

**Opening Statement for Chairman Joseph Lieberman  
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee  
“Nuclear Terrorism:  
Confronting the Challenges of the Day After”  
April 15, 2008**

**Good morning and welcome to our hearing today. This is the third in a series of hearings this Committee is holding to examine the threat of a nuclear terrorist attack on our homeland, what the federal government is doing to prevent such an attack, and how prepared our government is to respond to the challenges our nation would face if efforts to prevent a nuclear terrorist attack fail.**

**At our last hearing we asked how serious is the threat of nuclear terrorism itself, and top intelligence officials answered that terrorist groups have demonstrated a clear intent to develop and use nuclear weapons to achieve their violent extremist goals.**

**We learned that if terrorists acquire enough of the special nuclear materials they have sought, they could build at least a crude nuclear device.**

**Against the backdrop of the reality of the threat of nuclear terrorism inside America, today's hearing looks at the consequences of a nuclear attack and the challenges that our nation would face in the days and weeks thereafter.**

**While our primary national goal, of course, must be the prevention of a terrorist nuclear attack, we must also prepare for the possibility that a determined terrorist will succeed despite our best efforts.**

**An adequate response to such a catastrophe will require marshalling the full resources of our country, including all levels of government, the private sector, and individual Americans.**

**The detonation of a nuclear weapon in a major city would have a devastating impact, according to the Department of Homeland Security's National Planning Scenario.**

**Although we cannot know the exact yield from a nuclear weapon acquired by terrorists, a detonation would kill an enormous number of people from the cumulative effects of the initial blast, the ensuing fires, and the spread of lethal radiation.**

**Millions of people could be displaced for extended periods of time, especially if panic caused by the blast leads to an exodus of people from nearby areas not otherwise affected.**

**The economic damage from such an attack could be as much as a trillion dollars, according to a study by the Rand Corporation.**

**The challenges our country would face in the days after a nuclear attack are massive and unprecedented.**

**Essential response resources would be severely damaged or destroyed.**

**Our country's medical system would have to handle a sudden surge in casualties unlike anything it has previously experienced.**

**And the nation's government and private sector could face great difficulties meeting the basic needs of many Americans.**

**Coordination among federal, state, and local government entities would be vital. But those governments themselves could be compromised and the communications infrastructures that they oversee and operate could be badly damaged.**

**First responders trying to address the damage and help the injured would risk radiation exposure themselves.**

**Maintaining law and order would, of course, be a necessary prerequisite to providing emergency care and much else involved in a response.**

**Logistical challenges would be huge. Effective communication with the public could save lives and lessen the panic, but only if it was credible and it reached affected communities.**

**The scenarios we discuss today are very hard for us to contemplate, and so emotionally traumatic and unsettling that it is tempting to push them aside.**

**However, now is the time to have this difficult conversation, to ask the tough questions, and then to get answers as best we can and take preparatory and preventive action.**

**The actions we take now could still save many thousands of lives and could in many other ways reduce the damage to our country from such an attack. This is why we hold this hearing and are so grateful for the distinguished panel we have before us today.**

**Senator Collins.**