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# policy dialogue brief

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## Nuclear and WMD Security and Summit Diplomacy—Leveraging Top-Level Engagement

As experts and officials gear up for the second Nuclear Security Summit (NSS) in Seoul, and in light of the recent G-8 decision to grant the Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction (GP) an extension, it is a good moment to step back and assess achievements made thus far in nuclear and WMD security as well as the work that remains. While significant progress has been made, there is still much to be done. Engagement from the highest levels of government has been instrumental in spurring action, but important questions persist regarding how best to leverage top-level engagement and summit diplomacy in these areas.

With the NSS, although considerable progress has been made, it appears the goal of “securing all vulnerable nuclear material in four years” will not be reached, and most view 2014 as the final year for the NSS process, as the communiqué from the first summit seems to indicate. The next iteration of the GP calls for a broadened remit, the involvement of more countries, and better coordination amongst those involved. Engagement from the highest levels of government has been instrumental in spurring action, but consideration needs to be given to the future of both of these efforts.

The Stanley Foundation convened a group of experts and policymakers from the United States, Asia, Canada, and Europe on October 13-15, 2011, at its 52nd annual Strategy for Peace Conference. The group discussed “Nuclear and WMD Security and Summit Diplomacy—Leveraging Top-Level Engagement.” This policy dialogue brief offers an overview of the discussion and recommendations of roundtable participants.

### Top-Level Attention Through the Nuclear Security Summits

Participants took stock of the impact and value of the Nuclear Security Summit (NSS) process in heightening awareness of the threat of nuclear terrorism and the challenges of securing nuclear material. The first NSS supplied much-needed political will, and along with it increased attention and activity. Before the summit process was launched, there were no reliable diplomatic levers to impel states to take action and improve security measures,

This brief summarizes the primary findings of the conference as interpreted by the rapporteur, Kelsey Hartigan, and roundtable organizers and cochairs David Shorr and Jennifer Smyser. Participants neither reviewed nor approved this brief. Therefore, it should not be assumed that every participant subscribes to all of its recommendations, observations, and conclusions.

partially due to some governments' lingering skepticism over the urgency of the threat. More fundamentally, many governments seemed to lack the technical capacity for action and sometimes even a solid grounding in the issue's basics. One of the most important contributions of the NSS process has been to jolt governments out of the bureaucratic inertia that had held up long-sought measures. In those cases, the NSS served as the multilateral backdrop for domestic steps that were already the focus of state-based or bilateral consultations.

In terms of the contribution of the summit process itself, participants saw multiple advantages. Merely through their personal participation in the NSS, world leaders draw heightened attention from lower-level officials, boost the priority of the issue, and prompt "house gifts" (or new commitments to action from individual participating governments) to be prepared for announcement at the summit. Political pressures accompany these commitments because of the summit's public nature, the four-year timeline, and the built-in follow-up mechanism with another summit scheduled two years after the first. As noted above, the NSS serves a basic education function and raises awareness of the issue among senior officials, but also among the public. The NSS is also an opportunity to reconcile some of the remaining political differences in how nations view the threat of nuclear terrorism, its relative priority, and the locus of responsibility.

### Measuring Progress

A number of metrics measuring progress on nuclear security were highlighted. First, there are the specific steps taken by governments: upgrading the physical protection at sites where material is located, moving material to more secure sites, or downblending it to levels far below weapons-grade. National legislation and treaty adherence were also seen as key indicators of progress. Participants emphasized the importance of the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material (CPPNM) and its 2005 amendment. This amendment and the enactment of related domestic statutes are seen as vital contexts for ongoing work by national

governments. Putting it more broadly, the question is whether governments have internalized the objectives of the NSS, with a "culture of security" trickling down through their bureaucracies. Funding streams to underwrite the related costs of security were also seen as essential to any lasting progress.

Since the Washington summit, 15 additional states have ratified the CPPNM amendment with another 12 countries signing and ratifying the International Convention on the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism (ICSANT). A number of countries have made commitments to establish centers of excellence, including China, India, Japan, and South Korea; at least six countries have signed on to the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism; and a sizeable amount of highly enriched uranium (HEU) has been either eliminated or downblended.

### Country Participation and Norm Establishment

Throughout the conference, the conversation kept returning to the roster of countries involved in the NSS process and the relationship between the success of the summit and the number of participants. Some questioned whether there is an inverse relationship between the number of participating countries and the quality of the communiqué and work plan. Others suggested that the process should concentrate on effective implementation, not the number of states attending the summit. Smaller groupings might be more likely to make a decision, but decisions will not be effective until other countries are propelled to implement similar measures.

While most agreed that the summit and the associated norms must ultimately bring "spoiler countries"—diplomatic outliers that threaten to water down or thwart consensus positions—into the fold, there was no clear strategy for how to accomplish this. Significant attention was given to Pakistan, Syria, Iran, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Pakistan was singled out because its military is in charge of the nuclear program, state elements are suspected of complicity with terrorist cells, and it is widely believed that the state fosters insurgencies in neighboring states. Participants dis-

cussed whether bilateral discussions could facilitate the most progress with regard to Pakistan and its unique positioning.

Just as important are the states that are members in good standing of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), but excluded from the summit. While it is not uncommon for multilateral initiatives to be limited in membership, certain states might feel slighted if they are not asked to participate. Others pointed out that the model used during the 2010 NPT Review Conference could effectively deal with the membership question. A group of 16 countries, including Iran and Cuba, came together in New York to find agreement on the final document. There was no formal title for these states—it was just an ad hoc grouping that found areas of agreement and then reached out to other countries to forge a consensus. The NSS core could perform a similar function. At the end of the day, experts agreed that the question for the summit, and the process going forward, is not whether there is the right number of states, but whether the right countries are involved.

The NSS joins initiatives like the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism, the Nuclear Suppliers Group, and the Proliferation Security Initiative as well as broader institutions like the Atomic Energy Agency, UNSCR 1540, and the G-8's Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction. One participant noted that there are 25 separate processes and tracks for dealing with a range of nuclear-related issues. How these institutions, organizations, and ad hoc processes fit together is an important question and one with a direct impact on the future of the NSS. The NSS was originally conceived as a vehicle through which governments could concentrate on a narrow subset of issues, circumventing the institutional lethargy often prevalent in multilateral institutions like the United Nations or the longstanding political differences that have vexed the NPT review conferences.

Yet, in some ways, it has bred confusion about how this summit process fits within the issue's

broader context. Some participants wondered, for example, how the summit links up to the established NPT system and warned that repeatedly taking issues outside of the NPT framework could weaken the regime over time. "Issue-based forum shopping," as one participant called it, is nothing new and can have its advantages, but only if there is a clear division of labor. Countries with constrained resources are particularly cognizant of the need to reduce redundancy and duplication of work.

In 2013, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) will host a conference to discuss how various nonproliferation initiatives fit together. One challenge is that some of the programs are inherently tailored to particular states or carried out bilaterally and thus are not amenable to multilateral settings.

### Challenges and Next Steps

Participants questioned whether high-level political engagement through the NSS can and should be sustained. The main questions centered on how best to keep the process focused on outcomes and how to prevent the summits from becoming photo-ops for heads of state. Moreover, with so many summit-level forums across a wide array of subject matters or regional groupings, some participants worried that "summit fatigue" could set in for world leaders with very full calendars. It was noted that any drop-off in attendance by the heads of state or government (say, sending cabinet ministers in their stead) could serve as an early warning of a loss of interest in the NSS, though there have been no such indications yet.

This brought to the forefront the distinction between political and technical progress. Most participants did not see value in high-level engagement for its own sake. Experts recommended that the 2012 summit clearly outline the most urgent tasks to be accomplished before the planned 2014 sunset of the summit process, and then focus separately on what happens after the summit process in terms of implementation and delivery. Trying to determine if there should be another summit or where nuclear security efforts should be

housed in the wake of the 2014 summit, without also asking what states need to accomplish, misses the forest for the trees. Once there is a clear understanding of the outstanding priorities, it is easier to determine where and how this work can be done.

Yet, some participants were adamant that the summit was only intended to be a four-year endeavor and that it should not be extended beyond 2014. One unintended consequence of an extension, they argued, is that it could weaken the authority of the International Atomic Energy Agency, and thus any future discussions should take place at the IAEA. Other participants were eager to sustain the high-level political engagement and focused accordingly on how best to institutionalize the process. How this could be done, and in particular, where it could be done, was the subject of much debate.

While the 2010 summit accomplished much in terms of general education, nuclear security remains a fairly esoteric topic, and the wider public still does not, for instance, make a distinction between nuclear security and nuclear safety. In the wake of Fukushima, some participants pointed out that the public does not understand why nuclear safety—how states can avoid “another Fukushima”—isn’t also being discussed at the summit. Participants generally agreed that more work could be done surrounding the nexus of nuclear security and nuclear safety provisions. A “sabotage” scenario—where a nuclear reactor is the target of a terrorist attack—is one example of where such issues intersect.

Given that the summit process is a loosely structured set of consultations, it must rely on other multilateral institutions or individual states to carry out the actual work of nuclear security. And some important kinks are still being worked out for the working relationship between the NSS and other more permanent multilateral instruments. Participants noted that the IAEA can provide states with technical assistance if it is requested, but the challenge is how the IAEA can engage states that do not

have a culture of security and do not take the initiative to ask for assistance.

Finally, as experts considered the future of the summit process, it was clear that latent political differences and suspicions lingered in the background. In that vein, participants discussed the political implications of one of the NSS’ main premises: walling off the issue of keeping weapons-grade material out of terrorist hands from the nonproliferation issue of preventing new countries from getting the bomb. Because the former is less controversial and diplomatically fraught than the latter, the NSS process has tightly focused on nuclear security. Nonetheless, argued some participants, issues related to the NPT lurk in the background, particularly suspicion surrounding the validity of the NPT’s “grand bargain” and impatience with what some perceive to be insufficient disarmament of the US nuclear arsenal. Another participant defended the compliance record of the United States by mentioning that it had already reduced its nuclear arsenal to a mere 20 percent of peak Cold War levels.

Given these and other challenges, participants devoted much of their discussion to the possibility, ramifications, and options in the event that the Nuclear Security Summits come to an end in 2014. They saw a distinct possibility that the NSS will stick to the 2014 sunset because of the timeline set in the 2010 communiqué, the personal association of the NSS with US President Barack Obama—who will leave office in either 2013 or 2017—as well as the heads of states’ summit fatigue and limited attention span. As a US-designed process, most experts agreed that the United States will need to withdraw slowly from this role and allow other states to assume leadership. Some suggested that South Korea, as the host of the 2012 summit, could be well positioned to demonstrate its leadership on the issue and in the region.

#### **Maintaining Political Momentum**

Under the assumption that the NSS process could sunset in 2014, participants identified a range of options to reconfigure or serve as

alternatives to the biennial pattern of NSS summits. Assuming that the 2012 summit in Korea and a possible 2014 summit identify remaining challenges that need sustained high-level engagement, multiple options were discussed for carrying the political momentum beyond the current NSS process:

- **Lengthen the interval between summits to three or four years.** In place of the biennial structure, summit meetings could occur closer to the tempo of the NPT review conferences. This option would represent the least change from the status quo.
- **Shift summits to an irregular schedule.** Leaders could convene when they judge it necessary, though the challenge would be getting all parties to agree to come together.
- **Downshift to the ministerial level.** High-level political engagement might not be necessary after 2014, or realistic given the many demands on the attention of heads-of-state. Therefore, engagement at the ministerial level might be more feasible.
- **Develop the CPPNM into a more robust treaty regime with review conferences.** This would only address those dimensions of nuclear security covered by the treaty and several of the states that agreed to participate in the NSS process did so under the assumption that there would not be another treaty or regime.
- **Strengthen the capacity and statute of the IAEA.** The IAEA's main role is that of an adviser or manager, but its mandate and funds could be bolstered so that the agency could fully implement its work. Serious questions surrounding state sovereignty would need to be addressed.
- **Build the Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction into an NSS successor forum.** The Global Partnership (GP) has aroused some suspicions in the Global South, given

that it is a creature of the G-8 and therefore of the Western powers. However, the GP is on course to be substantially expanded and reoriented—which may offer a chance for developing nations to join with a greater sense of ownership. One participant suggested the Global Partnership separate from the G-8 as a “spin-off” that could address implementation and coordination of nuclear (and WMD) security efforts.

- **Place the NSS under the aegis of the G-20.** One of the advantages of the G-20 is that it is focused on consensus building. And even though the group does not have universal membership, its members possess more than 90 percent of the world's nuclear weapons, constitute more than 70 percent of the world's gross domestic product, and are home to 80 percent of the world's population. Such a concentration would make resistance from outside states more difficult, and would likely bolster the norm-building process. However, this idea drew the oft-heard response that the proper focus of the G-20 is economic affairs. Even participants who support G-20 moves into political matters saw problems with the mismatch of the two forums' participating states and the adoption by the G-20 of such an extensive program. (Advocates of a broadened G-20 agenda have focused more on issues to be upscaled, rather than downshifted, like the NSS would be.) The question was also raised as to whether this was the right group of countries to address nuclear security.
- **Fold the NSS into the United Nations.** This would certainly be an ironic move, since the NSS was born as a way to circumvent some of the politics of the United Nations. Concern was also expressed that the diplomats at the United Nations would not have a deep enough technical understanding of the issues. One advantage of the United Nations as a forum is its universality.

Regardless of where and when the summit process ends, participants stressed the importance of preserving the successes thus far.

Similarly, falling short of the original four-year goal should not cast a pall over the 2010–2014 push or the summit meetings of those years. For one thing, prospects look good for being able to declare victory just a few years after 2014. In addition, the summits stand to leave a strong legacy if they help bring about implementation of the CPPNM, new domestic legislation, increased government capacity, and top-level focus—all of which would help make security more self-sustaining outside of the hot, bright spotlights of the summits. Weighing these and other contingencies helped participants clarify which elements of the global nuclear security effort are most essential.

Experts at the conference thus recommended that governments continue to pursue the following objectives irrespective of the NSS lifespan:

- Strengthening the IAEA to ensure it has an integral role in nuclear security efforts.
- Ratification of the 2005 amendment to the CPPNM.
- Adherence to the CPPNM even before the treaty's amendment enters into force.
- Passage of national legislation to establish liability and penalties for the illicit trafficking of nuclear material.
- Provision of funding and technical assistance to boost nuclear security capacity.
- Establishment of centers of excellence to serve as the locus of professional standards and innovation.
- Installation of detection systems.
- Development of alternatives to HEU for civilian use, i.e., medical isotopes.
- Downblending of HEU to low-enriched uranium for civilian use.

Participants underscored the importance of action on the state level and the responsibility

of each state to secure its own facilities and materials. In the end, nuclear security depends heavily on the law enforcement, national laws, and intelligence gathering of sovereign nation-states. The combination of state-level and bilateral action is where the rubber meets the road for nuclear security, and yet this work can get bogged down absent the public attention and concern that creates a sense of urgency. The summit process has been instrumental in generating such pressure.

As more security measures are implemented, a trickle-down effect eventually renders top-level leadership and political involvement less necessary. As governments embrace treaties like the CPPNM, IAEA nuclear security guidelines, and various United Nations Security Council resolutions, norms are solidified and a framework is established that is conducive to ongoing nuclear security efforts. Yet, international cooperation still has a role to play. Cooperation on border control and thwarting illicit trafficking, the exchange of information and best practices, and the involvement of organizations like Interpol are crucial. The IAEA is seen as the main multilateral actor in nuclear security issues and crucial to progress being achieved. All of this underscores the importance of coordination instead of competition among initiatives like the IAEA, the Global Partnership, and the NSS. Ultimately, all of these multilateral instruments have the same overarching goal: a safer, more secure world.

### **Top-Level Attention Through the Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction**

Participants also discussed the Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction (GP). In 2002, the G-8 formed the GP and since then the Global Partners have spent over \$9 billion destroying Russian nuclear submarines and chemical stockpiles. Earlier this year at the G-8 summit in France, the ten-year mandate was extended.

The GP is now looking to expand its membership and reach. Partners have decided to invite an

additional 14 countries to join. With no African or Latin America countries currently participating, these are areas of focus for membership expansion. In the future, projects will be smaller and focus on a wider range of WMD efforts including biological security, nuclear safety, fissile material security, radiological safety, and export controls.

It is also anticipated that what qualifies as contributions to the GP will change. Going forward, states will count the money they spend on domestic nuclear security programs and initiatives toward their overall financial contribution to the GP. In addition, financial contributions to agencies like the Biological Weapons Convention, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, and the International Atomic Energy Agency will count toward a state's GP financial commitment. Concern was voiced over a possible dilution of the partnership's original intent of eliciting special new contributions from wealthy countries toward efforts that otherwise would not get off the ground. Such a shift could create the illusion of progress, where it appears more money is being spent, but in reality, less of the needed work is being done. Indeed, one participant suggested that by doing this the GP will have eliminated its "financial yardstick" and that the accountability mechanism will have been dramatically weakened.

Some participants maintained that the new way of counting GP contributions would allow states to better understand how certain processes and institutions fit together. States have limited resources and, therefore, need to understand how efforts under the auspices of the GP, IAEA, NSS, and elsewhere work together. Some experts stated that if a country is securing its facilities and materials, those efforts should count toward the overall understanding of global WMD security efforts. Ultimately, participants agreed that the new method may present problems.

## Conclusion

Experts shared an understanding that the four-year goal of securing all vulnerable nuclear mate-

rials as agreed to at the 2010 Nuclear Security Summit will most likely not be met. Therefore, future high-level engagement may be required to continue to address nuclear security discretely from other nonproliferation issues. It is recognized that the NSS is only one component of a system of treaties, conventions, initiatives, and ad hoc measures. It spurred activity on the multinational level which, perhaps most importantly, spurred action on the domestic level. If and when the summit process comes to a close, states will still need to remain focused on nuclear security efforts. Where and how the issues are given attention in the future is important, but perhaps more important is the degree to which states take action on their own. In this regard, 2014 will be a pivotal year for both the NSS process and the work itself.

While it's not yet clear what will be the proper venues or mechanisms for nuclear security beyond 2014, there is a clear need to grapple with these questions before the time arrives. Fragmentation, coordination, continuity, norm development, and connections back to other multilateral venues will remain critical issues for the global effort to combat nuclear terrorism. At the Seoul summit in 2012, leaders should address not only whether there should be subsequent summits, but also indicate in what venue (or venues) nuclear security should be given attention should the summit process end.

The Global Partnership's extension and expanded mandate present many new challenges and opportunities. While it is well-positioned to continue to play a key role in WMD security at a multilateral level, that role has not been clearly defined. The top-level attention that nuclear and WMD security receive in both of these summit venues should not be wasted and, therefore, the summit processes need to be managed in way that maximizes that attention to the benefit of global security.

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