

Terrorism and Weapons of Mass Destruction

June 27, 2005

Moderator Tim Roemer's Opening Remarks

Good morning. On behalf of the Board Members of the 9/11 Public Discourse Project—my friends and colleagues, the former 9/11 Commissioners—I'd like to welcome all of you here today.

The Center for National Policy joins the Public Discourse Project in co-sponsoring this morning's panel on Terrorism and Weapons of Mass Destruction.

Once again, we also want to thank the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars for hosting today's discussion.

This is the third in our series of panels reviewing the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission and what progress has been made since we issued our Report. What we learn will help inform our report card on the progress of reform later this year.

This morning we will be looking at a topic of overriding importance to our national security. As the Commission said in its final report, we need a maximum effort to keep the most dangerous terrorists from acquiring the world's most dangerous weapons.

All of our leaders agree that this goal is important. What we lack is a sense of urgency. We are not doing enough fast enough. That is why the Commission called for a maximum effort. That is why we are here this morning.

There are member of the families of 9/11 in the audience this morning. We welcome them. If we get the question of nuclear terrorism wrong, there is no room, no convention center in America that will be able to hold all those who grieve for lost loved ones.

In a recent survey, 85 experts estimate the risk of attack by weapons of mass destruction at as high as 70 percent over the coming decade. The threat is real. The threat is today.

The intent of al Qaeda is clear. The 9/11 Commission found that al Qaeda has tried to acquire or make weapons of mass destruction for at least 10 years. There is no doubt the United States would be a prime target.

We do not know if al Qaeda or one of its affiliates has yet been able to acquire nuclear materials.

But the good news is that we can prevent them from doing so. We can stop nuclear terrorism from becoming a reality if we can prevent access to nuclear materials. The hardest part of building a bomb is acquiring weapons-grade nuclear materials. We know what has to be done to protect these materials and keep us safe.

Since 1992, we have made significant progress. Through the Cooperative Threat Reduction program, or Nunn-Lugar program, we have successfully:

- Removed all nuclear weapons from Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan;
- Deactivated over 6,500 nuclear warheads;
- Destroyed over 1,100 nuclear missiles; and
- Performed security upgrades at over 70 nuclear warhead and material storage sites.

Still, the job of securing nuclear materials in the former Soviet Union is not yet done. We are only about half-way there.

In addition, there are weapons-grade materials at reactors in many countries around the world; these materials also need to be secured.

Finally, we know that there is international trafficking in WMD materials. The Administration's Proliferation Security Initiative is a good first step. What more can we and should we be doing?

We will begin this morning with Senator Nunn, who served as a United States Senator from Georgia from 1972 to 1996. One of his great legislative achievements is the program that bears his name, the “Nunn-Lugar” Cooperative Threat Reduction Program, which provides assistance, primarily to Russia and the former Soviet republics, for securing and destroying their excess nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. Senator Nunn serves today as co-chairman and chief executive officer of the Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI), a non-profit organization working to reduce the global threats from nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. He has been an outstanding leader on national security issues for a generation; we are indeed fortunate to have him with us this morning. Senator Nunn ...