

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-106486](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

According to NNSA, there is enough nuclear material around the world to make tens of thousands of nuclear weapons. Some of this material is in countries facing significant security challenges. The theft of nuclear materials or sabotage of a nuclear facility could result in a dangerous release of radiation.

GAO was asked to review U.S. efforts to secure international nuclear materials. This report (1) describes the risks to securing international nuclear materials identified by federal officials and experts; (2) examines the extent to which federal programs address these risks; and (3) assesses the extent to which U.S. agencies plan and coordinate their nuclear material security programs, and a national strategy exists to help ensure alignment of programs' objectives. GAO reviewed relevant plans and program documentation and interviewed federal officials and nongovernmental experts.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations, including that NNSA and DOD programs follow leading collaboration practices to clarify and document roles and responsibilities when working in the same countries, and that NSC's future national strategy include guidance for agencies to align their activities with the strategy's goals. NNSA and DOD agreed with GAO's recommendations; NSC did not comment. This is a public version of a Controlled Unclassified Information (CUI) report that GAO issued in December 2022. Information that NNSA and NSC deemed CUI has been omitted.

View [GAO-23-106486](#). For more information, contact Allison Bawden at (202) 512-3841 or [bawdena@gao.gov](mailto:bawdena@gao.gov).

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# OVERSEAS NUCLEAR MATERIAL SECURITY

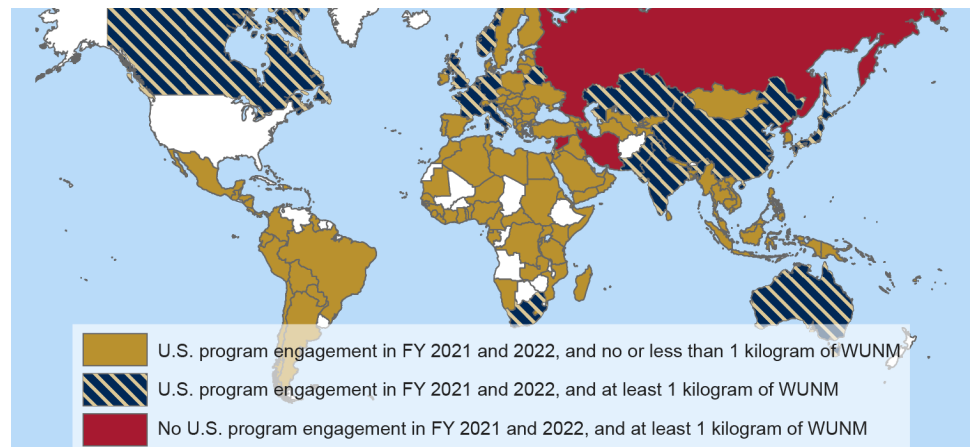
## A Comprehensive National Strategy Could Help Address Risks of Theft and Sabotage

### What GAO Found

Federal officials and nuclear security experts identified existing risks to the security of nuclear materials worldwide, such as inadequate physical security at facilities containing these materials. Officials and experts also identified trends that could exacerbate risks, such as advancements in cyber capabilities.

GAO identified federal programs, including those under the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) and Department of Defense (DOD), which are taking steps to address these risks. These steps include increasing facility security, countering nuclear smuggling, and reducing the use of weapon usable nuclear material in civilian nuclear applications. However, challenges exist in carrying out this work. For example, for selected countries with security risks, the state of bilateral relations limits U.S. efforts to secure international nuclear materials.

**U.S. Program Efforts to Secure Nuclear Materials, including Weapon Usable Nuclear Material (WUNM), Fiscal Years (FY) 2021 and 2022**



Sources: GAO analysis of documentation and information from the National Nuclear Security Administration, Department of State, Department of Defense, and Nuclear Regulatory Commission; Map Resources (map). | GAO-23-106486

Of the 23 programs GAO reviewed, some conduct similar work in the same countries, and GAO found that where programs overlap, they generally coordinate with one another. However, GAO found that a few of the overlapping programs did not clearly document their roles and responsibilities, as called for in leading practices for collaboration. For example, a DOD program has plans to undertake nuclear security capacity-building efforts in two countries where NNSA programs are undertaking similar efforts. NNSA officials identified the potential for these efforts to be duplicative, if roles are not further clarified.

The National Security Council (NSC) is developing a national strategy related to international nuclear material security, but it is uncertain how this strategy will guide agency and program efforts. By developing a national strategy that includes implementation guidance for agencies and programs, NSC can help program managers make informed decisions to align and prioritize their current and future activities with the nuclear material security goals articulated in the strategy.