



Committee on  
**HOMELAND SECURITY**  
Chairman Michael McCaul

*Opening Statement*

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**Statement of Subcommittee Chairman John Ratcliffe (R-TX)  
Subcommittee on Cybersecurity, Infrastructure Protection, and Security Technologies**

**“Weapons of Mass Destruction: Bolstering DHS to Combat Persistent Threats to America”**

**Remarks as Prepared**

During the Cold War years, the threat of nuclear annihilation was universally recognized. Today, there is an equally terrifying and persistent WMD threat, but the forms such weapons could take and the bad actors seeking to obtain them have vastly expanded. Today’s threat comes from Iran’s pursuit of a nuclear weapon, as well as the rise of ISIS and other terrorist organizations that are seeking to acquire chemicals, biological agents, radiological or nuclear material to use it to set off a weapon in one of our major cities. While such an attack may not result in total annihilation, it would be a major public health and safety catastrophe, as well as an economic and psychological blow to the entire country.

Today’s threat is illustrated by several evolving situations unfolding across the globe. The current nuclear deal being negotiated with Iran could increase the amount of nuclear material throughout the volatile Middle East if Iran is allowed to retain a certain amount of enriched uranium. Separately, Russia has recently announced it is pulling out of a decades-old Reagan Administration INF treaty, which limited the number of nuclear weapons between the two countries. Russia has since moved to modernize and increase its stockpile, thereby making the availability of nuclear and radiological material that much greater. Simultaneously, Middle Eastern countries like Saudi Arabia are building 16 new nuclear plants even as they struggle to battle radical Islamists within their own borders.

While these are greater geopolitical issues, the implications for the WMD threat to the U.S. homeland are immense. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has struggled to keep tabs on its radiological and nuclear material across Eastern Europe. The current nuclear negotiations deal with Iran and the proliferation of nuclear material across the Middle East raises similar concerns of operational control of these sensitive materials.

This is all happening at a time when ISIS is propagating a call for terrorist plots in the United States and taking control of large pieces of territory across Iraq, Syria and North Africa. Terrorists and militant

groups have long had an interest in using a WMD to attack U.S interests, especially those including chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear materials. ISIS has made its ambition known that it wishes to obtain WMD material and use it in an attack. Underscoring the real possibility of this threat, Australian Intelligence officials have publicly stated their belief that ISIS has already seized enough material from government facilities, hospitals and universities in Iraq and Syria to build a dirty bomb.

Currently, the Department of Homeland Security is organized to address the WMD threat through several different offices and directorates, the Office of Health Affairs (OHA), the Domestic Nuclear Detection Office (DNDO) and elements of the Science and Technology (S&T) Directorate. This fragmentation is in contrast to other Departments and Federal Agencies across the U.S. government that have centralized WMD defense programs and have clear focal points for interagency collaboration. One of the major concerns we have heard with the current structure is that DHS does not have the stature and voice that it should among all of the agencies working to address all of these threats.

In September of 2013, DHS was directed by Congress to undertake an in-depth review of its WMD programs. The review also required recommendations to improve its organizational structure to be more effective. Unfortunately, the Committee only received this report less than a month prior to this hearing, meaning that it's nearly 2 years late.

I've had the opportunity to sit down with Dr. Gowadia, Director of DNDO numerous times during my short tenure as Chairman as part of my oversight responsibilities to learn how DNDO operates and works with its stakeholders, both domestically and internationally. One thing that I have concluded, and have heard repeatedly from others, is that the current DNDO model works; something which unfortunately can't be said about every DHS office. In support of the opinion that DNDO is one of the most effective offices within the Department, the most recent 2014 edition of the Best Places to Work in the Federal Government ranked DNDO 11th out of 314 Agency subcomponents. This success is built on leadership, a clear mission, and a well-functioning organizational structure. And while DNDO hasn't always been a benchmark of success, the organization has certainly matured into a model that I think should be replicated throughout the Department.

Chairman McSally and I convened our Subcommittees here today to examine whether the DHS proposal to reorganize will support the shared opinion of most that the Department of Homeland Security should be doing more to guard against WMD threats. While the proposal to Congress lays out several different options and a proposed recommendation for how the Department should reorganize, we hope to hear more today about how this proposed reorganization will address gaps and strengthen the Departments posture towards WMD threats and we hope to hear some specifics. I thank Chairman McSally for joining me in this effort, and I thank the witnesses for being here today.

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