

## ARTICLES

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# Nuclear Security Summit 2014: The Way Forward

Arun Vishwanathan

Assistant Professor, International Strategic and Security Studies Programme, National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), Bangalore

Email: arun\_summerhill@yahoo.com

The third edition of the Nuclear Security Summit (NSS) is being held at The Hague on 24-25 March 2014. Leaders and officials from fifty-four countries and three international organisations (IAEA, INTERPOL and the UN) are expected to assemble for the international nuclear gala. As in the 2010 (Washington DC) and the 2012 (Seoul) avatars of the NSS, the main issues which are likely to be discussed at the Hague 2014 NSS are *inter alia* nuclear materials security and preventing nuclear terrorism.

Perusing the commentaries and op-eds leading up to the 2014 edition of the NSS and the communiqués put out after by the earlier editions of the NSS, one gets a sense that mindsets needs to change if the objective of a making the world a safer place is to be realised.

First, much of the discussions seem to be more in the nature of the US and the West lecturing the rest of the world about nuclear security. There is an assumption that nuclear materials and facilities are safe in the West and the problem lies in the rest of the world. This is hardly the whole truth. A case in point is the 28 July 2012 break-in by three senior citizens into the US's weapons-grade uranium storage facility at Oak Ridge, Tennessee. The fact that the trio managed to cut across four perimeter fences and were able to roam about freely around the Category-1 facility for almost ninety minutes without being challenged is cause for grave concern.

This then brings us to the point that in order to actually improve the security of nuclear materials and facilities it is important for world leaders to understand that there needs to be a 'reset' in the way the issue is approached. As Charles Perrow [writes](#) in the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, "our current approach to risk is 'probabilistic' ... but we should also consider a worst case approach to risk, the 'possibilistic' approach." Simply put, currently countries are always preparing on the basis of the last attack but are generally ill-prepared for the attack that has never happened before.

One of the possible solutions would be to pursue a 'systems-approach' to security. As Perrow argues, in complex systems like nuclear facilities, security must be more reliable and tightly regulated. Focusing on the people providing physical security to these facilities, it is important to be cognizant of the fact that many a time, it is a situation where very bright people are engaged in very boring jobs. This is a recipe for disaster as brought out in the Y-12 National Security Complex at Oak Ridge, Tennessee and more recently in the case of cheating by US missilliers in their proficiency tests. Constant motivation, upgradation of training techniques and ensuring high morale in these personnel - who are the first responders in case of an incident - should be the first priority.

Another issue, mentioned in Professor PR Chari's article, [Mixed Bag](#), for *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, which comes up quite frequently in most commentaries, is the issue of transparency. Somehow, there is a sense that if countries would just be more transparent all problems can be solved. It has been argued that because India and other countries are not transparent, all is not well in these countries.

Though it is agreed that increased transparency and better communication will help in building trust and is important during crises, it is important to realise that given the catastrophic nature of events in case of a successful attack, governments cannot be completely transparent or free in sharing their plans beyond a point.

India does put in a lot of effort in securing its nuclear material and facilities but the Indian government leaves much to be desired in publicising its efforts. However, such information is definitely being put out in the public domain and is there for one's taking. A case in point is the wealth of information shared by the Indian Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) about its efforts on nuclear materials security in the workshop organised jointly by the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), Bangalore and the US National Academy of Sciences (NAS).

Also, India has done much in terms of tightening its domestic laws, its national export control lists (SCOMET) and as a party to various international conventions. The DAE uses the best practices while deciding on siting of facilities, working on design safety, during transportation of nuclear material and in cyber security at nuclear facilities. Somehow, all these efforts are missed by most commentators when they focus solely on 'transparency' which has become somewhat of a panacea for all ills.

The objectives outlined by the Nuclear Security Summit will make the world a safer place. However, in order to realise them, a rethink of current practices and an appreciation that the problems are global and the solution can be achieved only through international cooperation is needed.

B 7/3 Lower Ground Floor, Safdarjung Enclave, New Delhi 110029, INDIA.

**Tel:** 91-11-4100 1900, 4165 2556, 4165 2557, 4165 2558, 4165 2559 **Tel/Fax:** (91-11) 4165 2560

**Email:** [officemail@ipcs.org](mailto:officemail@ipcs.org)

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