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Issue Brief

Donald Trump and US Nuclear Security Agenda

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The Obama administration had successfully launched nuclear security summits (NSS) after the popular address of President Obama in Prague in April 2009. It was his speech in Prague that helped him to win Nobel laurels.¹ More than fifty head of the states met at the subsequent NSS meeting in 2010, 2012, 2014, and 2016. The focussed agenda of these summits was to curb the menace of nuclear or radiological terrorism by non-state actors. The idea of nuclear security was appreciated by global leadership and they participated in all these summits with full enthusiasm.

In response to the Obama's call "not simply to talk, but to act," global leaders agreed to secure or destroy hundreds of thousands of tons of weapons-grade nuclear fuel by 2014 to avoid the dangers of nuclear terrorism and proliferation.² In response, the 2010 summit yielded tangible outcomes such as Ukraine announced to get rid of all its Soviet-era highly enriched uranium, and five other countries stated to convert their research reactors to run on low-enriched uranium.³ The NSS process has contributed significantly to the global nuclear security agenda, raising attention of the threats and catalyzing several substantial actions and dedications by participating states to strengthen nuclear security.

After the 2016 meeting, the Obama administration summarized the tangible achievements of the NSS:

- Over 40 Summit countries have engaged in capacity building, whether through training, Centers of Excellence, or exercises.
- Over 30 countries have updated national laws, regulations, or structures relating to nuclear security.

- Over 20 countries have held or invited peer review missions, either bilaterally or through the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) International Physical Protection Advisory Service.
- Three more countries — China, India, and Jordan — have pledged to strengthen nuclear security implementation through subscribing to the 2014 Joint Statement on Strengthening Nuclear Security Implementation (INFCIRC 869), bringing the total number to 38.
- Eighteen countries have taken steps to increase the security of radioactive sources. Seventeen countries have been involved in removal or disposal of nuclear materials, or minimization of highly enriched uranium (HEU).
- Sixteen countries have ratified nuclear security treaties or taken particular steps to implement them. Fifteen countries have carried out physical security upgrades or acquired security or detection equipment.
- A dozen countries have joined or launched new international or regional structures to support nuclear security cooperation. Twelve countries have indicated their financial contributions to support bilateral or international cooperation in nuclear security.
- And 10 countries noted steps taken to support or implement United National Security Council Resolution 1540.
- These represent tangible, practical steps towards locking down nuclear and other radioactive material and building up the global nuclear security architecture. (Nuclear Security Summit 2016)
- Additionally, during the course of the Summits, thirteen countries and Taiwan rid themselves of HEU, allowing more than 3 tonnes of fissile material to be consolidated to secure storage in the USA or Russia.
- The amended Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material gained sufficient ratifications to enter into force, in part because of the political force exerted by the Summits. Thirty-two buildings storing weapons-usable fissile material received physical security improvements. And, 328 border crossings were equipped with radiation detectors to combat illicit trafficking of nuclear or radiological material.⁴

Although NSS meetings have helped advance nuclear security in significant ways, but the nuclear security challenges cannot be resolved completely. It needs a sturdy and long-lasting commitment by all nuclear capable states, international organizations, and civil society to permanent development. For that matters, NSS meetings should be continued and global leaders should contribute for a safer world.

After the United States presidential election in 2016, nuclear experts and practitioners assume that nuclear security will not get such attention by the Trump administration. There are serious concerns that nuclear security and non-proliferation regime will receive less support from the new administration in the US. Obama was more serious and concerned with global nuclear issues and he had been successful in highlighting such issues at various forums. In fact, it was his successful nuclear diplomacy that convinced world leaders to join US's campaign against nuclear security threats. There is no doubt that during Obama's years of presidency, nuclear security threat was successfully highlighted.

President Trump's takeover of the seat at the White House has brought a major shift in US' global politics. In such a scenario, nuclear security policy does not seem to be his priority. "The Trump administration inherits a global nuclear non-proliferation regime that has been more effective and durable than many observers expected, but the regime may now be coming under stress".⁵

The Trump administration should give priority to nuclear security and proliferation issues and international campaigns like NSS should be continued.

Sates like United Kingdom, France, Germany, China and EU are the strong contenders of the NSS and other nuclear issues. If the Trump administration loses interests in programs like NSS, then it would have serious consequences for the global peace. Furthermore, the Trump administration seems very pessimistic about Iran's nuclear deal and it is reviewing the nuclear deal with that country, which was Trump's agenda during his presidential campaign. Before making any decision about Iran's nuclear deal and North Korean nuclear future, President Trump has to consider about other parties as well.

President Trump would need to do a lot to address the global nuclear issues, for example:

- Continuing with steps taken by former President Obama on nuclear security and keeping it on its priority.
- Setting his future agenda for nuclear security.

- Highlight further nuclear issues and proposing an agenda to curb them.

The US has a significant role in global nuclear diplomacy and its effective participation is necessary for world peace. Currently, there are numerous challenges in the world and US cannot solve them all alone. Coordination and collaboration with other states is important to settle the problems. Similarly, Trump must engage world leaders for addressing the nuclear security issues.

Notes and References:

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 - ² Branko Brkic, "As Washington's Nuke Conference Wraps Up, Non-State Mushroom Cloud Fears Dominate," *The Daily Maverick*, March 13, 2017, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2017-03-12-as-washingtons-nuke-conference-wraps-up-non-state-mushroom-cloud-fears-dominate/#.WMYmcPKO2Uk>, Accessed on March 13, 2017.
 - ³ "The Global Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime," *Council on Foreign Relations (CFR)*, June 25, 2013, <http://www.cfr.org/nonproliferation-arms-control-and-disarmament/global-nuclear-nonproliferation-regime/p18984>, Accessed on, March 14, 2017.
 - ⁴ Tobey, "Peering down from the Summit: The Path to Nuclear Security 2010–2016 and beyond," p.9.
 - ⁵ Robert Einhorn, "Non-Proliferation Challenges Facing the Trump Administration," *Foreign Policy at Brookings*, Arms Control and Non-Proliferation Series Paper 15, March 2017, p.iv.