

Wednesday 16 March 2005: Baroness Symons - Opening Address

International Conference on Nuclear Security: Global Directions for the Future

Welcome

It is my pleasure to welcome you to London for the IAEA International Conference on Nuclear Security: Global Directions for the Future. I am grateful to the Director General of the IAEA, Mohamed ElBaradei, for inviting me to act as Conference President, and for the chance to address you this morning. A gathering of so many key policy makers in the field of nuclear security presents an excellent opportunity to engage in a serious and wide-ranging debate, sharing experience and best practice, and forging strong partnerships and synergies that will form the backbone of our future work.

This morning, I would like to briefly set our global effort in context, examining how we can best look to the future in the light of our past achievements and present challenges.

Past Achievements

The dawn of the nuclear age brought with it a new power, terrifying in its ability to destroy, awesome in its potential for good. And it is the same stark contrast that confronts us today. On the one hand, as the technological expertise in handling its by-products develops, and with the growing realisation of mankind's impact on its surroundings, nuclear power represents an important, climate-friendly supply of energy. Moreover, its applications stretch far beyond civil nuclear power – food preservation and disease prevention are being revolutionised by nuclear technology, and indeed, nuclear power will almost certainly be necessary if we are to continue our adventure of exploration beyond our solar system.

However, if we are to continue to reap the benefits of the atom, we must keep in check its associated dangers, and prevent a technology with the power for so much good falling into the hands of those that would use it to harm and destroy. Nuclear security plays a vital role in this endeavour.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, or NPT, has been a significant and to many an unexpected success in restraining nuclear proliferation and providing a secure framework for the peaceful transfer of nuclear technology. The UK continues to believe in the central importance of all aspects of the NPT, and regards it as the cornerstone of the non-proliferation regime.

Alongside the NPT, the IAEA has played a crucial role in promoting and aiding nuclear safety and security; championing the peaceful use of nuclear science and technology; and encouraging and enforcing Safeguards, which protect nuclear material and prevent its diversion to harmful uses. Both the Treaty, and the operations of the IAEA, face serious challenges. In our view, this is not a reason to be downhearted, and to reject the one of the best examples of effective multilateralism. Rather it amounts to a clear call for enhanced international efforts to strengthen the system, and make it work better for the future. We are in London, but don't let anyone claim that nuclear security and nuclear non-proliferation are just the concern of Britain and a few of our allies and partners. The international nature of this conference, the central role in it of the IAEA, and the participation of representatives from so many countries, demonstrates better than any speech that we are dealing with global concerns. And only international action can meet the challenge.

Present Challenges

The end of the Cold War brought new hope, but also new challenges. The threat to global security has changed, and we too must change to address it.

Some have sought to articulate the security landscape we now face. The most enduring image of the Cold War was an 'iron curtain' – a hard, impenetrable divide wrought in the crucible of two opposing ideologies. Today's divide more closely represents the warren of mountain tunnels in which some terrorists have sought to shelter. The line of demarcation has become porous and ephemeral, eluding clear sight or depiction.

Similarly, the nuclear landscape no longer rests chiefly on a balance of poles, but on a balance of wills. Individuals willing to take their own lives as they destroy others are not deterred by conventional logic – those with little or no material assets, who often view their own destruction as a prize, cannot be dissuaded by deterrents, whether they be conventional or nuclear. The threat of a dirty bomb in the hands of a terrorist, with the ensuing panic, chaos and disruption it would cause, is a spectre difficult to contemplate.

For this reason, whilst regional proliferation between states remains of serious concern, a key focus for this conference will be the threat from sub-state actors or criminals acquiring a weapon of mass destruction or mass disruption. A key question we will need to ask, *and indeed, I very much look forward to Senator Nunn's keynote address on this issue*, is how we can adapt our non-proliferation machinery to address, and eventually overcome global terrorism.

We must be careful, however, not to isolate one form of terrorism, nor to let our response demonstrate the same discrimination and destructiveness its creed betrays. Whatever the final solution, it must encompass all geographical, social and religious communities.

Looking to the Future

How then can we address these problems for the twenty first century?

There must be a dual thrust from the international community, firstly to act swiftly and decisively to prevent weapons of mass destruction from falling into the hands of terrorists, and secondly, to embrace a long and broad-reaching campaign against the causes of terrorism, whether they be hatred or hunger, politics or poverty.

As the first element of this strategy, Nuclear Security represents our front-line of defence, but also our most likely vulnerability to attack. The number of nuclear and radiological sources is vast, and the challenge in securing them formidable. When only one such source could form the genesis of a catastrophic attack, the task seems overwhelming. But we must not give up. It is entirely right that the people in this room are counted amongst our most valued assets in our struggle against the nuclear threat. We must act quickly and in unison if we are to minimise the immediate danger.

To this end, the UK is already engaging in a number of endeavours, often alongside international partners and friends. I would like to highlight a few very briefly.

We are committed to playing an active role in the Global Partnership against the spread of weapons and materials of mass destruction. We have committed 750 million dollars, and are already well ahead with practical programmes in several countries of the Former Soviet Union.

Collaboration with other donor countries has been a major element in the success of our work to date. During our Presidency of the G8 we are focussing attention on ensuring the effective implementation of Global Partnership projects. And we are at the same time initiating an important consultation on priorities for the future.

Examples of such projects include the dismantling of nuclear submarines; assisting in the safe and secure storage of spent nuclear fuel; creation of new employment opportunities for former nuclear scientists and engineers, and contributing to the international effort to destroy Russia's chemical weapon stocks. A key area of advance during 2004 was the development of the UK's nuclear security programme, from strategy to the first stages of implementation. During 2005 we hope to complete the initial pilot project in collaboration with Rosatom and intend to roll-out further projects in this area over the course of 2005 and beyond. Work in the area of nuclear security will make up an increasing proportion of the UK's projects under the Global Partnership in future years.

Domestically, the UK has thoroughly reviewed its own nuclear security regulatory regime since the events of September 11, and has introduced a new, modernised legal framework to underpin the regulatory arrangements already in place. This is, of course, an ongoing process, and we are committed to maintaining and developing this framework further. Internationally, the UK has participated actively in efforts to amend the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Materials. We look forward to a successful Diplomatic Conference in July, which agrees the proposals put forward to strengthen the Convention, extending its scope to cover the physical protection of nuclear material in domestic use, storage and transport.

Finally, the United Kingdom has been a strong supporter of the IAEA's Nuclear Security Fund since its inception in 2002. We believe that the Agency has a unique role to play in co-ordinating, complementing and enhancing activities being undertaken at a national level. So far, we have donated nearly £1 million to the Fund. Today I am happy to announce that the UK has agreed to demonstrate again its support for the Nuclear Security Fund by contributing a further sum of £350,000. This money will be used by the Agency to support a range of activities in its nuclear security programme.

I would like to emphasise once more that in all these projects, we have been fortunate to work alongside or build on the achievements of others. In addressing the problems we face, the UK firmly believes that it is neither desirable nor possible to stand alone. Nor can we afford to work only within existing frameworks – the purpose of this conference is not to look back, but forward, considering new approaches and strategies.

In closing, I would like to return to the second prong of our approach in tackling nuclear terrorism. One of the UK's key objectives for its EU and G8 Presidencies, as well as for its long-term policy, is to attempt to redress some of the imbalances which scar our world and our collective conscience. This stems from a belief that the responsibility for the existence of the present global problems, together with the burden of their resolution, must be shared. In this regard, a war on terror cannot be a war between nations and ideologies, but rather a shared struggle to defeat terrorism and its causes. It should include a war on poverty and a war on inequality. If we wish freedom and security for ourselves, we must become slaves to the cause of the freedom and prosperity of all.

It is in this spirit that I welcome you once more to London, and thank you for sharing this endeavour with us. I sincerely hope that we will, indeed, find a *global* direction for the future.