U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

The Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism: A Comprehensive Approach to Today's Most Serious National Security Threat

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Introduction

Over the last 15 years, the nuclear threat to the United States and our friends and allies has changed dramatically. We no longer face a single adversary with thousands of missiles threatening our national existence. Rather, we now live in a world where transnational terrorist networks, motivated by violent and extreme ideologies, have declared their intent to use nuclear weapons against us. We also confront a growing nuclear threat from state sponsors of terrorism, who either possess a nuclear capability or are in the process of developing one. And finally, we are confronted with the prospect of non-state networks that are willing to sell nuclear technology and material to the highest bidder, and through whom terrorists may seek a nuclear weapon.

In addition, we are living in an era of globalization, which has yielded gains in economic prosperity and efficiency, as private enterprises have outsourced business functions, made investments abroad, and developed global supply chains. These trends have, at the same time, exposed us to new risks, such as the potential for terrorists to exploit cyberspace, financial networks, and the shipping and air transport industry to plan and carry out attacks against our population centers, including with weapons of mass destruction.

We must act to counter these emerging threats. On Saturday in St. Petersburg, Presidents Bush and Putin announced the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism, an effort that will establish a partnership among nations committed to developing their individual and collective capabilities to detect and defeat the most dangerous threat we face – nuclear weapons in the hands of a terrorist.

The Threat Today

Let me take a moment to outline our assessment of the threat from nuclear terrorism. The attacks of September 11 taught us that terrorists will stop at nothing to attack us and our way of life. Not satisfied with the killing of thousands of innocent civilians, Osama Bin Laden has declared his intention to acquire and use nuclear weapons against the United States with the potential to kill hundreds of thousands. Prior to 9/11, one member of Al Qaeda spoke directly to this point: "It's easy to kill more people with uranium."

Along with the nuclear threat from terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda, we are confronted with a growing nuclear threat from state sponsors of terrorism like Iran and North Korea who violate their obligations under the nonproliferation regimes. In addition, we know that non-state actors such as A.Q. Khan have entered the black market to sell nuclear technology to the highest bidder. The coming together of these trends – on the one hand, the increasingly lethal goals of today's terrorists and on the other, the illicit trafficking in nuclear material and technology – makes nuclear terrorism both the most serious international security challenge of our time, and the most urgent.

Many American leaders have called attention to the threat of nuclear terrorism. President Bush has described this threat as the central national security challenge of our era. Other leaders have voiced similar views. 9/11 Commission Chairman Thomas Kean and Vice Chairman Lee Hamilton pointed to nuclear terrorism as the most dangerous risk we face, and urged more focused action against the threat. The President's WMD Commission also emphasized that more must be done to improve our intelligence capabilities to combat this urgent threat. Both of these commissions concluded that Al Qaeda has taken concrete steps to acquire a nuclear weapon by attempting to buy nuclear material on the black market. Fortunately, Bin Laden's agents likely fell victim to a scam.

Many academics and authors have also identified nuclear terrorism as the preeminent threat requiring more focused efforts to counter. All agree that, to defend against this threat, we cannot afford to wait until after an attack before we take corrective action. The consequences could be catastrophic. To be wrong once is to have lost one of our cities. We do not have a second chance; we must take steps now to avert that dark future.

The Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism is the first initiative of its kind, one that takes a comprehensive approach to dealing with all elements of the challenge. The Initiative is consistent with, and builds on, existing legal frameworks such as the Nuclear Terrorism Convention and UN Security Council Resolutions 1540 and 1373. It provides a flexible framework that will enable sustained international cooperation to prevent, detect, and respond to the threat of nuclear terrorism. It offers an opportunity for the United States, Russia, and our international partners to speak – and to act.

Our National Strategy and Record of Accomplishment

The Global Initiative builds on the Bush Administration's unprecedented record of accomplishment to combat the threat of weapons of mass destruction. For example, in 2002 the President launched the Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction at the G8 Summit. In December 2002, the President approved the National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction, the first comprehensive strategy of its kind.

The National Strategy outlined the importance of integrating the traditional tools of nonproliferation with next generation counterproliferation efforts. Since the promulgation of that strategy, focused efforts have produced results and led directly to operational successes in the field. For example, the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), launched by President Bush in 2003 to strengthen international cooperation to disrupt the trade in WMD proliferation now counts over seventy-five partner nations and has played a key role in helping to interdict more than 30 shipments, including the interdiction of centrifuge parts that led to Tripoli's decision to abandon its chemical and nuclear weapons programs.

Under the President's leadership, a number of departments and agencies are taking a leadership role in implementing the National Strategy to Combat WMD. The Department of Defense promulgated its National Military Strategy to Combat WMD in February of 2006 and assigned U.S. Strategic Command with the responsibility for the combating WMD mission. Strategic Command, in turn, has established a Combating WMD Center at the Defense Threat Reduction Agency to bring together the expertise and resources in the Department of Defense to combat this urgent threat. Earlier, as recommended by the WMD Commission, President Bush signed a new Executive Order to ensure that we have the tools to stop the financing of proliferation related activity, a mission led by the Department of the Treasury in consultation with the Department of State. And the Departments Homeland Security and Energy have been active in establishing detection capabilities at ports abroad and at key land borders. At the Department of State, Secretary Rice spearheaded a reorganization of the bureaus under my direction to focus attention on the entire combating WMD mission, as well as the nexus of WMD and terrorism.

Finally, the standing up of the National Counter Terrorism Center, as well as the National Counter Proliferation Center, are bringing additional vigor to our planning and intelligence efforts. We are now ready to take the next step – to build the partnerships abroad that are necessary to achieve our strategic goal to protect the American people and citizens of partner nations against nuclear terrorism.

Fostering a Global Network of Partners

The central objective of the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism is to establish a growing network of partner nations that are committed to taking effective measures to build a layered defense-in-depth that can continuously adapt to the changing nature of the threat. While many individual programs and efforts have approached one element or aspect of the nuclear terrorism threat, the Global Initiative provides a capacity building framework for establishing new partnerships with those nations that wish to take similar action. In carrying out this new initiative, we will also cooperate with the IAEA and invite them to participate.

The approach begins with protecting material at the source. Here, the Global Initiative will build on activities underway through the Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) and International Counterproliferation Programs and the Department of Energy's many nonproliferation assistance programs. Our goal is to galvanize our partners to invest greater resources in their own capabilities to protect nuclear material on their territories. We will also seek to develop new partnerships with the private sector to reduce the risk of nuclear terrorism, including through innovative DHS programs such as the Customs Trade Partnership Against Terrorism (C-TPAT).

Since our efforts to secure nuclear material can never be fail-safe we must develop a robust international detection architecture. Here the Global Initiative will build on and sustain the successes of the Megaports Program and the Domestic Nuclear Detection Office, and catalyze new partnerships between these programs and their counterparts among partner nations. Our architecture must enable fixed and mobile detection across the air, land, and maritime domains and be flexible enough to ensure that our partners can develop interoperable and complementary capabilities.

A comprehensive architecture must also include capabilities to detect the movement of funds and the growing threat posed by terrorists seeking to procure nuclear technology through cyberspace. Here the Global Initiative will build on efforts underway at the Department of the Treasury to block the assets of terrorists and proliferators. To protect cyberspace, we must build on efforts underway in the Department of Homeland Security to protect our critical cyber infrastructure, including the relationship to critical nuclear facilities. We must develop new approaches to stop terrorists from using the virtual safe haven of cyberspace for planning attacks with nuclear weapons.

The Global Initiative will also strengthen our response capabilities to stop imminent attacks and mitigate their consequences should they occur. In this area, we must build on the capabilities of the Department of Energy's emergency response teams. At the same time, we must acknowledge that U.S. capabilities alone cannot meet this challenge. Rather, through the Global Initiative, we will foster partnerships with counterpart programs among Global Initiative partner nations, and develop cooperative concepts of operations for emergency response and consequence management. By joining the Global Initiative, partner nations will have the opportunity to participate in joint exercises that support the development of their own capabilities, and under certain circumstances, call on the assistance of partner nations for emergency response, consequence management, and criminal justice functions.

Transforming Our Diplomacy to Combat WMD Terrorism

In launching the Global Initiative, we will also be taking an important step to implement transformational diplomacy outlined by Secretary Rice. Through new, flexible partnerships, as well as stronger bilateral and regional ties, the Global Initiative will ensure that our strategies for combating nuclear terrorism are tailored to the conditions prevailing with our partner nations. In bringing to bear all instruments of national power against this threat, the Initiative will bring diplomats together with first responders, forensic and technical experts, law enforcement officers, the military, and others in the public and private sectors who shape the present and future risks of nuclear terrorism.

The Global Initiative will not only reinforce our national efforts, but it signals to all participating nations the importance of developing comprehensive approaches to combat the threat of WMD terrorism. The Initiative can help partners improve their understanding of the intentions of terrorists seeking to carry out attacks. It can help us develop the tools to prevent terrorists from gaining access to nuclear and radiological materials. Through the Initiative, we will employ in partnership with others new concepts of denial that are tailored to the specific facts, circumstances, and motivations of nuclear terrorists and their facilitators. The Global Initiative can also serve as the necessary platform for implementing the provisions of the Nuclear Terrorism Convention to ensure that we bring terrorists seeking to carry out nuclear attacks to justice, including through enhanced forensics techniques, as well as through strengthened legal processes.

As we proceed, we will build on the success of the Proliferation Security Initiative and the flexible partnerships it has established. However, we will also fill important gaps. For example, while PSI has focused on the interdiction of all WMD and related delivery systems, the Global Initiative brings a special focus to the operational and technical challenges associated with combating the nuclear terrorism threat. While PSI focuses on the proliferation trade among state actors, the Global Initiative will be focused on those pathways of nuclear proliferation that lead to terrorist end users. While PSI has strengthened our interdiction capabilities, the Global Initiative will move beyond interdiction within the nuclear and radiological area, to cooperation on tasks related to material protection, detection, emergency response, consequence management, attribution, and criminal justice.

Establishing Robust Interagency and Public-Private Partnerships

While the announcement of the Global Initiative shows diplomatic leadership by the United States and Russia, this effort must extend beyond the diplomatic realm to achieve success. In detecting nuclear material coming into our ports and urban areas and sharing best practices with foreign port operators, the Department of Homeland Security and its foreign counterparts must play a central role. In protecting our nuclear facilities from sabotage and exercising such capabilities with foreign partners, the Department of Energy and equivalent agencies abroad must play a central role. In stanching the flow of funds to terrorists seeking to buy nuclear material on the black market, the Department of Treasury and its fellow finance ministries must work closely. In all these areas, all departments and agencies participating in the Global Initiative will have to improve their sharing of information, whether law enforcement, operational, or technical.

There is also a large role for the private sector to play in mitigating the risk of nuclear terrorism. In the United States as in other countries, a substantial portion of the nuclear infrastructure is controlled by private sector utilities, laboratories, or university research centers or institutes. By working closely with these private entities, as well as those that supply and insure them, we can stimulate the development of best practices, risk management approaches, and codes of conduct.

Getting Results

As we move forward to implement the comprehensive vision of the Global Initiative, we must take care to identify specific ways to assess our efforts and measure our success. The Initiative offers the United States and other partners committed to taking a leadership role in combating nuclear terrorism an opportunity to raise the bar, to hold ourselves accountable for results, and in turn, to expect results from our partners. Building on the example set by the United States and Russia at the Bratislava Summit regarding nuclear security, we believe it will be useful to report every six months on the implementation of the Global Initiative.

Let me suggest four initial questions we should ask, as we seek to judge the success of the initiative from now until the end of 2008:

1) How many countries will have joined the initiative as partners? PSI has secured the endorsement of nearly eighty partners, and its capabilities have improved as its partnership has expanded.

2) How many multinational training exercises involving operational, technical, or other forms of global or regional cooperation will the Global Initiative have sponsored among its respective partners?

3) What specific steps will we have taken to improve the security of nuclear material at the source? We will expect partner nations to field a nuclear materials information database capability with inventory information regarding all material subject to their jurisdiction and to cooperate with information sharing requests from partners through Global Initiative activities.

4) To what extent will Initiative partner nations have expanded their nuclear and radiological detection or scanning of cargo coming to and leaving their ports and airports, as well as crossing their borders? Increasing the amount of total cargo scanned could serve as a worthy goal. We should also take steps to ensure that all partners exchange detection information in a near real-time manner with other partners.

Let me emphasize that we are still in the early stages of developing more precise performance measures of success for the Initiative, and some measures may ultimately be adopted by some partners, while they are not by others. This flexibility can be a valuable strength in an initiative, when it allows those partners who seek to do more to run ahead, while acknowledging the important contributions of others that are not as fully capable. In the coming months, Global Initiative partners will convene an initial meeting to agree not only to the guiding principles for this initiative, but also to establish a specific Plan of Work to implement these principles.

Conclusion

With the launch of the Global Initiative, the United States and Russia have taken a critical step toward developing a global network of like-minded partners to prevent terrorists from acquiring and using a nuclear weapon. Presidents Bush and Putin have provided us with the leadership and vision we need to confront the growing threat of nuclear terrorism. Now we must act to meet the threat of nuclear terrorism, and turn intentions into results.

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