

Session 7: Prospects for 2012 Nuclear Security Summit

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Summary

Next March, the Republic of Korea will host the 2012 Nuclear Security Summit in Seoul. The summit is expected to bring together more than fifty world leaders to discuss how their countries can work to improve the global nuclear security regime. Like the 2010 Nuclear Security Summit in Washington, D.C., the 2012 Summit will mobilize heads of state on the very important issue of nuclear security. Additionally, the summit will increase public awareness of nuclear security issues. Although it is often not recognized, nuclear security is a global issue. If a nuclear terrorist event happens in one country, many more countries would be devastated by a slowdown in global trade. Although not addressed specifically, the Nuclear Security Summit could potentially stimulate progress on the other two pillars of nuclear policy: nonproliferation and disarmament.

The summit will cover many major issues, including the intersection of nuclear safety and security. The recent crisis in Japan may have provoked increasing interest among terrorist groups in attacking civilian nuclear facilities in order to spread havoc and fear. Experts need to identify the common ground between nuclear safety and security. Furthermore, nuclear experts need to communicate clearly with the public on nuclear safety, particularly if civilian nuclear power is to continue its renaissance. Lastly, ROK officials hope that the summit will bring increasing attention to North Korea and the challenges of denuclearization on the Korean peninsula.

Why is nuclear security so important? This is the question that is often asked by the global public. In a few months, the world will commemorate the tenth anniversary of the September 11th attacks, which resulted in thousands of deaths. This shifted international concern toward terrorism and the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction. According to a RAND study, a nuclear terrorist attack on the port of Los Angeles/Long Beach could result in 60,000 deaths before radiation took its full toll on the population in addition to a trillion dollar loss in global trade. Terrorists need fissile material in order to build a nuclear weapon, which makes securing nuclear material incredibly important. Fortunately, acquiring fissile material is difficult. However, it is not impossible. There have been eighteen confirmed cases of theft or loss of fissile materials to date. Enough fissile materials exist in the world in order to create another 100,000 nuclear weapons. The Nuclear Security Summit is crucial because it expands international attention on this issue. This raises public awareness on the topic, which can in turn help world leaders to make bold policy decisions.

The Fissile Materials Working Group (FMWG) is helping to elevate international attention on this issue. The FMWG is a coalition of more than fifty organizations that seeks to provide innovative policy solutions to world leaders on nuclear security. In support of the 2010 Nuclear Security Summit, the FMWG hosted a press briefing to educate journalists on nuclear security issues so that they could ask informed questions at the Nuclear Security Summit and assist in educating the public. Additionally, the Korea Institute of Nuclear Nonproliferation and Control (KINAC) and the Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security (IFANS) from Korea will be organizing an experts/policy conference and an industry conference in preparation for the 2012 summit in Seoul.

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