

PASCC

Research in Progress

FY17-18

ADDRESSING THE THREAT OF STATE-LEVEL RADIOLOGICAL WEAPONS PROGRAMS

Performer: Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey

Project Lead: Jeffrey Lewis

FY17-18

ABSTRACT:

State pursuit and development of radiological dispersal devices (RDDs or “dirty bombs”) is a surprisingly unexplored field of research in WMD and nonproliferation studies, with most scholarship on radiological weapons presuming their exclusive appeal to non-state actors. Yet several countries have pursued radiological weapons programs: the United States and the Soviet Union possessed large-scale programs in the early Cold War, and there are indications that several other states, including Iraq and possibly Egypt, subsequently have sought to acquire radiological weapons. Recently, media reports of North Korea equipping commando units and unmanned aerial vehicles to spread radioactive material have raised the specter of an active DPRK radiological weapons program.

The James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies (CNS) proposes a two-phase effort to analyze state interest in and pursuit of radiological weapons. First, CNS would conduct a study examining historical interest by states in radiological weapons, their technical aspects, and potential military uses. Second, CNS would explore various approaches to address the challenge of state radiological weapons programs in the contemporary strategic environment. Following completion of the research, CNS experts would brief representatives of appropriate US government agencies on their findings.

Research in Progress describes ongoing PASCC research. For more information please contact INSS@usafa.edu.