



## Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

32/16

# WHAT NEXT AFTER THE LAST NUCLEAR SECURITY SUMMIT: A WAY FORWARD

**Manisha Chaurasiya**  
Research Associate, CAPS

The concluding session of the Nuclear Security Summit (NSS) process is scheduled for 31<sup>st</sup> March-1<sup>st</sup> April, 2016 in Washington. The aim of the multi-national initiative led by US President Barack Obama was to 'secure all vulnerable nuclear materials by building capacity for nuclear security and promotion of a nuclear security culture through dialogue and cooperation with all states.'<sup>1</sup> Two critical questions arise in the present with the upcoming last session of the NSS- 'whether the aim of the endeavour has been fulfilled?' and if not then, 'what next after NSS for the herculean task of global nuclear security?' The task that NSS undertook has not been fulfilled completely but partially in a short span of six years. The answer to the latter raises an urgent requirement for a formal institution on nuclear security, which would not let the flame, upheld by the NSS to die a sad death.

The envisioned aim of the NSS was indeed ambitious as ensuring nuclear security is an enormous task. In a comparatively brief period of

six years, the NSS as a process has worked quite satisfactorily towards its anticipated goals. The NSS (a) prioritized nuclear security in global attention, (b) accepted nuclear terrorism as a probable threat, and (c) brought together multiple actors, both states and non states, on to reduce and cut vulnerable nuclear materials around the world, and (d) represented a major multi-national, well purposed initiative of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The NSS attempted towards elimination of Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU) from civilian application which it successfully reduced to considerable levels. It facilitated greater cooperation among states to share 'best practices' on nuclear security, transportation of nuclear materials, prevent illicit nuclear trafficking, training of personnel and storage of nuclear materials. The summit process also furthered international adherence to the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material<sup>2</sup> (CPPNM), the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism (ICSANT), the UNSC 1540 etc.. Overall, the NSS as



an international initiative to globally strengthen nuclear security culture and infrastructure also coincided with the Indian stand on nuclear security. In India priority, concern and efforts towards countering nuclear terrorism and reducing its possibilities to the minimal has been central in the strategic thinking. Nuclear terror has been identified among major emerging challenges.

### After NSS: A Vacuum on Nuclear Security

Nuclear security is work far from over. Recalling the crucial needs of the world to secure and strengthen the existing nuclear infrastructure and the expected vacuum from the end of the NSS, it is salient to plan for future. The upcoming summit is a ripe time to evaluate the achievements of the NSS process but at the same time to contemplate the future of nuclear security in a gloomy world order. The rise in ambitions, audacity and scope of activities of the non state actors suggests that the struggle against which the NSS emerged in 2010 is yet to be achieved. The following are some available options post-2016.

#### 1. Devising a Formal International Nuclear Security Institution Under the IAEA

After the departure of the NSS one viable option to fill the vacuum could be through a dedicated institution on nuclear security. Though, the IAEA continued to have a proactive role in the international

nuclear security framework yet an institution under its auspice and expertise is not just desirable but urgent. The Work Plan of the NSS also recognized the multi faceted role of the IAEA as an institution providing guidelines, recommendations and support on nuclear security to states. The NSS process recognized all the 'contributions to the promotion of nuclear security by the UN and initiatives such as the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism, the G-8 Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction, as well as other bilateral, regional, multilateral, and non-governmental activities within their respective mandates and memberships.'<sup>3</sup> An IAEA backed formal institution will retain the existing thrust of the NSS. The 2012 Seoul NSS reaffirmed and 'encouraged continued IAEA activities to assist upon request, national efforts to establish and enhance nuclear security infrastructure through various programmes.'<sup>4</sup>

#### 2. Proliferation of Regional Nuclear Security Frameworks/Collaborations

The concept of "gift basket" in the NSS had unparalleled strength. The process saw countries contributing and collaborating on an international platform, those while living in the same

region had never even contemplated attempting it regionally. After the completion of the NSS certainly the global multilateral initiative seems more probable to a regional collaboration among states. Asia in particular has actively participated in the NSS and those same nations are presently better equipped to cooperate and share their best practices and expertise on nuclear security regionally. The role of the IAEA or regional organizations like South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and South African Development Community (SADC) can be decisive to lead in this regard. Even bilateral or trilateral nuclear security frameworks, in a region like Asia has potential to generate synergy, like between India-Pakistan, China-India-Japan etc...This can later on incorporate other regional states and states who are comparatively new to nuclear energy generation and nuclear security culture under its umbrella to benefit through the cooperative synergic expertise.

### **3. Extending the Existing NSS Till 2020**

It takes a lot of hard work and effort to build and run an institution and if it succeeds in overcoming obstacles and challenges on its way in fulfilling its goals,

it deserves continuance and not dissolution. The NSS has been a success. It has caused serious churning at respective domestic levels of several states to prioritize nuclear security, and to adhere to international treaties like the CPPNM, ICSANT and UNSC 1540 to cite a few. Synergic approach on the cyber security aspects of the nuclear infrastructures and systems is urgent among several others aspects that deserve attention. The ever increasing terror attacks and the scope and damage caused by the activities of non states continue to haunt the world regarding the worst case scenarios involving nuclear and radiological materials. If threat continues to multiply manifold so ought to expand the counter efforts. Extending the NSS process till 2020 would keep the thrust alive and help in advance planning and institutionalizing the needed alternative in its absence.

Some scholars have argued for the periodic NPT Rev Cons to overtake the task of the NSS after 2016. This option when weighed in costs and benefits proved to be counterproductive to the cause and spirit of nuclear security. The drawbacks of merging the nuclear security agenda inside the structure of NPT are many. Firstly, it would dilute the already weakening cause and priority to the achievement of the promised nuclear disarmament. Secondly, nuclear security would not be prioritized inside

the giant structure of the NPT Rev Cons, thus would lose its urgency and salience. Thirdly, the membership of the NPT is not as holistic and all encompassing as the IAEA. The cause of nuclear security is served best with as broad membership as possible. Instead of shutting doors to some on political, technical and legislative reasons an alternate is more desirable. After all, what is urgent is to maintain the priority to nuclear security and retain the hard achieved momentum of the NSS from loosing and wasting in lack of institutionalization and attention. The cause of nuclear security is certainly too prominent to afford being defeated.

*(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])*

---

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> As understood from the “Communiqué of the Washington Nuclear Security Summit”, 2010. Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/communiqu-washington-nuclear-security-summit>, accessed on 15 March, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> The Work Plan of the Washington NSS Summit recognized the importance of the Convention of the Physical Protection of Nuclear Materials and the 2005 Amendment as the only multilateral, legally binding agreement regarding the physical protection of nuclear material in peaceful uses. The document also encouraged participating states to work towards universality where applicable, early implementation of the amendment and assist states with implementation. Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/work-plan-washington-nuclear-security-summit>, accessed on 15 March, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> The White House (2010), “Work Plan of the Washington Nuclear Security Summit”, Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/work-plan-washington-nuclear-security-summit>, accessed on 15 March, 2016.

---

<sup>4</sup> United Nations (2012), “NSS Seoul Communiqué”. Available at: [http://www.un.org/disarmament/content/spotlight/docs/Seoul\\_Communique.pdf](http://www.un.org/disarmament/content/spotlight/docs/Seoul_Communique.pdf), accessed on 20 March, 2016.