



## Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

# NUCLEAR SECURITY SUMMIT: TO WHERE FROM HERE?

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The concluding Nuclear Security Summit (NSS), scheduled for March 31–01 April 2016 in Washington D.C., will appraise the balance sheet of the past summit initiatives, and may earmark further steps in pursuit of preventing nuclear material and technology falling into wrong hands. Undoubtedly, the planning and the summit process spanning almost a decade has brought the global nuclear security regime nearly at par with the global nuclear safety regime. However, given Russia's current cynicism on the value of the summit, and the forthcoming one being the last in the series, one wonders the prospect of this mammoth initiative beyond Obama administration.

President Obama has categorically said that the 2016 summit will be a "transition" summit where heads of state will look to handover responsibility for nuclear security to their ministers.<sup>1</sup> This implies, among other things, that it is timely to turn the deliberations and guidelines on nuclear security into binding

commitments backed by national laws and implementation. To expect something on this line, the 2016 summit must culminate in bold and concrete global and national commitments with careful analyses of both needs and gaps which would pave the way for future regime.

### ***Summit Prognosis***

The previous three summits have brought global attention to the urgency of securing nuclear assets through national and international cooperation. A number of initiatives have been undertaken in the legal, political, and physical protection domain. A number of countries have also offered 'gift baskets' or undertaken innovative steps with national resolve to strengthen their nuclear security culture. However, not much is achieved in the areas like information sharing, peer-review, transparency, etc.

To large extent, the nature of the nuclear security regime still remains nationally focused that stymies efforts to take a comprehensive

approach to bring in universal standards in nuclear security practice. This trend is unlikely to change soon. The *de facto* nuclear weapon states, with or without NFU posture, adhere to stringent secrecy of their assets and inventory as part of their security architecture. Unless they are accommodated in the non-proliferation regime as *de jure* nuclear weapon states, the requisite confidence to be transparent in all matters would not come about. Without ending the denial attitude to bestow normal NWS status to four countries outside the NPT, a meaningful nuclear security regime based on national transparency is unrealistic. The umbilical links among disarmament, non-proliferation, nuclear status, and nuclear safety-security-safeguards need to be recognized.

### ***Russian Tenterhooks***

Moscow has expressed its unwillingness to be part of the 2016 NSS as it doubts the value of this summit. Russia accuses that the “summits lack democratic procedure, since states hosting the meetings occupy a privileged position in shaping the agenda and those attending can form arbitrary guidelines that international organisations, with much broader memberships, are then expected to follow.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, it would prefer to focus on a similar conference to be held also in 2016 by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).<sup>3</sup> This stance, if not attended carefully, would open the Pandora’s Box of NSS legitimacy/universality, and US leadership.

Undoubtedly, NSS has brought about significant improvements in the nuclear security regime and efforts, but the success has been closely centered round President Obama. Though no country has yet questioned the US leadership in the summit initiative, all speculate on the future of NSS post-Obama Presidency. Russia seems started questioning the US leadership success – mainly attributed to Obama’s time – on nuclear security matters. Will it unfold a rivalry between US and Russia to claim this leadership? Will Russia’s cynicism pave ways for more breakouts? Already, North Korea, Iran, Iraq, and Libya are notable absentees from the summits.

### ***Way Forward***

A lot of skepticism and speculation on the future contours of the NSS process bound to emerge in the days ahead – especially, how to sustain such high-level attention on nuclear security; how to ensure implementation of the commitments made by states at the Summits, and who will track progress and hold states accountable for meeting those commitments; what mechanism will drive efforts to further strengthen the evolving nuclear security regime and to close existing gaps in the system?<sup>4</sup> Having drawn the attention of the entire world to nuclear security issues and strengthening the nuclear security regime to some extent, the NSS process must not be allowed to end without outlining a concrete future course of action to address the structural-functional deficiencies of the nuclear security regime.<sup>5</sup>

First, instead of abruptly drawing to a close, a similar process of summit meeting should be arranged by IAEA post-2016, mainly to maintain the momentum gained in terms of nuclear security awareness world over during the last one decade. Second, the possibility of organizing regional summits must be explored, and regional preparatory workshops (formal or informal) may be arranged to discuss holding of Regional Nuclear Security Summit (RNSS). Thirdly, international confidence should be built for the need to secure, minimize, and eliminate plutonium. Fourthly, the parameters and sanctity of indexing of states' nuclear security arrangements by NTI must be given a serious scrutiny as it demoralizes many countries that are ranked low despite having very positive nuclear security record. Else, this would instigate more break-outs of the summit initiative and polarize the hard won global unity in nuclear security domain.

***(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])***

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> “Obama says 2016 Nuclear Security Summit will be held in Chicago”, <http://globalnews.ca/news/1229317/obama-says-2016-nuclear-security-summit-will-be-held-in-chicago/>, March 25, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Cottee, “Matthew Cottee: The 2016 Nuclear Security Summit – a bridge too far for Obama?”, <https://www.iiss.org/en/iiss%20voices/blogsections/iiss-voices-2014-b4d9/november-4b85/2016-nuclear-security-summit-bebc>

<sup>3</sup> “Russia told U.S. it will not attend 2016 nuclear security summit”, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/11/05/us-nuclear-security-usa-russia-idUSKBN0IP24K20141105>, November 5, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Non-Paper: Sustaining the Nuclear Security Mission Beyond 2016

[http://www.nti.org/media/pdfs/Sustaining\\_the\\_Nuclear\\_Security\\_Mission\\_Beyond\\_2016.pdf?\\_=1413921221](http://www.nti.org/media/pdfs/Sustaining_the_Nuclear_Security_Mission_Beyond_2016.pdf?_=1413921221)

<sup>5</sup> “The future of nuclear security”, <http://thebulletin.org/future-nuclear-security>