

Science, Technology, and Security

Policy-makers facing critical decisions related to technical issues such as the risk of “dirty bombs” or how best to invest in missile-detection and warning systems can turn to the AAAS Center for Science, Technology, and Security Policy, supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. By providing high-quality and rigorously nonpartisan technical information, the Center serves as a credible, single-stop resource for lawmakers. See <http://cstsp.aas.org>.

Policy-Maker Briefings

AAAS security-policy staff annually work with hundreds of U.S. policy-makers, including Republicans as well as Democrats, through one-on-one meetings and Capitol Hill briefings. The internationalization of the nuclear fuel cycle was the topic of one recent Hill briefing, for example. Expert Nikolai Laverov, vice president of the Russian Academy of Sciences, said that Russia plans an international center for delivering fresh nuclear fuel to participating nations, along with procedures for recovering the spent fuel.

Another briefing focused on a nuclear agreement between the United States and India. Under the pact, India would receive assistance to further its civilian nuclear energy program, and in return, pledge to separate its civilian efforts from its military nuclear initiative, while complying with full-scope inspections from the International Atomic Energy Agency. Speaker Scott Sagan of Stanford University said that the pact does raise serious security concerns, but it also offers the potential for increased technology and information sharing.

Defense Media Briefings

With the correct expertise and access to highly enriched uranium, terrorists could build a “backyard atomic bomb” for less than \$10 million, experts cautioned during a briefing for defense reporters. Backyard bombs are a low-probability risk, according to Peter D. Zimmerman, former chief scientist for the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and Jeffrey G. Lewis, Managing the Atom Project director at Harvard. But, such a scenario underscores the need for governments to restrict funding to terrorist groups and use the best possible intelligence methods, they said. Other media briefings in 2006 addressed new measures for prompt warning of bioterrorism or disease outbreaks, and the need for increased oversight of electronic surveillance.

Informing the Public

Physicist Richard Garwin, an adviser to the U.S. government on national security matters since the 1950s and designer of the first nuclear fusion explosion involving a hydrogen bomb, offered chilling predictions during one of many 2006 security-policy events for the public. The risk of terrorists exploding a nuclear bomb in the United States is real, he said, and “we ought to be doing what we can to prevent it.”

Anthony Zinni, a retired Marine general, sketched a stark but ultimately more hopeful view regarding future prospects for stability in Iraq, as part of another public event. Expert Reza Mansouri, former Iranian Deputy Minister for the Ministry for Science, Research, and Technology, addressed the difficulty in translating evidence-based science within Islamic society.

Three films shown in the AAAS Auditorium — focusing on the dangers of stolen nuclear material (“Last Best Chance”), the potential impacts of a radioactive dispersal device in London (“Dirty War”), and an historic Islamic uprising (“The Battle of Algiers”) — also helped to raise awareness of critical security risks.

