

Casey Outlines Threat of Nuclear Terrorism

WASHINGTON, DC-On the Senate floor today, U.S. Senator Bob Casey (D-PA) addressed the issue of nuclear security and the need to improve efforts to prevent nuclear terrorism. Since arriving in the Senate, Senator Casey has identified the threat of nuclear terrorism as one of the top long-term challenges faced by the United States. The full text of Senator Casey's speech is below.

"The threat of nuclear terrorism persists, and the United States and the international community are failing to move quickly enough to neutralize this threat," said Senator Casey. "Instead, the Administration continues a 'business as usual' approach. That is a gross misjudgment. This issue cries out for real Presidential leadership."

Senator Casey continued, "We must move to bolster existing threat reduction programs, strengthen our deterrence capability against those who would perpetrate acts of nuclear terrorism, and recommit ourselves to the effort to reduce the role and number of nuclear weapons in our world today. We do not have the luxury of time to wait."

In his first year as a U.S. Senator, Senator Bob Casey has been extensively briefed by leading experts and former Administration officials on the scope of the challenge and what the United States can do to respond. In recognition of his interest in this issue, Chairman Joe Biden asked Senator Casey to chair a Foreign Relations Committee hearing in July on the spread of civilian nuclear energy around the world and the implications for stemming the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Senator Casey is an original co-sponsor of the Nuclear Policy and Posture Review Act of 2007 calling on the President to conduct a comprehensive review of U.S. nuclear weapons policy.

Next week, Senator Casey will host a public screening at the University of Pittsburgh of *Last Best Chance*, a docudrama that aims to illustrate to the public the danger posed by vulnerable nuclear weapons and fissile material around the world.

Below are Senator Casey's remarks as prepared:

Mr. President, the United States today faces a broad set of national security challenges. From initiating a responsible redeployment of U.S. combat troops out of Iraq to preventing the Taliban in making a comeback in Afghanistan, from addressing the current turmoil in Pakistan to responding to anti-democratic trends in Russia, our nation has a full plate. Today, I wish to spend some time discussing a longer term threat that does not receive the full attention it deserves, but I believe is the single greatest peril to our great nation: the prospect that a terrorist group, possibly with the active support of a nation-state, will detonate an

improvised nuclear weapon in an American city. I want to commend those who have displayed outstanding leadership on this issue, especially Senators Nunn, Lugar, and Biden.

In the weeks following 9/11, our intelligence community picked up a very frightening report from an agent. It was rumored that Al Qaeda had acquired a Soviet era nuclear weapon and had managed to smuggle it into New York City. The response of our government, although secret at the time, was swift. Teams of experts were deployed across the city, with state of the art detection equipment, in an effort to track down this bomb before it exploded. The threat was ultimately discounted – there was no nuclear weapon inside the United States. The intelligence community's agent had bad information.

What is so frightening about these events is that it is entirely plausible that Al Qaeda could have smuggled a nuclear weapon into our nation. One can only imagine the retrospective questions that would have followed such a horrific attack. What could have our federal government done to prevent such a detonation? What policies and programs did we fail to prioritize? How could we have not appreciated the urgency and magnitude of the threat of nuclear terrorism?

Six years later, neither the United States, nor any other nation, has been forced to confront the aftermath of a terrorist attack involving a nuclear weapon. Yet I regret to say that we cannot rely on good luck continuing indefinitely. The threat of nuclear terrorism persists, and the United States and the international community are failing to move quickly enough to neutralize this threat.

Why am I so concerned about nuclear terrorism and the challenge it poses -- not just for the world of today, but the world of our children and the world of our grandchildren?

- Last year, a Russian citizen was arrested in Georgia on charges of seeking to smuggle 100 grams of highly enriched uranium (HEU) on the local black market, with the promise made that he could deliver another two to three kilograms of HEU at a later time. This arrest on smuggling charges is only one of hundreds involving fissile material that have emerged since the breakup of the former Soviet Union in 1991. The good news is that the quantities detected so far have been very small. The bad news is that, just as with drug trafficking, those transactions that come to our attention are only a fraction of what may actually be occurring;
- Too many facilities across the globe do not yet have the security safeguards we should demand for stockpiles of fissile material. Today, as many as forty nations possess the key materials and components required to assemble a nuclear weapon. Surprisingly, we do not fully understand the magnitude of this problem. Dr. Matthew Bunn, a leading expert on nuclear terrorism, reports that neither the United States nor the International Atomic Energy Agency has a comprehensive, prioritized list

assessing which facilities around the world pose the most serious risks of nuclear theft;

- The Washington Post columnist, David Ignatius, reported last month that a senior Energy Department intelligence official has briefed the President and other senior Administration officials that Al Qaeda is engaged in a long-term mission to acquire a nuclear weapon to use against the United States. According to this report, Al Qaeda may have held off against further attacks against our nation since 9/11 to focus on obtaining a nuclear weapon;

Mr. President, I do have some good news to offer in this otherwise sobering recitation. The good news is that we know exactly what needs to be done to address the threat of nuclear terrorism. Even a terrorist group as sophisticated as Al Qaeda cannot build a nuclear weapon from scratch. The production of nuclear weapons, and the fissile material that gives these weapons their deadly explosive power, remains a capacity limited to national governments. A terrorist group can acquire a nuclear weapon through several means: it can purchase or steal a completed warhead from a state, or it can acquire the weapons grade plutonium or enriched uranium at the core of a nuclear warhead to construct an improvised nuclear device.

Thus, if the United States works in concert with other nations to “lock down” nuclear warheads and weapons grade materials around the world, we can prevent terrorists from accessing them in the first place. We’re making some progress on this front, through programs like the Nunn-Lugar effort to dismantle nuclear weapons and secure excess nuclear materials, but we’re not moving fast enough. Additional funding is required, but perhaps even more important, high-level attention, at the level of Presidents and Prime Ministers, is necessary to break through the bureaucratic obstacles and political inertia blocking more rapid security gains. After 9/11, the President should have made nuclear terrorism a key international priority, raising it to the very top of the U.S.-Russian agenda, for example. Instead, the Administration continued a “business as usual” approach. That was a gross misjudgment. This issue cries out for real Presidential leadership.

But as vital as cooperative threat reduction programs are, we must go above and beyond them if we are to successfully deter nuclear terrorism. Not only should we do everything we can to prevent terrorist groups from acquiring the means to detonate a nuclear weapon, we must also fortify our capability to deter their use. A terrorist group like Al Qaeda is undeterrable, but the states from which they acquire or steal nuclear material are not. We must enhance our ability to threaten overwhelming retribution against any state that, by intention or lax security, enables a terrorist group to detonate a nuclear warhead in the United States.

First, we must elevate the costs for individuals and businesses that choose to facilitate illicit smuggling of fissile material and related nuclear components. Nuclear smuggling networks rely on middlemen to transport fissile material and nuclear components, forge export licenses and customs slips, and engage in other black market activities. Too often in the past, when such individuals and businesses are caught with their hands dirty, they receive minimal prison sentences; for example, the Russian citizen arrested in Georgia for nuclear smuggling was sentenced only to eight years in prison. These lax criminal penalties cannot deter future acts of nuclear smuggling.

Aiding and abetting nuclear smuggling is abhorrent and should be recognized for what it is – a crime against humanity. Just as the international community has banded together in the past to stigmatize the slave trade and genocide as crimes against humanity, so too should it now do the same for those who help terrorist groups acquire weapons of mass destruction. The United States should be a leader in this effort.

Second, we should also be working with the International Atomic Energy Agency to establish a global library of nuclear fissile material. If the IAEA were to have nuclear samples from every weapons production facility in the world when a nuclear device exploded somewhere, we could in short order trace the nuclear material used in that explosion to the originating reactor or production facility. Such a capability could serve as a powerful deterrent – if a state knew that it could be held ultimately responsible for a nuclear detonation, it would have far greater incentive to secure and protect its nuclear materials. Those states that refuse to cooperate with such a global library would risk condemnation and suspicion in the event of a nuclear attack.

My colleague, Senator Biden of Delaware, the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, has worked with the Armed Services Committee to strengthen U.S. efforts to take the first steps towards such a global library. Today, a group like Al Qaeda can get away with a nuclear attack on the United States because it does not have a fixed address at which we can easily retaliate. The same, however, does not apply to the nation that, intentionally or through lax security, provides the means for a terrorist group to detonate a nuclear device. The United States must leverage the same type of deterrence against those nations as it did against the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

Finally, we must be doing more in the overall effort to combat nuclear proliferation among states. It is a simple equation: the more states that acquire nuclear weapons and fissile material, the more likely it is that some of those weapons and/or fissile material may be vulnerable to theft or illicit sale to terrorist groups. That is but one reason why we must prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. It is why we must work with our international allies and partners to ensure that North Korea verifiably dismantles its nuclear facilities and weapons under the Six Party Talks. This link between nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism demonstrates the importance of reinforcing the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

It is very difficult to imagine the utter devastation of an American city by an improvised nuclear device. It is, perhaps, for that reason that the specter of nuclear terrorism remains an abstract threat today. Yet, before 9/11, very few of us could appreciate the danger posed by commercial jetliners hijacked by those on a suicide mission.

Mr. President, the time for action on the challenge of nuclear terrorism is now. We must move to bolster existing threat reduction programs, strengthen our deterrence capability against those who would perpetrate acts of nuclear terrorism, and recommit ourselves to the effort to reduce the role and number of nuclear weapons in our world today. We do not have the luxury of time to wait.

I yield the floor.

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