

**OPENING STATEMENT**  
**SENATOR NORM COLEMAN**  
**Chairman**  
**Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations**  
**Hearing On**  
**Neutralizing the Nuclear or Radiological Threat: Securing the Global Supply Chain**  
**Part one**  
**March 28, 2006**

Good morning and thank you all for being here. Today, we will be kicking off two days of hearings on perhaps the most important threat confronting our country: terrorists acquiring and detonating a nuclear weapon in the United States. Have no doubt: this threat is real.

The Director of National Intelligence, John Negroponte, starkly noted this threat in his public testimony last month, “Attacking the US Homeland, US interests overseas, and US allies – in that order – are al-Qa’ida’s top operational priorities. . . .al-Qa’ida remains interested in acquiring chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear materials or weapons to attack the United States, US troops, and US interests worldwide. In fact, intelligence reporting indicates that nearly 40 terrorist organizations, insurgencies, or cults have used, possessed, or expressed an interest in chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear agents or weapons. ”

While the potential threat of a nuclear bomb is real, we cannot overlook the serious consequences that would result from a dirty bomb. For example a dirty bomb constructed with Cesium-137, which is significantly less powerful than a nuclear weapon, detonated in New York, would wreak havoc, forcing millions to flee the city and costing us billions in clean-up costs.

A disturbing report from GAO that will be a part of today’s hearing demonstrates significant vulnerabilities in our defenses against a dirty bomb and other terrorists’ threats. GAO investigators were able to smuggle enough radioactive source material to manufacture a dirty bomb across both our Northern and Southern borders.

However, there is both good news and bad news to this story. The radiation detectors correctly alarmed, signaling the presence of radioactive material. The customs officers followed the proper procedures as well. This is the good news.

The bad news, however, is that officers were fooled by fraudulent documents and didn’t have the mechanisms to verify the documents. These are documents my 20 year old son could easily develop with a simple Internet search. We cannot allow this potentially deadly material to transit our borders with ease.

Following this report I am pleased to report that DHS has done the right thing. They have acknowledged the vulnerability and are taking corrective action to ensure that we close this gap.

The NRC, however, does not appear ready to acknowledge that this is a problem. I disagree. It is a problem when it is tougher to buy cold medicine than it is to acquire enough material to construct a dirty bomb.

Many experts, including one here this morning, believe that a maritime container is the ideal platform to transport nuclear or radiological material or a nuclear device into the United States. Since 90 percent of global trade moves in maritime containers, we can not allow these containers to be utilized to transport Weapons of Mass Destruction. The consequences of such an event would be devastating to our way of life and our economy.

Therefore, it is imperative that we look at these issues holistically – neutralizing the radiological and nuclear threat and securing the global supply chain. We must:

1. secure, detect, and interdict nuclear and radiological materials, on the one hand; and,
2. ensure the global supply chain is secure, on the other.

Our defenses against this threat must start overseas. The first line of defense is securing source material in Russia and the former Soviet Union states. Simultaneous to securing the material at the source, our second line of defense must be to detect and interdict this material if it falls into the hands of a terrorist or if an insider tries to sell this material to a terrorist or terrorist network. These initiatives push our borders out, yet concurrent with these efforts, we need to secure material in the United States and detect and interdict material at our Ports of Entry. The borders of the United States must be the last line of defense. Collectively, this layered strategy will bring us closer to preventing the nightmare scenario – a terrorist with a nuclear weapon.

For the past two years, the Subcommittee has conducted an extensive investigation into global supply chain security and our layered defenses against nuclear terrorism. Today, in the first of our two-part hearing, we will address this layered approach to detect and interdict potential smuggling attempts – both abroad and domestically – as well as our efforts to secure the material domestically. In the second part of the hearing, on Thursday, we will focus on global supply chain security.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Ranking Member Levin, Senator Collins, Senator Lieberman, and Representative Dingell for their support and interest in this important subject. Preventing nuclear terrorism and securing our nation's ports demands a bipartisan and bicameral approach.

The Government Accountability Office has laid the groundwork for today with three superb reports. Collectively, these reports detail many positive steps taken by the U.S. Government to address these issues, but more importantly, note several gaps in our defense. Specifically,

- Four and one-half years after September 11<sup>th</sup>, less than 40 percent of our seaports have basic radiation detection equipment. This is a massive blind spot;
- Pervasive corruption poses a significant challenge to our detection efforts abroad; and,
- The Nuclear Regulatory Commission remains in a pre-9/11 mindset in a post 9/11 world. For example, the NRC has yet to implement even the most basic of reforms to secure radiological material.

These issues must be addressed with a sense of urgency. We must close the gap at our ports, the NRC must reform the processes by which anyone can acquire radiological material, and the National Nuclear Security Administration must continue to aggressively build safeguards to guard against corruption.

I would like to welcome and thank Governor Kean, the former Chairman of the distinguished September 11th Commission and our other noted expert panelists. Today our hearing will address the efforts to prevent the smuggling of nuclear and radiological materials; the disturbing fact that less than 40 percent of maritime containers entering the U.S. are screened for radiation; and the ability of undercover GAO investigators to use fraudulent documents to transport enough radioactive material across the border to construct a dirty bomb.

I look forward to your testimony and an engaging hearing.

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