

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-19-429](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Nuclear terrorism remains a significant threat to the security of the United States and its allies and partners. U.S. efforts to prevent nuclear terrorism include working with IAEA, an autonomous international agency affiliated with the United Nations. The Department of State coordinates the United States' policy with and financial contributions to IAEA. IAEA's nuclear security program aims to assist countries in enhancing the physical protection, control, and accounting of their nuclear and radiological material and nuclear facilities.

GAO was asked to review IAEA's nuclear security program. This report examines (1) the structure and range of nuclear security work that IAEA conducts, (2) how IAEA plans and prioritizes its nuclear security work and measures performance, and (3) the challenges that IAEA's nuclear security program faces. GAO analyzed key IAEA documents and interviewed IAEA officials, U.S. and foreign government officials, and nuclear security experts.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making five recommendations to the Department of State, including that it work with IAEA to develop guidelines for prioritizing IAEA's nuclear security activities, develop program baselines and targets, and work with the United States and other member states to analyze options to stabilize nuclear security funding. State concurred with all five recommendations.

View [GAO-19-429](#). For more information, contact David Trimble at (202) 512-3841 or trimbled@gao.gov.

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NUCLEAR SECURITY

The International Atomic Energy Agency Could Improve Priority Setting, Performance Measures, and Funding Stabilization

What GAO Found

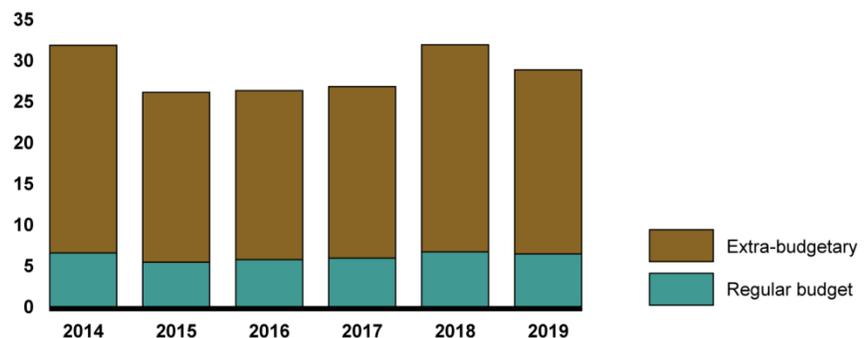
The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) carries out its nuclear security program under its Division of Nuclear Security through four subprograms. IAEA activities under these subprograms include developing guidance, providing training, and assisting countries in enhancing nuclear and radiological material security.

IAEA plans its nuclear security work through several key documents, including a Nuclear Security Plan, which calls for activities to be prioritized. However, IAEA's planning documents do not include guidelines for prioritization. Instead, IAEA officials said they respond to member states' requests as they arrive and to the extent resources are available. By developing guidelines for prioritizing its nuclear security activities, IAEA could help ensure that it is allocating its resources to the areas of greatest need. IAEA has developed performance measures for its nuclear security program, but these measures do not have baselines or targets. This limits IAEA's ability to demonstrate the results of its nuclear security program.

IAEA member states disagree over the agency's role in nuclear security, and according to U.S. and other member-state officials and experts GAO interviewed, these disagreements create challenges for the agency, such as funding its nuclear security efforts. Officials added that states that do not support the agency's nuclear security role resist efforts to substantially raise the agency's regular budget for nuclear security, contributing to the program's heavy reliance on voluntary, or extra-budgetary, contributions from member states.

Extra-budgetary and Regular Budget Funding for the International Atomic Energy Agency's Division of Nuclear Security

Nominal dollars (in millions)



Source: GAO analysis of IAEA Programme and Budget data. | GAO-19-429

GAO previously reported that extra-budgetary funding is unreliable. Reliance on such funding affects nuclear security program planning, human resources, and sustainability. Experts and U.S. agency officials have suggested options to stabilize nuclear security program funding, but IAEA has not analyzed such options. By working with the United States and other member states to analyze options to stabilize nuclear security program funding, IAEA could ensure that it has sufficient, reliable resources to implement the Nuclear Security Plan.