



At a PSA luncheon discussion for Congressional Hill staff, Ambassador Thomas Pickering and three other experts drew attention to the upcoming fourth and final Nuclear Security Summit to be held in Washington on March 31-April 1, 2016 and what Congress can do to strengthen this effort. More than 50 heads of state will consider the actions taken by countries (e.g. closed facilities, opened centers of excellence), and decide on how to continue to counter the threat of nuclear terrorism in the wake of the summits. Almost 2,000 metric tons of nuclear materials that could be used in nuclear weapons--highly enriched uranium and plutonium—are spread across hundreds of sites in 25 countries around the world. Ambassador Pickering noted that a significant quantity is not well secured and vulnerable to theft. Recent incidents at nuclear facilities demonstrate that governments must do more to secure these materials and keep them out of the hands of terrorists.

Joan Rohlfing, president and chief operating officer of the Nuclear Threat Initiative, noted that since the first summit in 2010, the number of countries with highly enriched uranium and plutonium has decreased from 35 to 24. A number of countries have joined the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Materials and its amendment, as well as the International Convention on the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism, however, there is still no international agreement covering weapons usable materials, in particular those held by the military, which account for 83 percent of the 2,000 metric tons noted above. Dan Lipman, Co-Chair of the Nuclear Industry Summit (NIS) and Vice President, Supplier and International Programs, Nuclear Energy Institute, drew attention to the technical areas to be addressed at the NIS, which will be held the day before the heads of state summit. He spoke of the design based threat, e.g. private security forces at nuclear facilities and other issues in the nexus of nuclear safety and security, including cyber security and security in the supply chain. He added that more attention will have to be given to “emerging nuclear countries.”

The world remains at risk from unsecured materials at a time when more nations are pursuing nuclear energy and other peaceful applications of nuclear technology, in particular in South Asia, China, Africa and the Middle East. Kelsey Davenport, Director of Nonproliferation Policy, Arms Control Association, addressed the accomplishments of various countries around the world, e.g. 90 percent of the “house gifts” (pledges to take concrete action) had been completed by 2012, and six countries-- including Ukraine-- gave up their HEU. She noted that the communiqués from the previous summits had not been binding and had many caveats, which points to the continuing need for vigilance in nuclear security.

All three panelists anticipate that the forthcoming nuclear security summit will be the last and that participating states will need to devise means to continue the nuclear security review, monitoring, and reporting function provided through the Summit process. In this regard, it was noted that a “Contact Group” of more than twenty states will continue to meet on the margins of the IAEA General Conference to continue high level discussions on nuclear security.

Noting that Congress decreased the nuclear nonproliferation budget since last year, and that 8,500 sites need enhanced security, speakers suggested using the oversight role of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to examine nuclear forensics, radiologic sources, and best practices, as well as increasing the efforts to protect against cyber security, among others. Some 35 countries signed the Strengthening Nuclear Security Implementation Initiative under which states agreed to use IAEA guidelines as minimum standards for domestic law, and to request peer reviews of their nuclear security rules. This provides a mechanism by which states could assure the international community that they are protecting materials and facilities. The final summit is expected to recommend five action plans in which different entities will continue the effort: the United Nations, the IAEA, Interpol, Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism, and the Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction. In addition, a contact group of 20 states is expected to follow up on implementation.