

## **White House, Congress Urged To Step Up Efforts To Prevent Nuclear Attack**

By Chris Strohm, "Government Executive", March 28, 2006

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Government security experts said Tuesday the United States remains too vulnerable to a nuclear or dirty bomb attack and called on Congress and the White House to increase federal efforts aimed at preventing the smuggling of such dangerous materials.

"In short, we still do not have a maximum effort against what everybody agrees is the most urgent threat to the American people," said former New Jersey Republican Gov. Thomas Kean, a co-chairman of the commission that investigated the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

Kean testified at a hearing by the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, which released Government Accountability Office reports revealing that U.S. efforts to prevent the smuggling of nuclear and radiological material are plagued by major flaws, schedule delays and cost overruns.

In an undercover operation last December, GAO investigators succeeded in smuggling past Customs inspectors at two U.S. land border crossings enough radioactive material to make two dirty bombs. A dirty bomb combines a conventional explosive, such as dynamite, with radioactive material, which the bomb is intended to scatter widely.

Kean said President Bush should develop "a comprehensive plan to dramatically accelerate the timetable for securing all nuclear weapons-usable material around the world." The International Atomic Energy Agency has reported 481 confirmed cases of nuclear and radiological materials being smuggled abroad since May 2002, according to GAO. Kean said Congress should provide the administration with the necessary resources to secure vulnerable materials as quickly as possible.

Stephen Flynn, senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and a former Coast Guard commander, told the committee that more regulations were needed to increase security at the nation's seaports.

"This thing screams for federal standards," said Flynn, who has spoken of such concerns in the past. GAO reported that only about 40 percent of seaports had radiation portal monitors, and it will likely take the Homeland Security Department longer than planned to deploy more monitors.

After the hearing, Flynn told reporters that the 2002 Maritime Transportation Security Act required seaports to have security plans but did not define what the plans should include. Because seaports are in competition with each other, they are hesitant to raise security standards out of fear that doing so will cost them business or increase their costs, he added.

Flynn said he believed that new regulations could come from the administration, rather than Congress. The Coast Guard, for example, could establish standards for training security personnel at seaports and for requiring the scanning of all containers, he said. Flynn added that requiring containers to have hardened seals was "technically feasible and economically viable."

"At the end of the day, confronting the nuclear smuggling threat requires that we take the post-9/11 security framework the U.S. government has been developing largely on the fly over the past four years, and quickly move it to the next generation of initiatives that build on the original framework," Flynn said.