations do you find to be most important for reaching this goal?

Bailes: You know, I think one of the interesting things about the commission was that we openly recognized that some of us were more attached to certain recommendations than others, and we had a very democratic process to work out, on average, which were the ones we all thought were most important. Among the 60 recommendations, I must say that I'm personally more drawn towards the ones where we could do something in a short-term perspective. I agree with some of the more visionary ones that we have to keep on searching for ways to get rid of nuclear weapons, we have to consider concluding new treaties, we have to bring into force the treaties we have. I totally agree with all of that but I'm also very intrigued by things that can be done here and now by everybody without treaties. So I'm very interested, for instance, in improvements of nuclear safety, nuclear security, bio-

safety and bio-security. That's not politically contentious either, but seems to be something all countries can work on.

IA-Forum: One of the things which is often brought up that could be done in the short-term would be to arrange a UN summit on disarmament of WMD. Do you think having such a world conference would be a good idea?

Bailes: I have come around to thinking this is quite a good idea if we don't do it in too much of a hurry, and the way that the UN works is that it takes several years to arrange such a thing anyway. So I think that if you give it a good couple of years to organize it and you try to make sure that it is comprehensive in the way that the WMDC report itself is comprehensive... And in fact – as the WMDC report suggests – one of the points of having such a meeting is to address the way the UN machinery handles the problem of arms control, which none of us can pretend is right at the moment or is working at the moment. There are big stoppages and wastes of resources going on, especially in the committee of disarmament in Geneva. So if we can do this as a kind of inclusive comprehensive summit, as a fresh pragmatic start and not just a chance to throw rocks at each other, it could actually be an excellent idea!

IA-Forum: Another recommendation put forth by the WMDC report stressed that all countries must ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). You don't think there's a risk that when having states, such as India and Pakistan doing so, you simultaneously legitimize their possession of nuclear weapons?

Bailes: Well, there's a purely technical problem here, which is deciding the status of India and Pakistan under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). If they would join the NPT, they would have to declare whether they have nuclear weapons or not. Then you come straight up against the contradiction; you don't want to add new nuclear weapons states but equally if they declare themselves as not having nuclear weapons, it doesn't work. However, with the CTBT, anybody can sign it – you don't have to be a member of the NPT and you don't have to have a certain status on the NPT. At least, that's my understanding. To be honest, India and Pakistan are, in fact, not the main problem – the U.S. and China are where it starts. The report says very clearly that if the U.S. would ratify it, China would be forced into a corner and would have to ratify it as well. Then it would actually be very difficult for anyone else to hang back.

So, although generally I'm arguing for not just pointing the finger at the U.S., I do think that on this particular issue, the U.S. position is absolutely pivotal. All indications are that the U.S. can carry out responsible stewardship of its existing nuclear arsenal and keep its defenses more than adequate, without needing the option to conduct tests far in the future. So I put this rather in the category of things that could be done here and now. Politically I'm not saying it's a small thing. Politically it would be a big thing, because it's not just the U.S. administration that would have to change course but also Congress would have to be persuaded. But I do think we have a duty in the commission just to point out how much it would help on the one hand and how little it costs in a purely concrete way, on the other.

IA-Forum: You have briefly touched upon this already, but what do you think are the main dangers to non-proliferation today?

Bailes: Well, I think they occur at a number of levels. Obviously we're concerned about individual countries that might acquire nuclear weapons. There's a tendency in the rich world for us to see this as a threat to us – nearly almost, it is not meant as a threat to us. It's mostly meant as a threat to their neighbors as a way of building up the credibility of their political regime, often with an internal political angle, sometimes with a economical business angle and usually in an attempt to improve their position in their own region. Why I'm putting it in this way is to say that the answer to such a nuclear problem is never just a nuclear answer. Just telling them that nuclear capacity is bad or trying to find a legal argument as to why they can't have it doesn't really address the point, because they're doing it for a purpose or a number of purposes. Most of those are bigger security, strategic or political purposes, and you have to address those as well. So the only answers for these country-specific threats are in fact package solutions. But to answer the question, I'm concerned about leakage into the hands of terrorists, criminals and corrupt businessmen. This also is an aspect of proliferation with things leaking into the world that shouldn't leak out, and I think those aspects of the dangers are less sexy but they also need to be taken very seriously.

IA-Forum: The hot issue of today is of course Iran with its potential nuclear weapons program and its refusal to comply with international demands. Could you elaborate on the risks of Iran getting WMD capabilities and what a suitable way for the world community dealing with this problem might be?

Bailes: Well, it makes no sense to accept Iran's getting a nuclear capacity and I don't think it would actually do Iran much good itself. It would create a basis for clear enmity between its neighbors. Clearly it wouldn't do any good for the region as a whole, and it would very much increase tension and reduce the risks of sensible regional cooperation. So, I don't think that any of us should waive in the statements that we don't want that to happen, and all our efforts have to be pushed towards stopping it from happening. The question is, then, how? The WMDC report is a little doubtful – and I'm a little doubtful – about how useful it is to keep putting legal arguments or arguments of principle about Iran's right to carry out any particular nuclear activity. The fact is that what they're trying to do with the enrichments and so on is things that countries like Japan do all the time, for example. The problem is not that Iran doesn't have a legal right to do them; the problem is that they are provocative and dubious in the given security or political situation. What we need to do is to get Iran to simply volunteer to not do them and moreover, to improve the ways that the rest of us can monitor that they aren't doing it. Now of course that's still asks quite a lot for them but I think its better to ask it in that voluntary political matter and not as an enforcement matter, because to be honest, it is not clear what rule you would be enforcing in that case.

And then you come to the question of how to persuade them to not to do it, and there the answer is – or has been for a very long time – that you need some kind of mixture. Of course you have to address what they say are their future energy needs and offer some non-dangerous, some cooperative ways that they can develop that

approach to energy. You have to come up with some economic and political incentive which gives them a prospect of increasing their respectability and prosperity and so on. And I think last but not least, is the question of security assurances. People look at the United States there, and I think there is certainly a contradiction and an instability in US-Iranian relations – not just because of the nuclear weapons but many other things – which have to be resolved in some way in order for either side to relax.

IA-Forum: Despite the fact that some people are claiming that we are currently experiencing a third wave of nuclear proliferation, the WMDC report states that one of the goals is to achieve complete global disarmament of WMD. Do you think this is in any way achievable, or is it merely an illusion?

Bailes: Well, let me start by answering the last part of the question. My feeling is that we have to have it there as a goal. We can never discredit that goal, because the presence of nuclear weapons is a problem and if we don't have the goal of eventual elimination, we say mankind forever has to live with that problem. It forever has to distract us and take away our resources from problems that are actually easier for us to work on together, whether they are diseases, environmental change or whatever. I think the strongest argument, in more practical terms, for keeping this goal is that it actually becomes less and less clear in today's security threat picture what the problems are that nuclear weapons can help us with. In the Cold War, it was really quite respectable to say – if you're on the West – that nuclear weapons can help us with the threat of being overrun by the Communists. The Communists could say that they helped prevent the West from attacking us, because the sad fact is that they did. Today, people are desperately trying to invent new functions or to confuse the question of their function, but it seems to me that they less and less have any actual practical uses where the benefits would be conceivably larger than the disadvantages.

Why does a country nevertheless seek to get them? Well, it's because they don't live in the same world that we do. They live in their particular stage of political and economical development and in their particular regional picture. But we in the West should be using our wisdom to say that we found out that things don't work, and we are prepared to start giving them up. If we were saying that, there might be a slight chance that the other people would listen. As it is, we are not giving them any reasons to stop thinking that nuclear weapons are useful. So that's a complicated way of saying that if we gave up this goal of elimination, we would actually be losing the last bit of logical legitimacy that we have towards other people not going in that direction.

IA-Forum: Any final thoughts?

Bailes: It has been noted in some of the commentaries on the WMDC report that the report hints a favorable position on nuclear energy use for peaceful purposes and civil nuclear power. And, of course, that's quite a controversial position. I know that Greenpeace, for example, said that it liked everything in the report except that. But I think civil nuclear power will grow and there are arguments why it should grow. So another way of looking at this whole nuclear riddle is to start from that end of it,

and say we cannot deny to the people of the world the right to make greater use of nuclear power as a civil energy source. So the question is, then, how we can have perhaps a large expansion, without triggering new country cases of proliferation and new types of proliferation – that is, worsening this danger of leakage into the wrong non-state hands.

Looking at it that way posts all kinds of challenges – whether you could make nuclear energy production more resistant to proliferation by using technologies that make it impossible to end up with weapons, for example. And there are actually some technological answers. There are some possibilities, there are some business forms of ownership that you could set up for nuclear companies that reduce the political risks. We at SIPRI, at least think it's very legitimate to look at that set of solutions as well, because this is something positive that we are doing. We are trying to facilitate the use of energy rather than tackling a subject by saying to people, "What you're doing is evil and you can't do that." Also, if we're going to get anywhere in this business of making nuclear energy safer, it has to be done with the producers that are with business; it has to be working with political and social forces within countries who will want to make their own demands and standards and have their own ideas about safety. Again it gets us away from the risk that there's purely an elite approach and the risk of being dominated just by the agenda of a few particular elites.