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Policy Memo

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SUBJECT: Nuclear Security Summits Crucial for Global Efforts to
Combat Nuclear Terrorism

This policy memo is based on a discussion by about 20 policy experts, government officials, and representatives from both intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations at “The Road to Korea 2012,” a roundtable at the Stanley Foundation’s 51st annual Strategy for Peace Conference held October 14–16, 2010, in Warrenton, Virginia.

The dialogue included a reflection on the 2010 Nuclear Security Summit (NSS) in Washington, DC, as well as the broader effort of nuclear security. Discussion also focused on building consensus on the threat of nuclear terrorism, additional measures necessary to meet the four-year goal and sustained nuclear security efforts, and the upcoming summit in the Republic of Korea in 2012.

Participants identified the following action points to further the nuclear security agenda:

- Serious and sustained engagement by governmental officials leading up to the 2010 Nuclear Security Summit produced both political consensus and action-oriented commitments.
- While the summit was a success, participating countries and organizations only made voluntary commitments to realize the summit’s four-year goal of securing all vulnerable nuclear materials worldwide by 2013.
- It remains a challenge to convey and sustain agreement on the urgency of the nuclear terrorism threat despite the declaration of the summit communiqué that it is one of the most challenging threats to global security.
- Measuring progress toward summit commitments must be a priority.
- Recognizing that there is not a universally accepted standard of nuclear security, there is debate on whether a standard could be developed.

- An ongoing, consultative forum should be created to provide for continued engagement of NGOs and nuclear industry leading into the 2012 summit in Korea.
- Recognizing that a narrow scope was one of the greatest strengths of the summit, any attempt to expand the scope must be carefully considered.
- Additional commitments should be made by countries participating in the 2012 summit (see recommendations below on page 5).

2010 Nuclear Security Summit Accomplishments and Opportunities Missed

There was broad consensus among roundtable participants that the April 2010 NSS was valuable in drawing much-needed attention to the threat of nuclear terrorism. Through serious and sustained engagement by governmental officials in the year leading up to the summit, the NSS produced both political consensus and action-oriented commitments on measures to enhance nuclear security for the sake of international security.

While the official summit convened 47 countries, in addition to three international organizations, meetings on the margins of the NSS marked significant new engagement between and among government, the nuclear industry, and civil society.

Participants hailed the NSS for the forum it created by which participating governments, as well as industry, will be held accountable to their commitments and expected to make further commitments in 2012. Another major value of the summit was its endorsement of existing international security agreements and mechanisms through the NSS communiqué and work plan. The summit outcome documents gave momentum to the various tools and mechanisms that impact nuclear security. It was noted as well that the NSS created space for progress on the larger nonproliferation and disarmament agendas.

While the summit is generally considered a success, the prior lack of previous international top-level engagement on the issue of nuclear security leaves the participating countries and organizations with a demanding agenda as it works to realize the summit's four-year goal of securing all vulnerable nuclear materials worldwide by 2013.

The summit produced a work plan that is far-reaching yet, given the nature of the NSS, the political commitments made are voluntary and, in many cases, not as demanding as many roundtable participants thought they should have been. Still, the summit and the sherpa process through which it was planned gave impetus for countries to make individual commitments beyond the consensus document.

Roundtable participants applauded the individual country commitments, although many noted that commitments could have gone further to increase momentum coming out of the summit. In addition, participants expressed concern that not all countries possessing nuclear materials or related facilities made new commitments at the NSS. While there are ways to measure countries'

successes against the summit commitments, participants reiterated concern that there are not precise ways to measure success toward the four-year goal or the overall state of nuclear security.

Building Consensus on the Threat and Responses to It

While the summit communiqué articulates consensus that “[n]uclear terrorism is one of the most challenging threats to international security, and strong nuclear security measures are the most effective means to prevent terrorists, criminals, or other unauthorized actors from acquiring nuclear materials,” differences remain as to the scope and urgency of the terrorist threat and whether there are universal ways to address the challenge.

It remains a challenge to convey and sustain agreement on the urgency of the nuclear terrorism threat. There was a shared understanding among participants that a detonation of a nuclear device is neither easy nor impossible, and that the low-probability, high-impact equation could help strengthen arguments on both sides on how seriously countries should work to avert such a disaster. Participants noted that those attempting to communicate the nuclear threat must be sensitive to different countries’ domestic and regional security concerns.

Participants agreed that while countries have a shared responsibility to address the nuclear threat, individual countries have different responsibilities to meeting the threat based on their possession of nuclear weapons, the types and forms of nuclear material possessed, the type and number of nuclear facilities on their soil, and the likelihood that material might be illicitly traded or transported through the country.

While there is no universal view of which country or region might be most vulnerable to a nuclear attack, roundtable participants noted that focusing only on a potential target of such an attack leaves out the related roles other countries could play, including serving as the source of dual-use materials, knowledge-transfer, or as a transit point. Also, the nuclear industry must remain keenly aware that their role in minimizing the nuclear threat is critical to maintaining public confidence in the industry.

In addition to robust physical security at any given site, the role of police and intelligence is critical to thwarting the nuclear threat. One participant reminded the group that we must be aware of security tradeoffs, i.e., advocating down-blending of highly enriched uranium (HEU) would necessarily increase transit activities.

The Remaining Agenda

Participants agreed that measuring progress against the work plan and individual country commitments must be a priority. At the same time, progress toward the four-year goal and overall nuclear security effectiveness must be evaluated on an ongoing basis.

A fundamental principle of transparency should underpin nuclear security approaches that allow for accountability, while recognizing limits in sharing sensitive information. The summit process empowered bilateral engagement, and such engagement must be continued and strengthened in order to make real progress leading up to 2012.

Participants noted that while it is difficult to determine how to evaluate progress, it is necessary to advance nuclear security. The question was raised as to who should measure progress toward NSS commitments and broader nuclear security goals. It was agreed that the NGO community should play a role in this effort. However, NSS states must also determine how to best share among themselves the progress made toward specific NSS commitments and the implementation of the work plan. Consideration must be given to how and when countries should engage their publics and to what end, another area where the NGO community could be involved.

Recognizing that there is not a universally accepted standard of nuclear security, there is debate on whether a standard could be developed. Some participants argued that establishing such a standard is feasible, and that it would have a positive effect on implementation of nuclear security practices. One suggestion was that it might be helpful to examine the evolution of the nuclear safety regime to draw upon lessons learned.

The Korea Summit: Scope and Goals

President Obama spearheaded the NSS process by announcing his administration's nuclear security goals in his Prague speech in April 2009. In order to achieve success, it is critical for the US administration to maintain a high level of commitment to engagement in the NSS.

Building upon the success of the April summit, governments should continue to engage industry and civil society in the process leading up to and at the Korea summit in 2012. An ongoing, consultative forum should be created to provide for continued engagement by all the relevant actors or such engagement could be brought into the sherpa process in some manner.

Participants emphasized the need for strengthening cooperation on the investigation of nuclear smuggling incidents, as well as known incidents of knowledge-transfer or sabotage. Since progress toward achieving nuclear security goals can only be measured if current security gaps are known, it is critical for robust cooperation to be developed for law enforcement, intelligence, and material characterization efforts to determine if current leaks have been plugged.

Recognizing that a narrow scope was one of the greatest strengths of the summit, any attempt to expand the scope must be carefully considered so as not to dilute the focus of the summit's original intent to address nuclear material security. Some participants noted that efforts to expand the summit's scope (i.e., to the threat posed by radioactive material) might also distract attention from the threat perception of nuclear terrorism as the most urgent threat to international security.

Given political sensitivities surrounding the area of nuclear security, universality of NSS participation is not ideal if the goal remains to achieve substantive outcomes. Instead, the next summit should identify progress made through (and changes to) existing mechanisms that were endorsed at the 2010 NSS and encourage implementation of new instruments by all states. Roundtable participants highlighted, among other tools, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540 and the G-8 Global Partnership as examples of existing mechanisms that were endorsed by the NSS and remain complementary to the goals of the NSS. Countries should try to the greatest extent possible to link their 2012 summit commitments to both the 2010 work plan and existing implementation mechanisms.

Some of the recommendations of additional commitments that could be made at the 2012 NSS to enhance nuclear security included:

- Elimination of highly enriched uranium in civil commerce.
- No new civil HEU activities.
- Adherence to a set of HEU transparency guidelines.
- Participation in the World Institute for Nuclear Security (WINS).
- A commitment to not increasing separated plutonium (Pu).
- Performance testing.
- Adding safeguards to fuel facilities in nuclear weapon states.

Participants suggested that countries should look for ways to engage non-NSS countries through regional outreach, including through regional organizations. Such regional outreach would not only advance summit commitments beyond the participants, but it would also enhance regional coordination and security. NSS participating countries should take seriously the obligation to identify ways for other countries to associate themselves with summit commitments, be held accountable for their commitments, and get credit for their progress.

Full Report to Follow

A more comprehensive report about this conference and its major recommendations will follow in a few weeks.

The analysis and recommendations included in this Policy Memo do not necessarily reflect the view of the Stanley Foundation or any of the roundtable participants, but rather draw upon the major strands of discussion put forward at the event. Participants neither reviewed nor approved this document. Therefore, it should not be assumed that every participant subscribes to all of its recommendations, observations, and conclusions.

For further information, please contact Keith Porter at the Stanley Foundation, 563-264-1500.

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