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BUILDING ON SUCCESS: THE IAEA IN THE 1990'S

To live in the world of the 1990's is to be a witness to change of a breadth and rapidity with few parallels in history. We have seen momentous events, of a kind which we are accustomed to think of as infrequent, follow one another with unnatural speed, as though in a time lapse film: the fall of established nations and the rise of new ones; the burial of historic enmities and the violent reawakening of others; the collapse of longstanding alliances and the emergence of unprecedented cooperation and solidarity among the world community.

In this whirlwind of change, leaders, governments and institutions around the world have been and continue to be put to the test. The United Nations, of which the International Atomic Energy Agency forms a proud part, confounded the doubters and, in the Iraq crisis of 1991, showed itself worthy of the hope and trust that underlay its founding in 1945: that organizations representing the world community, and embodying the shared values of that community, could act with unity and decisiveness to compel adherence to the rule of law among nations.

The significant success achieved by the U.N. system in dealing with the complexities of the world of the 1990's is tribute to its institutional flexibility -- a flexibility derived in large part from its willingness in past years to review its own programs and policies dispassionately and make the course corrections necessary to meet the changing demands of a changing world. Today the challenge and the opportunity for the IAEA is

to continue to show comparable clear-sightedness and candor about its own evolving responsibilities, so that in the coming decades, the Agency can build on the outstanding success it has achieved in its first 35 years.

SAFEGUARDS AND NONPROLIFERATION

The IAEA's record of accomplishment is impressive indeed. Its regime of international cooperation, of shared commitment to common values, has been a pillar of stability and security for the world community. The IAEA's safeguards responsibilities, which it acquired in 1957, were broadened significantly with the signing of the Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1968, during a time of Cold War and unrelenting arms race. Today the Cold War and the arms race are history, and, thanks in no small measure to the work of the IAEA, the extensive worldwide proliferation of nuclear weapons, so feared two decades ago, has not occurred.

On the contrary, acceptance of the international ethic of non-proliferation has steadily broadened. The recent accession of France, the People's Republic of China, and South Africa to the NPT; the comprehensive safeguards agreements with South Africa and North Korea; the steps toward full-scope safeguards in Argentina and Brazil; and the increasingly hopeful prospect that the Treaty of Tlatelolco will enter into force for all of Latin America within the next year -- all these developments constitute an implicit endorsement not only of the goal of non-proliferation, but also of the IAEA's role in helping to achieve that goal. In addition, decades of IAEA technical assistance -- training, technical cooperation projects, aid in establishing radiation protection programs -- have done much to improve the quality of life throughout the world.

In 1991, moreover, the Iraqi experience showed how effective IAEA safeguards can be, when fully supported by its member states. For the first time, a party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty was found to have violated its safeguards agreement with the IAEA. In response to those events, the Board of Governors confirmed that the IAEA has the authority to conduct special inspections anywhere there are indications of undeclared nuclear materials or activities in a state with a comprehensive safeguards agreement. In the past year and a half, IAEA teams have served with great distinction in implementing the provisions of U.N. Security Council Resolution 687. In so doing, they underlined the fact that this relationship with the Security Council, as envisaged in the Agency's own Statute, will be an important factor in the IAEA's continuing fulfillment of its responsibilities.

It must be acknowledged, however, that the Iraqi example demonstrated not only the strengths of the IAEA safeguards regime but also, as the Director-General made clear in his recent speech

at Elsinore, the challenge facing the IAEA and its members. To quote him:

The lesson of Iraq is ... that more must be done to increase the risk of discovery of secret, non-declared activity. It is not practical or possible to send in inspectors to roam the whole territory of States, searching in every nook and cranny for secret nuclear installations. Inspectors must have *information* about where they should look. In the case of Iraq, this information came from defectors and satellites. In the future, the IAEA will make use of many sources of information apart from the declarations of inspected States: from exporters, from the media, and from Member States. ... It may be hoped that the existence of strengthened verification and Security Council determination will deter any State so inclined from attempting to cheat.

The Iraqi example revealed that a safeguards system primarily designed to detect diversions of nuclear materials from civilian uses should not be expected to detect a clandestine nuclear weapons program that did not depend on diverted material. Nor can such a system be depended on as the primary source of information on proliferation-related concerns.

The passage of time, and the steady increase in technical sophistication around the world, have changed the emphasis of the IAEA safeguards program. But as the Director-General's remarks indicate, the events in Iraq are a valuable lesson as well as an opportunity. Armed with greater knowledge, and using the full range of information-gathering abilities available, strengthening the IAEA safeguards system can and must take place. The IAEA is devoting increased attention to monitoring questionable patterns of behavior, so that any attempt to undertake a clandestine program can become the focus of concern and of appropriate action by the IAEA, at an early stage in its development. The IAEA must continue to order its priorities to ensure the effectiveness of the safeguards regime in meeting the challenges of the coming decades.

It is perhaps ironic that at the same time that the world community rejoices that the Cold War is over, and is filled with hope that coming generations of children may grow up free from the fear of superpower conflict, our appreciation of the grave threat posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction has only increased. The parties to the NPT will have an important opportunity to strengthen the non-proliferation regime when they meet in 1995 to extend the Treaty. For nearly twenty-five years, the NPT has been the cornerstone of the nuclear nonproliferation regime, serving as the principal legal barrier

to the spread of nuclear weapons. It remains unmatched by any other treaty in the number of its signatories. The United States believes that the NPT should be extended indefinitely and unconditionally in 1995.

We are also encouraged by progress that has been made in the Middle East. We welcome the application of safeguards in Algeria and the conclusion of a full scope safeguards agreement between the Agency and Syria. As is well known, the U.S. urges all countries to join the Non-Proliferation Treaty and accept full scope safeguards. President Bush has also suggested some specific ideas for arms control in the region. Both the bilateral peace talks and the multilateral arms control meetings can create political conditions and momentum for realizing our common objective of achieving a nuclear weapons free zone in the region. The General Conference will have an opportunity this year to register its support for making further progress in this area.

On July 13, President Bush announced a major non-proliferation initiative to bolster international efforts to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction. As a reflection of the IAEA's central importance in the effort to prevent nuclear proliferation, the President vowed that the U.S. will work with other nations to strengthen the IAEA, and will support needed increases in the safeguards budget. As part of this initiative, the U.S. also announced that it will not produce plutonium or highly-enriched uranium for nuclear explosive purposes. This step is intended to encourage countries in regions of tension such as the Middle East and South Asia to take similar actions to halt production or acquisition of weapons-usable materials.

NUCLEAR SAFETY

A second area in which circumstances have changed markedly since the IAEA was put in place is nuclear safety. Although nuclear safety was listed in the Agency's Statute at the outset as a primary function of the IAEA, only recently has it become clear how vital a role the IAEA must play in providing a global forum for efforts to improve the safety of nuclear power facilities. As nuclear technology -- especially for electric power generation -- has steadily expanded worldwide, the need for rigorous, well-defined and consistently-applied safety principles in all countries choosing to use nuclear energy has become increasingly apparent; not only to nuclear specialists and governments, but more importantly, to the public, media and national legislatures, as well.

Since the Chernobyl accident in 1986, which had such a profound impact on international safety efforts, the IAEA has

been playing a key role in addressing the safety problems of high-risk reactors of Soviet design. In the last three years, the IAEA's comprehensive safety reviews of the VVER 440/230, and its efforts to undertake similar work on the RBMK reactors, have been important steps in lessening the grave danger of another nuclear power plant catastrophe. The United States strongly supports the Agency's work in that regard.

In dealing with the most imminent nuclear hazards in Eastern Europe, the IAEA performed its role admirably, identifying problems and calling attention to them. Regrettably, nations were not as swift in their response as the situation called for. Having learned from that experience, we are working to assure that, as requests for help are received from the states of the former Soviet Union -- where a generation of ill-designed reactors is in operation, each one a danger urgently requiring corrective measures -- necessary assistance is provided without delay.

Despite the initial difficulties in providing aid to Eastern Europe, however, the United States remains convinced that bilateral agreements are the principal path of choice for the provision of large-scale assistance to these nations. Consistent with that approach, Secretary Baker announced, at the Lisbon conference on Assistance to New Independent States in May, a \$25 million dollar program of nuclear safety assistance for Russia and Ukraine. That assistance will be directed principally to near-term measures, such as operational safety, including improved training and management systems; strengthening of regulatory authorities; and technical improvements to existing reactors, such as fire control measures.

We are gratified that a number of other countries, including Japan, Canada, Sweden, and members of the European Community, have also announced plans for multi-million dollar safety assistance programs. These initiatives were given further support at the Munich G-7 Summit in July. Working through the G-24 mechanism established to provide safety assistance to the nations of Central and Eastern Europe, a coordinated program, broadened to address the new states of the former Soviet Union, is now being implemented. The IAEA's assessment of safety needs in the recipient countries, and its role as a repository of information on assistance programs, will be essential to the success of these efforts.

As in the area of safeguards, the Agency's analytical work on the Eastern European reactors is a measure of its strength but also points to a potential weakness. Extremely important activities had to be funded from extra-budgetary contributions. At a time in which the IAEA is being called upon to provide technical analysis to assure nuclear safety worldwide, its

requirements for resources are growing. It is therefore important both to reorient resources from lower to higher priority programs and for all states to work to assure that the Agency has adequate resources to implement its highest priority activities.

Even beyond the immediate danger posed by the power reactors of the former Soviet bloc -- and there should be no underestimating the extent of that hazard or the urgency with which the deficiencies must be addressed -- the existence of so many inadequately designed power plants is strong evidence of the desirability of an international nuclear safety convention to assure minimum levels of safety in all plants, wherever they may be. The fact that fission products from a nuclear accident do not respect national boundaries is only part of the reason; in addition, the public acceptance of nuclear power for electrical generation depends on its being perceived, and perceived accurately, as an acceptably safe and environmentally sound form of energy.

The task of formulating an international nuclear safety convention, however, raises complex issues of how best to assure acceptable levels of safety among nations with widely varying legal systems, technologies and industrial organization. While we should not settle for a "lowest common denominator" approach, neither can the effort to codify internationally binding obligations in the nuclear safety field ignore these complexities. The United States would like to see rapid progress toward an instrument to which the great majority of nations using nuclear energy for electrical production could adhere, for if only a few nations eventually sign or ratify a convention, we will have failed to achieve the goal of establishing a broad consensus on what is needed to assure safety.

We believe that a very meaningful convention can be negotiated if the following points are adopted:

First, its scope should be confined to civilian nuclear power plants, as they pose the most serious risks, and there is already a broad technical consensus on necessary actions to assure their safety.

Second, the convention should consist of general principles, along the lines of those developed for the Agency document on Safety Fundamentals. Excessive detail in defining rules or standards is likely to be counterproductive and lead to undue delay in achieving practical results.

Third, the convention should be negotiated as a unified document, so that the interrelationships among its important

substantive and procedural provisions can be clearly appreciated. The alternative -- a series of legal and technical documents developed over an extended period of time -- would inevitably cause disorganization and confusion.

Fourth and last, we should avoid attempting to establish an international regulatory body to implement a safety convention. Nuclear safety is inherently a national responsibility which cannot be delegated, and we would do the cause of safety a disservice if the lines of responsibility were to be blurred. While the IAEA has an important role to play in implementing a convention -- providing technical advice and helping the parties to review compliance in periodic meetings -- we should not attempt to give the Agency a regulatory role it could not effectively manage.

CONCLUSION: THE NEED FOR REEXAMINATION

In sum, we stand at a watershed in the area of international nuclear safeguards and safety generally, and the life of the IAEA as an organization. The dramatic changes of recent years are a challenge to the world community and to the IAEA: to seize the opportunity presented or to risk its passing by irrevocably. The position of the United States is unequivocal. Our commitment has been demonstrated by a number of major steps, including our decision not to produce plutonium or highly-enriched uranium for explosive purposes, and our support for increased funding for the IAEA safeguards effort.

The IAEA itself must continue to reexamine its policies and priorities in light of the new realities. I referred earlier to the reevaluation, conducted for the United Nations in the late 1980's, that contributed so signally to the U.N.'s ability to respond flexibly and effectively to the Iraqi threat. That reevaluation did not proceed entirely from within; the U.N., recognizing the need for a completely objective analysis, wisely gave its blessing to an internationally recognized group of outside experts to conduct the study.

Commendably, the IAEA, in connection with the current effort to develop a medium-term plan, has also convened a distinguished group of experts to assess the Agency's needs and priorities. The salutary process of self-analysis which was begun by this "wise men's group" should be continued and expanded. The results of this process could be invaluable in helping the IAEA and its Member States make wise decisions about the course the Agency will follow into the new century.

The IAEA Statute itself is sound; what is needed is not a revised charter, but a dispassionate appraisal of how best the

Agency can fulfill its responsibilities under the existing statute. We must seize the moment. The circumstances are too propitious, and the potential consequences of inaction too grave, for the opportunity to be lost. In the coming decades, the world community will need, as never before, an effective and dynamic IAEA, with its attention and its resources firmly directed to the areas of greatest need. The Organization, supported solidly by its member states, must assure that it is ready to meet that challenge, helping to assure that ten and twenty and thirty years from now, the IAEA will continue to be, as it is today, building on success.