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## **Chairman Towns Sparks GAO Investigation of the Maritime Initiative**

### ***Port safety and security essential to combating nuclear attack on the United States***

Washington, DC – Chairman Edolphus “Ed” Towns (D-NY) today called on the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to investigate the Megaports Initiative, a program launched in 2003 by the Department of Energy (DOE) to protect the world’s shipping network from dangerous cargo and nuclear materials. Since September 11, 2001, Chairman Towns has been concerned that the nation may be vulnerable to a terrorist attempt to smuggle nuclear materials or a nuclear weapon into the United States through domestic and international ports.

In a letter sent today to Gene Dodaro, GAO’s Acting Comptroller General, Chairman Towns requests GAO launch a new, comprehensive review of the Megaports Initiative. The Megaports Initiative works with foreign customs, port authorities, port operators, and/or other relevant entities in partner countries to systematically enhance detection capabilities for special nuclear and other radioactive materials in containerized cargo transiting the global maritime shipping network.

“I am concerned that our ports may be vulnerable to an attempt to smuggle nuclear materials or a nuclear weapon into the United States. The consequences to our national and economic interests could be devastating,” said Chairman Towns. “We need ensure that systems are in place to prevent a future attack on American soil.”

The Megaports Initiative requires collaboration between several government agencies including the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Departments of State and Defense and the U.S. Customs and Border Security Agency.

In 2005, GAO raised a number of concerns that the Megaports Initiative was not succeeding and lacked a coherent and comprehensive long-term plan to prevent the smuggling of nuclear weapons and materials. It also found that the Initiative was unable to reach agreements with

key countries with high priority ports.

Chairman Towns asks GAO to determine the extent to which DOE has implemented the recommendations made in GAO's 2005 report on the Megaports Initiative, and address the status of DOE's efforts to implement the Megaports Initiative and what challenges remain.

Last week, in response to the failed terrorist attack on Christmas Day, Chairman Towns requested that GAO conduct a thorough review of the terrorist watch list and no-fly lists maintained by several different agencies. Chairman Towns also announced that the Committee would investigate issues within the federal government for improving the nation's cybersecurity and the deployment of Secure ID Cards under REAL ID.

"I was outraged by the intelligence breakdown that allowed a terrorist armed with explosives to board a United States-bound plane despite readily available information that could have prevented this from occurring," said Chairman Towns. "I do not take matters of homeland security lightly, especially as a New Yorker. I look forward to GAO's complete review of the Megaports Initiative and working to secure our ports. We simply cannot afford any lapses that would allow a terrorist to sneak a nuclear weapon onto our shores."

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### **Documents and Links**

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[Letter from Chairman Towns to GAO Acting Comptroller General Gene Dodaro](#)