

[SE7-GB-1] Prospects for 2012 Nuclear Security Summit

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Full Summary

Dr. Jun led off the panel by noting that the Republic of Korea will host the 2012 Nuclear Security Summit in Seoul between March 26th and 29th. 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. Following an introduction by Dr. Jun, the panelists began their presentations.

Mr. Hahn, who serves as Korea's "sous-sherpa" for the 2012 Nuclear Security Summit, addressed two general topics in his remarks. First, Mr. Hahn commented on the significance and importance of the 2012 Nuclear Security Summit in Seoul. Second, Mr. Hahn discussed the agenda of the summit and the major issue areas that would be addressed.

According to Mr. Hahn, the 2010 Nuclear Security Summit in Washington, D.C., was incredibly important because it mobilized heads of state on the important issue of nuclear security for the very first time. There are, of course, many different international norms and mechanisms to prevent nuclear terrorism, such as UN Security Council Resolution 1540 and the G-8 Global Partnership. However, by gathering heads of state together, the Nuclear Security Summit focused international attention on this issue at the highest level and helped spur political will to combat nuclear terrorism, which can often be lacking. Like the 2010 Summit, the 2012 Summit in Seoul will mobilize heads of state on the very important issue of nuclear security.

The 2012 Summit will hope to build upon the success of the 2010 Summit and be another rare victory for the nonproliferation/nuclear security/arms control field. Although the New START Treaty between Russia and the United States was a success, such victories are few and far between. Progress on the Fissile Materials Cutoff Treaty (FMCT) and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) has been slow or non-existent. The fact that the Nuclear Security Summit includes non-NPT (Non-Proliferation Treaty) members such as Pakistan, India, and Israel, inspires confidence for other major nuclear players. Thus, the

2012 Nuclear Security Summit could potentially facilitate progress on future non-proliferation fronts.

The summit is also important because it 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.

The Nuclear Security Summit was not intended to create new organizations. Rather, it was intended to strengthen current initiatives. It serves as the most highly effective impetus for these ongoing initiatives. As a result, the 2012 Summit will mobilize commitments from countries to strengthen their nuclear security, or what is often referred to as “house gifts.” 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 between nuclear safety and security. The nuclear crisis at Japan’s Fukushima-Daiichi power plant has highlighted the importance of this issue. However, many countries don’t distinguish between nuclear safety and nuclear security, despite the fact that 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. As a result, we need to be more vigilant on this issue. Experts need to identify the common ground between nuclear safety and security so that strengthening one will also strengthen the other.

Furthermore, nuclear experts need to communicate clearly with the public on nuclear safety, particularly if civilian nuclear power is to continue its renaissance. The crisis at Fukushima has raised international fears regarding the safety of nuclear energy, and some countries are backing away from their commitment to nuclear power. Thus, a good amount of education is needed to make clear that nuclear power can be safe and secure.

An additional topic that the 2012 Summit will address that was not addressed in Washington, D.C. is radiological security and control. The use of a radiological dispersion device, or “dirty bomb,” by a terrorist group is less deadly than a typical nuclear weapon, but is far more likely. So the summit will attempt to develop consensus around policies that reduce the radiological threat.

Coordination is highly important. The 2012 Summit should boost momentum for the ratification of the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Materials (CPPNM). Regional cooperation is needed to strengthen nuclear security because the threat of nuclear

terrorism is not confined within borders. Countering illicit trafficking in nuclear and other materials through border control should be coordinated regionally. Korea, Japan, and China can cooperate on establishing “centers of excellence” devoted to nuclear security, but need to determine how they divide the training.

Korea will encourage countries to bring national commitments or “house gifts” to the 2012 Summit, such as returning highly enriched uranium or converting reactors to low enriched uranium. Korea will also seek to encourage countries in transition because many do not have experts on technical nuclear issues, or on nuclear safety and security. Korea is a unique country, and thus it can serve as an exemplary model while still relating to many of the countries that will be in attendance at the Summit. The Republic of Korea is committed to non-proliferation and denuclearization, but also has the fifth largest nuclear power plant capability. Korea’s nuclear safety and security is excellent, and has a transparent and capable nuclear industry. Thus, Korea can put forth a consensus voice that bridges the divides between countries, particularly between advanced and developing countries.

Lastly, officials from South Korea hope that the summit will bring increasing attention to North Korea and the challenges of denuclearization on the Korean peninsula. This will not be a core focus of the 2012 Nuclear Security Summit, but Korea hopes to take advantage of the spotlight that the summit will shine on nuclear issues and the Korean peninsula. Thus, it serves as an opportunity to send a political message to North Korea so that the North can choose to engage the international community and potentially abandon their nuclear arsenal. Engaging North Korea on this issue is not seeking to blame, corner, or condemn their government, but is rather a way to encourage and potentially resolve the North Korean issue.

Question from Dr. Jun: How are you going to measure the success of the 2012 Nuclear Security Summit?

Nuclear security is an issue that can’t be resolved in one summit. It is a long-term issue to invest in by developing international regimes and detection systems. We would like next year’s summit to show a practical vision to the world. This vision is comprised of “two stones.” The first is a stepping stone from commitment to implementation. The second is a cornerstone, in that the gains of the Nuclear Security Summit will be consolidated over the long term.

Next, Alexandra Toma of the Connect U.S. Fund and co-chair of the Fissile Materials Working Group - a nuclear security advocacy coalition - gave her remarks on the importance of nuclear security and public engagement.

Why is nuclear security so important? This is the question that is often asked by the global public. Few people understand the Nuclear Security Summit process. For example, people in Korea hear that it will not address the denuclearization of the peninsula, and people wonder why we are getting together to talk about nuclear issues. In the Middle East, the proposed nuclear weapons free zone is the only topic that most people want to discuss. So it is clear that there needs to be substantial public engagement on this issue.

The goal of the Fissile Materials Working Group, like the Asan Institute, is to connect experts with the public. So why is nuclear security an important issue? In a few months, the world will commemorate the tenth anniversary of the September 11th attacks, which resulted in thousands of deaths. This event shifted international perceptions about threat away from a Cold War lens and toward terrorism and the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction. As a result, many former Cold Warriors who had defended the need for nuclear weapons to deter the Soviet Union, like Henry Kissinger, quickly changed their stance. They perceived a major shift in global geopolitics, and began to advocate for the elimination of nuclear weapons to reduce the chance that a terrorist could acquire a nuclear weapon. Bipartisan commissions in the United States declared that al-Qaeda continued to pursue a nuclear weapon to use against America and its allies.

What would happen if a nuclear terrorist event occurred? 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. Additionally, the economic fallout could result in a trillion dollar loss in global trade. In the United States and elsewhere, there would be an accompanying clampdown on civil liberties, as happened in the wake of September 11th. Ms. Toma's friend in graduate school, a young Algerian man who happened to have a name similar to a person on the U.S. government's "Terrorist Watch List," went home to Algeria on New Years and was erroneously barred from returning to continue his studies.

Terrorists need fissile material and technical expertise in order to build a nuclear weapon. By far the most important piece of the puzzle for terrorist groups (and rogue states) is the acquisition of fissile material, which makes nuclear security 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 chances that terrorists could acquire the material necessary to fashion a nuclear device are far too high to sit idly by.

The Nuclear Security Summit is crucial because it expands international attention on this issue. As it is a global issue, the Nuclear Security Summit needs to stimulate action from all corners of the globe. Civil society and the expert community were heavily involved in the first Nuclear Security Summit in 2010. Connecting experts with the public raised awareness on nuclear security, which in turn helped world leaders to make bold policy decisions to move the nuclear security regime forward.

The Fissile Materials Working Group (FMWG) is seeking to elevate global attention on nuclear security. The FMWG is a coalition of over fifty organizations that seek to provide innovative policy recommendations to world leaders. A major way the FMWG achieves its goal of advancing the global nuclear security regime is by engaging the media, which shapes public opinion. Prior to the 2010 Nuclear Security Summit, the FMWG organized a two-hour question and answer session with journalists on nuclear security. This set the stage so that journalists could ask educated questions at the Nuclear Security Summit. To have an informed and engaged media is highly important because it helps to inform public opinion. The FMWG hopes to replicate a similar event in support of the 2012 Summit.

For the 2012 Nuclear Security Summit, there is a strong need to draw international perspectives on nuclear security and why it is important. For example, why should Malaysia care about nuclear security? By making this case, we will create political space so that world leaders can make bold policy decisions at the Nuclear Security Summit.

Question from Dr. Jun: Ms. Toma, the Fissile Materials Working Group used to be an American-based organization, but it is expanding internationally, correct?

Yes, the Fissile Materials Working Group has over twenty International Partners, and has conducted outreach internationally with conferences in Cairo, Egypt and Vienna, Austria. We are hoping to arrange a similar conference in the Asia region.

Dr. Yoo spoke on the intersection of nuclear safety and security, in addition to an experts/policy conference that is being put on in Seoul around the time of the 2012 Summit. How do we harmonize three of the main issues confronting us: nuclear security, nuclear safety, and nuclear detection? Safeguards are needed to ensure that countries live up to their responsibility not to develop nuclear weapons. The International Atomic Energy Agency is critically important in this regard. Security is needed to prevent nuclear materials from being seized during an assault. UN Security Council Resolutions 1540 and 1373 also work to ensure that terrorists seeking to acquire fissile materials are thwarted. Through nuclear safety, states work to ensure that radiation is not accidentally released into the environment.

It is possible that synergies exist between these three challenges, particularly between nuclear safety and security. For example, a terrorist could seek to sabotage a nuclear power plant's cooling system, which could instigate a meltdown and release of radioactivity similar to the Fukushima crisis. Therefore, strengthening a nuclear power plant's cooling systems and backup power sources can reduce multiple threats to public safety. It is these synergies that we must search for.

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. Dr. Jun and Dr. Yoo are taking a leading role in this initiative, and 100 individuals from 30 countries are expected at the conference.

Questions/Comments

The 2012 Nuclear Security Summit is a great achievement for the Republic of Korea. It would be highly useful to arrange a follow-up event after the 2012 Summit to discuss its outcomes, which Russian academia and civil society would be highly interested in participating in.

The Republic of Korea will engage countries on their national commitments. Of course, we would like consensus on the Seoul communiqué, which will tackle important issues. This is not an easy job, but the 2012 Nuclear Security Summit will deal with all aspects of nuclear security, including technical aspects and law enforcement. We need to see what progress has been made after the summit.

It would probably make sense to invite leaders from the world's major religions to participate in the Nuclear Security Summit in order to demonstrate the absolute unacceptability of nuclear terrorism. Is there any such initiative in the works?

The Fissile Materials Working Group has successfully reached out to the Quakers and the Evangelical community. It does hit home with religious figures due to the moral issues involved. Making society safe is not only the responsibility of governments, but also of civil society leaders.

Last summit the most contentious issue was finding agreement on the threat that nuclear terrorism poses. Nuclear security experts are in agreement on this. In consultations with colleagues, are we any closer to an agreement on the level of threat?

This is an important question. The starting point for dealing with nuclear terrorism is by understanding the threat it poses. When you call something a threat there are two dimensions: reality and perception. The United States feels more vulnerable than any other state due to its status, which raises complications in implementation of the nuclear security regime. Detonation of a radiological dispersion device or dirty bomb could take place in any number of places. Getting fissile materials, fashioning a device, and then transporting to its site of detonation could involve many developing countries that don't share the same threat perception as the United States. This emphasizes the need for collaborative action on this important issue. If governments agree on the level of threat, it makes our job easier. This is where civil society can play a major role in helping to educate the public.

How many summits can we have, given that their value decreases over time? How many more do we need?

This is difficult to say, particularly because we don't know how much progress we will achieve. It is premature to say two or three; it depends on political will and implementation.

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