



Global forum

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

### Position: Consensus, not enforcement

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#### 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 (2012); and from India, Rajiv Nayan. The authors are nuclear security experts and members of the Fissile Materials Working Group, which publishes a monthly column at [www.thebulletin.org](http://www.thebulletin.org).

#### Keywords

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

**A**head of the 2012 Nuclear Security Summit in Seoul, apprehensions have surfaced in some quarters that the summit may lose momentum and become just another gathering. It seems that this apprehension is tied to the idea that there is no radical agenda

for the 2012 summit and beyond. So, is this anxiety warranted?

As of now, the conventional wisdom about the loss of momentum is an illusion. In fact, the summit process is *gaining* momentum. Since the first summit held in 2010 in Washington, DC, nuclear

security has been an international agenda item in both government-level and nongovernmental meetings. And such ongoing discussions are the key to finding ways to secure nuclear material around the world. Since the first summit, countries have not only developed domestic structures to ensure the security of nuclear materials, but they have shared information on plugging the loopholes that exist in their own nuclear security systems.

But a country's commitment to securing nuclear materials should remain voluntary in nature. The idea of information-sharing should not be heard as a clarion call for a monitoring center, as some have proposed. Any attempt to index or rank participating countries could result in a loss of faith in the summit process. The entire decision-making system of the summit process should be based on the principle of consensus, rather than oversight and enforcement, which could be counterproductive in attracting additional countries.

Forty-seven countries participated in the 2010 Washington summit. Two years later, 50 countries are set to attend the Seoul summit; Lithuania, Denmark, and Azerbaijan are the new participants. But to really be effective, the summit must expand even more. Several countries are potential candidates, Iran and North Korea standing out among them. This year, both India and Pakistan are participating again in the Nuclear Security Summit. These two rival countries overcame their differences for the sake of nuclear security. Countries strongly opposed to including Iran and North Korea also need to yield for the sake of nuclear security.

Most of the countries involved in the summit are members of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), so it seems to make sense for the summit to evolve by developing a partnership with the organization. The security summit as an international process should complement, not supplement, the efforts of the IAEA. A strong Nuclear Security Summit structure—a high-profile conclave that brings nuclear security to the fore—will strengthen the efforts of the IAEA. Similarly, the IAEA—with its strong knowledge and membership base—will strengthen the summit process.

At the 2010 summit, many countries announced global “centers of excellence”—collaborative innovation hubs designed to strengthen security processes—at the meeting in 2010. These centers, if they were to involve the IAEA, would have an integrated nuclear energy and security strategy. Rather than leaving nuclear security to myriad stove-piped groups globally, all organizations committed to the safety and security of nuclear materials must share information and work together—including the IAEA.

The Washington summit, by including both states party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and non-party states, demonstrated inclusiveness that is often absent from negotiations on pressing nuclear issues. The international community realized the relevance of international cooperation in fighting a danger that transcends boundaries. And this spirit needs to be maintained.<sup>1</sup>

Increasing involvement is one mission. But countries also made a commitment in 2010 to strengthen the structure of the summit when the participants

underlined the significance of achieving universal implementation of—and adherence to—both the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism and the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material, along with its 2005 amendment. This implementation is integral to the success of nuclear security. All the participating states are expected to work toward this goal, and any failure to find support for the conventions from the participating countries of the summit will send negative signals for the future of the summit process.

Thus, there is even more room to maintain—and increase—the momentum after Seoul. To ensure this, the decisions from the 2010 summit should be merged with those from the 2012 Seoul summit to reinforce the emerging commitments and goals. As was the case in 2010, countries should proceed with caution and propose thoughtful, sustainable ideas while avoiding radical solutions. It is the divisive landmines that could make an otherwise secure structure very insecure.

## Note

- I. It is worth noting that the Nuclear Security Summit should focus strictly on nuclear security and should not confuse its mission with the nonproliferation agenda in any way; by doing so, some countries will lose faith in the summit process.

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## Author biography

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