



Highlights of [GAO-08-434T](#), testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Committee on Energy and Commerce, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

During the decades before its dissolution, the Soviet Union produced a cadre of scientists and engineers whose knowledge and expertise could be invaluable to countries or terrorist groups trying to develop weapons of mass destruction (WMD). After the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, many of these scientists suffered significant cuts in pay or lost their government-supported work. To address concerns about unemployed or underemployed Soviet-era weapons scientists, the Department of Energy (DOE) established the Initiatives for Proliferation Prevention (IPP) program in 1994 to engage former Soviet weapons scientists in nonmilitary work in the short term and create private sector jobs for these scientists in the long term. GAO was asked to assess (1) DOE's reported accomplishments for the IPP program, (2) DOE's exit strategy for the program, and (3) the extent to which the program has experienced annual carryovers of unspent funds and the reasons for any such carryovers.

In December 2007, GAO issued a report—*Nuclear Nonproliferation: DOE's Program to Assist Weapons Scientists in Russia and Other Countries Needs to Be Reassessed*, (GAO-08-189)—that addressed these matters. To carry out its work, GAO, among other things, analyzed DOE policies, plans, and budgets and interviewed key program officials and representatives from 22 Russian and Ukrainian institutes.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-434T](#). For more information, contact Robert A. Robinson at (202) 512-3841 or robinsonr@gao.gov.

NUCLEAR NONPROLIFERATION

DOE Needs to Reassess Its Program to Assist Weapons Scientists in Russia and Other Countries

What GAO Found

DOE has overstated accomplishments on the number of scientists receiving DOE support and the number of long-term, private sector jobs created. First, although DOE claims to have engaged over 16,770 scientists in Russia and other countries, this total includes both scientists with and without weapons-related experience. GAO's analysis of 97 IPP projects involving about 6,450 scientists showed that more than half did not claim to possess any weapons-related experience. Furthermore, officials from 10 Russian and Ukrainian weapons institutes told GAO that the IPP program helps them attract, recruit, and retain younger scientists and contributes to the continued operation of their facilities. This is contrary to the original intent of the program, which was to reduce the proliferation risk posed by Soviet-era weapons scientists. Second, although DOE asserts that the IPP program helped create 2,790 long-term, private sector jobs for former weapons scientists, the credibility of this number is uncertain because DOE relies on "good-faith" reporting from U.S. industry partners and foreign institutes and does not independently verify the number of jobs reported to have been created.

DOE has not developed an exit strategy for the IPP program. Officials from the Russian government, Russian and Ukrainian institutes, and U.S. companies raised questions about the continuing need for the program. Importantly, a senior Russian Atomic Energy Agency official told GAO that the IPP program is no longer relevant because Russia's economy is strong and its scientists no longer pose a proliferation risk. DOE has not developed criteria to determine when scientists, institutes, or countries should "graduate" from the program. In contrast, the Department of State, which supports a similar program to assist Soviet-era weapons scientists, has assessed participating institutes and developed a strategy to graduate certain institutes from its program. Even so, we found that DOE is currently supporting 35 IPP projects at 17 Russian and Ukrainian institutes where State no longer funds projects because it considers them to have graduated from its program. In addition, DOE has recently expanded the program to new areas. Specifically, DOE began providing assistance to scientists in Iraq and Libya and, through the IPP program, is working to develop projects that support a DOE-led international effort to expand the use of civilian nuclear power.

In every fiscal year since 1998, DOE carried over unspent funds in excess of the amount that the Congress provided for the program. Two main factors have contributed to this recurring problem—lengthy review and approval processes for paying former Soviet weapons scientists and delays in implementing some IPP projects.

In its recent report, GAO recommended, among other things, that DOE conduct a fundamental reassessment of the IPP program, including the development of a prioritization plan and exit strategy. DOE generally concurred with GAO's findings, but does not believe that the IPP program needs to be reassessed.