



Results in Brief

Assessment of Continental United States-Based Nuclear Response Task Force (RTF) Programs

December 3, 2013

What We Did

Our assessment's overall objective was to examine the Department of Defense's ability to provide, train, organize, and equip Response Task Forces (RTF) to support necessary responses to a U.S. nuclear weapon accident or incident in the continental United States. The U.S. Nuclear Command and Control System (NCCS) Support Staff (NSS) recommended this assessment topic.

What We Found

DoD officials have not completed actions required to fully carry out DoD guidance that it issued in 2002. Specifically, a mission analysis for the RTF was never conducted, and Joint Mission Task Lists were never created. Disparate planning efforts caused geographic coverage gaps and a lack of sourced airlift plans to deploy an RTF. Moreover, some organizations are executing the RTF mission based on draft guidance. Finally, mechanisms do not exist to report RTF readiness to the Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff, and Commander, U.S. Northern Command, as required. These critical pieces are still absent due to the lack of priority that tasked agencies give to the RTF mission.

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The lack of a mission analysis, Joint Mission Essential Task Lists, disparate planning efforts, and mission execution resulted in non-uniform standards, task conditions, and measures; no means exist to determine if the level of the RTF readiness is effective or timely.

Recommendations

We recommend that Commander, U.S. Northern Command, coordinate developing RTF Mission Analysis, Joint Mission Essential Task Lists, Universal Joint Tasks change requests (new and modification to existing), associated measures and conditions, and performance standards. This effort should, at a minimum, include subject-matter experts from the Services, the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, and Joint Staff J3 and J7. A flag or general officer should coordinate and have this process tracked, until completion, by the Nuclear Command and Control System Committee of Principals Nuclear Weapon Accident/Incident Response Subcommittee. These standards should include criteria to indicate the expected performance of a given task.

We recommend that the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear Matters update guidance to reflect the Geographic Combatant Commander's responsibility in the mission analysis and Joint Mission Essential Task process.

We recommend that the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear Matters give priority to publishing DoD Manual 3150.08 and provide an estimated publication date.

We recommend that the Headquarters Air Force and the Navy develop respective processes to certify RTF commanders and its staffs as mission-ready to the Combatant Command, in accordance with Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff policies.



Results in Brief Continued

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Recommendations Continued

We recommend that the Joint Staff and the U.S. Northern Command immediately identify a reporting methodology and format for the RTF Commanders for Air Force Global Strike Command and Navy Regions Southeast and Northwest until such time as the Joint Mission Essential Task Lists can be used to report through the Defense Readiness Reporting System, as prescribed.

We recommend that the U.S. Northern Command, Air Force Global Strike Command, and the Joint Staff determine the appropriate method of supporting the logistical and operational requirements to deploy the Air Force Global Strike Command Response Task Force. Stakeholders should consider drafting an "Execute Order" addressing the necessary requirements, capabilities, resources, and procedures.

We recommend Commander, U.S. Northern Command, in conjunction with Commander, U.S. Pacific Command, update the appropriate concept of operations plan and operations orders to identify clear authorities and a clear chain-of-command for nuclear weapon incidents or accidents occurring in U.S. Northern Command's geographic area of responsibility, but currently outside U.S. Northern Command's operational area of responsibility.

Management Comments and Our Response

Management comments we received were responsive to the recommendations. The Commander, U.S. Pacific Command, did not respond to the draft report issued on August 2, 2013. We request that the Commander, U.S. Pacific Command, provide comments on the final report by January 10, 2014.

As a result of management comments and additional assessment work, we request that the Commander, U.S. Strategic Command, and Commander, U.S. Transportation Command, provide comments on the final report by January 10, 2014.

As a result of management comments and additional assessment work, we request Commander, U.S. Northern Command, provide additional comments on the final report by January 10, 2014. Please see the recommendations table on the following page.