

## **Making the nuclear point**

Written by [Shyam Saran](#) | Updated: April 6, 2016 11:40 pm



On the opening day of the Fourth Nuclear Security Summit in Washington on March 31, demonstrators outside the White House held up placards with the blunt message: “There is no nuclear security as long as nuclear weapons exist”.

The Nuclear Security Summits have been about adoption of measures to prevent terrorist groups such as the [Islamic State](#) (IS) and al-Qaeda from gaining access to nuclear weapons, fissile or radiological material, or from attacking nuclear facilities, through an array of national, bilateral or multilateral measures. However, international cooperation in promoting nuclear security is limited to the civilian sector only. Countries with nuclear weapons are expected to take national measures to secure their military facilities, fissile material and weapons.

President [Barack Obama](#) announced his initiative to convene serial Nuclear Security Summits in his much acclaimed Prague speech in 2009. But his key declaration in the speech was the re-commitment of the US to the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. Thus, nuclear disarmament and nuclear security were integrally linked. The latter could only be an interim, though important, step in the pursuit of nuclear disarmament. Obama also pledged that the US would, in negotiations with Russia, further reduce its nuclear arsenal and would not develop any new nuclear weapons. He also hoped to persuade the US [Congress](#) to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). While the limited nuclear security initiative has gone ahead, the pursuit of nuclear disarmament has been reduced to a mere proforma pledge. In fact, there has been a significant reversal, as both the US and Russia have expanded their nuclear weapon programmes over the past five years. The US has not ratified the CTBT.

On the eve of the summit, Obama said: “I’ve reduced the number and role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy. I have also ruled out developing new nuclear warheads and narrowed contingencies under which the US could ever use or threaten to use nuclear weapons”.

And yet, the Pentagon reportedly plans to spend \$1 trillion over 30 years on an entire new generation of nuclear bombs, bombers, missiles and submarines. After the Ukraine crisis, Obama has reportedly ordered 200 additional nuclear weapons to be deployed in Europe.

The decoupling of nuclear disarmament from nuclear security is complete. So what did the Fourth Nuclear Security Summit achieve? The summit adopted a Washington Communiqué and four fairly detailed “action plans” relating to key components of the nuclear security regime. These are all directed towards the laudable aim of securing all nuclear-related materials, devices and facilities so as to prevent access by non-state actors and terrorist groups.

The global nuclear security regime is based on both legal and informal instruments. The UN Security Council Resolution 1,540 (2004) imposes an obligation on states to secure all fissile materials and nuclear facilities to prevent the risk of a dangerous link between international terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. The International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism and the International Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Materials and its 2005 amendment are other legal instruments. The summit communiqué urges states that have not done so to sign and ratify these instruments and to ensure their implementation. For follow up, the IAEA will convene a ministerial-level international conference on nuclear security in December this year, and this is likely to become a regular high-level forum.

There will also be a contact group at the IAEA at the official and expert level to continue and advance the momentum achieved at the nuclear summits.

In addition to endorsing the central role of the IAEA in promoting nuclear security, the summit adopted four action plans pertaining to the UN, Interpol, the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Weapons and the Global Partnership Against the Spread of Nuclear Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction — the latter two being informal arrangements among a number of states, mostly from the developed world. The action plans are non-binding best endeavours pledged by states for national and bilateral initiatives or multilateral cooperation to strengthen nuclear security through the use of technology, adoption of best practices and capacity building.

This summit brought a timely new focus on the link between nuclear security and cyber security. Interpol’s “Operation Fail Safe” initiative deals with the potentially dangerous nexus between cyber attacks and nuclear risks. The other areas of cooperation are methods of vetting and carrying out psychological assessments of personnel working in nuclear facilities and the monitoring of radiation levels and surveillance at borders for preventing trafficking of nuclear-related materials. Nuclear security is also linked to non-proliferation measures; for example, the continued reduction in the use of highly enriched uranium (HEU) and plutonium in civil nuclear facilities to minimise possible leakage for weapon use.

Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) announced several contributions to nuclear security. India will participate in the informal international “contact group”, which fosters cooperation in countering nuclear smuggling. Its own Global Centre for Nuclear Energy Partnership (GCNEP) will participate in the group on nuclear

security training and support centres and centres of excellence. India has also announced that none of its research reactors will be using HEU henceforth.

In the past, India had avoided joining such groups known as “gift baskets”, which brought together countries to cooperate on a voluntary basis on nuclear security issues.

These announcements underscore India’s credentials to become a member of the Nuclear Suppliers’ Group.

Modi also used the summit to focus on the threat to nuclear security posed by state sponsorship of terrorist groups and the pursuit of risky escalatory policies such as the deployment of theatre nuclear weapons. Though Pakistan was not named, the target was obvious. And, yet, in his closing remarks, Obama put India in the same bracket as Pakistan, calling on both “to make sure that as they develop military doctrines, that they are not continually moving in the wrong direction”. Old habits of hyphenation are difficult to shed despite the much vaunted India-US strategic partnership.

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