



The Nuclear Security Summit: Wins, Losses, and Draws

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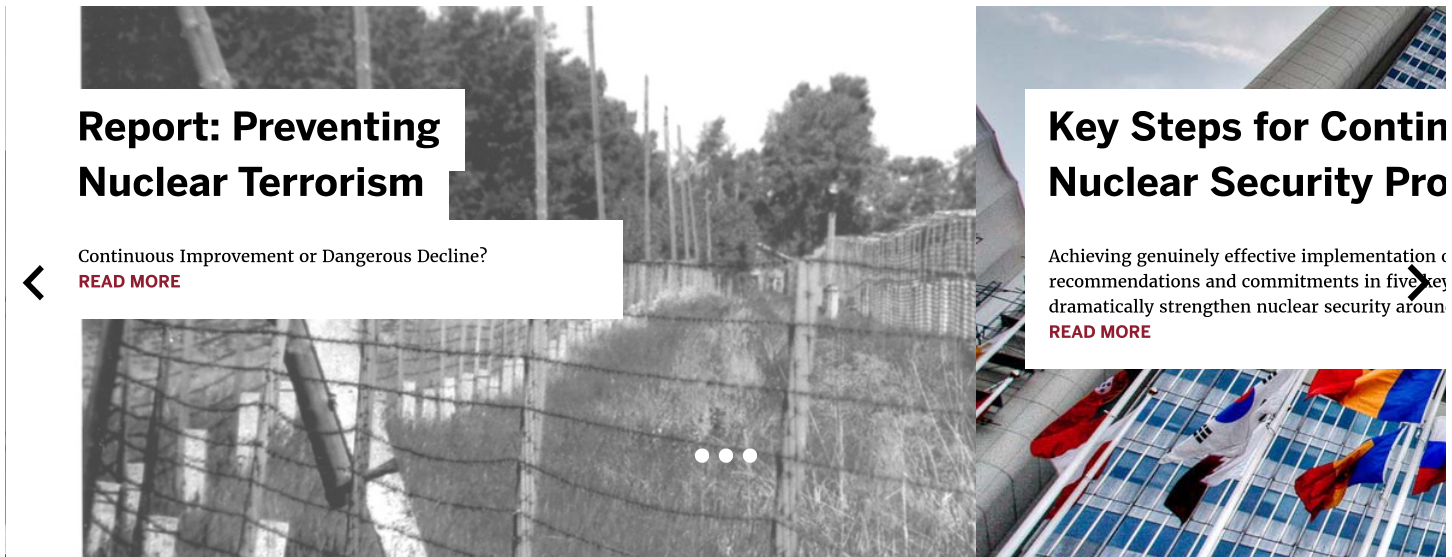
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The Nuclear Security Summit: Wins, Losses, and Draws

Author: [Matthew Bunn](#) | Apr. 04, 2016

The just-concluded fourth and final nuclear security summit saw some serious progress, but also some missed opportunities.

On the progress side:

- Enough states ratified the 2005 amendment to the physical protection convention to finally bring the amendment into force. That will provide a somewhat stronger legal foundation for nuclear security efforts – and will trigger a review conference that **some hope** could be a key new element of the nuclear security architecture.
- China joined in the strengthening nuclear security implementation initiative, thereby committing to achieve the objectives of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) nuclear security recommendations and accept peer reviews of its nuclear security arrangements.
- Japan and the United States removed hundreds of kilograms of weapon-grade plutonium and highly enriched uranium from the Fast Critical Assembly in Japan, **as promised** at the last summit.
- States agreed to 18 new group commitments or “gift baskets,” on topics ranging from protecting against insider threats to replacing radiological sources with less dangerous technologies. Probably the most important of these was the **commitment** to create a “Nuclear

Security Contact Group” – a set of senior officials that will keep meeting on the margins of the IAEA General Conference, to keep at least moderately high-level attention focused on nuclear security.

On the missed opportunity side:

- We still have no progress toward building a global commitment that all nuclear weapons and weapons-usable nuclear materials, wherever they may be, need to be secured against the full spectrum of plausible adversary threats. (See discussion in [Managing the Atom’s new report.](#))
- The [communiqué](#), as expected, offers no firm new commitments (though it does more firmly establish the goal of continuous improvement in nuclear security). More disappointing, the “[action plans](#)” for five international institutions offer few steps beyond what those institutions are already doing – certainly less than is needed to fill the gap left by the end of the summit process.
- Many of the gift baskets have few specifics or deadlines; how much they will actually do to accelerate progress toward their objectives remains unknown.
- Many key countries – including Pakistan, India, Russia, and others – are still not participating in the initiative on strengthening nuclear security implementation that China joined. (UPDATE: India announced that it joined the initiative on strengthening nuclear security implementation, see [here.](#))

The question now is: where do we go from here? [As discussed in our new report](#), the U.S. government and other interested states need to push hard to keep high-level attention focused on continuous improvement in nuclear security and on combating complacency. We make a number of suggestions on how to do that in [our new report](#) – including a shared global database of real nuclear security incidents (or non-nuclear incidents that highlight tactics or capabilities adversaries might use at a nuclear site) and lessons learned about how to prevent similar incidents in the future, and expanded use of realistic nuclear security performance tests against intelligent adversaries looking for ways to defeat them.

The United States should also put high priority on rebuilding nuclear security cooperation with Russia, on a different, more equal model. Russia’s decision not to take part in the summit was a mistake, only isolating Russia further, as was its [decision in late 2014](#) to cut off most U.S.–Russian nuclear security cooperation. In a world grappling with threats from the Islamic State and other bloodthirsty terrorist groups, it is essential that the two countries with the world’s largest nuclear stockpiles and the world’s greatest stores of experience in nuclear security find ways to work together to keep nuclear weapons and materials out of terrorist hands.

The next U.S. president needs a plan for taking on the Islamic State and other terrorist groups – and that plan has to include steps to prevent them from ever getting their hands on the ingredients of nuclear terror.

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