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# U.S. Seeks Tighter Security to Prevent Dirty Bombs

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By Tabassum Zakaria

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The United States is seeking greater global security for radioactive material that could be used by extremists to create what security experts call a "dirty bomb," the Energy Department's chief of nuclear security said on Tuesday.

Non-proliferation efforts have mainly focused on securing nuclear weapons and fissile material that could be used in those arms, and more efforts are needed to secure lower level radioactive materials, said retired Air Force Gen. John Gordon, head of the National Nuclear Security Administration.

"The next frontier though is to get into the non-weapon grade fissile materials as well, and that's an area we're just starting to engage in," he told a Defense Writers Group breakfast. "We're really exploring that area hard."

Since the Sept. 11 attacks on America, U.S. officials have expressed greater concern that terrorists might try to build a radiological dispersal device, or "dirty bomb."

While such a device would not have the destructive capability of a nuclear weapon, materials for it could be easier to obtain.

The United States has started discussions with its allies and Russia about the issue, Gordon said.

"It's not stored as weapons grade material, it's not shipped as weapons grade material, so it may or may not be inventoried as well," he said.

"I think we are asking people to start opening their eyes a little bit more and say, do we have adequate physical control on this? Do we have adequate inventory? It undoubtedly varies by country. France and Britain are very, very good," he said.

CIA ([news](#) - [web sites](#)) Director George Tenet, in testimony to Congress this year, said Osama bin Laden ([news](#) - [web sites](#)) and his al Qaeda network were believed to be seeking a nuclear device and a dirty bomb.

The United States has blamed bin Laden and al Qaeda for the Sept. 11 attacks that killed about 3,000 people.

While speculative reports have emerged of nuclear materials or even a weapon missing from Russia's stockpile, there was no evidence that had occurred, Gordon said.

"There's Russian assurances, and no other data to suggest that's wrong," Gordon said. "I think weapons grade material is under pretty good control," he said of Russia.

"But what I wonder about ... is the controls and security of fissile material that is not weapons grade - generally it comes from either reactor fuel, spent reactor fuel or reprocessed fuel -- I think that's an area for non-proliferation that we need to really start getting our hands around a little bit more," Gordon said.

He reiterated that the U.S. nuclear stockpile was reliable and there was no need to conduct tests in the near future.

"To say that we would never have to do a test, I can't do that. On the other hand I can say I don't have a need to test now," he said.

Nuclear weapons facilities were safe from a Sept. 11 style attack and despite a stream of reports of suspicious characters lurking about, "I have no specific threats to any of the facilities," Gordon said.

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