

Opening Statement of
Senator Susan M. Collins

**Nuclear Terrorism:
Confronting the Challenges of the Day After**

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
April 15, 2008

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The Committee's previous hearings on the threat and the impact of a terrorist nuclear attack on a U.S. city made clear that preventing such an attack must be an urgent and compelling priority.

It is also clear that we must consider the response that would be necessary in the terrible setting of death and devastation our nation would confront if an attack were to succeed. As a report from the Harvard-Stanford Preventive Defense Project makes clear, the day after a terrorist nuclear attack is "a grim prospect to contemplate, but

policymakers have no choice, since the probability of nuclear terrorism cannot be calculated but is surely not zero.”

A 10-kiloton device - a plausible yield for a bomb constructed by terrorists - could be smuggled into a seaport as cargo, flown over a city in a private plane, or driven into a city in a truck. When detonated, this bomb could instantly kill many thousands and destroy buildings within a half-mile radius.

In the aftermath, we would confront overwhelmed and obliterated local response capabilities, mass casualties, evacuations, and demands for food and shelter. Great numbers of people would be in urgent need of medical attention

and decontamination. The economic and psychological impacts would be also devastating.

In some respects, however, planning and response for a terrorist nuclear attack would resemble that for any catastrophic natural disaster. In other respects, including the intensity of shock in the target area, the initial pulse of radiation, and subsequent fallout, a nuclear attack would have its own special horrors that demand specific preparations.

Those preparations ought to include well-thought-out measures to deal with non-physical damage. A nuclear detonation in an American city would be an unprecedented event with profound emotional and psychological ramifications. Our preparations must therefore include plans for

providing steady flows of accurate information and for treating psychological as well as physical injury.

No region of the country is immune to this threat, and an attack would undoubtedly require a regional and federal response to supplement overwhelmed state and local capabilities. These are powerful reasons to ensure that responders across the country are supported at high levels of preparedness, and that we maintain the all-hazards focus of the National Response Framework. Just as the Katrina disaster drew in responders from around the country, including people from my own State of Maine, a nuclear strike in any American city would require resources from well beyond the immediate area.

Those resources would clearly include military units. As my colleagues will recall, however, in January the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves warned that “the nation has not adequately resourced its forces designated for response to weapons of mass destruction,” and thus has “an appalling gap” in readiness.

This gap could be partly filled by the 55 specially trained and equipped Civil Support Teams in the National Guard that are the foundation of our state and federal military response for chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear incidents. Our hearing on military support in catastrophes illustrated how useful these resources could be – and how important it is to have well-coordinated and well-understood plans in place before dire need arises. However, that same hearing also underscored

that those plans and the required resources re not yet fully in place.

We must also carefully consider the political and economic consequences of an attack. Without diligent continuity-of-government planning, critical services and the rule of law will be severely diminished. Our commercial and financial sectors must also plan to mitigate initial losses and to provide for timely resumption of the economy.

To be sure, no level of all-hazards readiness will prevent the horrendous toll of death, injury, property damage, economic disruption, and political upheaval that would follow a nuclear attack. But proper planning can ease suffering and mitigate losses.

**Our panel of expert witnesses can help us
achieve some clarity and perspective in that
unwelcome but essential task.**

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