Center for Strategic and International Studies

Press Briefing: 2016 Nuclear Security Summit

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MODERATOR: Good morning, colleagues. Thank you for coming to CSIS this morning. We've got some modest breakfast out there. There are really good bagels, so please indulge. Our interns will be well-fed all day.

Thank you for coming here to this briefing. It's timely, obviously. Next week, the summit begins, and I'm really glad to see such a good turnout. Glad you guys got off the Donald Trump train for a couple days to focus on some policy.

We have a terrific lineup. And I want to start with my colleague, Sharon Squassoni, who's going to give an overview.

SHARON SQUASSONI: Good morning. Thanks for being here.

The Nuclear Security Summit will start this Thursday evening with a series of bilaterals that President Obama will hold with 50-some-odd mostly heads of state, but in the case of Russia, as you may know, there will be observers rather than President Putin attending the summit. This is the fourth and what we think is the final summit that is devoted to nuclear security issues. It was kind of a landmark element of President Obama's Prague agenda.

The question is, how much news is there going to be out of this summit, right? One of the objectives, I think, is to kind of just place a capstone on this whole effort, and you'll get nitty-gritty details like 10 kilograms of HEU coming out of this country or that country. But the real question is, what happens after this?

So there have been successes in this process since 2010, but the overall objective of securing the most vulnerable nuclear materials in four years I think we can safely say a lot of progress has happened, but that goal I don't think has been achieved. There is still material out there, and the material that we're talking about is highly enriched uranium – 25 kilograms of which can be used to make a nice nuclear explosive – (chuckles) – and separated plutonium.

So when you look at the bigger picture, a lot of the material is held in military stockpiles. And that's one question: these summits have never really addressed the issue of material in military stockpiles, and that's because it's a tough one. And, given that Russia is no longer cooperating in this process, one of the key questions going forward is, what role will Russia play? And my colleague Olga is going to talk a little bit about that.

There have clearly been some successes along the way. You might have read in the media, obviously, that Japan has given up quite a large stockpile of highly enriched uranium and plutonium that it had at its Tokai facility. That was 500 kilograms' worth of highly enriched uranium and plutonium. That's actually now being shipped over to the United States.

But I guess what I would like to highlight for you is there's been, I hope, a kind of lasting change in countries' perspectives about the threat. So, in 2010, when we held the summit here in Washington, D.C., the organizers could not get other countries to even listen to a threat briefing. There was no threat briefing in 2010. In 2014, when the summit was held in the Netherlands, the

Dutch managed to get leaders to participate in a tabletop exercise. And this week – you know, simulating a nuclear terrorist event. This week, we're actually watching things – (chuckles) – play out in Belgium, where terrorist activity has highlighted and actually kind of lit a fire under Belgian officials to strengthen facility – strengthen security at their nuclear facilities. So, for example, last month there were no armed guards at their nuclear power reactors. Now there are armed guards.

So, back to the bigger question that I posed: How can you sustain attention over time? I'll be very curious to see what the organizers of this summit are actually able to achieve. The current plan is to pass this off to the five organizations that currently handle these issues. So one is the International Atomic Energy Agency. Another is the U.N. Another is Interpol. A fourth is the Global Partnership, which is the kind of inheritor of our Cooperative Threat Reduction process that we started – now I'm trying to remember – 15 years ago, 2001, with the then-Soviet Union, Russia, and that's kind of branched out with our European and Asian colleagues. And the final one is the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism, which the U.S. and Russia co-chair.

Finally, I'll just leave you with this. And we can – you can ask questions about, you know, specific details. One of the goals of this summit, I think, has – will be to strengthen the architecture, the international architecture, for nuclear security. And those five organizations or efforts I've just mentioned are part of that. But when it comes down to it, there are no legally binding obligations for countries to implement the kinds of security measures that, say, for example, the United States has on its nuclear material and nuclear facilities, and also on radioactive sources. That is a big – you know, when we think about a nuclear terrorist threat, there are a couple different categories, right? One is building an improvised nuclear device by stealing material. Another is sabotaging nuclear facilities – and that's what we're worried about, for example, in Belgium. And the last is a dirty bomb. So that's where you take some radioactive material – it's not HEU or plutonium, it's just simply maybe a medical radioisotope that you use for cancer therapy – you wrap it in explosives, and then set it off as a terror device. There's a lot more to be done on strengthening the security of those sources. And these summits have done a little bit on that, but there's more to be done.

So I'm going to hand the microphone over to my other colleagues to talk about specific country issues, and then Jim will also touch on cybersecurity issues, but we'll leave most of the time for your questions.

So, Victor, I think you need this microphone. Yeah.

VICTOR CHA: So let me just make a couple of points.

The first is I would entirely agree with Sharon that really, prior to this initiative – these four summits – there really wasn't a legally binding architecture for the security and safety of materials. And these summits hopefully have really created a(n) international regime that reinforces norms and practices among countries about safety, security and operation.

Focusing on the architecture going forward I think is going to be very important. And whether it's these five agencies or the partnering countries that will do it remains to be seen, but I think it is quite important.

In terms of Asia, as Sharon mentioned, Japan, South Korea – two countries that I look at – have been quite strong supporters of this effort by the administration. Looking forward to this meeting that starts on Thursday, I think it's going to be interesting, at least from my perspective, because while a lot of the focus will be on the security and safety of materials, I think there will also be a lot of discussion about the other nuclear problem in the – in the world, which is North Korea. My understanding is the three leaders are going to have – sorry, the three leaders being the U.S., Japan and South Korea – are going to have a trilateral summit in which certainly I think they will be focused on the agenda going forward in terms of what Japan and Korea can do to support the continuation of these summits and this new regime. But I think another good part of the discussion will be about North Korea – the enforcing of sanctions, the U.N. Security Council sanctions, the unilateral sanctions by each of the three countries; and the degree to which the cooperation with China in terms of enforcing U.N. Security Council Resolution 2270 is going to continue at the pace that they – that they want it to continue.

On North Korea going forward, I think this summit comes at a very timely moment because we are in the midst of a steadily growing drumbeat of North Korean activity that is all geared towards May, which is the 7th Party Congress, the first 7th Party Congress – the first Workers' Party Congress in 36 years. And it is also coming in the middle of U.S.-ROK military exercises that have really taken the level of exercise and the tempo to a completely different level in response to the January nuclear test and the February missile launch. So it would not surprise me if there was activity by North Korea during this summit because of all the attention focused on what's happening here in Washington. You know, the North Koreans always like to draw a little bit of attention to themselves with further missile launches, I think there's still concerns about a fifth nuclear test, and efforts to demonstrate different elements of their ability to put a miniaturized warhead on an ICBM and reach the mainland of the United States.

I know you wanted to get away from Trump, but Trump said some stuff over the weekend that – (laughter) – that we can certainly talk about. I have a view on it, and we can certainly talk about that. But I think that it's – I would say that it's my view that I think countries like Japan and Korea are – their leadership I think is strongly committed to this nuclear safety and security regime that is being set up, in spite of the, you know, very real threat that comes from North Korea in terms of their nuclear capabilities and the absence of what looks like a real solution to that problem. I still believe that the leaderships in these countries are quite committed. They're quite committed to nuclear power, particularly South Korea, but they're also quite committed to the safety and security of these materials. And I think through these efforts they both learned a lot about how to do this and I think want to be very proactive in terms of supporting such a regime.

So going from that to Russia, I guess, so.

OLGA OLIKER: Thanks. Thanks, everyone. And thanks, Sharon and Victor, for leading this off.

OK, so, obviously, as Sharon said, the Russians are not coming to the summit at the presidential level. They're coming only as observers, so Russia's not going to be an active participant.

What does that mean? And my apologies if this is all stuff you already know. I am going to try to be brief. But, you know, they were at previous summits. But what happened was, this time around, the Russian Foreign Ministry said that they felt this particular structure had served its purpose, and it's time for the IAEA, which is also holding a high-level nuclear security conference later this year, and other international organizations to be the ones in the lead. They also expressed some concerns that countries which hold views different from those of the organizers might not be heard at this forum.

So a lot of people look at this and they see this as a sign of the obviously strained ties between Russia and the United States, which of course has been the case since 2014 and the start of the Ukraine crisis. That said, Russia did attend the 2014 meeting at The Hague right after the annexation of Crimea. But it is obviously true that relations remain tense.

So what I would say is there are two things behind the Russians' non-attendance. One is, indeed, the tension between the U.S. and Russia. And in that is the Russian lack of a desire to appear at something that's so clearly a U.S. baby. They're in the midst of sending a lot of signals to the United States and to the world that they're important; that they're a great power; and that, importantly, since the other two don't really in any way preclude summit attendance, that they don't follow the U.S. lead, right – that they chart their own course, and if it aligns with that of the U.S. that's fine, but they're not going to step into line behind the United States.

The other issue is very simply that Russia has never been the bigger fan of this forum, although it's participated. It does prefer these broader international structures where it feels it can claim more of a leading role and its voice specifically is a bit louder.

That doesn't mean that Russia opposes the goals of the summit, that it's opposed to nuclear security. It doesn't emphasize them the way the United States does, but generally speaking it has cooperated on nuclear security issues, including things like getting highly enriched uranium out of countries like Kazakhstan and Poland. It's cooperated on the Iran deal, obviously on North Korea issues. And, of course, as Sharon noted, Russia and the United States co-chair the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism.

And I'd argue Russia likes this better. First, it's a co-chair role, right? So Russia has a senior role. It's not – again, it's not following the U.S. lead; it's up there next to the United States. It also fits nicely with Russia's focus, particularly recently, on the need to cooperate against terrorism globally. And Russia's generally been louder on that recently than it has been on proliferation.

Whether or not this is bad for Russia, this non-attendance at the summit, depends to an extent on what happens at the summit. And whether or not it's good for the summit is – also depends a bit on what happens. I mean, one could argue that without Russia there to weaken

some of the statements, as it has done in the past, you could probably get more forceful results. For example, at The Hague summit, it was the Chinese, the Russians, the Indians and the Pakistanis who abstained rather than sign up to some of the information-sharing projects the United States wanted. So, for instance, when Sharon talks about military stockpiles, I mean, we've got a long way to go before Russia under any circumstances is committing to anything intrusive on military stockpiles, right – anything that it's really going to have to reveal information about.

The problem is that, whatever you agree to at the summit, I mean, there's progress that can be made in a number of areas, but there are a lot of areas where Russia's absence is sort of a missing elephant in the room. Look, Russia, combined with the United States, that's 90 percent of the HEU in the world. It's more than half of the plutonium in the world. It's almost half of the – almost half of the civilian research reactors that use HEU fuel are in Russia, about 40 percent. And Russia – and that might go up because Russia has plans to resume HEU production for research reactors and for naval reactors.

So what that means is, while there could be meaningful progress without Russia, there can be more meaningful progress if you can get Russia onboard. And that means that, with Russia staying out of this particular forum, that might mean that that sort of progress has to be – has to be pursued somewhere else.

Thank you. Jim?

JAMES A. LEWIS: Great, thanks.

I'm just here to be ornamental, so I'm not going to say that much. But I will say a couple things. You know, you can't avoid it.

First, one of the trends we've seen in this industry, as in others, is the digitalization of controls, and this increases vulnerability. Previously, when you had mechanical or analog controls, or you had software that was written by two old guys who retired to Tallahassee, hacking was not really an issue. Cybersecurity was less important. That is no longer the case.

The complexity of the systems makes defense difficult. It makes attack difficult, but it probably makes defense – puts defense at a disadvantage. And you hear sometimes about air gapping. Air gapping is an imperfect defense. If you depend on air gapping, you are at risk.

There has been some progress in hardening nuclear facilities, but how we measure this progress and how we understand where it applies and where it doesn't work remains important. You know, overall, the level is probably not sufficient. Some countries do better than others.

This is an ongoing effort, but we have to think of it as a lowest-common-denominator. If you wanted to cause a nuclear incident, you might look for the country with the most vulnerable reactors, not necessarily the country with the best-defended reactors.

Finally, as with everything cyber, international cooperation is essential. You need to share best practices on defense. You need to practice – develop and practice a collective response to any incident. In every one of these tests we've seen, not just in the nuclear side but in other industries, the first result is a failure of cooperation. So you don't want to practice your response to a crisis the day of the crisis. You want to do it beforehand. And that's an area where we could use some work.

And finally, there needs to be development of international norms. There is discussion of norms that would say that countries would refrain from attacking critical infrastructure – critical infrastructure writ large, not just nuclear infrastructure – would refrain from attacking critical infrastructure in peacetime. There's general agreement to that. I mean, Russia, China, the U.S. and others have agreed to that. Now there's a question of should we be more explicit and explicitly take nuclear facilities off the table. But that's in the "to do" category. It's not done.

So we're not giving a report card, but things are better than they were in 2012, but they are not yet what you would call secure.

Q: Hi. Chen Weihua from China Daily.

Yeah, I want you just to continue. I mean, you talk about the strain the U.S.-Russia relations, or Putin didn't come – is not going to come. So, I mean, there is tension over South China Sea between China and the U.S., but President Xi still is coming. Obviously, he's going to have the only bilateral with President Obama out of the more than 50 heads of states. So, I mean, Secretary Moniz was in China last week opening this Nuclear Security Center of Excellence. So how do you read this China-U.S. cooperation in nuclear security? And what do you see China's role in this picture? Thank you.

MS. SQUASSONI: So I think China has been very helpful in this process overall. And you mentioned the opening of the Center for Nuclear Security Excellence. Actually, the U.S. government helped fund that, and so that's quite a(n) impressive – (chuckles) – achievement, since we don't ourselves have a Center for Nuclear Security Excellence, not one that's funded by the government. So that's been helpful. It's taken China, actually, quite a long time to implement that. But I think it's going – that's going to be a state-of-the-art facility.

What I'd like to see, actually, is more collaboration between China, Japan and South Korea. And we've been trying to get that going among those Centers of Nuclear Security Excellence.

For those of you who don't know this – and we're going to have an event right after this – one of the few tangible outcomes of the summit process has been countries sort of volunteering to say, yeah, we'll build a Center of Nuclear Security Excellence. And there are a dozen or more of these things. Now, they're fledgling institutions. Mostly, they provide training. But training is really important for facility operators, for officials, and it spans a range of not just, you know, how do you protect a facility and specific, you know, nuclear material, but also nuclear security culture, which is something that we really have to promote.

And so the – in Asia, one of the initiatives is to get the Chinese, Japanese and South Koreans, all of whom have very active nuclear programs, to collaborate a little more. So I'm hoping we'll see something along those lines at this summit. We've tried to do it for the last few summits.

MR. CHA: Yeah, I mean, I would – I agree entirely with Sharon.

So China's participation, I think, is quite important. I mean, it is going to be – is and will be one of the most active countries in terms of nuclear energy into the future, certainly, in Asia, if not the world. And therefore, the internalization of this safety culture that Sharon talks about is absolutely critical. And whether that is through the United States actually helping to fund the creation of such a center in China, or whether it's through at a regional level much more cooperation and conferencing and meeting with regard to safety of – safety with regard to operation of nuclear reactors and safety of materials, you know, this is a functional area that many of us experts who look at Asia – this is one of those functional areas where it should not be hard for there to be cooperation. I mean, there are many other issues – you mentioned South China Sea and others – in which it's very difficult for countries like Korea, Japan and China, three of the major nuclear players in Asia, to cooperate. This is one where there shouldn't be this sort of – there shouldn't be the barriers that we see on other issues.

So obviously, Chinese participation this week is quite important. And hopefully it sets an important trend for the future in terms of better bilateral and – as well as regional cooperation.

MODERATOR: George.

Q: Thanks. George Condon with National Journal. Two related questions.

One, this has been a baby of – a high priority for President Obama going back to when he was in the Senate working with Dick Lugar. Can we say now that he's about to leave office that this is an accomplishment of his foreign policy, or something that will just basically disappear as soon as he leaves office?

And related to that – speaking of what comes next – how concerning is it to the other leaders that will be here that the likely Republican nominee for president talks openly about Japan and South Korea going nuclear? And how can – how much will Trump be a topic of conversation, you know, in the hallways of this summit?

MS. SQUASSONI: I'm going to try to answer the first question and – (laughter, laughs) – leave the second one for Victor.

Yeah, I think it's fair to say that this is an accomplishment of Obama. It may not be – you know, of the entire Prague agenda, it may not be the one that he sort of ardently wished for the most. And in some respects, I think when we held the first summit in 2010, there was no expectation that there would be follow-on summits. So it took on, in some respects, a life of its own. Whether increased attention or really what I – what I called sustained progress in nuclear security – because we haven't won this war yet – whether that is possible to sustain in the future

without such leadership as he has shown is an open question. And certainly I think that Hillary Clinton, when she was in the Senate, supported some of these issues, but she didn't have the interest that Obama did. So – and maybe it's hard to tell whether she will see this as worthy of spending a lot of time on, but I think she, you know, in general probably will support this.

So I'll leave, then, the Republican – (laughs) – crystal-balling to you.

MR. CHA: Well, I – well, let me just also say on the first question I think – I think it's a success as well. I mean, if you look in Asia, the creation of these centers – you know, the one in – the safety center in South Korea, the one – the big deliverable on Japan, the creation of the center on China – it's safe to say these things probably wouldn't have happened without the Nuclear Security Summit. And then, in that sense, you could consider it as a success.

In terms of the question about Japan and – you know, these statements about Japan and Korea going nuclear, I don't think it'll be a discussion among the leaders or even a hallway conversation. If so, only in jest, as people are going to refill their coffee cups. I don't see it as a serious policy discussion. I think those statements were really less about – I saw them as less about nuclear weapons and in many ways much more anti-alliance statements, because the bigger headline was not that they should go nuclear, but that the U.S. should pull out of the region. Those, to me, seem like bigger statements. And those really are more anti-alliance statements, and I don't think they reflect an accurate understanding of U.S. equities in the region. So in that sense, I don't think it will be a topic of discussion, certainly among – maybe among the press, but it won't be, I don't think, among the leaders at the summit.

Q: Good morning. Stefan Grobe with Euronews, European television.

The State Department yesterday said, in preparation of the summit, that the threat through terrorists has largely been diminished over the last six, seven years, since the beginning of this series of summits. Do you share this characterization, especially in light of the recent events in Belgium? And you singled out Belgium as a country that is just now taking steps to secure its nuclear facilities.

MS. OLIKER: I think, overall, you need to look at it as a supply and demand question. So there's not much we can do about – on the demand side, right? Terrorist organizations will continue to exploit gaps and seek opportunities where they can. What we can do is reduce the supply side of it. And so since the beginning of the summits, yes, there have been 14 countries where we've taken out material complete. There have been other countries where material that was poorly secured is now secured. Overall, I would say security and physical protection has improved, and most definitely as a result of these summits.

And as an example, I will give you the United States has conducted a program called – it has a great – it doesn't have a great acronym – RERTR, Reduced Enrichment for Research and Test Reactors, right? So as part of the Atoms for Peace program we sent highly enriched uranium around the world to many different countries in the '50s. And we have been since the 1970s – since 1978 we have been trying slowly to bring that material back. That was, you know, a small program and a bureaucracy that we, you know, time and time again encounter, oh,

countries had a lot of reasons not to bring material back. It was costly, it was – you know, they would have to make technological changes to the reactors.

With the advent of these summits, suddenly there was political pressure. There was momentum. There was a recognition that, well, yeah, this is somewhat of a risk. We need to bring it back. So I do agree with the State Department assessment that we have reduced the risks, because we've taken preventive measures around the world. I don't think that job is done. I still think there's more to do. But you know, this recent – or the news from Brussels about surveillance of, you know, personnel at nuclear facilities, and then also some – you know, for example, one of the plants was sabotaged a couple years ago. You probably wouldn't have even gotten a news story out of that, but suddenly now in the wake of these – or in the context of these summits, people are paying attention. And that's what we really need to do, is to pay attention to these risks.

MR. LEWIS: Just as a footnote, Daesh or ISIS focuses more on chemical weapons. And so that's probably – if you're looking at WMD risk, that would probably be the place more than this. There is – surveillance of facilities has been observed, but it's been external surveillance. And the planning that we know about has focused on chemical weapons.

Q: Sorry. Tom Watkins, AFP.

And I was just wondering if you could give us an overview, please, of what you expect the likely outcomes of this summit to be.

MS. SQUASSONI: I think the goals of this summit are a little modest. I mean, one is they want to consolidate some of the progress that's been made so far. And so that means that countries that have committed to certain actions actually implement those. So, for example, in the last summit Japan committed to taking this 500 kilograms of material out, so that's actually in the works.

The second thing they would like to see are some new commitments, either on a national basis or through – you know, they have this multilateral mechanism called gift baskets. So countries get together and they come up with a policy or a work plan and they commit to doing certain things. So one of those things might be greater information exchange. Another might be committing to bringing in peer reviews of facilities. They will ask, for example, the International Atomic Energy Agency to come in and do an assessment of the physical protection of the facility and give some recommendations.

In the 2014 summit there was, for lack of a better term, a gift basket called the Implementation Initiative that 35 countries signed up to. And I will say that there are a few key countries who are missing who did not sign that initiative, and those are – I'm looking for my notes – I think it's China, India, Pakistan, Russia, and there may be a few more. It would be really important for those countries to sign onto this initiative. Again, it's not legally binding but it's better than what we have now, because in that Implementation Initiative countries have agreed to sort of commit to work further to strengthen, you know, some of the requirements.

And then the last thing is, you know, the future, the sustained implementation. You know, I don't know if any of you have ever worked for international organizations, but the idea of five international organizations collaborating together to move progress forward, it's not clear to me how that's going to work out. So I would love to see – I would love to hear on Friday that there is an actual plan, you know, either meetings at a sub, you know, heads of state level. Maybe it's every five years. Maybe each organization takes a different chunk of the problem and works on that. But I think there have to be some either deadlines or benchmarks set so that we can measure how much progress we're actually making.

Q: Can I just follow up on that?

MR. LEWIS: Sure.

Q: Yeah, just as a follow up, how likely – you say it's really important that these countries sign on – China, India, Pakistan, Russia. How likely is it that they will do that?

MS. SQUASSONI: Fifty-fifty chance, if I'm feeling optimistic. I don't know how much behind-the-scenes diplomacy has gone on in the last two years to make them comfortable with that.

I know that India is – there was a – the Nuclear Threat Initiative puts out this Nuclear Security Index and India has not gotten a very good ranking over the last couple years. So, you know, if India signed onto that initiative, they, you know, might improve their status. I don't know how incentivized they're feeling to do that. Maybe this could be a topic of conversation between President Xi and President Obama. You know, it depends on how much pressure is placed and whether these countries feel they need to commit.

Q: Thank you. Howard LaFranchi with Christian Science Monitor.

I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit more about the question of military stockpiles. Is that just absolutely off the table, because there have been some commentary in the U.S. that the U.S. should be more proactive on that and move forward. So I was wondering if you could just discuss that issue.

And then, secondly, Olga, you mentioned that one reason Russia wasn't coming – at least the idea that – I don't know if it was minority opinions or countries that might not agree with the – kind of the train of things, that they're not heard. So are there any legitimate concerns along those lines or that's just something that Russia is using?

MS. SQUASSONI: So on the question of military stockpiles, most of the highly enriched uranium and separated plutonium is – as Olga mentioned, 90 percent is in the U.S. and Russia. And the U.S. and Russia, over the last 20 or so years, have declared some of that material excess to their military needs. So these are old programs, right, the Megatons to Megawatts Program, where Russia blended down highly enriched uranium and it was used to fuel our civilian power reactors; the Plutonium Disposition Program, where we designated I think it was 34 tons of plutonium as excess to military needs.

Those, I think – you know, military stockpiles have never been off the agenda of these summits but it's been, I think, very, very difficult to get at it. Besides the U.S. and Russia, there are other countries that have this material, and those are the hard cases, as you asked about India, Pakistan. Obviously North Korea is not here, or won't be coming to this summit and has never attended. My guess is that most countries think there needs to be another forum to address that. And that would be a good question to ask the organizers on Friday, how they intend to do that.

MS. OLIKER: So on the question of minority views, I think a lot of this is this very consistent Russian narrative that U.S. leadership is in the interest of the United States, not in the interest of others, necessarily, and you need a broader leadership base, which presumably includes Russia for, you know, true fairness.

You know, I think, generally speaking, look, nobody is going to – nobody is going to say they're against the securing of nuclear material, right, so the broad goals are shared. I think where you get the disagreements is in how you go about it, how intrusive it can be, to what extent countries are making actual commitments. And Russia is always nervous about these things, and there have been other countries that have shared its views, including the Chinese, the Indians, the Pakistanis.

And I would argue their views have been heard at these summits because they've had input into what the final statements say, and as a result of which the final statements and the commitments have sometimes been weaker. But I think the Russians would be more comfortable if it wasn't a U.S.-led forum because there – you know, because there is this perception that in that way some of the views that the U.S. and its allies tend to promote get a – get more of a hearing. So I would say that it's been amorphous, the attitude, and kind of where you stand depends on where you sit on how much credibility you give it.

Q: Thank you. My name is Jim Piesho (ph) from Japanese Public TV, NHK.

I want to ask one question regarding U.S.-Japan's plutonium issue. There is a program in Japan to recycle the plutonium. And recently in this town there was a congressional hearing and briefings and a kind of mixed message from the State Department officials – first of all seemed like very explicit in showing their deep concern to that program, and after that, which was yesterday, seems to trying to play down that concern.

To be honest, I wasn't that aware of this problem between the United States and Japan. If you have a sense, can you share that? Is there really a concern in the United States about that Japanese plutonium recycle program and is there anything going on behind the scenes? Thank you.

MS. SQUASSONI: I'm not familiar with the – what was the statement from the State Department? Was this Tom Countryman?

Q: Yeah, Countryman – (off mic). He was saying that it's not working so Japan maybe should just give it up. This is – (off mic).

MS. SQUASSONI: Yeah, I can't comment on – because I didn't see exactly what Tom said.

Overall, I think there is a concern that Japan's plans to reopen or to open the Rokkasho reprocessing plant don't reflect perhaps an accurate plan to use that plutonium. So in other words, right now there are 10 tons of separated plutonium at Rokkasho. And there are another I don't know how many in the U.K. and France, but it doesn't have any reactors operating that are actually going to use the MOX fuel for that. And so the question is, is Japan going to be building up plutonium stockpiles? And there seems to be a mismatch between, you know, its nuclear energy usage and the actual production of this plutonium.

The U.S., for many, many decades, has had a policy that, you know, you don't need reprocessing to have a vibrant civil nuclear power program, and so I'm not sure how widely reflected Assistant Secretary Countryman's views are in the U.S. government. I do know that, you know, the U.S. and Japan have a nuclear cooperation agreement that the initial term expires in 2018. And that agreement is set to continue in perpetuity, and that includes consent for Japan to reprocess U.S.-origin fuel. So I don't see – you know, we may have congressional hearings on that but I don't see any plans to change that – those consent rights.

Q: David Welna with NPR.

There was a report put out by the Nuclear Threat Initiative I believe early this year, and Sam Nunn and others assessed nuclear security efforts as somewhat flagging recently, and I wonder if you agree with that assessment.

The other thing is that this summit is being characterized as the fourth and final summit, kind of driving a stake in it, and I wonder if this is more something of a victory lap for President Obama. Is this really sort of saying this is coming to an end by calling it the final summit? Thank you.

MS. SQUASSONI: Thanks for the question.

I think there is a little bit of what we would call summit fatigue. You know, these summits, this is the fourth one in six years and these take a lot of effort. It's not just the summit but there are sherpa meetings and sous-sherpa meetings and a lot of negotiating over summit communiqués and work plans and the like. And so, as I mentioned at the outset, I'm not sure the Obama administration thought there would be more than one summit. And so that's been a welcome surprise.

Yeah, I think this is a bit of victory lap for the Obama administration, and that's a good thing. I support that. I do think that, as Victor intimated, that some of the achievements that we've had so far, particularly the Centers of Nuclear Security Excellence, they could actually help, you know, propel progress in the future if we continue to fund them and, you know, give them appropriate roles.

On the Nuclear Security Index they said a number of things. Actually, this security index covered two new areas. One was cybersecurity and one was the threat of sabotage. And in both those areas I think they highlighted that, you know, more work needs to be done. On the – you know, on NTI's, or the Nuclear Security Index's, assessment that progress is flagging, sure, you know, along with the summit fatigue comes sort of, you know, a slowing of or, you know, the political pressure is waning a little bit to actually implement some of these, you know, procedures, some of these programs.

It gets very nitty-gritty, right? So it's very technical. You know, we know what to do. The question is, do we have enough willpower and money and attention to do it? And so I don't think that the Nuclear Security Index is wrong. I think that in many cases it's very likely that it will fall to the nongovernmental sector, and to a certain extent the nuclear industry, to continue to push for progress.

And in that context, the nongovernmental organizations – and CSIS participates in this. We'll be having our own meeting tomorrow and will issue a set of recommendations. And the nuclear industry is going to have their nuclear industry summit tomorrow and – what is today? Today is Tuesday – tomorrow and Thursday. And they also, I think, have plans to continue to meet into the future. So the question is, what's the mix in the stakeholders for pushing progress forward? And hopefully there's a little bit in each sector.

Q: Geoff Dyer from the Financial Times.

A question about North Korea for Victor. As you mentioned, it might not be on the formal agenda but it's going to be the subject of the bilaterals and trilaterals and hallway conversations. Could you give us your sense of what the current Chinese thinking about North Korea is, their level of frustration and irritation, willingness to impose sanctions after the latest tests and missile launches?

MR. CHA: So, very frustrated I guess would be the first response. I think the Chinese are quite frustrated with North Korea. There was no advance notice of the fourth nuclear test and then actually no response when the Chinese inquired after the test about an explanation. So I think clearly they're very – they're quite unhappy with DPRK.

And that was – I think that frustration was manifest in China signing onto a very strong U.N. Security Council Resolution 2270, which took the level of sanctioning to North Korea, I think everybody would agree, to a completely different level, because it moved beyond – it moved beyond proliferation-specific targets to broader things like exports of coal, sectoral measures and others aspects of sanctioning including what is now an inspection regime for all cargo, not just cargo considered to be a proliferation nature. So there's definitely a higher level of sanctioning.

My own read on this is that the Chinese thus far have been implementing Resolution 2270, but at the same time we're seeing similar behavior that we've seen in previous cycles with North Korea, which is after signing onto a resolution calling for sanctions, the other shoe drops, which is pressure on the United States to go back to dialogue, go back to diplomacy. And, you

know, I don't think that was there before China signed onto 2270, but I feel like it's certainly there now.

And I think the frustration from a U.S. perspective is that, you know, China will put the squeeze on North Korea for a short period of time and will push the United States back to dialogue, and then once we go back to dialogue all the pressure will come off and then we just fall back into the same cycle again.

So, you know, we don't know if it will be different under Xi Jinping, but at least – you know, so I follow this pretty closely and I have already seen a change – a sort of change in the Chinese perspective after signing onto 2270 in the sense of really pushing the United States more to engage in diplomacy. The Chinese were not happy with Obama's unilateral sanctions that followed 2270 – every unhappy with those, very unhappy with the South Korean sanctions, the Japanese sanctions.

So I feel like we may be falling back into the same cycle again, which of course won't be – won't lead to any good outcomes.

(END)