

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **NENSC and Center for the National Interest Host Panel on Impending U.S. – Saudi Arabia 123 Nuclear Agreement**

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WASHINGTON, D.C. — The [Nuclear Energy and National Security Coalition \(NENSC\)](#), in partnership with the Center for the National Interest (Center), recently convened a distinguished panel of bipartisan experts to discuss the forthcoming “123 agreement” on civil nuclear cooperation between the United States and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The [online forum](#) featured insights from NENSC Co-Chair and Former Deputy Secretary of Energy **Daniel Poneman**, NENSC Expert Council member and Former Assistant Secretary of State **Stephen Rademaker**, and leading nonproliferation expert **Robert Einhorn**. The conversation, moderated by the Center’s President **Paul Saunders**, focused on the implications of the impending 123 agreement, negotiations recently concluded by U.S. officials, and the critical themes shaping the future of U.S. – Saudi nuclear cooperation.

### **BACKGROUND**

In late 2025, the Trump administration notified Congress that it had concluded negotiations for the 123 agreement with Saudi Arabia. This agreement, essential for any U.S. civil nuclear cooperation with foreign nations, is anticipated to have far-reaching impacts on nuclear security, nonproliferation efforts, and the economic interests of the United States. In October 2025, Daniel Poneman hosted an in-depth discussion on these matters on NENSC’s Atomically Speaking [podcast](#).

### **KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- **No Deal Doesn’t Mean No Nuclear:** Panelists cautioned that if the United States does not finalize an agreement, Saudi Arabia has alternative partnerships available, including with Russia and China. As Stephen Rademaker emphasized, “If America says we’re not going to cooperate with you, they have a long line of other countries prepared to cooperate with them.” He further noted that “the Kingdom has many alternatives to the United States, and we should be relieved that their preference is to cooperate with the United States because it will ensure long-term U.S. leverage over what happens on the territory of the Kingdom.”

- Imperative for U.S. Engagement: Experts reached consensus on the necessity for the United States to remain involved in Saudi Arabia’s nuclear energy ambitions, stressing that any agreement should secure nuclear security, uphold nonproliferation promises, and protect U.S. economic interests. As Robert Einhorn remarked, “An agreement stacking the deck in favor of US-Saudi civil nuclear relations would help revitalize the U.S. nuclear industry and strengthen the bilateral strategic relationship. And it could also serve nonproliferation interests by excluding countries that are less insistent on effective nonproliferation controls and by reducing the opportunity for sensitive and difficult monitoring of Saudi engagement with these countries.” As the experts considered what a renewed Saudi deal might include, Einhorn pointed out that, with some important restrictions, “the Biden administration was prepared on day one after [the agreement] entering into force to begin constructing a uranium enrichment facility in Saudi Arabia” as a means of achieving the Administration’s major goals.
- Enrichment is the Decisive Issue: The panel agreed that the approach taken regarding uranium enrichment will be pivotal in determining both the nonproliferation risks and the political sustainability of the agreement. Daniel Poneman underscored that “if you care about safety, security, and nonproliferation, you have to want U.S. leadership.” He added “I would love to see U.S. companies providing both the reactors and the fuel, because with every reactor and fuel export from the United States, there is a little American flag that goes along with it. Inside that flag, it says, Non-Proliferation Act of 1978.”

## CONCLUSION

The discussion underscored the strategic importance of the U.S – Saudi Arabia 123 agreement. Experts highlighted the need for the U.S. to balance nonproliferation objectives, economic priorities, and regional security—particularly in relation to enrichment provisions. Continued U.S. engagement in civil nuclear cooperation is critical to setting global standards and safeguarding national interests.

## FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

To schedule time to connect with NENSC's expert panelists regarding the agreement, please contact us at [information@nensc.org](mailto:information@nensc.org).

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*The Nuclear Energy and National Security Coalition (NENSC) is an independent organization of leading national security experts dedicated to leveraging U.S. nuclear energy to advance U.S. national security interests. NENSC is dedicated to expanding recognition of this interdependence among policymakers at all levels and promoting policies that ensure a robust U.S. nuclear energy enterprise.*

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