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International Legal Framework for Strengthening Nuclear Security

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Although nuclear security is primarily a national responsibility, the legal framework emerged and has been evolving because governments and international institutions recognize that threats to nuclear security have a global dimension. This imperative to work together gave rise to an international effort to build a nuclear-security framework to meet nuclear related threats. Its goal: a coordinated, consistent, sustainable fight against these threats. For the purpose of this paper, the legal framework for nuclear security constitutes a set of legally binding (“hard law”) and nonbinding (“soft law”) instruments which –in combination with other institutions and programs –strengthens nuclear security while helping the international community combat nuclear terrorism. International efforts to deter and prevent nuclear terrorism would be largely ineffective without criminalization of these crimes. States acting under these provisions define actions that threaten nuclear security as criminal offences in national law, and levy criminal or civil penalties commensurate with such serious offences. In this sense, nuclear forensics is key to successfully investigating and prosecuting such offences. The international legal framework for nuclear security provides a comprehensive umbrella under which to pursue such vitally important goals.

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