

Why GAO Did This Study

NNSA established the Megaports Initiative in 2003 to deter, detect, and interdict nuclear or other radiological materials smuggled through foreign seaports. The Initiative funds the installation of radiation detection equipment at select seaports overseas and trains foreign personnel to use this equipment to scan shipping containers entering and leaving these seaports—regardless of destination. NNSA provides partner countries with maintenance and technical support for about 3 years, after which it transfers the equipment and all related responsibilities to partner countries. GAO was asked to examine (1) the status of the Megaports Initiative and NNSA's plans for completing and sustaining it and (2) the benefits of the Initiative and factors that reduce its effectiveness. GAO analyzed key documents; interviewed agency officials; and visited eight Megaports in five countries, selected on the basis of port size and unique characteristics, among other things.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that NNSA take actions, including (1) finalizing its long-term plan for ensuring the sustainability of Megaports operations after NNSA's final transfer of equipment to partner countries and (2) developing and maintaining useful and reliable measures to assess the performance of the Initiative. GAO also recommends that NNSA and DHS jointly assess the extent to which the two Initiatives are effectively coordinating. NNSA and DHS agreed with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-13-37](#). For more information, contact David Trimble at (202) 512-3841 or trimbled@gao.gov.

COMBATING NUCLEAR SMUGGLING

Megaports Initiative Faces Funding and Sustainability Challenges

What GAO Found

As of August 2012, the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) had completed 42 of 100 planned Megaports projects in 31 countries and, as of December 2011, NNSA had spent about \$850 million on the Megaports Initiative (Initiative). NNSA's Initiative has equipped these seaports with radiation detection equipment, established training programs for foreign personnel, and created a sustainability program to help countries operate and maintain the equipment. However, the administration's fiscal year 2013 budget proposal would reduce the Initiative's budget by about 85 percent, and NNSA plans to shift the Initiative's focus from establishing new Megaports to sustaining existing ones. As a result, NNSA has suspended ongoing negotiations and cancelled planned deployments of equipment in five countries.

Officials from the five countries GAO visited reported benefits of the Megaports Initiative, including increased capacity to interdict nuclear and radiological materials. However, GAO identified several factors that reduce the Initiative's effectiveness. For example, NNSA has not finalized a long-term plan for ensuring the sustainability of Megaports operations after NNSA transfers radiation detection equipment to partner countries. Without a long-term plan for ensuring countries' ability to continue Megaports operations, NNSA cannot be assured that its \$850 million investment will be sustained. Moreover, the Initiative's performance measures do not provide sufficient information for decision making because they do not evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the Initiative. GAO has previously reported that agencies successfully assess performance when they use measures that demonstrate results, cover multiple program priorities, and provide useful information for decision making. GAO also found that the Megaports Initiative and the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Container Security Initiative (CSI)—a related program that examines high-risk shipping containers for weapons of mass destruction before they are shipped to the United States—are not sufficiently coordinating. The two Initiatives are co-located at 29 foreign seaports. In two countries, DHS officials told GAO that they were using personal radiation detectors—a type of equipment intended for personal safety but not appropriate for scanning containers—to inspect containers if their radiation detection equipment is broken. However, in both countries, the Megaports Initiative had more suitable equipment that DHS officials could have used.

Megaports Radiation Detection Equipment at Foreign Seaports



Source: GAO.