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SCHAKOWSKY CALLS ON BUSH ADMINISTRATION TO INVEST IN INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS TO COMBAT NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION

"BY SOLELY CONCENTRATING OUR EFFORTS ON IRAQ, IT IS GETTING HARDER TO CONVINCE THE WORLD THAT THIS IS JUST ABOUT WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION, NOT DOMESTIC POLITICS OR OIL OR REVENGE."

WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today called on the Bush Administration to invest in international efforts to combat nuclear proliferation. During a hearing in the Government Reform Subcommittee on National Security, Veterans Affairs and International Relations hearing on Combating Terrorism: Preventing Nuclear Terrorism, Schakowsky asked, *"Why is the President only concentrating on Iraq's nuclear ambitions and ignoring the countless number of insecure nuclear facilities across the globe? Why is the President not making sure that Russia's stockpile of uranium, for example, is not made more secure? Why is the President not working harder to prevent nuclear scientists all over the world from joining the ranks of terrorist organizations and rogue nations?"*

She added, *"A new investment in nonproliferation would help convince a skeptical world that we're serious about nuclear proliferation. By solely concentrating our efforts on Iraq, it is getting harder to convince the world that this is just about weapons of mass destruction, not domestic politics or oil or revenge."*

Below is the full text of Schakowsky's remarks from today's hearing.

Nuclear terrorism has been a topic of concern for the Administration, the Congress, and the American public. In a recent speech before the United Nations, President Bush suggested that a primary reason for taking military action against Iraq is that Saddam Hussein is seeking nuclear weapons which he could provide to terrorists. Administration officials have also stated that they have intelligence indicating that al Qaeda operatives were actively seeking to obtain nuclear weapons. I consider these statements to be cause for concern and it is important that we analyze this issue very carefully.

We need to understand the different ways that terrorists groups can acquire radiological or nuclear weapons, and ways to prevent such actions from occurring. I am eager to learn more about the expertise and resources that terrorists would need to build a radiological or nuclear weapon. Another important issue to investigate is what current safeguards exist and what new ones need to be put in place to protect our homeland against such a deadly attack. I am hoping these concerns will be addressed in today's hearing.

When discussing threats of terrorist groups and nations using weapons of mass destruction on the United States and our allies, the current debate of whether we should attack Iraq comes to my mind. One of the underlying reasons that the Administration claims to support a preemptive strike against Iraq is the idea that Iraq may supply weapons of mass destruction to terrorist groups who will in turn use them on the United States and its allies. In the President's National Security Strategy report for 2002, it is stated that the Administration has "irrefutable proof" that Iraq has designs to acquire nuclear weapons. Another issue of concern to me is our policy on nuclear proliferation. Why is the President only concentrating on Iraq's nuclear ambitions and ignoring the countless number of insecure nuclear facilities across the globe? Why is the President not making sure that Russia's stockpile of uranium, for example, is not made more secure? Why is the President not working harder to prevent nuclear scientists all over the world from joining the ranks of terrorist organizations and rogue nations? A new investment in nonproliferation would help convince a skeptical world that we're serious about nuclear proliferation. By solely concentrating our efforts on Iraq, it is getting harder to convince the world that this is just about weapons of mass destruction, not domestic politics or oil or revenge. Instead of spending $200 billion on a war with Iraq, we could invest in nonproliferation, which would make more of a positive impact on the global war on terrorism and would actually make us safer than a war on Iraq would. I am hoping that today's hearing will shed some more light on these important issues.

Nuclear terrorism is a serious topic that must not be overlooked. We must make sure that terrorist groups never get their hands on such destructive and deadly weapons. But when dealing with rogue nations, such as Iraq, the situation becomes much more complicated. Dismantling a terrorist organization is one thing, but preemptively attacking an entire nation is something else. If nuclear weapons do exist in Iraq, are we actually going to be safer if we launch an attack? It is important for us to work with the international community to continue to force weapons inspections to resume in Iraq and continue to isolate Iraq. It is vital that we work with our international allies and others in the international community to make sure that we look over all possible options in preventing these groups and nations from acquiring such weapons before we look to military solutions. Where we have concerns, we must undertake aggressive efforts to protect this nation. When the threat is imminent, the President has many tools and options at his disposal to deal with that threat. However, it is imperative that, when time and circumstance permit, we exercise all diplomatic options before sending soldiers to war.

War brings death, brutality, and emotional and economic losses that no person or nation should ever experience and should always be the last resort.