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Remarks to the Institute of Nuclear Materials Management

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Southwest Chapter
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(As Prepared)

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to participate in this important workshop and provide you a few remarks on something that we at the State Department are focused on – preventing the world's most dangerous people from acquiring and using nuclear and radiological materials.

I'd like to recall Steve Coll's article entitled "What Bin Laden Sees in Hiroshima." Mr. Coll had just attended a conference at the Los Alamos National Labs where he asked nuclear scientists and terrorism experts "How many of you believe that the probability of a nuclear fission bomb attack on U.S. soil during the next several decades is negligible – say, less than 5 percent?"

Some of you might recall this article or perhaps you were in attendance at the conference. If so, you probably remember the ominous message sent by the response. All, but only a handful of the 60 or so experts believed that an attack will happen within 5 years. Just recently, in fact, Mr. Coll published another article in the New Yorker questioning whether the United States can be made safe from nuclear terrorism. I remember, however, Steve's first article with particular distinction for another important reason. I knew that he had just finished a very well-researched volume on Al-Qa'ida and Afghanistan called *Ghost Wars*.

Mr. Coll's experience has given me a deep appreciation for the gravity of the threat we face from Al-Qa'ida and its continued desire to acquire and use WMD against us. I feel fortunate now to lead an office whose primary mission is to prevent terrorists from acquiring and using chemical, biological, and radiological and nuclear weapons.

Speaking of WMD terrorism, I thought that I might offer you a few observations about what I see are the critical elements of any terrorist organization who might desire to use WMD. These are not exclusive, nor do they represent a single held position by the U.S. Government. But they are important points to discuss for any deeper understanding of the threat we face.

Before talking about our most dangerous enemies, I must acknowledge we can not prevent WMD terrorism everywhere and all

the time. There are simply too many opportunities for terrorists to use chemical, biological and radiological materials found in industrial, medical, or other commercial applications to enhance their conventional capabilities. That is not to say that we should not take steps to prevent local or low-impact terrorist attacks from occurring. To the contrary, many local law enforcement organizations view the "homegrown" threat as most likely, believing that terrorists will judge the movement of material or other operational constraints as either too difficult or too revealing. Terrorists are opportunists and often are more practical than they get credit for, and where material remains uncontrolled or lacks security, there remains opportunity. Our role is to work closely with industry members and local governments, in addition to foreign governments, to manage WMD terrorism risk to the point where a terrorist will be relatively disappointed by the cost of doing business and by the impact of their attacks.

I would argue, however, that "transnational" terrorist organizations like Al-Qa'ida will not be satisfied to conduct attacks that cause merely low impact disruption and not catastrophe. For "transnational" terrorists such as Al-Qa'ida, I would like you to consider a couple general principals that, if identified, would cause me to believe that a "transnational" network was taking the critical steps to develop a catastrophic WMD capability. First, I would be gravely concerned if it were determined that the leader of a known and capable transnational terrorist organization was playing a direct role in the development of a WMD capability. The leader's participation goes far beyond showing interest or general intent. It means that a leader is actively managing the effort by prioritizing resources, recruiting and vetting expertise, and pooling funds and other means, to include perhaps identifying or communicating directly with smugglers to acquire material – all steps that good managers do to support a project leader. As with any organization, such participation by a leader sends a strong signal that the boss will not be satisfied until the final goal is achieved. Secondly, and as part of the overall project, I would also be concerned if a terrorist organization placed strong emphasis on deepening their own understanding of the nature of WMD material, perhaps by thoroughly researching industry practices, while transforming acquired material and expertise into a weapon. Finally, as part of the organization's overall capability development process, it would concern me to see indications that a terrorist organization developed the sophistication to draw lessons about the use of WMD from its often widely dispersed activities and to be able to impart that knowledge across a greater span of its organization. To use a military term, the terrorist organization would be finding ways to both measure and accelerate its WMD readiness capability – a goal that far exceeds having only isolated and limited pockets of expertise which could be identified by authorities and defeated. The combination of leadership support, of a richer understanding of the material, its effects and expertise, and finding ways to improve the organization's readiness presents a truly formidable transnational terrorist threat.

Unfortunately, for us, Al-Qa'ida already proved its ability before 9/11 to institutionalize similar measures in support of attacks that did not include WMD. Sources such as Steve Coll's *Ghost Wars*, the 9/11 Commission Report, and others show just how far Al-Qa'ida went to meet achieve its goals.

We should, therefore, approach the recent attacks in Iraq involving chlorine with a belief that we might be seeing something new and equally dangerous developing. As you might know, Al-Qa'ida leaders in Iraq remained interested over a long period to developing a chemical weapons capability. It was only through the good efforts of Jordan and our forces in Iraq that we began to see the terrorist interest more clearly. The Al-Qa'ida affiliation with these attacks and the persistence demonstrated to use chemicals in attacks, to me, reflects a dedicated effort by leaders, strong organizational learning, and maybe a tipping point of sorts for these attacks and others.

Whether dealing with local or transnational threats, we must deny terrorists any and all avenues to achieving a WMD capability. That means that a focus on the threat alone will not defeat WMD terrorism. Effective WMD terrorism risk management also includes reducing our vulnerability to WMD terrorism and establishing effective crisis and consequence management steps that limit the outcomes of a WMD terrorist attack. Effective WMD terrorism risk management means establishing the right policies and implementing those policies effectively to combat nuclear terrorism. The U.S. National Strategy for Combating Terrorism directs, as a priority mission, efforts to combat WMD terrorism.

When implementing the [National Strategy for Combating Terrorism](#), we must in particular place emphasis on building the

right partnerships to combat WMD terrorism so that the steps we take are extended far beyond the reaches of any single government or other organization and are conducted with the necessary depth and local approaches that make partnerships so effective. To manage all three elements of WMD terrorism risk, we must increase the strength of our current partnerships and establish new partnerships in ways that use the strengths of our partners and focus on gaps in our defenses.

We at the State Department see our work as rooted in partnership and partnership is the foundation of Secretary Rice's vision of Transformational diplomacy. In July last year Presidents Bush and Putin announced the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism. The Global Initiative is transformational diplomacy. The Initiative provides this Institute and its members another opportunity to work with a growing set of partners who are committed to combating nuclear terrorism.

All Global Initiative Partner Nations (which currently includes the United States, Russia, Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Morocco, Turkey, the United Kingdom, Ukraine and just today Palau) and likely several others as the Initiative is strengthened are also committed to "work with the private sector and local governments to enhance the implementation of the...Global Initiative Principles."

I hope that my remarks today provided you with some ideas on how we view our common challenge and how another step is being taken to meet that challenge with the Global Initiative. We look forward to continuing to work closely with you to combat nuclear terrorism by preventing terrorists from acquiring the materials they need to become an even greater danger to us and to others.

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