

Bio Terror 'Next Threat' For US

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Nuclear and biological terrorism is the emerging threat the next US President should focus on, the US security chief has told Sky News.

In an exclusive interview, homeland security secretary Michael Chertoff said sources of radioactive and biological materials must be properly secured "at all costs".

He warned terrorists are actively seeking to acquire such materials.

Mr Chertoff said he did not think a weapon of mass destruction, like a biological or nuclear bomb, was a danger that could be just months away.

But he warned: "It may be years away and we can't afford to waste this time waiting for that event to happen.

"We've got to stay ahead of the issue of weapons of mass destruction, if not for our own benefit, then for the benefit of our children."

His comments echo those of the British Home Secretary Jacqui Smith, who told Sky News last year that intelligence suggested terrorists were trying to get their hands on materials and know how to make a dirty bomb.

Last November, the security services in Slovakia arrested three men attempting to sell enriched uranium on the black market.

Mr Chertoff said it must be a priority to secure sites in rogue countries where dangerous materials may get into the wrong hands.

He said: "It is also important to secure our own radioactive material.

"Medical facilities, for example, have radioactive material, which they use for medical purposes. We're in the process of securing those in the United States."

Mr Chertoff also warned nuclear proliferation was a major concern.

He said: "Obviously, the more countries that get the (nuclear) bomb, the greater the likelihood that they will deliberately or inadvertently pass the bomb into the hands of dangerous people."

But the security chief said biological threats posed the most pressing and "challenging issue" to security, "because the raw material exists in nature".

He said: "The internet and the proliferation of knowledge is an increasing challenge.

"It will require the whole world to make sure people aren't setting up laboratories where they're beginning to fashion biological weapons."

Mr Chertoff told Sky News the intent of terrorists to get their hands on such weapons was clear.

He pointed to the discovery of al Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan, where experiments with biological and chemical agents had taken place, saying: "Al Qaeda would, if they could, use these types of weapons.

"It is not a lack of intent, it is a lack of capability. But I don't think that we want to wait in addressing these issues and that's why this is a very hot priority for us."