

## US luring Russian, Libyan, Iraqi scientists away from terrorists

The United States is offering alternative jobs to scientists from Russia, Libya and Iraq with nuclear expertise to prevent their recruitment by rogue states and terrorist organisations.

This is part of ongoing efforts with more than 70 countries to secure and dispose of dangerous nuclear and radiological materials to prevent it from falling into the hands of terrorists, officials say.

'Prevention plays an important role in our non-proliferation strategy,' said William Tobey, who is the second-in-command at the Energy Department's National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA).

Tobey told the United States Industry Coalition recently that even if it were possible to secure every kilogram of nuclear and radiological material, 'the right kind of scientific expertise can be applied to generate more'.

To prevent that, a project is under way to retrain Russian nuclear computer scientists in software applications to serve the hospitality industry and telemedicine. Another joint project has Russian scientists developing alternative epilepsy therapies.

Preventing Russian scientists from being 'recruited by rogue states and terrorist organisations remains a priority', Tobey said. And now new engagement programmes are under way to offer alternative employment to Libyan and Iraqi scientists with expertise in weapons of mass destruction.

Lt. Gen. Michael Maples, the director of the Defence Intelligence Agency, said during a recent congressional hearing that Al Qaeda seeks to acquire nuclear weapons capability, but analysts do not believe they have achieved that goal yet.

Threat analysts have considered the possibility that terrorists might put together a dirty bomb - one dispersing radioactive materials with conventional explosives - or that they might be able to build an improvised nuclear device using only a few kilotons of nuclear explosives.

NNSA, in concert with several US government departments, has stepped up counter-nuclear terrorism activities. 'We have intensified our efforts to keep material and nuclear weapons out of the hands of terrorists and other networks and states that sponsor them,' said Tobey.

The strategy to detect and prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons involves: preventing the acquisition of nuclear weapons or special related materials; deterring the threat; detecting, interdicting and disarming a device; identifying the source that created, acquired or tried to detonate it; and preparing for a catastrophic incident.

Steven Aoki, deputy under secretary of energy for counter-terrorism, says that doing everything possible to keep nuclear materials from making their way to terrorists is the best means of prevention. That means eliminating vulnerable stockpiles of weapons-usable materials.

'Barriers to acquisition also provide an important element of deterrence,' according to Aoki. 'If a terrorist believes that it will be extremely risky, or impossible to acquire weapons or materials, they may seek other avenues of attack.'

NNSA has trained 350 officials from other countries on procedures to account for and control nuclear material and has trained more than 500 more every year since 2001 on physical protection measures for critical nuclear sites.

Additionally, the United States has helped remove more than 80 kilograms of highly enriched uranium from vulnerable sites to more secure ones.

The United States and Russia have been cooperating on a variety of projects to secure nuclear materials against theft or attack by terrorists especially where nuclear warheads are located.

By 2008, efforts to improve nuclear security through the US-Russian Bratislava Initiatives will be near fruition, including safety at Russian naval and Strategic Rocket Forces sites and buildings. Additionally, hundreds of metric tonnes of nuclear material will be secured.

But Deputy Energy Secretary Clay Sell says both countries need to proceed with an old agreement that each would dispose of 34 metric tonnes of excess weapons-grade plutonium. So far, none has been eliminated.

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