

**UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1540  
INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ESSAY CONTEST**

**OVERALL CONTEST RESULTS AND ESSAY HIGHLIGHTS  
September 2016**

The goals of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540 International Student Essay Contest were: to increase awareness of the challenges of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and their means of delivery; and to generate new ideas for implementation of Resolution 1540 to support the 2016 UN Security Council comprehensive review of the resolution. Given the difficult detailed requirements of the essay contest and the short time frame for it, Stimson hoped to get 100 student submissions for the contest.

Stimson partnered with institutions around the world to advertise the contest from May to August 2016, when the contest closed. We are happy to report that the contest website attracted 16,000 viewers from 165 countries. Essay submissions were 50% over the target; Stimson received 150 submissions from students in colleges, universities and law schools in 44 countries. These students developed implementation plans for 50 different countries. An international panel of ten expert judges conducted a blind review of the submissions, taking into account clarity, feasibility and ease of implementation, and potential for WMD risk reduction. The only details the judges received were whether the essay had a professor sponsorship and for which country the essayist's implementation plan was intended. The Stimson Center then reviewed the judges' selections and forwarded the top qualifying essays, eighteen in total, to another panel of judges directly involved in the work of the United Nations Security Council's 1540 Committee to select the first and second place winners, as well as the three entries to receive "honorable mention."

In reading the essays, both the judges and the Stimson Center found that many contained proposals and analysis that could prove useful to the United Nations and to countries in their implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1540 (2004).

**Below are common themes and statements that the 1540 Committee and its experts should note in their 2016 Comprehensive Review.** Boxed quotes are from student submissions.

**COMMON THEMES**

**1. The Need for Assistance in Risk Assessment**

Student essays for both small and mid-size countries felt these countries did not have the capacity to analyze the risks of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) and missile technology proliferation, and required expert help in completing this analysis, including for items in transit. Students also expressed concern in their entries about illegal trafficking in small arms, light weapons, and drugs. These essays explored ways to include nonproliferation issues in the context of more prominent trafficking concerns. One submission (for Jordan) suggested developing a risk-weighting mechanism that states could apply. A submission for Sierra Leone highlighted the need to link implementation of Resolution 1540 commitments with other commitments, such as for the Arms Trade Treaty.

Several of the essays noted the opportunity to utilize big data and the need to develop government databases to consider anomalies in transport. An essay for Thailand raised the question about whether there could be standard operating procedures developed for this issue. A submission for the

*“Although export control is mostly administrative, routine work, it is important to give all employees, from officer to gate opener, a sense of importance and meaning in the fight against WMD proliferation.”*

United States suggested the need for identifying transit states of

importance, given that most trade goes through a few dozen states. The need to publicly identify transit points that pose proliferation risks could help countries better address these risks. [Interestingly, the Stimson Center did a project in 2014 in which it interviewed U.S. freight forwarders, who said that a simple outreach briefing from government at a freight forwarders’ conference provided great information: the forwarders were told to pay special attention to certain

named ports and then they indeed could and did.]

*“If a cute kitten video clip can reach a million viewers, maybe the visual demonstration of the destruction of a major American city can, too.”*

Risk was also addressed in terms of readiness to respond. A submission for Russia recommended developing reportable metrics for reducing WMD vulnerabilities, including red team exercises and measures of readiness to address materials out of control.

The P5 (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) were called upon to lead nonproliferation efforts given their special responsibility to the world, including through developing a more prescriptive approach to assessing and prioritizing concerns. International state leaders could do well to, in essence, adopt selected countries to mentor, e.g., Japan could work with Thailand, Pakistan, or Bangladesh to develop good nonproliferation approaches, especially given its strong trade ties with some of these countries and the terrorist threats there. Such pairings between countries in a position to provide assistance and those in need of assistance could involve the former country taking on a broader mentoring role for the latter across a wealth of activities. Such partnerships could involve more than, for example, simply assisting in a training module. A mentor country, for example, could help another with reporting, which could help alleviate reporting fatigue that many smaller countries experience. In essence, countries could develop partnerships to ensure compliance.

## 2. The Importance of Public Engagement and a Larger Development /Cooperative Approach

Students around the world noted in their essays the urgent need to first increase public awareness and understanding of the magnitude of the risks posed by proliferation, then to gain public support for addressing the risks, and finally, to move to cooperative action.

Many noted the possibility of leveraging social media and other forums:

- To raise awareness and encourage the larger public to work toward nonproliferation, students suggested: using public art, including pop-up displays; leveraging the influence of the Model UN and the World Health Organization; engaging media personalities; and developing informative podcasts. The important role of investigative journalism in uncovering corruption and illicit

trafficking was also noted. One essayist noted the good work of the U.S. State Department [TechCamps](#).

- Students recommended that social media play a larger role in fostering better global interactions, inter-cultural dialogues, and educational opportunities that could reduce terrorism and proliferation. Several essays mentioned the importance of education, and some mentioned the development of a curriculum on proliferation and global peace and security and the possible role of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in such educational efforts.

Some essays also noted the importance of targeting specific audiences, including with a three-fold approach (awareness, urgency of action, and knowledge and ability through training to respond appropriately). A submission for Ghana, for example, noted the need to educate certain targeted industries, including the medical and pharmaceutical industries, as well as police, customs, and other government officials.

Several noted the need to broaden engagement beyond proliferation issues and to take a regional approach to address common problems between neighboring states. This could include, as a submission for Tanzania noted, addressing small and light weapons trafficking as well as wildlife poaching, human trafficking, money laundering, and environmental/disaster management. Several noted the security-development linkage.

Idealism is woven through many of the essays. Students emphasized that positive relations among societies need to be better developed through: increased international tourism; cooperative regional projects, e.g., in Central Asia and Caucasus; a student nonproliferation club to exchange ideas and opinions – perhaps first in Russia, then expanded to the Commonwealth of Independent States; and increased cross-border dialogues on issues that transcend political boundaries. Students suggested ways to encourage positive regional cooperation among societies, such as development projects focused on education. Many suggested the need to collaborate in “mending relationships.” Such an approach was suggested in what some would consider an extreme - one innovative submission suggested possible engagement with terrorist organizations in a “consultative dialogue” without labeling.

Stopping the demand for weapons of all kinds by promoting understanding and positive social development was a common refrain. Halting the commercial selling of weapons and instead providing potable water to people was an idea put forth in a submission for Australia. Another submission noted the need for countries to increase efforts to curb drug use and addiction, which increase the demand for weapons of all kinds.

### 3. Technology as Both a Risk and Opportunity

Many noted the need to address cyber risks, including the theft of information leading to proliferation. Also mentioned was the need to update control lists and to address new concerns, such as over 3-D printing.

Despite these negatives of technology, the ability to leverage it for the good, for example to promote compliance, was also emphasized. A submission for South Korea called for an integrated end-user database. This idea fits well with the call for better state-based and regional risk management approaches. A submission for the Philippines, for example, called for web postings to “ensure open public disclosure

of policies and programs related to UNSCR 1540.” Several noted that nonproliferation compliance could be increased through posting information on government websites and providing more open access to data.

Other ideas included:

- Tagging materials of concern, including dual-use materials, and developing sensors to track them (as suggested in an essay for Sierra Leone).
- Establishing a more harmonized regime for registration of new chemical/biological materials including working with the United Nations Environment Programme’s Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (in an essay for South Korea).
- Getting away from dull training lectures and moving toward the use of interactive, reinforcing learning tools and what-if simulations using videos, software, and case studies (in an essay for Canada).

#### 4. Idealism vs. the Realities of a Nuclear World, Border Challenges, and Other Issues

Many of the student submissions are framed in a bright idealism centered on the as-yet-untarnished potential of the world in the future. Several hoped to do away with nuclear weapons, and tactical nuclear weapons in particular, and to invest in education, development, and peace. Several advocated alternatives to nuclear energy development and suggested instead more investment in alternative energy sources.

*“Countries do not even know what people are in their country, let alone what goods are.”*

A few suggested that progress could be made toward a WMD-free zone in the Middle East by incremental means, such as the coordinated signing/ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, even for states that may not be part of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

Submissions for many countries, from Indonesia to Pakistan, noted the challenges posed by porous borders. Several essays suggested countries cooperate on border controls, with one

country responsible for both sides of a joint border – both to save on administrative costs and to build trust between states. However, most called for better monitoring and controls, and in a few cases applied this idea to people too, via biometric databases. Corruption at the borders and in general was a frequently mentioned issue. One suggestion was to form an international monitoring agency under the UN with independent administrative staff (perhaps not from the top ten importing/exporting countries) to monitor imports/exports as a service.

A few student submissions recommended identifying and engaging more with states known to be conduits for goods or even proliferators (admittedly an idealistic suggestion). A submission for Turkey suggested it help make “rogues” into members of the World Trade Organization, asking, “If they can get dual-use items anyhow, then why not place trade in these items under the umbrella of the WTO?” Another submission suggested engagement with the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea by asking for regime reform rather than regime change, and by seeking small initial DPRK steps toward nonproliferation.

## SELECTED IDEAS/STATEMENTS

### 1. Organizing for Action



Countries need to first get organized internally to address proliferation issues, and then organize at a regional level. Specialized joint committees could be stood up domestically, including stakeholders from outside of government, such as businesses, who can then be responsible for implementation – including regular reporting on progress. Once an organization has been established internally, regional engagement can begin. A submission from South Africa called for an African Regional Nonproliferation Committee. Others echoed that approach. Local and regional port cooperation could be developed between and among countries, including in response planning (mentioned for Turkey, for example).

Calling for states to proactively address proliferation issues:  
*“As it is often said, an inaction is in itself a certain form of action.”*

## 2. Certain Countries Can and Should Share More of Their Experiences

Many submissions for Japan noted the country’s distinct experience as having been subjected to both nuclear and chemical weapons, and the lessons other countries could learn from their unique history. Given the Fukushima nuclear accident, Japan may also want to share seismic safety studies for nuclear installations. Iran’s experiences both with chemical weapons in the Iran-Iraq war and in the nuclear arena with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action place the country in a position to take the lead in promoting nonproliferation. Promoting nonproliferation can also be done through helping states with Sustainable Development Goal 16 for strengthening national institutions and “promoting just, peaceful and inclusive societies” (for Iran).

One essay called for the Argentine-Brazil ABACC bilateral nuclear inspection mechanisms to be shared with India and Pakistan. A coordinated approach to finding materials out of control should be built before this happens, and emergency preparedness plans should be in place before a diversion of material. With many students focusing on the need for nuclear security and addressing the spread of nuclear power, some called for more secure nuclear facilities, and for experienced states such as France to develop “turnkey” security training programs to share with other countries. The need for better radiological security was also mentioned in several submissions.

## 3. Other

Judges commended certain essays for their innovative approaches and/or good design. These included, among other: Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Jordan, Moldova, Nigeria, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Russia, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Turkey, Turkmenistan, and the United Kingdom (regarding controlling terrorist financing). The Stimson Center advised students who did not receive an award to consider submitting their reviews directly to the relevant country’s [1540 National Implementation Point of Contact](#) or Ministry of Foreign Affairs, if the Resolution 1540 point of contact has not yet been established.

Some specific ideas of note were:

- A broader emphasis on security culture throughout a country is needed. It “should cover all sectors, including food, medical and trade, to name a few...” (for Malaysia).
- Existing organizations and resources should be leveraged, such as the World Customs Organization and the Organization for Security and Co- operation in Europe Border Management Staff College training.
- An international ethical code in the biological arena should be developed that could become an internationally agreed-upon standard.

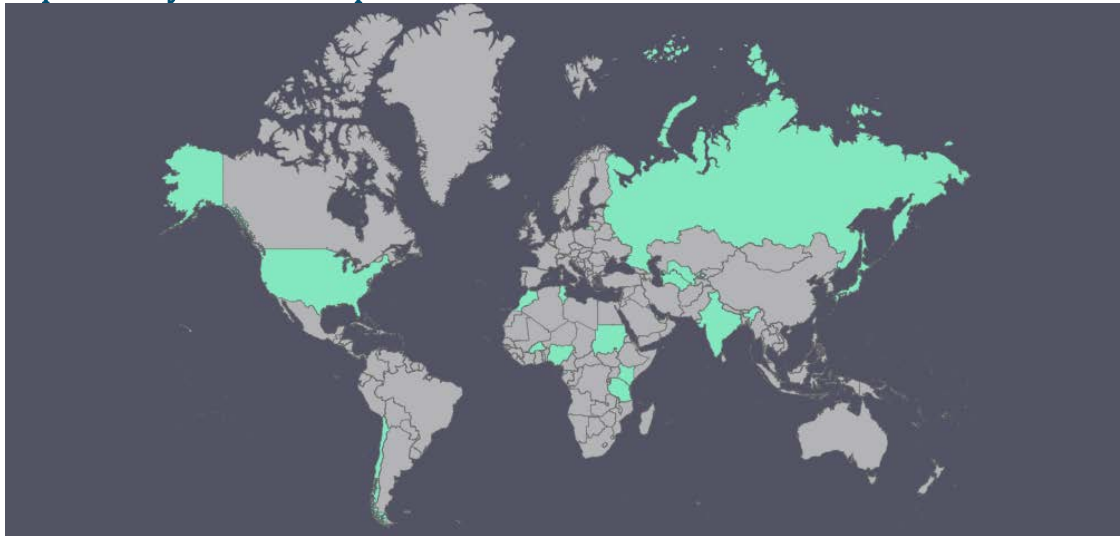
- States should prioritize assistance to those states who have submitted national action plans and are cooperating with Resolution 1540 (for USA).
- States should better crack down on terrorist financing, with countries such as the UK taking the lead (for the UK).
- The Financial Action Task Force model legislation should be updated to include provisions regarding prohibition of financial assistance and funding for R&D activities related to WMDs.
- The EU should take a more united approach to proliferation controls (from an essay disqualified for being over the word count).
- States should consider ways to contain knowledge, e.g., track personnel who currently work in or have worked in WMD-related areas (including former nuclear personnel), and conduct thorough reliability testing and background and family investigations for those with access to dangerous materials, including those in the military with access to nuclear weapons (mentioned for a few essays).
- A “Global Strategic Alliance” of states should discuss “deployment of troops to nuclear sites at risk of being besieged by terrorists” (for Singapore and Canada).
- Safeguards by design should be developed, thinking further into the future of nuclear power.

Judges, building off of student essays, suggested: given the many submissions for action plans from Nigeria, perhaps students could be invited to participate in a future national meeting on implementation there or in the region. In addition, responding to students’ common call for more tabletop exercises and workshops, judges suggested the 1540 website could have a repository for after-action reports, which are reviewed by the 1540 Committee and then used in targeted assistance efforts.

## Top 18 Essay Finalists' School Locations:



## Top 18 Essay Finalists' Implementation Countries



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