

Introduction

Mark Jansson

Coordinator, Project on Nuclear Issues

The Center for Strategic and International Studies launched the Project on Nuclear Issues (PONI) in 2003 in order to revitalize and strengthen a community of nuclear weapons experts that had been shrinking in size and increasingly thin in critical technical skills and policy expertise, especially among younger generations. The PONI conference series was created in order to promote new and innovative thinking on how to address key questions associated with the evolving role of nuclear weapons in international security and to bring people together from across the enterprise to discuss these ideas. To that end, the conference series has always placed a strong emphasis on featuring the ideas of newcomers to the field, who are uniquely positioned to generate creative insights and who represent the future of intellectual leadership in relevant technical and policy areas. The series quickly became the most recognizable aspect of PONI and sustains a high level of interest from junior-, mid- and senior-level experts, with all three cohorts making special contributions to the educational and network-strengthening success of each event.

In 2009, the conference series drew participants from across the country and around the world. Each event took deliberate and purposeful steps to bring the community together and elevate the level of discussion. The spring conference hosted by the U.S. Naval Academy, for example, featured a special panel comprised of leaders focused on arms control and disarmament efforts, as this constituency had been historically underrepresented at PONI events despite being an important force in nuclear policy-making circles. The University of California, San Diego was chosen as the host of the summer conference in order to strengthen the connection between PONI and the university's Public Policy and Nuclear Threats (PPNT) program, which educates up-and-coming nuclear experts in essential areas of nuclear science and policy. Holding the summer conference just following the conclusion of the PPNT program allowed us to involve many of its participants. The location was also crucial for the fall conference at the Royal Society in London. Holding an event at the Royal Society helped raise the profile of PONI in the scientific community, particularly in the UK and in Europe.

Each conference featured presentations on topics corresponding to the 2009 research agenda, which included a range of topics in four primary categories: Preventing Nuclear Proliferation and Nuclear Terrorism; Arms Control and Disarmament; Nuclear Posture; and Sustaining Infrastructure Capabilities and Competence. A selection of some of the best briefings from the spring, summer and fall conferences were chosen for presentation at our winter capstone event at Offutt AFB in Omaha. This journal contains papers that are based on the briefings delivered at the capstone conference and thus captures the essence of some of the many of the rich discussions that were had throughout the 2009 series. These papers address several timely issues and offer insights that can be brought to bear now and in the future. They seek to answer some of the broad questions that frame the space in which nuclear strategy and policy is developed, as well as some of the more specific questions related to how these strategies could be executed.

As nuclear policy goals adapt to changing circumstances, it is important that the community continues to challenge itself to discover new and creative ways for how these goals can be met. PONI is therefore grateful to all of the participants in the conference series for taking up this call to action and delivering significant contributions of time, energy and insight throughout the year. Each paper in this journal benefitted from the feedback of the conference participants; in particular, the senior experts who moderated panels and offered insight during discussion added immeasurable and irreplaceable value to each event. PONI would also like to thank those who have financially supported the conference series, including the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, National Nuclear Security Administration, Sandia National Laboratories, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, Los Alamos National Laboratory and also the Northrop Grumman Corporation. The support of the UK Ministry of Defence remains vital to PONI and was crucial to the success of the fall conference. Likewise, the cooperation and assistance provided by Offutt Air Force Base and U.S. Strategic Command allows PONI to offer a unique venue for its members to discuss their ideas with senior leadership from the military and across the nuclear enterprise. Finally, PONI would like to thank the authors for delivering the intellectual contributions that make the entire conference series possible and have made this year's publication a valuable contribution to the field.