

Nuclear-security lessons from Australia by Tanya Ogilvie-White and David Santoro

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No country can afford to be complacent about nuclear and radiological terrorism. Even countries with little or no nuclear infrastructure could fall victim to groups that have procured radioactive materials from poorly secured foreign facilities. Australia has emerged as a world leader in nuclear security both by enhancing control over radioactive materials and facilities at home, and by helping countries in its near neighborhood (Southeast Asia and the South Pacific) develop the capacity to do the same. Its officials and nuclear-industry leaders have learned key lessons along the way and conducted security-building activities that have not been valued as much as they should have been in Australia's decision-making circles. Rather than neglect Canberra's past advances, the government of new Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott should launch a nuclear security strategy that builds on the country's track record and the lessons it has learned.

Pace Matters. Building consensus among governments on how to prevent nuclear terrorism may be frustrating and time-consuming, but it is vital. Yet different states have different priorities, capabilities, and approaches to security, and the global regime-building process needs to occur at a pace and through a process acceptable to the majority. This lesson is not new; many states that recognize the urgency of different security threats have had to fight an uphill battle to bring other nations on board through the United Nations system. At the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) over the years, Australia has found the slow uptake of strengthened nonproliferation measures at times exasperating. But Australia's experience at the Nuclear Security Summits (NSS) – a series of regular meetings among heads of state and international organizations aimed at preventing nuclear terrorism – has shown that even outside the UN system, building consensus is a laborious process that cannot be rushed. Australian attempts to encourage states to share sensitive information, provide briefings on their nuclear security risks, and establish a tracking mechanism to monitor implementation of summit commitments, proved to be too politically controversial. Plainly, many of the same dynamics that have obstructed advancement in nonproliferation and disarmament also exist in the nuclear security domain.

With that in mind, Australian officials are now encouraging a slow-paced strategy in the lead-up to the next Nuclear Security Summit in the Netherlands in March 2014, in particular by pressing for “international assurances.” These are **defined** as “activities taken, information shared, or measures implemented voluntarily by a state or other stakeholders that provide confidence to others ... of the effectiveness of nuclear security within a given state.” This approach moves away from what some states see as overly intrusive monitoring and verification, as well as from the one-size-fits-all measures involved in formal regime-building. Instead, it focuses on slowly building confidence and trust through an informal and voluntary process of information-sharing. States would voluntarily publish reports on their nuclear security measures when they see fit; invite external peer reviews of their nuclear security systems; launch best-practice exchanges; and engage in other collaborative initiatives at their own pace and in a way that squarely respects the principles of equity, fairness, and sovereign responsibility.

Size Matters. Although broad-based multilateral efforts are essential and must be pursued, more rapid progress can be achieved via parallel initiatives at the bilateral and regional levels. Targeted regional projects that focus on transferring a single skill, such as training customs officials to detect radioactive substances, can have a high impact for a low cost. The more focused the initiative, the better.

Such one-off workshops have their benefits, but can be more effective over the long term if they occur under the auspices of an institutional framework capable of promoting regional inter-agency cooperation and follow-up exercises, like Australia's Regional Security of Radioactive Sources (RSRS) project. Beginning in 2004, the RSRS created an ongoing peer review process around radioactive-sources security in Southeast Asia. It proved so successful that the US National Nuclear Security Administration and the IAEA saw it as a trailblazer.

Australia's experience of nuclear-security diplomacy over the past decade suggests that it is time to build a regional mechanism to run parallel to and draw upon IAEA and Nuclear Security Summit activities – one that can serve as a model for cooperation. Australia's experience in leading a regional collaborative exercise in Southeast Asia makes it the ideal candidate to launch such an initiative. Other states could also step up to the plate, and could benefit from Australia's experiences. Possible candidates include Japan, South Korea, and China, which are all launching nuclear-security centers of excellence.

People Matter. The Australian experience also suggests that individual champions who can wield influence both domestically and abroad are critical to addressing transnational threats. This is especially true when it comes to

nuclear and radiological security, an area where the threat is often too abstract for politicians, who often prefer to focus on dangers that appear more concrete, newsworthy, and politically expedient. Australia's nuclear security leadership has been driven by a handful of advocates. In addition to key people within the Canberra bureaucracy, this group consists of Australians who are based overseas and helping to shine a light on nuclear dangers. People involved in the Nuclear Threat Initiative's [Global Dialogue on Nuclear Security Priorities](#), who have been driving the proposal on international assurances, have shown the important role of individual proponents. Australian nuclear-security champions John Carlson, Robert Floyd, and Trevor Findlay have been active members of this forum, helping to define the concept of assurances, pin down what it means in practice, and shape the proposal that Australia and others are currently promoting. Crucially, Floyd, who is director general of the Australian Safeguards and Nonproliferation Office, has helped carry the proposal from nongovernmental forums into the official diplomatic process, where it has formed the basis for discussions at international meetings in Istanbul, The Hague, and Ottawa. If language on international assurances is adopted at the March 2014 NSS, it will be largely thanks to the efforts of a core group of nuclear security champions from Australia, the United States, and the Netherlands.

A Strategy for the Abbott Government. Australia's new government can draw upon these lessons to launch a nuclear security strategy that would require a modest financial output (about AUD \$2 million or \$1.8 million per year) and yet reap significant national, regional, and international rewards. Such a strategy should focus, first of all, on relaunching the highly-successful RSRS project. The sooner it is revitalized the better, so that the network it developed between 2004 and mid-2013 will not have broken up.

Second, the Abbott government should create a new regional mechanism centered on improving nuclear security in the Asia-Pacific region more generally. This should be a multi-stakeholder effort conducted in close collaboration with the IAEA, domestic nuclear agencies across the region, and the centers of excellence in Japan, South Korea, and China. Efforts should focus on capacity-building in Southeast Asia, particularly in countries set to develop nuclear power programs.

Finally, Australia should develop a public education campaign, both domestically and at the international level, to raise awareness of nuclear-security challenges and opportunities and to help ease political issues surrounding the topic.

Together these initiatives would capitalize on Australia's successful nuclear security record and help reduce global dangers – all at a very modest cost. They would also serve as a useful model for other states seeking to play a similar leadership role.

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