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CONTACT: Cathy Gwin (NTI)
202-454-7706, gwin@nti.org
Jeanie Barnett (Belfer Center)
617-495-9858, jeanie_barnett@harvard.edu

Nunn, Lugar: Programs to Secure Vulnerable Nuclear Weapons and Materials Must be Accelerated and Reshaped to Meet Terrorist Threat

New Harvard Report Grades Programs, Recommends Actions to More Effectively Block Terrorist Pathway to a Nuclear Bomb

Former Senator Sam Nunn and Senator Richard G. Lugar, the original sponsors of the Cooperative Threat Reduction program, today said the approach and pace of these programs is inadequate to the threat. Nunn and Lugar made the comments at a news conference to release a new report from Harvard University on steps to keep nuclear weapons out of the hands of terrorists and hostile states.

“We are calling for an acceleration and reprioritization of U.S. threat reduction programs to ensure that the most urgent threats are addressed first,” said Senator Richard Lugar, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and Board member of the Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI). “The scope of the effort does not match the scale of the threat at a time when these programs are more essential than ever.”

“A great deal of critically important threat reduction work has been done, but current efforts remain far too slow to win the race to keep these deadly materials out of terrorist hands,” said former Senator Sam Nunn, Co-Chairman of NTI. “Terrorist groups are racing to get weapons of mass destruction – we should be racing to stop them. The threat cannot be made to fit the programs; the programs must be remade to fit the threat.”

The new report, “*Controlling Nuclear Warheads and Materials: A Report Card and Action Plan*,” says the effort requires immediate attention from the highest levels of U.S., Russian and other governments and calls on the response to be “every bit as determined and resourceful as the terrorists are.” According to the report, U.S. threat reduction programs have secured and destroyed enough nuclear material for thousands of nuclear bombs, demonstrably improving U.S. and global security, but most of what needs to be done to keep nuclear weapons out of terrorists hands has not yet been done and the pace at which the remaining work is moving forward is “unacceptably slow.”

“While President Bush has said that ‘we will do everything in our power’ to make sure that terrorists never use nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, there remains an enormous gap between the seriousness and urgency of the threat and the scope and pace of the U.S., Russian and international response,” said Matthew Bunn, one of the report’s authors, from the Project on Managing the Atom at Harvard University.

The report, by experts from the Project on Managing the Atom and commissioned by NTI, recommends steps to accelerate and strengthen programs to upgrade security for Russian nuclear warheads and materials, and calls for expanding these efforts to address insecure nuclear stockpiles around the globe. To overcome the obstacles to progress, the report calls for sustained, day-to-day engagement on these issues from the President. “The lesson from the history of U.S. arms control and non-proliferation efforts is very clear,” the report concludes. “When the President is personally and actively engaged in making the hard choices, and overcoming obstacles that arise, these efforts succeed. When that is not the case, they fail.”

The report and its online companion at www.nti.org/cnwm provide the most comprehensive assessment ever published of nuclear threat reduction programs to date, both in terms of work completed and dollars spent.

The report includes a sweeping action plan for accelerating the effort, with a systematic analysis of the steps on the terrorist pathway to the bomb and what can be done to block them. The website features in-depth program-by-program assessments and recommendations and an interactive budget database including the budgets for each nuclear threat reduction program from 1992 to the present.

“As the world debates how to disarm Iraq, we must focus our efforts on shutting down the hundreds of pathways around the world that terrorists could use to acquire nuclear weapons or the material and know-how to make them,” said Ted Turner, Co-Chairman of NTI.

“The steps recommended in this report would benefit U.S., Russian and global security, and can only succeed if carried out in full partnership with Russia and all the nations that have nuclear weapons and materials,” said Vladimir Lukin, Deputy Chairman of the Russian Duma and NTI Board member.

Among the report’s key findings:

- The al Qaeda terrorist network has been attempting to get stolen nuclear weapons or the material to make them for more than a decade – and hundreds of tons of potential bomb materials, in hundreds of buildings around the world, are dangerously insecure, making the possibility that they might succeed frighteningly real. Four times in 2001-2002, terrorists carried out reconnaissance at Russian nuclear warhead storage sites or transport trains.
- The easiest, most cost-effective way to keep nuclear weapons from falling into the hands of terrorists is to prevent nuclear weapons and materials from being stolen in the first place. In that sense, homeland security begins abroad, wherever insecure nuclear stockpiles exist.
- But most of the work of securing these stockpiles remains to be done. By the end of Fiscal Year 2002, only slightly more than one-third of the potentially vulnerable nuclear material in Russia had been protected by initial “rapid” security upgrades. Scores of research reactors fueled with highly enriched uranium around the world remain dangerously insecure.
- While there are many obstacles to accelerating progress, the report concludes that with sustained high-level leadership, new global initiatives could accelerate and strengthen existing efforts, rapidly and dramatically reducing the risk.
- After more than a decade of threat reduction cooperation between the U.S. and Russia, these efforts must shift from a focus on short term stop-gaps to improvements that can and will be sustained for the long haul – while maintaining an emergency pace justified by the need to keep these weapons and materials out of dangerous hands.

Among the report’s key recommendations:

- Focus intensive, sustained leadership from the highest levels of the U.S. government on an integrated, prioritized plan for blocking the terrorist pathway to the bomb. This includes a single senior leader in the White House with full-time responsibility and accountability for leading the effort.
- Build the G8 “Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Destruction” announced in June of 2002 into an effective working partnership that will take rapid action to keep nuclear weapons and weapons-usable materials from being stolen and falling into the hands of terrorists or hostile states – with the United States and Russia both playing leading roles in the effort, shifting from a donor-recipient relationship to a genuine nuclear security partnership.
- Establish a focused program with the authority, resources, and expertise needed to remove all nuclear material from the world’s most vulnerable sites as rapidly as possible, negotiating tailored incentives to facilities to convince them to give up their material.
- Agree with Russia on a target of completing rapid security upgrades for all Russian nuclear warheads and materials within two years and comprehensive upgrades within four years, and a plan to meet that goal, using a partnership-based approach integrating Russian experts throughout.
- Forge security partnerships with other key states – such as Pakistan – whose nuclear weapons or materials might be threatened by terrorists.
- Build effective global standards for nuclear security for each nation with nuclear weapons and materials to meet, combined with an offer of assistance to any state willing to commit to these standards but unable to do so alone.

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