



Committee on
HOMELAND SECURITY
Chairman Peter T. King

Opening Statement

November 15, 2012

Media Contact: Shane Wolfe

(202) 226-8417

**Statement of Chairman Patrick Meehan (R-PA)
Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence**

“WMD Terrorism: Assessing the Continued Homeland Threat”

November 15, 2012

Remarks as Prepared

I'd like to welcome everyone to today's hearing of the Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence.

I look forward to hearing from today's expert witnesses from the Aspen Institute Homeland Security Group who are here to update the Committee on the Recommendations of the Commission on the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation and Terrorism, also known as the WMD Commission.

It easy to forget that just one week after the terror attacks of September 11, 2001, a bioterrorist mailed letters containing anthrax spores to the offices of several news media and two United States Senators. The toxic material infected 22 people and took five lives.

Dozens of buildings were contaminated with anthrax as a result of the attack. The decontamination of one postal facility took 26 months and cost \$130 million. The United States Environmental Protection Agency spent some \$40 million to clean up government buildings in Washington, D.C. In

all, at least 17 post offices and public office buildings were contaminated. According to the FBI, the damage from the anthrax attacks cost \$1 billion.

Despite the loss of life, this was a relatively unsuccessful attack. Had the bio-agent been stronger, had the dispersal of the toxin been more widespread, or had this been a sustained campaign by a terror group or hostile nation state, hundreds of thousands could have been killed and there would have been untold billions in economic and infrastructure damage.

In 2008, the Congressionally mandated Commission on the Prevention of WMD Proliferation and Terrorism concluded that unless the world community acts decisively and with great urgency, it is likely that a weapon of mass destruction will be used in a terrorist attack somewhere in the world by the end of 2013.

We know that former al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden had called for the development and deployment of biological weapons before his death. We know that al Qaeda's strategy against us and the West is one of "death by a thousand cuts," and al Qaeda would love nothing more than to severely hamper the American economy with a bio-terror attack.

For instance, just before his death in 2011 American cleric Anwar Awlaki was publicly calling for such action, saying, "the use of chemical and biological weapons against population centers is allowed and is strongly recommended."

In addition to the al Qaeda threat, we know of active WMD programs in Syria, Iran, and Pakistan, which could easily be used by hostile governments or passed to allied terrorist organizations in order to threaten the United States. Considering the political volatility in the Middle East, particularly in Syria, the ability of these nations to properly secure their chemical and biological weapon capabilities from hostile terror groups should also be of paramount concern for us.

The threat of rogue regimes such as North Korea using such dangerous weapons or selling them on a black-market to the highest bidder are both security concerns as well.

WMD terrorism is a continuing and serious threat to the homeland. Four years after the WMD Commission released its sobering assessment, the time is ripe for reanalysis to ensure that resources are being targeted wisely.

The Aspen Institute's WMD Working Group has assessed that WMD terrorism is a continuing and serious threat to the U.S. Homeland. At today's

hearing, we will hear from the Institute on where we are and where we need to go.

This report reminds us that some of the building blocks for weapons of mass destruction are appropriately and legitimately used in the U.S. for medical and other peaceful purposes. So we must also ensure that certain biological, radiological, nuclear, and chemical materials never fall into the hands of domestic terrorists or others who would do us harm.

A host of government agencies are already working diligently on numerous aspects related to international proliferation and security, as well as the security of biological agents here at home.

For instance, the Intelligence Community continues to engage friendly countries in intelligence gathering and sharing regarding bioterrorism and the Department of Justice performs background checks on people who seek to possess certain dangerous pathogens, such as researchers and hazardous material drivers.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has also played a large role on ramping up the preparedness apparatus and since 2004 has spent at least \$70 million developing more than 20 CBRN risk assessments.

In March of this year, this Committee marked up legislation I proposed in order to establish weapons of mass destruction intelligence and information sharing functions of the Office of Intelligence and Analysis at DHS and to require dissemination of information analyzed by the Department to entities with responsibilities relating to homeland security.

This is a threat that I take very seriously, as the results of a successful CBRN attack on the homeland would be catastrophic.

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