

Nuclear Crisis in Northeast Asia

Panel: Session 4 (Violet/Cosmos)

Date/Time: April 26, 2012 / 14:30-15:45

Organizing Institution: Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)

Speakers: Sharon Squassoni, CSIS (moderator)
Hwang Il-Soon, Seoul National University
Philip Chaffee, Nuclear Intelligence Weekly
Peter Bradford, Vermont Law School
Scott Sagan, Stanford University

Panel Short Summary

Brian Reams, Yonsei University
Jeongsu Sinn, Korea University

The current trend in global nuclear development is shifting towards aspiring new civil nuclear states in the Middle East and Asia, and with this trend comes the challenge of responsible development of sensitive technologies in these states. Uranium enrichment and fuel reprocessing are among the technologies that must be carefully limited in the interests of non-proliferation. These questions raise the issues of global leadership and good governance in order to maintain nuclear safety, security, and nonproliferation.

Dr. Hwang Il-Soon forecasted a nuclear renaissance in Asia within the next decade as many countries take an economic development course. This growth draws attention to current problems with governance in regards to security, safety and technology issues. According to Dr. Hwang, one obstacle to nuclear governance is the primacy of political power over technological perfection. He cited Confucianism as a cause of this obstacle, and suggests the need for a new type of leadership that will not be restrained by these cultural factors. Dr. Hwang noted some alternatives, such as attracting policy makers, fostering youngsters who will be able to provide a different policy approach, and seeking possible solutions from outsiders.

Philip Chaffee elaborated on the nuclear renaissance taking place in China as it plans to vastly expand its dependency on nuclear energy. However, whether this plan will become a reality is in question because of the ongoing bureaucratic battles on a variety of nuclear related issues, many of which are related to nuclear safety. The issues of conflict include the

shift from coal to nuclear energy in China's electric utilities, the lack of liability legislation, and the inability to rapidly educate reliable plant operators. One of the biggest battles was that concerning the use of second generation reactors that China has already ordered and whether they should be switched to a safer type of reactor.

Mr. Peter Bradford framed Chinese nuclear development in the context of US experiences during the 1960s and 1970s. During this period, growth outpaced regulation and culminated in the Three Mile Island accident. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission did an exhaustive investigation and overhaul of oversight rules. Recently, however, the NRC reaction to the more dangerous Fukushima accident was far less comprehensive, highlighting the diminished oversight role it is playing today. In the context of future nuclear development, Mr. Bradford stressed that these accidents did not impact the construction of new reactors in the US, as economic factors had already limited their viability.

Dr. Scott Sagan focused on three challenges to managing nuclear security and safeguards in the future. First, aspiring nuclear energy states are, on average, less stable than those that currently deploy nuclear power. It is critical to observe these states carefully in light of the proliferation risks they pose. Second, the threat of proliferation demands a reconceptualization of the Non-Proliferation Treaty to include enrichment and processing safeguards. Finally, the lessons of the Fukushima disaster include the possibility of terrorism on a similar scale. Proactive vigilance to anticipate new potential threats must remain a key concern.

The assembled panel relied on its expertise to inform its discussion of the various types of leadership needed in Northeast Asia and the world at large to combat the issues at hand.

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