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WORLD - USEFUL POLITICAL FALL-OUT

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KRASNYI ARKHIV

VIENNA, AUSTRIA, JUNE 29 - THE POLITICAL FALL-OUT OF THE CHERNOBYL REACTOR ACCIDENT HAS BEEN IMPRESSIVE. IT TOOK A DREADFUL SHOCK TO BUDGE MAJOR COUNTRIES FROM THEIR SMUG BELIEF IN NUCLEAR SOVEREIGNTY, BUT NOW THINGS ARE BEGINING TO MOVE AT THE INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY HERE.

IN THE NEXT THREE MONTHS, THE IAEA IS GOING TO START MEETINGS TO DRAFT NEW INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS REQUIRING EARLY WARNING AND EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE IN CASE OF NUCLEAR ACCIDENTS; MAKE AN EXPERT REVIEW OF JUST WHAT HAPPENED AT CHERNOBYL, WHY AND WHAT CAN BE LEARNED; HOLD A SPECIAL SESSION TO PLAN MORE SAFETY MEASURES.

OBVIOUSLY, GOVERNMENTS HAVE BEEN SERIOUSLY SHAKEN BY THE WORLD-WIDE IMPACT OF THE ACCIDENT, NOT LEAST BUT NOT ONLY THE SOVIETS. AFTER THE THREE MILE ISLAND ACCIDENT, THE U.S. WAS MOVED TO PROPOSE VOLUNTARY GUIDELINES FOR SAFETY. BUT CHERNOBYL, WHICH WAS ENORMOUSLY WORSE, HAS MADE CLEAR THAT THERE ISN'T ANY CHOICE TO STARTING OBLIGATORY MEASURES.

THIS IS A SIGN OF SOME RESPONSIVENESS, AT LAST, TO PUBLIC FEARS. IT ALSO REFLECTS THE CONVICTION, ON OFFICIAL LEVELS, THAT THE WORLD HASN'T ANY CHOICE BUT TO EXPAND THE USE OF NUCLEAR ENERGY OR TO FORGO STEADY INCREASES IN THE USE OF ELECTRICITY ON WHICH IMPROVED LIVING STANDARDS DEPEND. SO IT HAD BETTER TAKE BETTER CARE OF THE ATOM.

HANS BLIX, THE EARNEST, SOFT-SPOKEN SWEDISH DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE IAEA, SAYS BLUNTLY, "I CAME TO NUCLEAR ENERGY FOR ENVIRONMENTAL REASONS. THE ONLY ALTERNATIVE IN THE NEXT FEW GENERATIONS IS COAL, WHICH WOULD INEVITABLY CAUSE MUCH MORE DANGEROUS POLLUTION." AT THE RATE ELECTRICITY CONSUMPTION IS GOING UP ALL OVER THE WORLD, HE SAYS, NOTHING ELSE COULD TAKE UP THE SLACK.

IN A LETTER TO BLIX, SOVIET LEADER MIKHAIL GORBACHEV ACCEPTED THE IMPLICATIONS. "ENSURING RELIABLE AND SAFE NUCLEAR POWER DEVELOPMENT MUST BECOME A UNIVERSAL INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATION OF ALL STATES SEVERALLY AND COLLECTIVELY," HE WROTE. HE WASN'T PREPARED TO GO THAT FAR ON INTERNATIONAL VERIFICATION, WHICH THE SOVIET LEADER SUGGESTED ONLY "WHERE APPROPRIATE." BUT HE DID RECOGNIZE THAT RADIATION CAN'T BE MADE TO RESPECT BORDERS.

THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF THE PROBLEM WHICH CHERNOBYL SHOWED REQUIRE NEW ATTENTION. FOR EXAMPLE, THERE WERE THE DRASTIC DIFFERENCES IN WHAT NEIGHBORING GOVERNMENTS TOLD THEIR PEOPLE WERE SAFE LEVELS OF CONTAMINATION IN FOOD, WHICH NATURALLY ADDED TO FEARS.

ONE GOOD NEW IDEA IS TO HAVE THE WORLD METEOROLOGICAL ORGANIZATION INCLUDE RADIATION READINGS IN ITS DAILY GLOBAL WEATHER REPORT. THAT WOULD SHOW BOTH THE NORMAL BACKGROUND LEVELS WHICH CAN VARY WIDELY IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE WORLD, AND GIVE QUICK NOTICE OF ANY INCREASE.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE IAEA AS THE CRUCIAL GROUP IN DEALING WITH THESE NUCLEAR ISSUES IS AN EXAMPLE OF THE NECESSITY OF MULTI-LATERAL ORGANIZATIONS.

IT WAS FIRST ESTABLISHED IN THE WAKE OF PRESIDENT EISENHOWER'S ATOMS FOR PEACE PROGRAM, AND HAS HAD A LITTLE NOTICED BUT REMARKABLY EFFECTIVE ROLE IN SPREADING THE BENEFITS OF NUCLEAR SCIENCE, NOT ONLY IN ENERGY BUT IN AGRICULTURE, MEDICINE AND HEALTH. CONTROL OF THE MEDITERRANEAN FRUIT FLY AND THE DREAD TSETSE FLY IS BEING DEVELOPED WITH NUCLEAR ISOTOPES.

IT IS ALSO RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SAFEGUARD SYSTEM OF MAKING SURE COUNTRIES DON'T USE PEACEFUL ATOMIC PROGRAMS TO DEVELOP SECRET WEAPONS, AN EXPERIENCE WHICH COULD MAKE IT THE VITAL WATCHDOG IF NUCLEAR POWERS EVER AGREE TO CUT OFF PRODUCTION OF ATOMIC EXPLOSIVES.
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WORLD - (1) USEFUL POLITICAL FALL-OUT

FORTY YEARS INTO THE ATOMIC AGE, AND MORE THAN 50,000 WARHEADS LATER, THIS SEEMS PIDDLING PROGRESS COMPARED TO THE DISASTER WHICH EVERYONE NOW KNOWS EVEN LIMITED RELEASE OF RADIOACTIVITY CAN PRODUCE. BUT THERE HAS BEEN A GRADUAL CHANGE OF ATTITUDES. COMPARED TO THE LONG TIME IT TOOK TO BAN NUCLEAR TESTS IN THE ATMOSPHERE, WHICH SHOWERED THE GLOBE, THE UNIVERSAL REACTION TO CHERNOBYL SHOWED PEOPLE HAVE BEGUN TO LEARN.

THE ATOMIC AGE WON'T BLOW AWAY AND IT ISN'T THE ONLY GRAVE DANGER RESULTING FROM MAN'S INDUSTRY AND INVENTION IN AN INCREASINGLY CROWDED WORLD. CHEMICAL POISONS, FOR EXAMPLE, HAVE CAUSED EVEN WORSE ACCIDENTS IN RECENT YEARS.

NO LONGER THE VICISSITUDES OF NATURE, BUT THE SOMETIMES PERVERSE EFFECTS OF HUMAN INGENUITY ARE THE GREATEST THREATS NOW. SADLY, IT STILL TAKES A DREADFUL SHOCK LIKE CHERNOBYL TO FORCE REALISTIC RESPONSE. BUT THERE'S A BIT OF COMFORT IN SEEING THE POLITICAL COLOSSI CAN BE MOVED. AM/66