

## Experts Statement on U.S. Priorities for Reducing the Risk of Nuclear Terrorism

The undersigned experts, with decades of experience reducing nuclear risk, urge the Biden administration to quickly restore U.S. leadership in strengthening global nuclear security.

President Biden knows this issue well. In 2004, as we were still recovering from the September 11th attacks, then-Senator Joe Biden said, “If we are to avoid nuclear terrorism in the future, there is no more critical effort today than securing the world’s fissile materials.” Threats have changed since those harrowing days, but the importance of this effort has not. An act of nuclear terrorism anywhere would be a global humanitarian, economic, and political catastrophe and could cripple nuclear technology’s contributions to energy, medical, industrial, and other purposes. The international community can reduce the danger by effectively protecting the hundreds of nuclear facilities and transport operations around the world.

This is a rare national issue where there is bipartisan consensus. For 25 years, every president made reducing the threat of nuclear terrorism a top priority. With the end of the nuclear security summits and limited high-level attention during the Trump administration, however, U.S. leadership on this issue has weakened and international progress has slowed. Some nuclear security systems remain inadequate, and such systems must keep up with dynamic threats, such as drones or cyber-attacks. Nuclear material and facilities remain vulnerable around the world.

*The following critical steps can reinvigorate U.S. security efforts:*

President Biden should launch a comprehensive, whole-of-government plan to achieve effective and sustainable nuclear security for the world’s stocks of nuclear weapons, highly enriched uranium, separated plutonium, and nuclear facilities whose sabotage could cause a major catastrophe. This plan should include new initiatives, for which President Biden can take ownership, to overcome the substantial obstacles to nuclear security progress around the world.

The plan should prioritize working with countries that face the greatest risks, even where the United States is competing with those countries in other areas, as with Russia and China. While there may be political and practical obstacles to such engagement, making sure nuclear materials do not fall into terrorist hands is manifestly in U.S. national interests wherever those materials may be. This is a particular challenge with Russia, but revitalizing US-Russian cooperation to reduce the risk of nuclear terrorism, along with building relationships through joint work on areas such as nuclear science, nuclear cleanup, verification, and nuclear energy will make both countries safer.

Any comprehensive plan will require additional funding. As an investment in U.S. national security against the threats of nuclear and radiological terrorism, the U.S. government should expand and revitalize its international nuclear security programs, with broader objectives, more money, and the personnel to accomplish them. To help coordinate increased funding, the Office of Management and Budget should publish an annual report summarizing the budget and priorities for nonproliferation and nuclear security programs.

Finally, the United States should work to strengthen the international treaties and institutions that support stronger nuclear security around the world. This should include increasing financial and political support for the International Atomic Energy Agency and active U.S. diplomacy to ensure the 2021 initial review conference for the amended Convention on Physical Protection of Nuclear Material—the central binding international agreement strengthening global nuclear security—produces an agreement for regular and substantive future review conferences.

The new administration faces many urgent challenges. Nevertheless, preventing nuclear terrorism must remain an urgent priority. A sustained, focused effort is required as long as both terrorists with global ambitions, and nuclear weapons, materials, and facilities that might be their targets, exist.

### Endorsers

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