



Obama Vows Fresh Proliferation Push as Summit Ends



Doug Mills/The New York Times

President Obama with Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. during the Nuclear Security Summit in Washington on Tuesday.

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WASHINGTON — [President Obama](#) completed a first meeting of world leaders on combating nuclear terrorism with a list of specific commitments from dozens of nations to eliminate or lock down nuclear materials, in what he called a “bold and pragmatic” program to finish the task in the next four years.

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But in a news conference after leading the conversation among 47 presidents, prime ministers and senior officials, Mr. Obama acknowledged that tough choices lay ahead on many of the far more politically volatile issues in stopping the proliferation of [nuclear weapons](#).

He issued a specific warning to Iran, which was not represented at the conference, saying that after four years of failed efforts on sanctions, the penalties he was trying to win at the [United Nations Security Council](#) had to be significant enough to get the attention of the Iranian leadership.

Speaking to reporters, Mr. Obama said he had insisted to President [Hu Jintao](#) of China that in dealing with Iran:

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Luke Sharrett/The New York Times

President Obama led the international meeting on nuclear security in Washington on Tuesday.

to mean something. There have to be some
 that Mr. Obama convened, and to a great
 managed, was unlike any negotiations over
 with the Soviets during the cold war or, more
 o-far fruitless talks to get North Korea to
 as a far broader effort to persuade African,
 n, Asian and European nations to agree on
 terrorist groups the two materials necessary
 b: plutonium and highly enriched uranium.

Mr. Obama began the session arguing that while
 superpower confrontation was far more remote, the risk of
 nuclear terrorism had never been greater, and he quoted
 the warning of [Albert Einstein](#) soon after the beginning of
 the nuclear age: "We are drifting towards a catastrophe
 beyond comparison."

Mr. Obama deliberately narrowed the scope of the meeting
 to avoid some of the most contentious issues, and at a news
 conference on Tuesday he dodged questions about trying to
 get Pakistan to stop producing weapons-grade plutonium,
 or pressing Israel to acknowledge its nuclear arsenal. He
 simply urged them to sign the Nuclear Nonproliferation
 Treaty, which both have rejected, along with India.

Critics contended that this session was all for show.

"The summit's purported accomplishment is a nonbinding communiqué that largely
 restates current policy, and makes no meaningful progress in dealing with nuclear
 terrorism threats or the ticking clock represented by [Iran's nuclear weapons](#) program,"
 said Senator [Jon Kyl](#), the Arizona Republican who has vowed to oppose nuclear treaties
 Mr. Obama regards as essential.

Mr. Obama acknowledged that the commitments were voluntary, but he said the situation
 was nothing new. "If you are asking, 'Do we have an international, one-world law
 enforcement,' we don't, and we never have," he said.

At the end of [two days of meetings](#), Mr. Obama could claim two major accomplishments:
 The summit meeting forced countries that had failed to clean up their nuclear surpluses to
 formulate detailed plans to deal with them, and it kicked into action nations that had failed
 to move on previous commitments.

A second summit meeting will be held in two years in South Korea, Mr. Obama said, to
 make sure countries are on track.

Some countries arrived with what Gary Samore, Mr. Obama's nuclear adviser, called
 "house gifts" that the United States had encouraged as signs of sincerity. For example,
 Canada, Mexico and Ukraine committed to eliminating their surplus weapons-grade
 materials or giving them to the United States.

This week, Russia closed a plutonium reactor it had used to make weapons-grade fuel.
 Other nations agreed to convert research reactors to fuel that could not be used for
 weapons.

But much of what was completed over the past two days amounted to reviving, or putting

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in effect, long-dormant agreements. Secretary of State [Hillary Rodham Clinton](#) held a signing ceremony with her Russian counterpart over the disposal of an amount of plutonium that could make 17,000 weapons. The first agreement on this issue was announced by her husband, [Bill Clinton](#), when he was president, and signed with fanfare by Vice President [Al Gore](#) 10 years ago. The accord has never been acted upon, and by the White House's own accounting could take at least six years to complete.

Outside experts were optimistic. [Sam Nunn](#), the former senator who tutored Mr. Obama on proliferation issues, said he thought "we are now closer to cooperation than catastrophe." Graham Allison, a Harvard expert on nuclear terrorism, made the case that if countries "lock down all nuclear weapons and bomb-usable material as securely as gold in Fort Knox, they can reduce the likelihood of a nuclear 9/11 to nearly zero."

But overcoming bureaucratic inertia, while important, leaves Mr. Obama far short of his broader goals. Now he must take on several far more delicate tasks: persuading Pakistan, India and China to halt the manufacture of more bomb fuel; coaxing North Korea to give up the small arsenal of 8 to 12 weapons it built over the past decade; and stopping Iran from becoming capable of making nuclear weapons.

The Pakistanis were fighting Mr. Obama's call for a treaty to end the production of fissile materials; its prime minister, [Yousaf Raza Gilani](#), told reporters this week that "for a minimum deterrence, we have to have it."

Russia made it clear that if American missile-defense technology improved, it reserved the right to drop out of the new strategic arms reduction accord. Some Russian officials warn that cutting the country's arsenal more deeply, one of Mr. Obama's goals, will leave Moscow vulnerable to America's nuclear dominance. North Korea has backed away from the agreements it made with President [George W. Bush](#), and Iran greeted the opening of the meeting here with a declaration, probably infused with more wishful thinking than reality, that it would soon be manufacturing a new generation of centrifuges to make uranium more quickly than ever.

Mr. Obama and his aides insist that they are unfazed. It took 60 years to build the current arsenals, they argue, and it could take that long, or longer, to destroy them.

The next test for Mr. Obama will come in May at a monthlong review of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty in New York. Iran will take part in that session, just as sanctions are on the table for what the Security Council has called repeated violations of the treaty.

That will leave Mr. Obama trying to make long-term fixes in the treaty — closing loopholes that allowed North Korea to exit the treaty seven years ago and Iran to pick and choose which questions from nuclear inspectors it wanted to answer — while dealing with the Iran sanctions.

"My interest is not with having a long, drawn-out process for months," he said of the sanctions. But he warned anew that "sanctions aren't a magic wand."

"What sanctions do accomplish is, hopefully, to change the calculus of a country like Iran," he said.

Brian Knowlton, contributed reporting from Washington, Andrew Jacobs from Beijing and Alan Cowell from Paris.

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