

**Statement of
Colonel Randall J. Larsen, USAF (Ret)
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Senate Judiciary Committee
Subcommittee on Terrorism and Homeland Security**

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you my thoughts and perspectives on America's state of readiness to respond to biological terrorism--and let me be direct—America is not prepared.

Mr. Chairman, since 1994 I have been studying both the threat of bioweapons and the technologies, organizations, and systems required to defend our cities, our communities, and our families. America has spent a lot of money in the past 16 years in the name of biodefense, but progress has been incredibly slow, disjointed, and misdirected. This lack of progress leaves us highly vulnerable. This vulnerability will increase in the years ahead as the biotechnical revolution provides capability to a growing number of non-state actors, both foreign and domestic.

I speak today on my own behalf, but based on knowledge I have acquired during the past decade. I previously served as the chairman, Department of Military Strategy and Operations at the National War College and the founding director of the Institute for Homeland Security. Last year, I served as the executive director of the Congressional Commission on the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation and Terrorism, and currently serve as the CEO of the WMD Center, a not-for-profit research and education organization that former Senators Bob Graham (D-FL) and Jim Talent (R-MO) created as a follow-on to continue the work of the WMD Commission—and there is much work to do.

As you know, The WMD Commission Report Card released on January 26, 2010 gave a failing grade to America for preparedness to respond to bioterrorism. Senators Graham and Talent thought this might be a wake-up call for the Administration and Congress. That has apparently not been the case. On July 1, the House of Representatives voted for a raid on the BioShield Strategic Reserve Funds (SRF). In a letter to President Obama, Senators Graham and Talent stated that removing funds from the BioShield SRF would “drive a stake through the heart of America's fledgling biodefense program.”

The White House remained silent on the issue, but thankfully, a bipartisan effort in the U.S. Senate halted this attempted raid. This was not the first attempted raid on this vital national security program, and it will not likely be the last. While troublesome in itself, it is really a symptom of a much larger problem. Many leaders in this town, both Democrat and Republican, fail to understand the growing threat of bioterrorism.

That was best demonstrated when the bipartisan leadership in Congress created the WMD Commission. The words biology, biological, and bioterrorism did not appear in the enabling language. It was as if the U.S. Congress thought WMD was an acronym for nuclear.

I was not part of the Commission's first year of work, and had no input to their December 2008 report, *WORLD AT RISK*. But since the term "teachable moment" has become popular in this town, let me explain the teachable moment from that report.

With enabling legislation solely focused on nuclear weapons, nine commissioners with strong backgrounds in national security and nuclear weapons, and a staff of 30-- with only two members with bioweapons backgrounds--one could have expected a report primarily focused on the nuclear threat. However, when nine highly-respected national security experts took the time to closely examine the WMD threat, they came to the unanimous conclusion that bioweapons were the more likely threat. They got it, but I am not sure that Congress and the Obama Administration do.

The Department of Justice Inspector General Report, released in May of this year, stated that the Department was poorly prepared to perform the duties assigned by Emergency Support Function 13 of the National Response Framework—"coordinating federal law enforcement activities in response to a critical incident, such as a WMD attack, and for ensuring public safety and security in the event an incident overwhelms state and local law enforcement." I was not surprised with this assessment. This critique was one additional example of the deficiencies highlighted in the Commission's failing grade.

The underlying cause for this failing grade is exactly the same across the board in all departments and agencies—leadership, to be precise, lack of leadership. Nowhere is that more evident than in the Department of Justice (DOJ). The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) was designated as the lead DOJ agency for WMD response, and yet, ATF has not had a director for more than four years. That makes a pretty easy argument for lack of leadership—both at ATF and for those responsible for putting a director in place and ensuring DOJ was ready to respond.

Unfortunately, this lack of leadership goes all the way to the White House. Both the Clinton and Bush Administrations had a Special Assistant to the President for Biodefense to coordinate efforts across the federal government. The Obama Administration eliminated this position and the Biodefense Policy Coordinating Committee that was the forum to ensure that US Government was focused on the problem. This leadership and senior-level coordination deficiency is critical since there are more than two dozen Presidentially-appointed, Senate-confirmed individuals in the executive branch with some responsibility for biodefense. However, no one has it for a fulltime job, and no one is charge. Perhaps that is worth repeating.

There is not a single Presidentially-appointed, Senate-confirmed individual with fulltime responsibility for leading America's biodefense efforts. More than that, there is no place in the executive branch, other than in the person of the President himself, where the various lines of authority converge on a single individual. Imagine how these facts will read when some future Commission investigates the failed response to a biological attack on our homeland.

That, Mr. Chairman, is what I see as one of the two primary reasons for the failing grade assessed by the WMD Commission, and I have seen no perceptible progress on this issue in the past six months.

The second reason that resulted in a failing grade is the lack of understanding of the threat of bioterrorism. I am firmly convinced that if senior leaders in Congress and the Administration understood the threat, as Senators Graham and Talent do, we would be acting differently and aggressively addressing the vulnerabilities that confront us today.

I recommend all members of Congress and key leaders in the Administration receive the Department of Homeland Security Population Threat Assessment briefing. Frankly, I would not waste your time by recommending a briefing by the Intelligence Community (IC) on the subject of bioterrorism. They would tell you they have little or no information of any terrorist group developing biological weapons capability.

That should not be surprising. During 15 years of the cold war, the IC failed to appropriately identify the massive Soviet biowarfare program that consisted of 50,000 scientists and technicians working in scores of laboratories across 10 time zones. (This was the size of the Soviet's offensive biowarfare program after they signed the Biological Warfare and Toxin Convention.) The IC also missed al Qaeda's anthrax programs in Afghanistan and Malaysia, and they missed the Aum Shinrikyo biowarfare and chemical weapons programs. Thankfully, both of the Aum's weapons programs were plagued with technical errors when they went from small-scale to large-scale production.

Do we really think there is a high probability the IC will find a half dozen individuals working in a make-shift laboratory (standard bio lab equipment purchased on the internet in a facility no larger than a two-car garage) in a remote village in the tribal regions of Pakistan or Sana, Yemen or the suburbs of New York City? That is the size and scale of a facility required to produce bioweapons, according a study (BACUS) done by the Defense Threat Reduction Agency in 1999 that determined there would be no perceptible "intelligence signature" of such an operation.

For the threat of bioterrorism, the IC can provide us with sound strategic intelligence information on intent, but very little tactical level information: status of a bioweapons program of a specific terrorist organization or the time and location of a planned attack. That is why the Department of Homeland Security's Population Threat

Assessment, which demonstrates capability, is the most valuable briefing you can receive.

I think we all understand that there are people and organizations out there that want to kill large numbers of Americans. The WMD Commission said there are two ways to do that, nuclear and biological, and by far, biological is easier. If the senior leaders in the Congress and Administration understood the biological capabilities now available--and even more troubling, what will be available in the next couple of years--to small terrorist groups, there would be no requirement for hearings such as these. Biodefense would be a top priority, and we would be making rapid progress in defending our cities, communities, and families.

Mr. Chairman, for the nation to effectively deal with the biological threats facing us, it is imperative that those responsible for shaping the strategy understand the true nature of the threats. The best way to improve this subcommittee's understanding of the threat would be for all members to receive the Population Threat Assessment briefing prepared by Dr. Elizabeth George at the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Science and Technology.

Senators Bob Graham and Jim Talent concur with this recommendation and asked me to tell you that one of the most important briefings they received during the two years of the WMD Commission was the Population Threat Assessment.

While my focus today has been on the capability to respond to a biological attack, I will close with one thought about DOJ's responsibility under ESF-13 of the National Response Framework for response to an attack with an improvised nuclear device (IND).

According to a two-year study by Brooke Buddemeier from Lawrence Livermore Laboratory, and work by the Center for Biosecurity-UPMC, the casualty figures from an IND in a large city, such as Baltimore, could be reduced by several hundred thousand--in some cases up to 500,000--if people took the proper actions. That is more Americans than died in World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War combined. Law enforcement would play a major role in this effort and DOJ has the lead for the Federal government. If the leaders in DOJ and ATF understood how many lives they could help save, they might put a higher priority on their assigned mission.

Mr. Chairman, Senators Graham, Talent and I formed The WMD Center with two primary missions: First, because the threat of bioterrorism is increasing, we want to do all we can to assure that senior leaders across all levels of government--federal, state, and local--fully understand that threat and the actions needed to counter it. That is why Senators Graham and Talent wrote an op-ed for yesterday's Washington Post and why I am here today. Second, we want to ensure that America continues to build its capability to respond to acts of bioterrorism, so we will issue a second report card early in 2011. We sincerely hope that we will be able to assign a passing grade at that time.