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The Seoul Nuclear Security Summit: “Beyond Security Towards Peace”?

Paul Meyer

High-level representatives from 53 states, including Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, will be in Seoul to attend the second Nuclear Security Summit on March 26 and 27. For Seoul, the summit presents several challenges which will have to be handled well if the meeting is to be considered a success. Author Paul Meyer argues that despite the challenge of a restrictive definition of nuclear security, Seoul has the opportunity to brand its own summit success by supporting practical results to secure vulnerable nuclear material and enlarging the summit scope to address threats to the nuclear order of greater saliency and priority than those associated with putative terrorists.

From March 26-27, 2012 Seoul will witness a major gathering of world leaders, including Canada's Prime Minister, to discuss ways of reinforcing nuclear security. This second Nuclear Security Summit follows two years after the inaugural summit convened by President Barack Obama in Washington in April 2010. There have been significant developments in global nuclear affairs over the last two years and the hosts of the Seoul summit, like the hosts of the Washington summit, will be looking to ensure a successful outcome to the meeting while putting their own stamp on the proceedings. What are the prospects for the Seoul summit and the entire endeavour of nuclear security summitry going forward? How well does the agenda for the summit respond to the real threats and stresses

faced by the global nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament regime? And finally given its venue, how will the Seoul summit participants deal with the “elephant in the room” that is North Korea and its nuclear ambitions? This article will address in turn the origins, participation, agenda, implementation record, the North Korean factor and Canada's role in the Nuclear Security Summit and assess its prospects for success.

Origins

The origins of the Nuclear Security Summit can be traced to the major foreign policy speech delivered by the new U.S. President, Barack Obama, in Prague,



About The Author

Paul Meyer is a Fellow in International Security and Adjunct Professor of International Studies at Simon Fraser University as well as a Senior Fellow at the Simons Foundation. He retired in 2010 from the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade after a 35 year career in the Foreign Service. An expert in international security policy, he served as Canada's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN and the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva (2003-2007). His current research interests include nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, outer space security and cyber security.





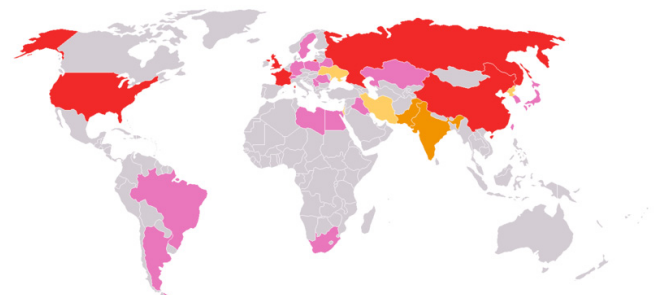
Photo Credit: www.kremlin.ru

Czech Republic on April 5, 2009. In that speech, the President set forth his vision of a world free of nuclear-weapons and enumerated the steps his administration intended to take towards this goal. Amongst these was the launching of "...a new international effort to secure all vulnerable nuclear material around the world within four years." As part of this effort he announced that the U.S. would host a "Global Summit on Nuclear Security" within the next year. These efforts were designed to counter the risk of nuclear terrorism, which the President described in the Prague speech as constituting "the most immediate and extreme threat to global security."¹

A major U.S. led diplomatic effort duly followed the President's announcement to develop the parameters and modalities for the Nuclear Security Summit. A "Sherpa"-led summit process, akin to that employed for the preparation of G8 summits, was initiated to oversee the development of the summit agenda and its two major outcome documents: a communiqué and a work plan. The Washington summit was held April 12-13, 2010 with 47 Heads of State or Government, including Prime Minister Harper, and three international organizations in attendance. The Americans retained a close control over the entire process, insisting on a narrow interpretation of "nuclear security" that was limited essentially to combating nuclear terrorism through measures of better safeguarding of nuclear materials. Such steps related to relatively obscure and technical matters concerned with international cooperation on protecting nuclear material, such as supporting the ratification of a 2005 amendment to

the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material which would extend the provisions of the convention to nuclear material at domestic facilities or in transit and not just during international transport as per the original convention. However laudable these efforts were, the subject matter was not of the nature normally associated with global summits. While these limits on the summit's scope may have facilitated arrival at a consensus amongst the 47 participating governments, they also contributed to results which were arguably of marginal significance or so caveated as to render their actual impact on government behaviour doubtful. As one observer characterized the final document: "The communiqué was vague and nonbinding, and undermined further by escape clauses."²

Another challenge for the Washington summit was the evident scepticism on the part of many participants with respect to the U.S. depiction of nuclear terrorism as the overriding threat to international security, although this did not pose a problem for Canada. This refusal by summit participants to grant nuclear terrorism top threat priority status was also coloured by the fact that "virtually every country possessing fissile materials is reluctant to acknowledge that its security procedures may have shortcomings that could be exploited by terrorists."³ Despite these shortcomings, the Obama administration hailed the summit as a success and pointed to the various national commitments offered by the participants as so-called "house gifts" to the summit host. It also worked to line up a successor host for a follow-on summit to take place in 2012 as a manifestation that the Obama administration was not engaged in a one-off display of the convening power of a new American president, but



Nuclear Weapon Programs Worldwide
Photo Credit: Maphobbyist

was launching a major global initiative which would be sustained by other partners going forward.

The selection of South Korea as the host for the next summit suited the interests of both Washington and Seoul. For the U.S. it entrusted the succession to a trusted ally with good international credentials and for South Korea it was, in addition to furnishing a service for an important partner, a further manifestation of South Korea's coming of age on the international scene akin to its hosting of the G20 summit in 2011. With the honours, however, go the responsibilities. For Seoul, the summit presents several challenges which will have to be handled well if the meeting is to be considered a success. Prominent among these is the close control the U.S. has maintained on the nuclear security summit process, which is viewed as a "registered trade-mark" of Washington the use of which is subject to approval by the American owners. It will require both skill and determination if the South Korean authorities are going to be able to shape a summit that will reflect their requirements as much as those of the "brand" holders in Washington and the international community. We will consider the nature of these challenges under the categories of i) participation, ii) agenda, iii) implementation and iv) the North Korea factor, as well as commenting on Canada's role.

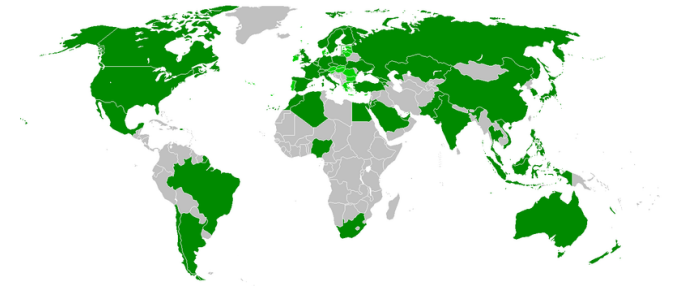


Foreign Minister of South Korea

Photo Credit: <http://www.thenuclearsecuritysummit.org>

Participation

The Seoul Summit will essentially include the same attendees as the Washington event. The number of states participating will go up slightly from 47 to 53 with the addition, by the Korean chair, of Azerbaijan,



Participating nations of Nuclear Security Summit held in Washington, D.C.
April 12-13, 2010
Photo Credit: Spry895

Denmark, Gabon, Hungary, Lithuania and Romania. In addition, the three international organisations present previously (UN, EU, IAEA) will be augmented by the inclusion of INTERPOL. There is nothing problematic in this list of invitees, but observers will be more interested in seeing the level of the representatives attending the summit. Will President Lee be able to attract the same number of Heads of State and Government as did President Obama in Washington? Some decline in personal attendance by state leaders can be expected, but if there is a marked falling off in the level of state representation this will reflect poorly on the summit and the global nuclear security enterprise it represents. The Canadian Prime Minister's decision to attend the Seoul summit will please both the U.S. and the South Korean governments and is consistent with Canada's support for the summit's aims.

Agenda

A formal agenda for the Seoul summit has not been publicly released although a December 2011 briefing document by the ROK Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade sets out its likely content.⁴ This listing includes items such as Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU) and Plutonium management and minimization; the IAEA's role; illicit trafficking detection and border control; information security and enhancement of international and regional cooperation; which represent continuity with the Washington summit's agenda. Two new items are also mentioned: the synergy between nuclear safety and nuclear security and the security of radiological sources. The first item is an obvious effort to make the summit more relevant by incorporating some reference to nuclear safety, an issue which was not addressed at Washington, but

which post-Fukushima, would be conspicuous by its absence, especially as the summit will be occurring only a couple of weeks after the first anniversary of this major disaster at a civilian nuclear facility. It will be a challenge to achieve something of significance on this front however as the two fields of nuclear security and nuclear safety have tended to be handled separately by concerned nuclear regulatory and industry players and the desired 'synergy' between the two may be difficult to manifest in anything more than declaratory terms.

Radiological security may prove a more promising item as the vulnerability of such sources to be used in a so-called 'dirty bomb' is arguably the most probable scenario for an act of nuclear terrorism. The Washington summit's Work Plan only had a passing mention to this issue ("Participating States will consider how to best address the security of radioactive sources...") and there could be real potential at Seoul to do something more substantial on this topic if the hosts have developed realistic proposals.



Photo Credit: Fastfission

The major lacuna in the summit's agenda is a function of the restricted definition given to its principal theme: nuclear security. In line with the Washington model, this subject has been restricted to the risks of nuclear terrorism and has excluded the issues which naturally arise when one thinks of security in the nuclear realm, i.e. the dangers posed by nuclear weapons proliferation and the potential for their use. While the American architects of the summit deliberately limited the treatment of nuclear security to the misdeeds of non-state actors, the world and its leaders cannot ignore the more prominent and pressing nuclear threats emanating from state actors, notably Iran, Syria, Pakistan and Seoul's neighbour North Korea. The pressures these unresolved cases place on the less than robust global nuclear non-proliferation regime and the crisis of non-performance in the nuclear disarmament sphere represent the subject matter

worthy of a summit-level gathering on nuclear affairs. To come to Seoul and fail to consider such issues as the forthcoming NPT PrepCom, the failure to bring the Comprehensive (Nuclear) Test Ban Treaty into effect, and the multilateral blockage that has prevented even the commencement of negotiation of a fissile material production ban; would represent a missed opportunity for nuclear statesmanship. Of course this subject matter is more challenging than the relatively easy common ground of securing nuclear material against possible terrorist acts, but ultimately is that any excuse for leaders to ignore it?

Implementation

One of the perennial challenges in multilateral diplomacy is how to encourage states to live up to the commitments they undertake as parties to various international arrangements. The nuclear security summit process both in Washington and soon in Seoul has had to find the appropriate means to promote implementation by states of the explicitly voluntary commitments made in their outcome documents. Without a dedicated organization to monitor and report on implementation, it is difficult to track the degree to which participants have actually fulfilled their undertakings. The respected U.S. NGO, the Nuclear Threat Initiative, in conjunction with the Economist Intelligence Unit, has recently helped to fill this monitoring gap by producing a report on the conditions and performance of states in the field of nuclear material security.⁵ The accompanying tables set out an overall score for the states participating in the Seoul summit, distinguishing between those participating states possessing one kilogram or more of weapon-usable nuclear material and those without such holdings.

Two years after the Washington summit, the report findings point to a wide range of results on the nuclear material security file on the part of summit participants. Among the states with nuclear material, Australia captures the top spot with a composite score of 94. The Netherlands, the designated host of the follow-on 2014 summit is in sixth place with a total score of 84. Canada is tied with the UK and Germany for 10th place with its score of 79.⁶ The United States finds itself in 13th place with a score of 78, while Japan (23th place, score 68) and China (27th place, score 52) are lower down on the rankings. The lowest score amongst this grouping is Pakistan's 31st place

NTI Nuclear Materials Security Index: Countries with Nuclear Materials						
COUNTRY	OVERALL SCORE	QUANTITIES AND SITES	SECURITY AND CONTROL MEASURES	GLOBAL NORMS	DOMESTIC COMMITMENTS AND CAPACITY	SOCIETAL FACTORS
Australia	94	96	100	92	100	81
Hungary	89	93	100	79	96	73
Czech Republic	87	88	88	87	100	76
Switzerland	86	66	88	96	100	83
Netherlands	84	69	81	93	100	79
Sweden	83	89	65	77	96	98
Norway	82	81	71	79	100	86
Poland	82	93	76	76	100	75
Canada	79	65	81	71	96	81
Germany	79	68	75	93	100	70
United Kingdom	79	12	100	100	97	68
Belgium	78	50	85	85	100	68
United States	78	22	100	84	93	72
Ukraine	76	80	76	89	100	47
Argentina	74	96	69	71	93	55
Italy	74	73	83	64	100	52
France	73	34	79	77	97	70
Mexico	73	85	68	71	96	56
South Africa	73	72	70	71	100	59
Kazakhstan	71	68	79	87	96	34
Japan	68	23	60	85	79	89
Russia	65	22	85	93	91	30
Israel	56	35	78	40	63	45
China	52	27	58	69	82	28
India	49	20	60	65	50	43
Vietnam	48	96	36	39	22	58
Pakistan	41	20	50	52	88	5
Notes:						
Overall Score: Combination of all five categories, as determined by weighted profile.						
Quantities and Sites: Captures quantity and production of materials and number of types of sites.						
Security and Control Measure: Includes core activities directly related to protection, control and accounting for nuclear materials.						
Global Norms: International legal commitments, voluntary participation in global initiatives and transparency.						
Domestic Commitments and Capacity: Indicates how well a country has implemented its international commitments						
Societal Factors: Can affect nuclear materials security conditions.						
Source: Nuclear Threat Initiative, 2012 NTI Nuclear Materials Security Index (Website: http://www.ntiindex.org/)						
For the purpose of the NTI study, countries possessing nuclear material were those having one kilogram or more of weapon-usable nuclear material.						

NTI Nuclear Materials Security Index: Countries Without Nuclear Materials

Country	Overall Score	Global Norms	Domestic Commitments and Capacity	Societal Factors
Denmark	100	100	100	98
Finland	97	100	100	87
Spain	96	100	100	78
Lithuania	92	93	100	71
Romania	92	100	100	60
United Arab Emirates	87	100	88	57
New Zealand	83	73	88	95
South Korea	82	73	100	62
Armenia	80	80	95	49
Jordan	75	87	83	37
Chile	74	87	57	82
Algeria	73	73	89	37
Morocco	71	73	84	39
Turkey	70	60	95	41
Georgia	68	80	68	45
Brazil	65	60	70	64
Azerbaijan	60	73	65	25
Gabon	59	73	45	58
Indonesia	59	47	84	35
Nigeria	57	47	79	33
Philippines	55	67	57	25
Singapore	50	40	43	82
Saudi Arabia	48	87	15	37
Thailand	34	33	27	47
Malaysia	31	27	27	48
Egypt	26	20	27	34

Notes:

Overall Score: Combination of all three categories, as determined by weighted profile.

Global Norms: International legal commitments, voluntary participation in global initiatives and transparency.

Domestic Commitments and Capacity: Indicates how well a country has implemented its international commitments

Societal Factors: Can affect nuclear materials security conditions.

Source: Nuclear Threat Initiative, 2012 NTI Nuclear Materials Security Index (Website: <http://www.ntiindex.org/>)

For the purpose of the NTI study, countries possessing nuclear material were those having one kilogram or more of weapon-usable nuclear material.

(score 42) one place above non-summit participant North Korea with its score of 37. Among participating states without nuclear material, Denmark heads the list with a perfect score of 100, whilst summit host South Korea finds itself in 13th place (tied with Iceland) with a respectable score of 82. While applauding this assessment effort by civil society, it would be helpful if summit participants could agree to establish some mechanism to regularly monitor their performance across key nuclear security categories. In recent remarks to the press, South Korea's First Vice Foreign Minister Ahn Ho-young, stated "When we develop a working institution to deal with the nuclear security issue, then we will make another very important achievement which is the development of building blocks for global governance."⁷ While intriguing in its reference to global governance mechanisms for nuclear security, it is not clear from the Minister's remarks if the establishment of such an institution features among the results South Korea aims to achieve at the summit. In the absence of some agreed systematic tracking of state action, there is a risk that the summit hosts will end up having to rely on their guests bringing generous 'house gifts' in order to move beyond mere declaratory outcomes for the Seoul meeting.

The North Korea factor

It borders on the surreal to conceive of a nuclear security summit being convened in Seoul that did not in some way address the North Korean nuclear reality. Pyongyang certainly is not letting the event pass in silence, having characterized it as a "childish farce" and an "intolerable grave provocation" in addition to denouncing the host government as a "special-class nuclear war servant for its American master."⁸ While the South Korean government indicated that the North might be invited to the gathering if it renounced its nuclear programme, it is unlikely that this condition is going to be fulfilled any time soon, notwithstanding the positive indications emerging from recent U.S. –North Korean bilateral discussions. North Korea, with its overt nuclear ambitions, will constitute the "elephant in the room" if the summit participants do not find some time to discuss it. Even an informal update of prospects for the six party talks by those concerned would be better than pretending the issue is outside the meeting's agenda. South Koreans close to the summit process seem still to be trying to "educate" the public regarding the omission of North Korea from the agenda, rather than finding a suitable means of including it. There is an

almost plaintive note in the writing of one commentator: "...the public should understand that the summit is not about preventing nuclear proliferation by state actors, but about fighting nuclear terrorism by non-state actors."⁹ On this topic the public has it right and it would be wise for the officials to accommodate this palpable concern into the summit programme. North Korea after all is capable of drawing attention to itself in provocative ways and may be tempted to do so during the proceedings in Seoul.



Photo Credit: Orlovic

Canada's Role

Canada has been a faithful follower of the U.S. –designed path for the nuclear security summit from its inception. It has apparently been quite comfortable with the narrow limits placed by Washington on the "nuclear security" theme and has not advocated for a broader approach to be taken to the summit by including larger issues of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament or the regional security challenges posed by North Korea. This in part can be explained by the desire to conform to the wishes of a key ally, but also reflects the alignment of the nuclear security summit's agenda with Canada's existing contribution to reducing nuclear proliferation risks through assistance programs in the Former Soviet Union. These programs form part of the "Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction" launched during Canada's G8 chairmanship in 2002, but which now involves 15 non-G8 countries as well. Since the beginning of the Global Partnership, Canada has provided some \$800 million towards projects which involve the securing of nuclear materials, the dismantlement of nuclear-powered submarines and the employment of scientists from the former weapons complex, primarily in Russia

and other former Soviet states. Not surprisingly, the bureau at DFAIT responsible for managing the Global Partnership is also responsible for the nuclear security summit process and its technical assistance orientation is appropriate for an international exercise that has been confined to technical and regulatory measures geared to securing vulnerable nuclear materials. Over recent years, this has been the focus of the Government of Canada's international activity relating to nuclear threats, rather than engagement in diplomatic initiatives directed at achieving progress on stalled nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation files.

Conclusion

The forthcoming nuclear security summit provides an opportunity for South Korea to demonstrate its

capabilities and credentials as an active middle power on the international stage. Although impeded by the artificially restrictive definition of 'nuclear security' being employed in this process, South Korea could use its chairmanship to support both practical results for the global effort to secure vulnerable nuclear material and an enlargement of the scope of summit discussion to address threats to the nuclear order of greater saliency and priority than those associated with possible action by putative terrorists. In doing so, Seoul would be honouring the spirit of the official slogan it has selected for the summit: "Beyond Security Towards Peace" and recognizing that securing peace in the current threatening nuclear context is much more than simply a matter of safeguarding nuclear material. Such an effort should merit the support of Canada and other participating states.

¹ "Remarks by President Barack Obama – Hradcany Square Prague Czech Republic" The White House, April 5, 2009

² William Tobey, "Planning for Success at the 2012 Seoul Nuclear Security Summit", Policy Analysis Brief, The Stanley Foundation, June 2011, Muscatine, Iowa

³ Kenneth N. Luongo, "The Urgent Need for a Seoul Declaration" *Arms Control Today*, April 2011 pg 9

⁴ Hahn Choong-hee "2012 Seoul Nuclear Security Summit", ROK Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Seoul, December 2011

⁵ See "Nuclear Materials Security Index" Nuclear Threat Initiative, January 2012, Washington, available at www.ntiindex.org

⁶ "Nuclear security summit aims to lay 'building blocks' for global governance" Yonhap news February 29, 2012

⁷ See Reuters report of Feb 22, 2012 citing North Korean official statement

⁸ Bong-Guen Jun, "Road to the 2012 Seoul Nuclear Security Summit" US-Korea Institute at SAIS, Washington, February 2012, pg 19

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