



COMMENTARY

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Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism Launched in Morocco

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Today and tomorrow the United States and Russia co-chair a meeting of partner nations in the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism in Rabat, Morocco. The Initiative was announced by Presidents Bush and Putin at the July 2006 bilateral summit outside of St. Petersburg. Many skeptics then thought that combating nuclear terrorism was about the only issue on which Washington and Moscow could agree at a time of tense bilateral relations and that the initiative might not again see much light of day.

To the contrary, the initiative has already begun to mobilize bureaucracies in both countries and outreach has begun to cooperate with other countries on the first truly comprehensive approach to preventing nuclear terrorism. This is long overdue. It is shepherded by Under Secretary of State Robert Joseph and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Kislyak. The dedication of these two diplomats to this effort gives hope for its success, but there is a long and challenging road ahead.

Since 9/11, the threat of nuclear terrorism has grown more acute and awareness of the problem more widespread, but international cooperation to share intelligence, secure vulnerable nuclear materials worldwide, and bolster security and detection programs has moved at a slow pace compared to the urgency of the threat. The Global Initiative offers a chance to organize and accelerate this work.

According to media reports, the Group of Eight—Canada, France, Japan, Germany, Italy, United Kingdom, US and Russia—plus China, Turkey, Kazakhstan and Australia are the initial ‘partner nations’ that have gathered in Morocco this week. The government of Morocco and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) are attending as observers. These key countries are to agree to a statement of principles which will be very similar to the initial goals laid out in the bilateral statements last summer.

The structure of the Initiative is a ‘flexible framework’ to prevent, detect and respond to the threat of nuclear terrorism. It is meant to enhance cooperation and build capacity worldwide. The summit documents outline that actions under the initiative will take legal guidance from the International Convention on the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism, the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Materials and UN Security Council Resolutions 1540 and 1373.

The Global Initiative should not be confused with another ad hoc, coalition of the willing-style counter proliferation program, the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). Actions under the Global Initiative are meant to include PSI activities. However, government officials emphasize dissimilarities to PSI— that the emphasis of the Global Initiative is on the internal actions of states and on enhancing the interagency process within a country, “a layered defense in-depth.”

The Global Initiative is focused on domestic operational and technical challenges of combating the nuclear terrorism threat. While PSI is focused on trade, the Global Initiative is focused on “pathways of nuclear proliferation that lead to terrorist end use.” The Global Initiative goes beyond interdiction to include material protection, detection, law enforcement, emergency response, consequence management, attribution and criminal justice. The Global Initiative is also meant to build capacity by facilitating assistance from states with knowledge and resources to those who need it to achieve these goals.

There are some positive indicators of initial good planning for this initiative. An emphasis on the interagency process in all countries will be important to sustainability and good functioning. This should include counterterrorism and nuclear experts, law enforcement, intelligence and the military in all countries. It should facilitate international dialogue between these agencies and not be limited to foreign ministry channels.

Gaining true commitment by a diverse group of countries to the Global Initiative will require understanding differing threat perceptions and tailoring joint activities according to what the individual country might be most concerned about (i.e., a victim of attack, a transshipment point, a source of material). In Under-Secretary of State Robert Joseph's speech to the Capitol Hill Club on September 18, he emphasized that this initiative fits into the broader U.S. strategy of "transformational diplomacy." It may actually be more precise to say that this initiative is tailored diplomacy, as it envisions strategies that fit the conditions facing the individual partner nations. This is the right approach.

There are clearly many challenges ahead for such a necessarily ambitious project. Momentum will need to be sustained for true success. The IAEA should be brought into this process for further global legitimacy and acceptance in particular by developing countries who are a crucial part of this effort but whose view of the likelihood of nuclear terrorism differs greatly. There is still an open question about whether this initiative will be a bureaucratic mobilizer or whether it will create an extra layer of bureaucracy with redundancies. It will be important to emphasize and clearly explain to other countries what new actions this initiative will entail and how this group of partner countries hopes to coordinate existing programs such as PSI and the Global Threat Reduction Initiative.

No one will ever be able to say that we have successfully prevented nuclear terrorism. It will be a constant battle to secure materials, interdict illegal transfers, punish violators, prepare to mitigate consequences and prevent the desire to conduct such an attack in the first place. However, five years after 9/11, it is high time that governments work in concert across their own domestic agencies and with each other to prevent the ultimate nightmare scenario.

For an inter-disciplinary approach to preventing nuclear terrorism, see CSIS' Black Dawn nuclear terrorism scenario exercise [final report](#). For analysis of international cooperation to prevent WMD terrorism, see Chapter 5 of the CSIS book, [Five Years After 9/11](#).

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