



# U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

Statement for the Record  
by Senator Joseph R. Biden, Jr.  
Hearing of the Foreign Relations Committee  
“Safeguarding the Atom:  
Nuclear Energy and Nonproliferation Challenges”  
July 31, 2007

Today our Committee is holding a hearing on a subject of vital importance for U.S. national security and for peace and stability around the world: how can the world enjoy the benefits of civilian nuclear energy without increasing the risk that more countries will acquire nuclear weapons?

In his time President Kennedy worried that by the mid-1970s the United States might face a world in which 15 or 20 countries possessed nuclear weapons. By that standard, the nuclear nonproliferation regime has been remarkably successful. A central part of that success has been the system of safeguards on civilian nuclear technology overseen by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The purpose of safeguards is to ensure that countries are fulfilling the pledges they have made to forego nuclear weapons, even if they are making use of civilian nuclear technology. A well-functioning IAEA safeguards system is essential to nonproliferation.

But the IAEA and its safeguards system are facing intense challenges. The world rightly keeps asking more of the IAEA safeguards system, but the IAEA is not getting the funds it needs to meet those demands. Many countries are looking to nuclear power as a response to climate change and energy insecurity, but the IAEA struggles to find and retain enough qualified nuclear inspectors to keep up even with today's demands.

Even if the IAEA safeguards system can overcome these challenges, it may not be able to cope with a wide diffusion of the technology to enrich uranium or to reprocess spent fuel to extract plutonium. These technologies are used to create the fuel for civilian nuclear power, but they also can be used to create weapons-usable material. Producing material suitable for nuclear weapons is the most difficult hurdle for countries in acquiring nuclear weapons, so the spread of enrichment and reprocessing technology beyond the small number of countries already possessing it poses serious risks for U.S. national security.

To address these risks while meeting a growing demand for nuclear fuel, several nuclear fuel supplier states, including the United States, along with the IAEA and nongovernmental groups such as the Nuclear Threat Initiative, have proposed some type of guaranteed access to nuclear fuel for states that play by the rules and are looking to make peaceful use of nuclear power. With confidence in such fuel supply assurances, it is hoped, countries could forego the costly and risky pursuit of enrichment and reprocessing technology.

I want to thank Senator Casey for agreeing to chair today's hearing in my absence; he could not have chosen a topic more important to the long-term national security of the United States. The Committee is fortunate today to hear from well-qualified witnesses, including our colleague Senator Bayh of Indiana. Senator Bayh and the Ranking Member of our Committee, Senator Lugar, are the co-authors of S. 1138, the Nuclear Safeguards and Supply Act. On June 27, our Committee unanimously ordered that bill to be reported to the full Senate. The Lugar/Bayh bill addresses the same challenges the Committee is meeting on today, and is an important contribution to Congressional consideration of these important questions. I hope today's hearing will contribute to perfecting that bill and to gaining the full Senate's support for it.

I look forward to the insights and recommendations from all our witnesses on how the IAEA safeguards system can meet the challenges it already faces and how it might accommodate an expansion of nuclear power without increasing the chances that more states will acquire nuclear weapons.