

Preparing for a nuclear terrorist attack by creating a unified response through national nuclear response frameworks

Abstract: As attempts by terrorists to obtain nuclear and radiological weapons and materials increases, it is important to plan and prepare for terrorists detonating an R/N bomb. A key preparation component is a national nuclear response framework (NNRF), which details the policies, procedures, capabilities, and priorities for responding to a nuclear terrorist attack. Defining the roles and responsibilities as well as coordination mechanisms among national and international bodies will help ensure the framework creates a unified response. In turn, a unified response will help streamline the response and avoid confusion in the field. The paper will detail three important coordination factors within a NNRF: interagency coordination; international coordination; and public communications. The Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism identified these key national nuclear framework components during a Nigerian hosted workshop focused on adapting all-hazards response frameworks to nuclear response frameworks.

Discussion at the workshop highlighted a number of key best practices related to NNRFs. A NNRF should take a multi-faceted approach to detailing agencies' roles and responsibilities. Frameworks clearly define the roles of each agency. For instance, first responders should know their in-field roles and priorities in advance of an attack. Additionally, the frameworks outline interagency coordination. Each responsibility denotes a lead agency as well as defined supporting agencies. A country also identifies an agency to lead the overall response. Countries can hold interagency exercises as way to ensure all agencies understand how to operate and coordinate based on their NNRF. Agencies should not only prepare with communicating with each other but also with the public.

The workshop also focused on crisis communications pertaining to public messaging. Countries should outline a public messaging strategy in preparation of an attack in order to deliver a unified public message. A unified message will ensure there is no conflicting information disseminated and manage public risk perception. Key preparation factor is identifying messaging priorities and a lead authority to communicate information to the public. To ease messaging during a response, agencies can coordinate to create pre-approved messaging for the lead public messaging authority to disseminate during an attack. It is important to not only prepare nationally but also internationally.

Participants at the Nigerian workshop stressed the importance of international coordination and communication. NNRFs should address international requirements, protocols, and coordination mechanisms to ensure the attacked nation receives the highest amount of aid possible and safeguard other countries. Effective bilateral coordination requires both strong relationships between institutions in each country and established formal mechanisms for exchanging information. Agencies can formalize information sharing and coordination through protocols and agreements. Nations should also consider plans and protocols for submitting assistance requests to international organizations and regional partners. Furthermore, nations should understand the relevant international legal instruments they are party to and detail the procedures needed to comply with those agreements. Through bilateral and multilateral exercises, countries can test these international protocols and coordination procedure

Gender

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