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### Tackling the Nuclear Dilemma: An Interview With IAEA Director-General Mohamed EIBaradei

**February 4, 2005**

Paul Kerr and Miles Pomper

Mohamed EIBaradei has served as the director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) since 1997. In this position, he is charged with ensuring compliance with the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). In a Feb. 4 interview with Arms Control Today, EIBaradei provided his views on how to strengthen the NPT on the eve of a once-every-five-years NPT Review Conference.

**ACT:** *We understand that you've outlined seven steps[1] for NPT states-parties to take at the 2005 NPT Review Conference in May. Can you describe those steps and explain their importance?*

**EIBaradei:** The underlying tone of all the seven steps are, on the one hand, to try to strengthen the nonproliferation regime at a time when it's really under serious stress and also try to give ourselves time to work out how we go about that. The regime is just like any living organism: it needs to be adjusted as required in light of development and evolution. We have seen a number of challenges recently, particularly, of course, the spread of the technology and the interests of terrorists and a number of states to get the wherewithal to develop the fissile material. And I think everybody realizes that the regime as is right now is not adequate to deal with the increasing challenges. The most important in my view is this five-year moratorium,[2] which is basically saying, "Let us give ourselves time to think, to consult, to negotiate, to see how we want to organize ourselves with regard to this activity of the nonproliferation regime," which is the ability to readily have fissile material at hand and which we now know puts a country right on the edge of being a nuclear-weapon state.

**ACT:** *So, in a way this is sort of a timeout for consideration?*

**EIBaradei:** It's a timeout. We're basically saying, "Let's all step back and think about how we want to organize ourselves on this issue and strike a proper balance between making sure the technology is available to all who want to make use of nuclear technology, but at the same time, reduce the risks associated with that technology." So, yes, if you like, it's a timeout, but a timeout to actively engage and think of how we want to go about it. And there is enough capacity right now for enrichment and reprocessing so that it is not going to be a major setback for the technology, but it would have a lot of benefits. Just business as usual, meaning having more and more countries sitting on factories that develop enrichment or reprocessing, is not in my view going to enhance our security—in fact, quite the opposite.

I have seven steps. It is not, an exhaustive list but simply a discrete and adequate package. I am also saying a "package" because the nature of a package is that everybody has to make some concessions, but the total sum will be of benefit to everybody. The second step is obviously that the Additional Protocol[3] become the standard for verification. Short of that, our ability to detect, particularly the nondeclared activities, is very limited. And we saw the limitation of the system in Iraq pre-'91 when Iraq had a complete, clandestine program without us being able to detect it. And we have seen the value of the protocol in Libya and Iran; we have been able to go places and get information and manage a robust verification system. We also now know, if a country wants to proliferate, it will most likely go underground, meaning undeclared. It will not divert from declared activities because that is much more risky. The undeclared, of course, is usually an easier route, and that's where the protocol is a key. And we're seeing a whole other list of cases, whether it's Libya or North Korea or what have you, that the undeclared is the preferred route; and therefore, we need the protocol. So, basically what I'm saying [is that] without the protocol, I cannot fulfill adequately the responsibilities entrusted to the agency under the NPT.

**ACT:** *Going back to the first point, you talk about this timeout. Obviously you've talked about a multilateral approach to the nuclear fuel cycle, and you've got an experts group studying this issue. How would that fit into the timeout, what do you expect to come out of this report, and how would that play into this debate over the timeout?*

**EIBaradei:** Well, I'm not sure if timeout is the right word for it because timeout implies a sort of a negative or a passive approach. I would say it's time simply to hold our breath and try to engage in active thinking. But yes, I mentioned this multinational approach or regional approach as just one possibility, and I asked a group of experts to look into the options. They are working on the report. I will have the report before the NPT [Review Conference]. I'll share it obviously with the NPT. But, my understanding of it is not going to by any means be conclusive. There's a lot of brainstorming that still needs to be done; there's a lot of legal, political, economic, and technical issues involved, so that's going to take time. But at least I will show to the conference that work has already started, and I'll encourage others to do similar work. Unfortunately, right now we are the only game in town who are working on this—this expert group.

But I'd like the report to bring [the issue] to a higher level of policy debate and be coupled with some solution. There is a lot of concern about commercial competitiveness. I'm not really interested in any of that, nor do I want to touch the economics of it. What I'm really after is to make sure that we have a system by which that sensitive part of the fuel cycle is under redundancy of oversight, and I thought that's why the multinational effort, that the number of any of these facilities, a number of countries, will be overseeing each other. It's of course easier now to say, "Let us not build new facilities." Of course it is much more complicated to see what to do with the existing facilities. That's why I say, "Let us just stop now, not add to the problem, and then see how we proceed for the future." But also, we have to go back and look at the existing facilities and what to do with them. Of course, things also would be much easier in the future if you have a fissile material cutoff treaty because then all the enrichment/reprocessing facilities in all nuclear-weapon states will be under verification, so that will make it much easier to manage the fuel cycle. That's also, as you know, one of my seven steps.

**ACT:** *Could you elaborate a little bit more on that? As you know, the Conference on Disarmament is divided on the question over whether a fissile material cutoff treaty is effectively verifiable, and you just mentioned verification. Do you think such a treaty could be effectively verifiable?[4]*

**EIBaradei:** To me, to verify a cutoff treaty means that we have to verify all enrichment/reprocessing facilities and look for any such undeclared activities, which we do now in other countries. Basically, we will have to do the same in all nuclear-weapon states and the countries outside the NPT (India, Israel, and Pakistan). So, I don't see anything about the fissile material treaty—again, just off the cuff—that is different from what we do now in other places.

**ACT:** *But those are obviously states you're generally looking at now that are nuclear-weapon states, right?*

**EIBaradei:** Yes, but it is the same technique. We would be looking at all the facilities that are capable of producing either plutonium or highly enriched uranium, which is no different from what we do now. I'm not looking into the stockpiles, as far as I understand the cutoff. We are basically looking at future production, meaning that the existing facilities are under verification, that there are no undeclared facilities. So, as I said, I don't see why we should not be able to verify a cutoff treaty.

But anyway, a fissile material cutoff treaty obviously would facilitate very much the question of management of the fuel cycle in the future because then at that time, if you have a universal cutoff, every enrichment plant in the world, every reprocessing plant in the world, would be under verification. Then it's much easier to say, "Is that enough, or should we also have a multinational approach?" Right now of course, you have fuel cycle facilities in the military sector that are completely outside any verification at all, let alone multinational verification or multinational oversight.

**ACT:** *Let me ask you about the politics of the fuel cycle issue. You mentioned it a little bit earlier. What will it take to get the non-nuclear-weapon states as well as nuclear suppliers and states possessing relevant facilities to agree to measures for controlling the fuel cycle? Obviously, this is a real challenge.*

**EIBaradei:** Well again, it is a real challenge, but again, I come back to [the point that] everybody will have to make some concessions. Yes, it's true that a number of countries want to continue to build enrichment facilities and reprocessing facilities. But the question they have to face, that if they continue to do that, then they have to expect that others will do the same, or they agree they will hold their horses for a while until we see that we have a much more secure system of managing these facilities.

I mentioned also very clearly that, during this hiatus period, we need to make sure that there is an assurance of supply, that every country who would like to get access to peaceful technology should be able to get guaranteed fuel and the access to technologies, and possibly take back the spent fuel again into a multinational reprocessing facility later on. But you'll have to have a guarantee of supply, and that's where also the IAEA could play an important role because under our statute that role ironically has been envisaged since 1957, that the agency would be sort of the go-

between suppliers and recipient countries. So, there's a lot of work, as I said, in terms of institutional, technical, legal, political, and economics that need to go into that.

But I believe that it is worth the effort because, frankly, I see no other way to move to the future. I do not want to see 30, 40, 50 countries develop their own fuel cycle. We know now that this is not just economics. This is very much linked to security. And we know that you do not want every country to have a fuel cycle as an insurance policy to hedge their nuclear bets. Then the kind of security system we have would be, in my view, very, very fragile.

**ACT:** *In this process, how necessary is it for the nuclear-weapon states to take additional steps to fulfill their Article VI commitments?*

**EI Baradei:** I believe it's vital. I think people need to understand that everybody is shouldering their responsibility, whether it's nuclear-weapon states or non-nuclear-weapon states. It has to be an environment where people see that there is a good faith implementation by all parties of their respective obligations under the treaty. And that's why I mentioned cutoff. One of the seven steps of course is that nuclear-weapon states should demonstrate their commitment to Article VI, and I specifically mentioned the cutoff not just as a demonstration of commitment, because it in fact will be very important as we look to the future for managing the fuel cycle, that all fuel cycles in the world are subject to at the very least international verification if not an additional redundancy of oversight.

But I look to the cutoff as one good example of where we can make progress. Frankly, this is something we have been trying to launch in negotiations for more than 10 years. I still look at the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT)[5] as again another step where I would like to see progress. Hopefully, [we will be able to achieve] universal adherence to the CTBT.

The Moscow Treaty is clearly a good step. Russia and the United States can build on the Moscow Treaty by extending its duration and reducing the limit of permissible weapons.[6]

There are lots of steps that the nuclear-weapon states can take that would enable them to say, "Here is a clear, pragmatic, practical demonstration of our unequivocal commitment, which we made in 2000, to move toward nuclear disarmament." I think if that would happen, then they would also be in a much better position to request additional concessions, which, at the end of the day, is of benefit to everybody, both nuclear-weapon and non-nuclear-weapon states.

**ACT:** *When you mention steps, obviously that language comes in when we talk about the 13 steps[7] that were agreed at the 2000 NPT Review Conference. At least one nuclear-weapon state suggests that these 13 steps no longer apply.*

**EI Baradei:** As I said, I don't know where each state is with regard to the 13 steps. But again, to me it's much better to look to the future and not to engage into recrimination about who has done what in the past few years. That's why I do not want the conference just to be a retrospective but, frankly, much more of a prospective: here's where we are today in 2005, here is the problem, and here's what we need to do.

And I believe these seven steps are by no means exhaustive, I mean there is, for example, export controls, the question of withdrawal (Article X of the treaty), there's a lot of other things one can think of to strengthen the regime. But these are steps that, if put together, will greatly enhance the vitality of the system. It's also balanced in the sense that everybody is requested to do one step or another. If you look at any of the proposed steps, you will find somebody grumbling somewhere.

**ACT:** *It's a hard job you have there.*

**EI Baradei:** Yeah, but that's, as I said, in the nature of a package, a balanced package, frankly.

**ACT:** *Speaking of your job, so far you're running unopposed for a third term as director-general. As you know, the United States says it opposes another term for you because it's opposed to third terms for the heads of international organizations in general. Do you believe the United States wants you replaced for any other reason?*

**EI Baradei:** You should address that question to the United States. I really haven't discussed it with them, and all I know is that the overwhelming majority of members-states have come to me and asked me to continue to serve. I was not necessarily planning to, if you had asked me a year ago, but they asked me to serve, and I think the reason for it is that we are in a very delicate phase in the nonproliferation regime, both the whole vitality of the regime as well as specific cases like Iran and North Korea, and that's why I agreed to serve. I'd be happy to serve if people want me to; if

not, again, I'll be equally happy to do other stuff.

**ACT:** *U.S. officials as well as some officials from other governments have indicated dissatisfaction with the fact that your reports to the IAEA Board of Governors did not say that Iran was in noncompliance with its IAEA safeguards agreement. What is your reaction to that?*

**EIBaradei:** Well, first, the only thing I saw publicly is that during the [confirmation] hearing of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, she said, from the U.S. perspective, I served with distinction. I think that's the language she used, so that's all I have seen publicly, and I'd be obviously happy, if there are any who have any qualms about any of our reports, to discuss them privately and publicly. But our reports on Iran have been characterized, at least from our perspective, by being factual and objective, and that's what we'll continue to do. We have no axe to grind, one way or another. Our role is to bring the facts out and, as I think I mentioned in Davos, [8] when Iran cheated I reported, when Iran cooperated I reported. That's exactly what we have continued to do. We have clearly [reported that] Iran was in breach of its obligations under the safeguards agreement. We have said that Iran failed in many ways under its safeguard agreement.

But the question of what to do, in Iran or in any other case, whether you want to report to the UN Security Council or try to deal with it within the confines of the IAEA—that is clearly a political assessment, which has to be made by member states. So far, the majority of the member states have decided that, as long as we're making progress in Iran, as long as things are moving and the agency is able to cope with it, that it's better at this stage to keep the matter in Vienna. So, it's not really something that I dictate, it's [a matter for] member states based on our reporting, and our reporting laid out all the facts that we know about Iran.

**ACT:** *Speaking of Iran, the IAEA Board of Governors is meeting later this month. Do you plan to present a report to the board about the ongoing IAEA investigation?*

**EIBaradei:** We are going to report to the board. Whether we have a dedicated report or a statement, we haven't yet decided that, but certainly I'll bring them up to speed as to where we are.

**ACT:** *In your opinion, does the agency need any additional authority or assistance to locate concealed Iranian nuclear-related facilities?*

**EIBaradei:** Well, I think we have all the authority to implement our mandate, which is to look after any possible undeclared nuclear material. Mind you, we don't have an all-encompassing mandate to look for every computer study on weaponization. Our mandate is to make sure that all nuclear materials in a country are declared to us. The logic behind that, that this is a chokepoint of any nuclear weapons program, [is] that if a country is denied the nuclear material, they cannot have a weapon. However, in Iran we have been also trying to, under what we call "transparency visits," to go into places where there might have been possible weaponization activities using nuclear material. Parchin, for example, the military facility we visited recently, was the kind of situation when we tried again to push the envelope under transparency, explaining to Iran that it is in their interest to build confidence.

But the more important thing for us, particularly if you look at undeclared nuclear material or undeclared facilities, is information. Information is a key in any country. If you don't really have information [about] where to go, it becomes almost impossible. You probably heard me recently in Davos; I was saying that we haven't been getting much new information. So, we're still working on the business of what information we have, we're still conducting investigations with people from the illicit trafficking network. We're still working with countries where some of this equipment has originated. We're still discussing, clearly, with Iran some aspects of their past program, the centrifuge program. We're still trying, as I said, to see whether there are any facilities which we think we need to visit, through a process of elimination, and take environmental sampling to make sure that there has not been any use of nuclear material. So, we are again doing a full court press and trying. We are doing all that we can, but again, I believe it's not really about authority, it's much more [about] information right now. And, I would appreciate very much, if anybody has any additional information that could help us, to pass it on in a timely fashion. Any actionable information we get, we act on.

**ACT:** *Turning to the proliferation network, of Abdul Qadeer Khan—does the agency have a complete picture of that network, and do you believe it's been shut down?*

**EIBaradei:** I'm not sure we have. I hope it is shut down. I am not 100 percent sure that we have seen all pieces of the puzzle. We still have some questions about where certain equipment was manufactured, coming from, and these are some of the questions we are still looking at. I'm not 100 percent sure whether there hasn't been any satisfied or unsatisfied customers other than the ones we have seen. So, we are still at it, but we are making good progress. We are not in a position yet to say, "Yes,

we have seen every aspect of this network, and yes, for certain, I can tell you that it has come to a complete halt.”

**ACT:** *In speaking of information specifically about the Khan network, is the agency getting sufficient assistance now from NPT member states as well as Pakistan?*

**EI Baradei:** I think we are getting cooperation from Pakistan. We are in constant contact with them, and they are cooperating. But, we are getting quite a bit of good information from countries like South Africa and Malaysia. I would say everywhere we ask for cooperation we are getting it, and that's central, of course, because this is a joint effort. The network has been like a labyrinth going everywhere, and we need to look at so many different contacts, countries, factories. So, it's complicated work, but I think we're making progress.

**ACT:** *A couple of more questions about transparency and verification. As you know, the EU-3 (France, Germany, and the United Kingdom) and Iran have agreed to negotiate an agreement which provides "objective guarantees" that Iran's nuclear program is exclusively for peaceful purposes. We know that the EU-3 wants Iran to completely cease its enrichment program. Do you think that Iran could provide some objective guarantees short of that complete cessation?*

**EI Baradei:** Well, I will not touch that question at all. That's clearly the question, that's really the crux of the negotiations. Of course, Iran claims that they can keep some capabilities and still provide objective guarantees. The Europeans, as you said, would probably like to see cessation of that program. We would only get into that if we are asked by all parties to express technical views or be of technical assistance. The political part I leave to the member states who are the players.

But I can tell you this, that in Iran or in North Korea, the nuclear program is the tip of an iceberg. It masks many difficult issues of insecurity, of sanctions, of trade, of normalization, of terrorism, of even human rights. And that's why I am encouraged that the Europeans are putting all these issues on the table, and that's why I also suggested on a number of occasions that the United States should be, at the appropriate time, part of that dialogue exactly as they are with the North Koreans. I don't think you can just fragment these issues. You really need to address the entire relationship or the entire concern because they are all self-supporting or reinforcing, not unlike the seven steps I just mentioned.

Again, linkage is the order of the day on many of the issues we deal with. I would hope that, if the Europeans and the Iranians are putting all their concerns on the table and are discussing them in good faith, then I'm sure we will be able to reach an agreement which satisfies the concerns of the international community—and there's a lot of concern out there about the Iranian enrichment program—but also satisfy Iran's needs for economic relations and normalization, technology transfer, etc.

**ACT:** *We spoke earlier about the importance of the Additional Protocol to IAEA verification. I want to delve into that a little more. You argued in a Nov. 15 speech that IAEA actions in Iran, Libya, and Iraq have demonstrated the effectiveness of agency verification. Given that these instances are sometimes cited as showing the failure of IAEA verification, why do you believe agency verification has been effective there?*

**EI Baradei:** Well, with the exception of Iraq pre-'91, when there was a clandestine program that we completely missed—and we missed it because of lack of authority—I think all the other cases are frankly cases of success. If you look in Korea, even without the Additional Protocol, in fact at that time we were right in 1991, by 1992, in raising the alarm, ringing the bell, shouting and screaming saying that there is a case of noncompliance, and shortly after we started an inspection there. In Iraq—although again when we had much more extensive authority under the Security Council—by 1997 we said that Iraq has been disarmed, at least in terms of the nuclear program. Luckily for everybody, we have been proven correct after the war that Iraq was disarmed and the nuclear program at least had been completely eliminated in Iraq through the agency's work.

In Iran, I believe in the last year and a half, what we now know about the Iranian program is mind-boggling, but it's all credit to the IAEA inspection on the ground that we know the extent of the program, the network, and the degree of sophistication. We haven't finished our work in Iran, but it is the agency, frankly, which brought this whole program to the surface, I mean, that it was completely submerged and we brought it to the surface.

People I think confuse two things. One is that the agency did not see the Iranian program when it was still at the very low level of export/import or we did not see the Libyan program when it was still in warehouses. I visited Libya, and the centrifuges were still in boxes in a warehouse. No system would have that sensitivity to detect activities at such a low threshold. But, I would hope now, with the Additional Protocol, that once a program starts to mature and turn into a commercial or industrial scale, that we would be able to detect that.

The second point, of course, is that it is a slow process, and people sometimes just get impatient. An inspection by its very nature—always over a large nuclear program, particularly if it has a history of undeclared nature, as in the one in Iran—takes time. But as long as we are making progress, as long as we are getting cooperation, as long as we don't see a smoking gun of an undeclared material ready to go into a weapon or an undeclared facility, people—the international community—need to bear with us because, frankly, this is the best alternative available. People have to continue to support us and rather than being critical, try to give us the bolstering that we need. Not because we are perfect, but because we are the best game in town right now.

**ACT:** *One more question on verification. We know the United States is promoting a new approach to verification, where other governments are encouraged to rely more on their own national judgments and resources rather than those of international organizations like the IAEA for information relevant to compliance questions. What is your reaction to that approach?*

**EI Baradei:** I'm not really familiar with it, frankly. How do they want this to operate? As I said, this is the first time I hear about this. Both the international system and the national system complement each other. As I mentioned before, we need information from national governments, we need resources, we need technology. Mind you, we are the only ones who have the legal authority to go on the ground. I gave Iran as a good example. Without inspectors being on the ground, whether it's in Iran, whether it's in Libya, whether it's in Timbuktu, our knowledge is just a conjecture. You can send a couple of agents to look around, you can send a satellite station to take a picture, but there is no substitute for the legal authority of international organizations to be on the ground. So, I don't think we are in competition at all. I think, again, people should understand that we need them, they need us. We all share the same objective and we should act as partners.

**ACT:** *There was a meeting concerning a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, or past precedents for it, scheduled for earlier this month that has been delayed. Can you give us a sense of why? Has it been rescheduled? What did you hope to accomplish with this meeting?*

**EI Baradei:** Well, I think we still hope that that this meeting will take place sometime this year. I would like to have this meeting when the parties agree on the agenda of that meeting. We're still consulting with them to make sure that everybody is involved because the important thing is to make sure that all the relevant parties are there sitting at that meeting. I think the importance of that meeting—and there is no illusion that this will end up in the creation of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East—is that this could be the beginning of the parties sitting together discussing the security concern in the nuclear field and how to go about it.


As you know, I've been advocating for a long time the need for a permanent security dialogue with the peace process in the Middle East, and this meeting at least could be the beginning of that hoped-for security dialogue, which again is going to take time, is going to be complicated. It covers conventional [and] nonconventional weapons and confidence building.

But, this will be the first time where the parties will sit together and discuss this issue of a possible nuclear-weapons-free zone in the Middle East. Even, I think, in the Madrid multilateral negotiations, they never really came around to discuss the nuclear issue. So, it would be in my view a very good breakthrough. It will take a lot of frustration out, which exists in the Middle East, that there's not even a discussion on this issue. I'm still hoping that this meeting will take place; but, as I said, I have no illusion that this is more than the beginning of a long, long-term process.

**ACT:** *Thank you.*

#### ENDNOTES

1. Mohamed ElBaradei, "Seven Steps to Raise World Security," *Financial Times*, February 2, 2005.
2. ElBaradei is referring to his proposal for a five-year moratorium on building new facilities for uranium enrichment and plutonium separation included as part of his seven steps.
3. Arms Control Association, "Fact Sheet: The 1997 IAEA Additional Protocol at a Glance," January 2005.
4. For background on the debate over this proposed pact, see John Carlson, "Can a Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty Be Effectively Verified," *Arms Control Today*, January/February 2005, pp. 25-29.
5. Arms Control Association, "Fact Sheet: The Status of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty: Signatories and Ratifiers," January 2005.

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6. Arms Control Association, “**Fact Sheet: U.S.-Soviet/Russian Nuclear Arms Control**,” June 2002.
  7. Claire Applegarth, “**The 2000 NPT Review Conference and the 13 Practical Steps: A Summary**,” Arms Control Today, January/February 2005, p. 8.
  8. “IAEA Chief Meeting Leaders at World Economic Forum,” January 28, 2005, found at <http://www.iaea.org>.
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