



Opening Statement
Senator Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
Hearing on Sea Island and Beyond: Status Report on the Global Partnership
Against Weapons of Mass Destruction
June 15, 2004

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate your holding this hearing today. With the possible exception of the situations in Iraq and Afghanistan, there is no more urgent topic than the risk posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. And there is no more important topic.

Over three years ago, we held a hearing on an important report issued by former Senator Howard Baker and Lloyd Cutler. They wrote:

The most urgent unmet national security threat to the United States today is the danger that weapons of mass destruction or weapons-usable material in Russia could be stolen and sold to terrorists or hostile nation states and used against American troops abroad or citizens at home.

They proposed that the world devote \$3 billion per year to securing former Soviet nuclear materials. We're not there yet.

Given the non-proliferation initiatives at last week's G8 Summit... this week's review by the International Atomic Energy Agency of Iran's nuclear program... and next week's resumption of the 6-party talks on North Korea, this is a particularly appropriate time to review our non-proliferation efforts.

And the Senate has added to the defense bill Senator Domenici's significant amendment on a global "clean-out" of fissile and radiological material.

Senator Lugar and I were both co-sponsors of that amendment, and I am especially pleased that Senator Domenici was our lead witness today. He is a tower of strength on non-proliferation issues, and he had led the effort to accelerate DOE programs.

Senator Domenici's amendment complements the Global Threat Reduction Initiative that Secretary Abraham announced in Vienna on May 26 – to repatriate Russian and U.S. highly-enriched uranium (or HEU) and to convert civilian research reactors that use HEU to use low-enriched uranium fuel instead.

I don't want to appear ungrateful, but I am not convinced that even this initiative goes far enough or fast enough.

It's great that we're accelerating some efforts by two years, and others by up to 50 percent.

But the real question is, how long will it take to recover and secure all the at-risk fissile material? Will this all be done by 2008? Or will we still be talking about it in 2013?

I welcome also the initiatives that came out of the G8 Summit, but I would like to hear more from Secretary Bolton about whether and how these promises will achieve tangible progress.

The "Action Plan on Non-proliferation" contains some new initiatives and reiterates others. It adopts or supports several ideas that the President set forth in his February 11 speech.

G8 members also agreed to expand the Global Partnership that works to secure and dismantle Russian WMD materials.

All these agreements and initiatives sound like progress.

But will significant new resources be devoted to them – by our G8 partners, by new Global Partnership members, and in our own budget?

Too often, bright new initiatives turn out to be largely repackaging funds that are already in the budget.

Too often, bureaucratic disputes over issues like access and liability stall our programs.

I wonder whether those disputes can be resolved, unless and until Presidents Bush and Putin give them their sustained attention.

Too often promises are not implemented when tough actions – such as export control laws, sanctions, and actual enforcement – are called for.

I want to hear from our witnesses today how these fine words will translate into real action – and what the Administration will do at the highest levels to make non-proliferation work.

As we confront the problems of an increasingly nuclear-armed North Korea, of a potentially nuclear Iran, and terrorists seeking weapons of mass destruction, real and effective action could not be more urgent. I literally cannot think of a single thing that would warrant a greater allocation of resources and focus than these issues. Nothing is more urgent. Nothing is more important. We need a much greater sense of urgency from the Administration.

