GICNT Lays Out New Priorities

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By Kelsey Davenport

The Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism (GICNT) laid out its priorities for the next two years in a statement at a June plenary meeting in Finland, announcing that they will include practical activities and regional initiatives to increase capacity to combat nuclear terrorism.

The priorities build on GICNT activities since the 2013 plenary in Mexico City and will be expanded to increase regional cooperative exercises and could incorporate nuclear industry participation for the first time.

A voluntary, multilateral organization launched in 2006 to strengthen global abilities to prevent and respond to acts of nuclear terrorism, the GICNT has 86 participating states and five official observers. Participation is open to any country that endorses the organization's statement of principles, which includes voluntary commitments to strengthen nuclear security within each country, improve response capabilities in the event of a nuclear incident, and promote information sharing to suppress acts of nuclear terrorism.

Thomas Countryman, U.S. assistant secretary of state for international security and nonproliferation, said on June 16 at the opening of the plenary that the "structure and flexibility provide unique value in advancing global nuclear security objectives" and that all participating countries have improved their capacity to "prevent, detect, deter, and respond to nuclear terrorism" since 2006.

Russia and the United States, co-chairs of the initiative, issued a June 17 statement summarizing the plenary meeting. The statement said partner countries will continue to focus on holding practical exercises and activities at the regional level to increase coordination, facilitating the exchange of best practices, and exploring "cross-disciplinary themes" from the three GICNT working groups.

One working group, chaired by Finland, covers nuclear detection. Another, chaired by Australia, deals with nuclear forensics. The third one, chaired by Morocco, focuses on responding to and mitigating the effects of an act of nuclear terrorism.

The co-chairs' statement also noted the accomplishments of the working groups over the past two years. The most recent activity, held in May in Germany, included an exercise, named Radiant City, that built on a January exercise in Finland, called Northern Lights, and focused on tracking down missing radiological material and using nuclear forensics to investigate illicit trafficking of nuclear materials within a state's borders. The nuclear forensics and nuclear detection working groups collaborated on the exercise.

Countryman noted in his remarks that the GICNT held 15 multilateral activities over the past two years. He said that the "events also advanced the GICNT strategy by focusing on the interfaces between nuclear detection, response, and forensics" and helped explore "regional nuclear security challenges and approaches to enhancing cooperation."

The GICNT also has an implementation and assessment group charged with coordinating the organization's activities and ensuring that they complement other international efforts to combat nuclear terrorism. The Netherlands took over from South Korea as chair of that body at the June 16-17 plenary.

The co-chairs' statement noted that the Netherlands expressed interest in promoting the participation of nuclear industry representatives in future GICNT activities.

The next plenary meeting is scheduled for 2017. Working groups are to meet periodically over the next two years.

A U.S. official said on Aug. 18 that the next exercise, which the response and mitigation working group will lead, is scheduled for November. The exercise, named Blue Raven, will be held in London and will focus on the role of national crisis management centers in responding to nuclear events, the official said.

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