

***Addressing
Excess Stocks of Civil and
Military Plutonium***

**Proceedings of the
December 10, 2001 Conference**

Washington, DC

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PREFACE

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 give new urgency to the need to protect and reduce stocks of weapons-usable fissile materials worldwide. The attacks have transformed the academic debate of whether terrorists would use nuclear weapons into a plausible and frightening reality. There is little doubt that al-Qaeda (or a sympathetic group) would use a nuclear explosive device, or a plutonium dispersal device, given the opportunity to do so.

In the wake of September 11, all countries are seeking to better secure their fissile material stocks. Recent events have highlighted the importance of reducing stocks of separated plutonium, despite the great difficulty of doing so.

As part of a long-term commitment, the Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) sponsors international conferences to consider plutonium-use and disposition alternatives, and to mark progress in international efforts to reduce the risks posed by excess stocks of civil and military plutonium. This conference, titled “Addressing Excess Stocks of Civil and Military Plutonium,” took stock of these issues in light of both a new administration and the attacks of September 11. It was also a follow-up to a larger conference held by ISIS in March 2000.¹

Both conferences were attended by government officials, scientists, and nuclear policy experts from several countries that possess significant stocks of separated plutonium. Featured presentations at the December 2001 conference were made by French, Japanese, and Russian government officials, by nongovernmental nuclear experts, and by former U.S. government officials who have made first-hand contributions to the international nuclear nonproliferation regime. On behalf of U.S. Senator Pete V. Domenici, the ranking member of the Senate Energy and Water Appropriations Subcommittee, Peter Lyons, the Senator’s Science Advisor, delivered a keynote address.

This conference serves several purposes:

- **Increasing transparency of separated plutonium stocks and utilization programs.** Sharing information about the size of separated civil plutonium stocks, and plans for utilizing these stocks, can help build confidence that nuclear programs remain entirely peaceful and reduce suspicions generated by secrecy. This transcript helps to disseminate such information, and includes proposals for making nuclear programs more transparent.
- **Increasing government accountability.** Reducing stocks of separated plutonium is a controversial subject that eludes solution and involves billions of dollars. Open debate and discussion of the issues involved helps improve international and domestic scrutiny of plutonium-use and disposition programs. It also helps inform the public of the costs and benefits associated with different utilization and disposition options, and the progress of such options to-date.

¹ *Civil Separated Plutonium Stocks—Planning for the Future*, Proceedings of the March 14-15, 2000 Conference (Washington: ISIS Press, 2001). <http://www.isis online.org/publications/civil_pu_conference/index.html>

- **Generating new proposals about how to secure and reduce separated plutonium stocks.** For example, the conference featured a proposal, made by former U.S. government officials Harold Bengelsdorf and Fred McGoldrick, to create an international plutonium custody regime, whereby the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) would take legal custody of separated plutonium stocks that are deemed “excess” by a country. However, unlike earlier such proposals, this one would have each country retain responsibility for protecting the transferred material at its own storage facilities, thus eliminating the seemingly impossible task of creating a new international storage facility. As in other such proposals, custody of the material would be retained by the IAEA until such time that the plutonium could be utilized in a defined civil nuclear activity, or could be disposed of in a peaceful manner.

This conference proceedings preserves the many substantive talks and insightful discussions during the conference. Attended by both proponents and opponents of plutonium use, the conference featured new information and sometimes spirited debates over how to best address separated civil plutonium stocks.

ISIS would like to thank both the speakers and participants who attended the December 10 conference. This transcript would not be possible without their presentations and contributions to the discussions. ISIS also would like to thank the Ford Foundation, the New-Land Foundation, the Ploughshares Fund, the Prospect Hill Foundation, and the Scherman Foundation for their financial support for this conference. Finally, ISIS would like to thank the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace for making their facilities available for this conference. □

— David Albright
February 28, 2002