

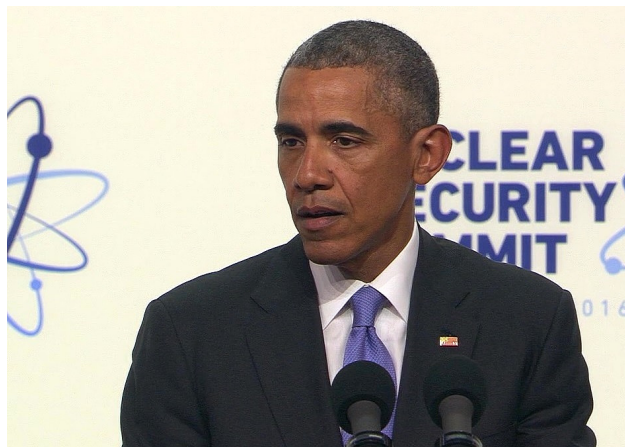


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**Barack Obama**

*Nuclear Security Summit Press Conference*

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**AUTHENTICITY CERTIFIED:** Text version below transcribed directly from audio

Good evening, everybody. I want to begin by thanking the people of Washington, D.C. for hosting us, especially for putting up with more than 50 motorcades. And I will make one promise to the people of this city -- I will not hold another one of these summits in another six years.

I want to thank everyone who participated in our meetings -- more than 50 leaders from every region of the world and key international organizations. As at our previous summits, we didn't just come here to talk, but we came here to act. I know that the very technical nature of nuclear security doesn't always make for flashy headlines. But over the past six years, we have made significant, meaningful progress in securing the world's nuclear material so that it never falls into the hands of terrorists. And I want to take a few moments to step back and lay out exactly what we have accomplished.

Together, we have removed the world's most deadly materials from nuclear facilities around the world. With Japan's announcement today, we've now removed or secured all the highly enriched uranium and plutonium from more than 50 facilities in 30 countries -- more than 3.8 tons, which is more than enough to create 150 nuclear weapons. That's material that will never fall into the hands of terrorists.



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Fourteen nations and Taiwan -- countries as diverse as Argentina and Chile, to Libya and Turkey, to Serbia and Vietnam -- have now rid themselves entirely of highly enriched uranium and plutonium. In particular, I want to point out again that successfully removing all of Ukraine's highly enriched uranium four years ago meant that the very difficult situation in Ukraine over the past two years was not made even more dangerous by the presence of these materials.

As of today, South America -- an entire continent -- is completely free of these dangerous materials. When Poland completes its removal this year, central Europe will be free of them as well. When Indonesia completes its work this year, so will all of Southeast Asia. In other words, as terrorists and criminal gangs and arms merchants look around for deadly ingredients for a nuclear device, vast regions of the world are now off-limits. And that is a remarkable achievement.

We've made important progress in the United States as well. In addition to the new steps I announced this morning, we've improved nuclear security and training. We've consolidated nuclear materials at fewer facilities, eliminated some 138 tons of our surplus highly enriched uranium -- which would be enough for 5,500 nuclear weapons. Working with Russia, we're on track to eliminate enough Russian highly enriched uranium for about 20,000 nuclear weapons, which we are converting to electricity here in the United States.

More specifically, as a result of these summits, every single one of the more than 50 nations represented here have taken concrete steps to enhance security at their nuclear facilities and storage sites. And that includes improved physical security, stronger regulations, abiding by international guidelines, greater transparency, and that includes international peer reviews. Fifteen new centers have been created around the world to promote nuclear security technologies and training, to share best practices. And as part of our work today, we agreed to keep strengthening our nuclear facilities' defenses against cyber-attacks.

We've bolstered international efforts to disrupt nuclear smuggling. The Proliferation Security Initiative has grown to more than 100 nations, including regular exercises to improve our collective ability to interdict shipments. The United States and 36 partner countries have worked to install radiation detection equipment at more than 300 international border crossings, airports and ports. And we are developing new mobile detection systems as well. And finally, as I noted this morning, we've strengthened the treaties and international partnerships that are a foundation for so many of our efforts.

So, again, we have made significant progress. And everyone involved in this work -- especially our teams, who have worked tirelessly for years -- can take enormous pride in our achievements. Nevertheless, as I said earlier, our work is by no means finished. There's still a great deal of nuclear and radioactive material around the world that needs to be secured. Global stocks of plutonium are growing.



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Nuclear arsenals are expanding in some countries with more small, tactical nuclear weapons, which could be at greater risk of theft. And as a consequence, one of the central goals of this summit was how do we build on the work that has been done so that we have an international architecture that can continue the efforts, even though this is the last formal leaders' summit.

So even as this is the last of those leader-level summits, today we agreed to maintain a strong architecture, including through the United Nations, the International Atomic Energy Agency, and INTERPOL, to carry on this work and to provide the resources and technical support that is needed to continue this mission. And we are creating a new nuclear security contact group -- senior-level experts from more than 30 of our countries -- who will meet regularly to preserve the networks of cooperation we've built, to institutionalize this work, and to keep driving progress for years to come.

At our session on ISIL this afternoon, there was widespread agreement that defeating terrorist groups like ISIL requires more information-sharing. Everybody understands the urgency in the wake of what's happened in Brussels and Turkey, Pakistan, and so many other countries around the world. As a consequence, our Director of National Intelligence, Jim Clapper, is continuing to engage with intelligence leaders from a number of our European partners on deepening our cooperation. And today, I invited all the nations represented at this summit to join a broader discussion among our intelligence and security services on how we can improve information-sharing within and among our nations to prevent all manner of terrorist attacks, especially those that might involve weapons of mass destruction.

In closing, I just want to say that preventing nuclear terrorism is one part of the broader agenda that I outlined seven years ago in Prague -- stopping the spread of nuclear weapons and seeking a world without them. In recent days, there's been no shortage of analysis on whether we've achieved our vision, and I'm the first to acknowledge the great deal of work that remains -- from negotiating further reductions with Russia to dealing with North Korea's nuclear program.

As I indicated in Prague, realizing our vision will not happen quickly, and it perhaps will not happen in my lifetime. But we've begun. The United States and Russian nuclear arsenals are on track to be the lowest that they have been in six decades. I've reduced the number and role of nuclear weapons in our nuclear security strategy. In a historic deal, we've prevented the spread of nuclear weapons to Iran. An international fuel bank is being built to promote civil nuclear cooperation.

So I'm extremely proud of our record across the board. And we're going to keep pushing forward wherever we can, as I hope future administrations do, to bring us closer to the day when these nuclear dangers no longer hang over the heads of our children and our grandchildren.



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With that, let me take a few questions. And I'm going to start with Roberta Rampton of Reuters.

**Question:** Thank you. I want to ask about Iran. And three weeks ago, Iran's Supreme Leader complained that his country has not been getting actual business deals since the nuclear agreement. And non-U.S. companies are saying that it's very hard, or sometimes impossible, to do much business with Iran without at some point accessing the U.S. financial system to do U.S.-dollar-denominated transactions. So my question is, are you considering allowing such transactions? And if so, is that not a betrayal of your assurances that most U.S. sanctions would stay in place?

**President Obama:** That's not actually the approach that we're taking. So let me say broadly that so long as Iran is carrying out its end of the bargain, we think it's important for the world community to carry out our end of the bargain.

They have, in fact, based on the presentations that were made by the IAEA this morning to the P5+1, have, in fact, followed the implementation steps that were laid out. And as a consequence, sanctions related to their nuclear program have been brought down. Part of the challenge that they face is that companies haven't been doing business there for a long time, and they need to get comfortable with the prospects of this deal holding.

One of the things that Secretary Lew and his counterparts within the P5+1 and elsewhere are going to be doing is providing clarity to businesses about what transactions are, in fact, allowed. And it's going to take time over the next several months for companies and their legal departments to feel confident that, in fact, there may not be risks of liability if they do business with Iran.

And so some of the concerns that Iran has expressed we are going to work with them to address. It is not necessary that we take the approach of them going through dollar-denominated transactions. It is possible for them to work through European financial institutions, as well. But there is going to need to be continued clarification provided to businesses in order to -- for deal flows to begin.

Now, what I would say is also important is Iran's own behavior in generating confidence that Iran is a safe place to do business. In a deal like this, my first priority, my first concern was making sure that we got their nuclear program stopped, and material that they already had that would give them a very short breakout capacity, that that was shipped out. That has happened. And I always said that I could not promise that Iran would take advantage of this opportunity and this window to reenter the international community.



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Iran, so far, has followed the letter of the agreement. But the spirit of the agreement involves Iran also sending signals to the world community and businesses that it is not going to be engaging in a range of provocative actions that might scare business off. When they launched ballistic missiles with slogans calling for the destruction of Israel that makes businesses nervous. There is some geopolitical risk that is heightened when they see that taking place.

If Iran continues to ship missiles to Hezbollah, that gets businesses nervous. And so part of what I hope happens is we have a responsibility to provide clarity about the rules that govern so that Iran can, in fact, benefit, the Iranian people can benefit from an improved economic situation. But Iran has to understand what every country in the world understands, which is businesses want to go where they feel safe, where they don't see massive controversy, where they can be confident that transactions are going to operate normally. And that's an adjustment that Iran is going to have to make as well.

And, frankly, within Iran, I suspect there are different views. In the same way that there are hardliners here in the United States who, even after we certify that this deal is working, even after our intelligence teams, Israeli intelligence teams say this has been a game-changer, are still opposed to the deal on principle, there are hardliners inside of Iran who don't want to see Iran open itself up to the broader world community and are doing things to potentially undermine the deal.

And so those forces that seek the benefits of the deal not just in narrow terms but more broadly, we want to make sure that, over time, they're in a position to realize those benefits.

David Nakamura.

**Question:** Thank you, Mr. President. As you mentioned at the beginning of your remarks, you just finished a working session with 50 world leaders about combatting terrorism and groups like the Islamic State. And I wanted to ask you specifically about one of the strategies, prime strategies your administration is using in that effort. In the past several weeks, your administration has killed well over 200 people in airstrikes in Somalia, Libya, and Yemen, according to the Department of Defense. How can you be certain that all the people killed posed an imminent threat to the United States? And why is the United States now killing scores of people at a time, rather than eliminating individuals in very targeted strikes? Thank you.

**President Obama:** We have constructed a fairly rigid and vigorous set of criteria for us evaluating the intelligence that we receive about ISIL, where it might be operating, where al Qaeda is operating. These guidelines involve a whole range of agencies consulting extensively, and are then checked, double-checked, triple-checked before kinetic actions are taken.



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And for the most part, our actions are directed at high-value targets in the countries that you just described, outside of the theater of Iraq and Syria. In some cases, what we're seeing are camps that after long periods of monitoring becomes clear are involved in directing plots that could do the United States harm, or are supporting ISIL activities or al Qaeda activities elsewhere in the world.

So, if after a long period of observation, we are seeing that, in fact, explosive materials are being loaded onto trucks, and individuals are engaging in training in small arms, and there are some of those individuals who are identified as couriers for ISIL or al Qaeda then, based on those evaluations, a strike will be taken. But what we have been very cautious about is making sure that we are not taking strikes in situations where, for example, we think there is the presence of women or children, or if it is in a normally populated area.

And recently we laid out the criteria by which we're making these decisions. We declassified many elements of this. We are going to be putting forward and trying to institutionalize on a regular basis how we make these evaluations and these analyses.

I think, in terms of the broader debate that's taking place, David, I think there's been in the past legitimate criticism that the architecture, the legal architecture around the use of drone strikes or other kinetic strikes wasn't as precise as it should have been, and there's no doubt that civilians were killed that shouldn't have been. I think that over the last several years, we have worked very hard to avoid and prevent those kinds of tragedies from taking place.

In situations of war, we have to take responsibility when we're not acting appropriately, or where we've just made mistakes even with the best of intentions. And that's what we're going to continue to try to do. And what I can say with great confidence is that our operating procedures are as rigorous as they have ever been and that there is a constant evaluation of precisely what we do.

Carol Lee.

**Question:** Thank you, Mr. President. You've spent seven years now working on nonproliferation issues, and you said in your opening remarks that you hope that future administrations do the same and make it a priority. This week, the Republican frontrunner to replace you said that perhaps South Korea and Japan should have nuclear weapons, and wouldn't rule out using nuclear weapons in Europe. Did that come up at this summit? And just generally, what message does it send when a major-party candidate is articulating such a reversal in U.S. foreign policy? And also, who did you vote for in the Democratic primary?

**President Obama:** Well, first of all, it's a secret ballot, isn't it, Carol? Okay. No, I'm not going to tell you now.



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What do the statements you mentioned tell us? They tell us that the person who made the statements doesn't know much about foreign policy, or nuclear policy, or the Korean Peninsula, or the world generally.

It came up on the sidelines. I've said before that people pay attention to American elections. What we do is really important to the rest of the world. And even in those countries that are used to a carnival atmosphere in their own politics want sobriety and clarity when it comes to U.S. elections because they understand the President of the United States needs to know what's going on around the world and has to put in place the kinds of policies that lead not only to our security and prosperity, but will have an impact on everybody else's security and prosperity.

Our alliance with Japan and the Republic of Korea is one of the foundations, one of the cornerstones of our presence in the Asia Pacific region. It has underwritten the peace and prosperity of that region. It has been an enormous buoy to American commerce and America influence. And it has prevented the possibilities of a nuclear escalation and conflict between countries that, in the past and throughout history, have been engaged in hugely destructive conflicts and controversies.

So you don't mess with that. It is an investment that rests on the sacrifices that our men and women made back in World War II when they were fighting throughout the Pacific. It is because of their sacrifices and the wisdom that American foreign policymakers showed after World War II that we've been able to avoid catastrophe in those regions. And we don't want somebody in the Oval Office who doesn't recognize how important that is.

Andrew Beatty.

**Question:** Thank you, Mr. President. Yesterday you met with President Erdogan of Turkey hours after some fairly ugly scenes at the Brookings Institution. I was wondering, do you consider him an authoritarian?

**President Obama:** Turkey is a NATO ally. It is an extraordinarily important partner in our fight against ISIL. It is a country with whom we have a long and strategic relationship with. And President Erdogan is someone who I've dealt with since I came into office, and in a whole range of areas, we've had a productive partnership.

What is also true, and I have expressed this to him directly, so it's no secret that there are some trends within Turkey that I've been troubled with. I am a strong believer in freedom of the press. I'm a strong believer in freedom of religion. I'm a strong believer in rule of law and democracy. And there is no doubt that President Erdogan has repeatedly been elected through a democratic process, but I think the approach that they've been taking towards the press is one that could lead Turkey down a path that would be very troubling.



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And we are going to continue to advise them -- and I've said to President Erdogan, remind him that he came into office with a promise of democracy. And Turkey has historically been a country in which deep Islamic faith has lived side by side with modernity and an increasing openness. And that's the legacy that he should pursue, rather than a strategy that involves repression of information and shutting down democratic debate.

Having said that, I want to emphasize the degree to which their cooperation has been critical on a whole range of international and regional issues, and will continue to be. And so as is true with a lot of our friends and partners, we work with them, we cooperate with them. We are appreciative of their efforts. And there are going to be some differences. And where there are differences, we will say so. And that's what I've tried to do here.

I'll take one last question. This young lady right there.

**Question:** Thank you, President. Mr. President, what do you think --

**President Obama:** Where are you from, by the way?

**Question:** I am from Azerbaijan. How can Azerbaijan support in nuclear security issue?

**President Obama:** Well, Azerbaijan, like many countries that participated, have already taken a number of steps. And each country has put forward a national action plan. There are some countries that had stockpiles of highly enriched uranium that they agreed to get rid of. There are other countries that have civilian nuclear facilities but don't necessarily have the best security practices, and so they have adopted better security practices.

There are countries that could potentially be transit points for the smuggling of nuclear materials, and so they've worked with us on border controls and detection. And because of Azerbaijan's location, it's a critical partner in this process.

I should point out, by the way, that although the focus of these summits has been on securing nuclear materials and making sure they don't fall into the hands of terrorists, the relationships, the information-sharing, the stitching together of domestic law enforcement, international law enforcement, intelligence, military agencies, both within countries and between countries -- this set of relationships internationally will be useful not just for nuclear material, but it is useful in preventing terrorism generally. It's useful in identifying threats of chemical weapons or biological weapons.

One of the clear messages coming out of this summit and our experiences over the last seven years is an increasing awareness that some of the most important threats that we face are transnational threats.





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And so we are slowly developing a web of relationships around the world that allow us to match and keep up with the transnational organizations that all too often are involved in terrorist activity, criminal activity, human trafficking, a whole range of issues that can ultimately do our citizens harms. And seeing the strengthening of these institutions I think will be one of the most important legacies of this entire process.

Mark Landler, since you had your hand up, I'll call on you. One last question.

**Question:** Thank you, Mr. President. I wanted to ask a question about nuclear policy. Through these past seven years when you've pushed to rid the world of nuclear materials and fissile material, the U.S. nuclear industry has actually worked to improve miniaturization of warheads. And while it has not developed new classes of cruise missiles or warheads, it's worked to improve the technology. And that's prompted some in China and Russia to say, well, gee, we need to keep up. Are you concerned that the technological advances in the United States have had the effect of sort of undermining some of the progress you've made on the prevention side?

**President Obama:** I think it's a legitimate question, and I am concerned. Here's the balance that we've had to strike. We have a nuclear stockpile that we have to make sure is safe and make sure is reliable.

And after the START II Treaty that we entered into with Russia, we have brought down significantly the number of weapons that are active. But we also have to make sure that they're up to date; that their command and control systems that might have been developed a while ago are up to snuff, given all the technology that has changed since that time. And we have to make sure that our deterrence continues to work.

And so even as we've brought down the number of weapons that we have, I've wanted to make sure that what we do retain functions -- that it is not subject to a cyber intrusion; that there's sufficient confidence in the system that we don't create destabilizing activity.

My preference would be to bring down further our nuclear arsenal. And after we completed START II, I approached the Russians -- our team approached the Russians in terms of looking at a next phase for arms reductions. Because Mr. Putin came into power, or returned to his office as President, and because of the vision that he's been pursuing of emphasizing military might over development inside of Russia and diversifying the economy, we have not seen the kind of progress that I would have hoped for with Russia.

The good news is that the possibilities of progress remain. We are abiding by START II. We're seeing implementation. And although we are not likely to see further reductions during my presidency, my hope is, is that we have built the mechanisms and systems of verification and so forth that will allow us to continue to reduce them in the future.



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We do have to guard against, in the interim, ramping up new and more deadly and more effective systems that end up leading to a whole new escalation of the arms race. And in our modernization plan, I've tried to strike the proper balance, making sure that the triad and our systems work properly, that they're effective, but also to make sure that we are leaving the door open to further reductions in the future.

But one of the challenges that we're going to have here is that it is very difficult to see huge reductions in our nuclear arsenal unless the United States and Russia, as the two largest possessors of nuclear weapons, are prepared to lead the way. The other area where I think we'd need to see progress is Pakistan and India, that subcontinent, making sure that as they develop military doctrines, that they are not continually moving in the wrong direction.

And we have to take a look at the Korean Peninsula, because the DPRK, North Korea, is in a whole different category and poses the most immediate set of concerns for all of us, one that we are working internationally to focus on. And that's one of the reasons why we had the trilateral meeting with Japan and Korea, and it was a major topic of discussion with President Xi, as well.

Thank you very much, everybody. Have a good weekend.