



How can countries ensure that the Nuclear Security Summit does not lose momentum and become just *another* gathering?

Position: Kickstart momentum with local review teams and summits with teeth

Mustafa Kibaroglu

Abstract

In 2009, President Barack Obama announced from Prague's Hradcany square that “the most immediate and extreme threat to global security” was nuclear weapons in the hands of terrorists, and world leaders listened. A year later, 47 of these leaders responded to Obama's call “to secure all vulnerable nuclear material around the world within four years” when they gathered in Washington, DC, for the first Nuclear Security Summit. Since then, nearly 400 kilograms of highly enriched uranium (HEU) have been removed from 10 countries. And both Russia and the United States have worked hard on HEU destruction efforts—48 metric tons and 7 metric tons, respectively. In March, 50 nations are taking part in the Seoul Nuclear Security Summit. But how can these countries ensure that the momentum toward a global nuclear security culture isn't lost, and the Seoul summit does not devolve into just another gathering? Three authors explore this question: from the United States, Sharon Squassoni (2012); from Turkey, Mustafa Kibaroglu; and from India, Rajiv Nayan (2012). The authors are nuclear security experts and members of the Fissile Materials Working Group, which publishes a monthly column at www.thebulletin.org.

Keywords

Barack Obama, HEU, highly enriched uranium, nuclear material, Nuclear Security Summit, plutonium, Prague, Seoul, Washington, DC

How can countries ensure that the Nuclear Security Summit does not lose momentum and become just *another* gathering? The answer is simple: Refer to the essence of the momentum. That is to say, expand, enrich, and institutionalize the efforts of the group of scholars and experts

who first took the initiative and helped create a unique momentum that paved the way for the April 2010 Nuclear Security Summit in Washington, DC. The summit, convened by President Barack Obama, was a landmark event that brought together heads of state and government leaders from some 47 countries.

While the threat of nuclear terrorism is real for scientists and scholars, it is not necessarily a chief concern for many politicians and diplomats in key national positions—even though their jobs involve dealing, directly or indirectly, with such contingencies. Countries around the world do not properly acknowledge the gravity of the threats associated with the possible use of nuclear weapons or fissile materials in terrorist attacks. This being the case, it is not only impossible to feel safe against such a threat; it is also impossible to ensure that future nuclear summit meetings are treated as important events.

To prevent inertia in the Nuclear Security Summit process, all responsible countries must take tangible steps swiftly and effectively. But the summit structure itself must also be recast—countries must be celebrated for their actions and held accountable for their inactions. To strengthen their commitments to securing nuclear materials, each country involved in the Nuclear Security Summit should agree to create *review teams*—that is, teams that include government officials and national academic communities, working both with the public and within the government, to raise awareness of nuclear threats. If countries were to create this mechanism within their borders, the Nuclear Security Summit could then evolve into something with more teeth: A *review conference* involving

a worldwide network of concerned scholars, experts, and government officials who scrutinize the work and goals set out by their individual countries. This review could be instrumental in holding decision makers and chief executives accountable.

It goes without saying that achieving such a goal requires a lot of resources, both human and financial—and most states would be unable to adequately provide these resources. Therefore, during the Seoul Summit in March, government leaders should agree to establish financial resources so all countries can build local review teams. The structure should be financed by larger countries with larger coffers—for example, the United States, United Kingdom, Japan, and others. But because the threat is global—and to ensure consensus on this point—all countries must be involved in crafting strategies to counter the threat of nuclear terrorism.

The difficult task is not establishing a financial structure—in fact, that is the easy part. The real challenge is in recruiting the local scholars and experts who will commit to carrying out a long-term strategy with government officials. Today, there are grassroots efforts that can serve as a model for national efforts. The Fissile Materials Working Group, of which I am a member, is one such organization. The group—which involves more than 35 American expert organizations and over 30 international partner organizations to create consensus related to fissile materials issues, design policies, and craft implementable recommendations for government officials around the world—could provide support and guidance to countries when creating their local teams. In addition, the International Atomic Energy

Agency could also be instrumental in enhancing national capabilities on nuclear security by cooperating and collaborating with these local teams.

With a review structure in place, the Nuclear Security Summit could then be used not only as a way to exchange ideas and streamline commitments, but as a way to provide suggestions—and solutions—for countries to reach their goals.

At the Nuclear Security Summit in March, countries must reach consensus that nuclear terrorism is a grave threat for all. Some countries still consider the summit as yet another instrument used by the United States to sustain its world hegemony. Unfortunately, American policy makers have not always responded sufficiently to such criticisms. Nevertheless, nuclear terrorism is too serious and imminent to be relegated to a mere subject of political dispute and speculation.

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Author biography

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