Eliminating Syria’s Chemical Weapons

November 19, 2013

On November 19, 2013, the Arms Control Association and The Lugar Center brought together three individuals with firsthand experience in chemical weapons destruction and the current situation in Syria. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Nonproliferation Simon Limage stressed the incredible accomplishments that have been made thus far, particularly the aggressive timetable for chemical weapon destruction. This is not only a technological achievement, but also a testament to the international community’s ability to positively influence the Syrian regime. Internal conflict aside, the Assad regime’s willingness to strictly and honestly follow all protocols set forth will be critical to completing the mission.

Major General Jay Santee, Deputy Director of the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA), spoke to the technological capabilities that have enabled the OPCW to commit to such a plan. Last year, the Threat Reduction Advisory Council engaged DTRA to develop the mobile CW-destruction technology that will now likely be used. This foresight would have been futile without the funding provided by the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction program. This enabled DTRA to pursue the technological achievements we have seen faster than any thought possible.

Despite the best-laid plans, there are always dangers and further considerations. Providing a unique perspective as the former director of the Iraq Survey Group, Charles Duelfer warned that many parties – from American politicians to Syrian rebels – will attempt to disrupt the success story by questioning the intelligence reports and disputing claims. He also emphasized the value of the OPCW-verified destruction of the mixing and filling equipment to date, which prevented the Syrian regime from producing additional chemical weapons.

Speakers:

● Major General Jay G. Santee, USAF, Deputy Director of the Defense Threat Reduction Agency
● Simon G. Limage, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Nonproliferation Programs
● Charles Duelfer, former Director of the Iraq Survey Group