

## Five Questions for Dr. Walid Phares on the Nuclear Security Summit

Contributed by W. Thomas Smith, Jr.  
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On Monday, the U.S. will host the leaders of 46 countries at a two-day nuclear security summit: Many of the attending governments urging that the summit serve as a benchmark for a renewal of international focus to prevent nuclear terrorism. Ironically, the summit is taking place a few days after the Iranian regime, which constantly thumbs its nose at the international community, celebrated its so-called "National Day of Nuclear Technology."

Beyond the obvious, what should be the focus of the summit?

We ask Dr. Walid Phares, director of the Future of Terrorism Project at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies and the author of *The Confrontation: Winning the War against Future Jihad*. Phares has served both on the National Security Council's advisory task force on nuclear terrorism (2006-2007) and as an advisor to the Anti-Terrorism Caucus of the U.S. House of Representatives (a position he has held since 2008).

Our questions and his answers follow.

W. Thomas Smith Jr.: What should be the primary topic addressed at the conference?

DR. WALID PHARES: Without any doubt it should be the looming Iranian nuclear threat. This is a regime which is rushing to build-and-deploy nuclear weapons and at the same time issuing public statements that it would actually use such terrible weapons to wipe an entire country from existence. This alone should be a red line. Also, the Iranian regime — while seeking nukes — is interfering in Iraq and Afghanistan. It has an alliance with the Syrian regime, which — like Iran — supports Hezbollah with weaponry, funding, and operational support, all of which could trigger a regional war at any moment. Moreover, the Iranian regime is backing an armed insurrection in northern Yemen. It has a presence in the Red Sea. And it has signed a treaty with Hugo Chavez's regime in our own Hemisphere. If we allow Iran to acquire nuclear weapons, we may end up seeing the deployment of those weapons on three continents. Pres. Obama has a unique opportunity to gather a vast international consensus on isolating Tehran and opposing its nuclear ambitions.

Smith: India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh says the summit should focus on "nuclear terrorism and proliferation of sensitive nuclear materials and technologies." You served on a U.S. task force on nuclear terrorism back in 2007. Explain what we mean by nuclear terrorism and touch on the specifics?

PHARES: It simply means that terrorist organizations can put their hands on nuclear material or weapons and eventually use them. The first stage in this threat is proliferation: Where can terrorist groups acquire these weapons. This is the crux of the problem. Who would give, sell, or — in any way — allow them to obtain such weapons. Then if they do indeed acquire them, how will they use or threaten to use them? How to stop them? This is our second problem. Tight international cooperation is one of the best ways to combat nuclear terrorism.

Smith: Terrorist organizations are indeed seeking to acquire nuclear weapons.

PHARES: Yes, of course. Some terrorist groups have a very focused interest in acquiring and eventually using them. Osama Bin Laden stated that he wishes to put his hands on such weapons and he also has alluded that he believes the Pakistani nukes belong to the Jihadists. On the other hand, if Iran's regime obtains these weapons, it goes without saying that Hezbollah could receive them. Hezbollah already has the missiles capable of delivering these weapons.

Smith: Which of the "nuclear countries" might be a source for terrorists?

PHARES: We should first be concerned about the situation in Pakistan. The government there is anti-Taliban and has assured the U.S. and the international community that these weapons are secure. However, there are concerns that those sympathetic to the Taliban might facilitate a transfer of one or more of those weapons to the Jihadists, or the Jihadists might seize them outright. Nuclear material from former Soviet republics is also a matter of concern. Obviously North Korea is another potential source of proliferation.

Smith: Israel's Prime Minister is reportedly not going to attend, because, apparently, Turkey and Egypt are going to raise the issue of Israel's nuclear arsenal. Explain why two American allies would focus on Israel and not on

Iran?

PHARES: Good question. Traditionally, Turkey's secular administrations have been careful not to enter the fray of nuclear debate in the region. However, it seems that the AKP [Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi] Islamic Party is now adopting an increasingly pro-Islamist position, and thus is using the issue in regional and international forums to enhance its stance with Islamist forces in the Arab world. The AKP government has declared its solidarity with Iran's nuclear program while claiming that the latter is not a military program, and it has supported the Omar al-Bashir regime in Sudan as well as Hamas in Gaza. Turkey's government also has been vocally critical of its former military partner, Israel. I expect the AKP is preparing to eventually declare its own intention of acquiring such technology in the not-so-distant future. As for Egypt, its government is under severe propaganda and political pressure by the Muslim Brotherhood at home and in the region and thus takes advantage of international forums to show ideological toughness.

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