



United States Senate
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Chairman Joseph I. Lieberman, ID-Conn.

Opening Statement for Chairman Joseph Lieberman
“Nuclear Terrorism: Strengthening Our Domestic Defenses, Part II”
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee
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As Prepared for Delivery

Welcome to our hearing on the Committee’s investigation of efforts by the Department of Homeland Security to strengthen our nation’s defenses against the threat of nuclear terrorism.

I want to welcome Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security Jane Holl Lute who will be our primary witness today, as well as the new director of the Department’s Domestic Nuclear Detection Office, Warren Stern, and representatives from other DHS agencies that have important roles to play in preventing a nuclear terrorist attack.

The first thing to say is that this threat is real.

In fact, the “National Security Strategy,” released by the Administration in May contained the following stark warning – and I quote:

“The American people face no greater or more urgent danger than a terrorist attack with a nuclear weapon. . . . Black markets trade in nuclear secrets and materials. Terrorists are determined to buy, build, or steal a nuclear weapon.”

In Part I of this hearing, on June 30, witnesses from the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the Congressional Research Service and the National Academy of Sciences, testified that one of the key offices assigned to protect us from this threat – which is DNDO, the Domestic Nuclear Detection Office – is woefully behind in its planning and implementation efforts despite \$2 billion in funding since it was created in 2005 as an office within the Department of Homeland Security.

And since our last hearing, DNDO has provided further financial information to GAO that shows another \$2 billion was spent department wide by Homeland Security in support of the Nuclear Detection Office’s mission.

And what has that \$4 billion bought over five years?

In part, that money has gone to expanding existing programs at Customs and Border Protection, the Coast Guard, TSA and other DHS agencies that are critical to our defenses against nuclear terrorism.

But, unfortunately, there is too much evidence that very little progress has been made with the funds that have been targeted towards enhancing our current nuclear detection capabilities.

Most importantly, the overall nuclear terror defense plan DNDO has been working on since it was created now five years ago– the Global Nuclear Detection Architecture – is still not completed.

And, in fact, last year, DNDO officials concluded that the plan they were developing was too dependent on unproven technologies and did not take into consideration the contributions that law enforcement and intelligence agencies could make with their existing assets.

I appreciate that designing a global system-of-systems – and coordinating the activities of agencies in other Departments that are part of that system – is a big challenge.

But the threat is enormous here, and the size of the challenge, therefore, cannot explain away the failure of DNDO to develop a strategic plan for strengthening parts of the domestic layer of the architecture operated within the Department of Homeland Security, and help guide the nuclear detection investments by its fellow DHS agencies.

So that will be a primary focus of this hearing.

In our previous hearing, we also heard that DNDO has spent hundreds of millions of dollars trying to develop new radiation detection technology – known as the Advanced Spectroscopic Portal, or ASP – that the GAO concluded is only marginally better than what we have now.

GAO has also provided the Committee details about the failure of a second large DNDO technology investment, known as the Cargo Advanced Automated Radiography System, or CAARS.

According to GAO, the Nuclear Detection Office awarded contracts for the CAARS systems without ever determining if the system could be used in domestic ports of entry or whether it would meet the requirements of the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agency, which is on the front lines of protecting our borders.

GAO estimates that DNDO has spent approximately \$400 million combined on the ASP and CAARS programs with little or nothing to show for it.

GAO also contends that had DHS completed a strategic plan before making these investments, it might well have considered the security benefits of other mobile or portable detection systems.

Last year, GAO strongly recommended that DHS “develop a strategic plan for the domestic part of the global nuclear detection strategy . . . to guide the domestic nuclear detection investments of DHS agencies.”

This is sound advice – but it has apparently not been followed by DHS or DNDO in making expensive decisions about the investments that they’re making here at home.

This morning, we really need to hear a direct response from DHS to these criticisms and we need to know what corrective actions are being taken now.

Because our Committee wants to make sure that in carrying out our oversight responsibilities we do not cause the revelation of any information that could be exploited by our enemies, the hearing will adjourn at the appropriate time, to be resumed in closed session in the Senate Security offices.

Finally, I’d say that the problems facing the Domestic Nuclear Detection Office and the Department of Homeland Security, and our efforts generally to design and implement the global nuclear detection architecture are not new and they have been well documented. We held hearings on this topic during the previous administration.

But now this Administration is in charge and must step up to the plate and close this gap in our defenses against nuclear terrorism.

Sen. Collins.