60th Anniversary of the International Atomic Energy Agency

Austrian President Adolph Schärf greets scientists and diplomats from 55 countries at the opening session of the IAEA’s First General Conference, which met at the Konzerthaus beginning 1 October 1957. Shown faintly on the curtain is the initial version of the IAEA’s logo, which was redesigned in 1960. (Source: U.S. National Archives, RG 59, Decimal Files, 1955-1959, box 1501)

Published: Oct 26, 2017
Briefing Book #609
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U.S. Argued It Was Entitled to “Role of Leadership,” Soviets Joined Agency Despite “Complete Skepticism” over Its Effectiveness

Facing Opposition from India and Soviet Union, the United States Took “No Retreat” Approach to Safeguards and Inspection

Washington, D.C., October 26, 2017 – The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) came into existence in 1956-1957 despite the “complete skepticism” of the USSR, sharp disagreements with India and other countries over the question of equitable inspections, and the United States’ insistence that an American be appointed to head the
organization, according to declassified documents compiled by the nongovernmental National Security Archive to mark 60 years of IAEA history.

The IAEA has garnered world headlines in recent years as the lead international body charged with monitoring the nuclear programs of North Korea and Iran, among other states. Its activities have sometimes come under scrutiny and its statute has been amended three times since coming into force in July 1957. As today’s posting of internal U.S. documents shows, differences over its broader mission as well as key areas of focus such as safeguards policy have been a regular feature since the agency’s earliest days.

By William Burr

The inspection system responsible for verifying Iran’s compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) has its origins in the creation of the International Atomic Energy Agency’s, sixty years ago.

In July 1957, the IAEA’s Statute entered into force, staffers began setting up offices in Vienna, and in October, the Agency held its first General Conference, electing a Director General and Board of Governors. To a great extent, the IAEA was the brain-child of the U.S. government. Its first Director General was an American by U.S. insistence.

According to a State Department message, personally approved by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, and published for the first time by the National Security Archive and the Nuclear Proliferation International History Project, the “role of [the] U.S. in conceiving and developing [the] Agency and making major material contributions clearly entitles [the] U.S. to [a] role of leadership during [the Agency's] early years.” Accordingly, the IAEA’s first Director General was Sterling Cole, a former Republican Congressman from New York with expertise in nuclear energy matters.

With the U.S.-Soviet Cold War arms race in full swing and the world increasingly worried about nuclear war, President Dwight D. Eisenhower sought to reduce nuclear fears and improve the U.S. diplomatic position by offering positive words and deeds about “peaceful atoms.” Created at the height of the Cold War, the IAEA signified the possibility of East-West cooperation, although superpower tensions would shape its development.

The new Agency would also reflect North-South tensions, with countries such as India especially critical of proposals for safeguards. Yet, senior U.S. officials believed that establishing a safeguards system was essential because they understood that peaceful nuclear installations could provide the basis for the proliferation of weapons capabilities. For them, establishing an IAEA represented an opportunity to establish an international safeguards system to deter IAEA members from diverting nuclear resources to military uses.[1]

Today, the National Security Archive posted archival records documenting key moments and developments in the IAEA’s early history, including the difficult U.S.-Soviet discussions of “Atoms for Peace,” the negotiation of the Agency’s Statute, its first General Conference in October 1957, and the complex and contentious negotiations over the Agency’s safeguards policy. As the history of these developments is involved, the documents focus on the U.S. role and U.S. perceptions to give readers the flavor of the events. The posting includes:
A State Department history of the early stages of the IAEA negotiations.

The observations of a State Department adviser who argued that Washington “badly needs to demonstrate its interest in helping the world realize the benefits of the peaceful uses of atomic energy ... to counterbalance fears that we are set on a course of unloosening atomic and thermonuclear weapons.”

An AEC official’s report on early discussions on safeguards noting that the Soviets “do not like the idea of an Agency but feel they have to become involved in case it is established.”

A State Department memorandum supporting Vienna for the IAEA’s location because Austria was “overwhelmingly anti-Communist and pro-western.”

A memorandum on the Eisenhower administration backing Sterling Cole “to the hilt” as IAEA Director General.

A U.S. diplomat’s “frank assessment” of the U.S. role at the Agency’s first General Conference: “The United States emerged from the General Conference with its major objectives generally attained but it paid a price for this accomplishment” by pushing for so many issues.

Records of discussion of an influential Canadian proposal for a safeguards system: “100% effective control was impossible under any system and that audit and spot inspection would provide as effective control as could reasonably be expected.”

A record of a discussion with Soviet atomic energy official Vasilii Emelianov, who “display[ed] complete indifference to safeguards and complete skepticism [as] to the effectiveness of any system.”

The record of a U.S. official’s shock when he learned that the Canadians had “no safeguards” on the nuclear reactor that they had provided to India: that would “greatly increase our difficulties in getting IAEA safeguards.”

An Indian government memorandum opposing IAEA safeguards as “discriminatory in character and, in consequence, repugnant to the charter of the United Nations.”

Telegrams on the debate over and the “decisive vote” in the Board of Governors approving the Agency’s first safeguards document.

**Atoms for Peace and the Creation of the IAEA**

The IAEA had its origins in the “Atoms for Peace” speech that President Eisenhower delivered before the United Nations General Assembly in December 1953. In the speech, Eisenhower surveyed the nuclear danger, noting the prospect of a “swift and resolute” U.S. response to atomic attack, and the fact that U.S. “retaliation capabilities ... are so great that such an aggressor's land would be laid waste.” Nevertheless, by leaving matters at that would appear to “confirm the hopeless finality of a belief that two atomic colossi are doomed malevolently to eye each other indefinitely across a trembling world.” Instead, Eisenhower proposed that Washington, Moscow, and other atomic powers use their nuclear resources for peaceful economic development, that they “make joint contributions from their stockpiles of normal uranium and fissionable materials to an international atomic energy agency” established under the auspices of United Nations.

Eisenhower wanted to assuage widespread nuclear fears by taking initiatives on peaceful uses of nuclear energy without making any changes in military policy. Massive retaliation
would stay in place, but Eisenhower proposed that fissionable materials “serve the peaceful pursuits of mankind.” He suggested that the new agency “could be made responsible for the impounding, storage and protection of the contributed fissionable and other materials.” It could allocate fissionable materials for development in such fields as agriculture and medicine. Moreover, the new agency could promote electrical power generation “in the power-starved areas of the world.” “Towards that end, the United States would be more than willing – it would be proud” to work with other nations, including the Soviet Union, to promote the peaceful uses of atomic energy. [2]

What Eisenhower left unsaid was that a proposal to donate fissionable materials would put pressure on the Soviet Union. As AEC Chairman Lewis Strauss put it, the U.S.-proposed amount to be donated to the IAEA would be a “figure which we could handle from our stockpile, but which it would be difficult for the Soviets to match.” [3]

“Atoms for Peace” would involve a number of initiatives by the Eisenhower administration, including declassification of nuclear power information and the commercialization of atomic energy. In light of a critical Soviet reaction to the original proposal, Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles were ready to move forward on an IAEA as a mainly U.S. scheme. The Soviets, however, did not want to be left out of an important world development; by the fall of 1954, they were expressing greater interest and eventually participated in the negotiations over the Agency’s statute.

Moscow was far less interested in U.S. thinking about safeguards, which for U.S. government officials would be an important function of IAEA (how else to ensure that transferred fissionable materials were not misused?) The U.S. follow-on planning focused on what State Department official Gerard C. Smith and others saw as a central dilemma: that atomic energy promotion posed “a worldwide security problem” because a by-product of electrical power generation, spent reactor fuel, could be turned into plutonium for nuclear weapons [See Document 4]. With three nations – the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union – in the nuclear weapons club so far, the Eisenhower administration wanted to inhibit a “fourth country” from gaining admission.

For Smith and others, the proposed IAEA could become a “control mechanism” against the “fourth country” problem by preventing the diversion of peacefully defined nuclear resources into military activities. Thus, to ensure that nuclear resources were used appropriately, the U.S. government wanted the new organization staffed with international civil servants empowered to monitor resources provided by the agency or by member states through bilateral agreements. To formulate a safeguards policy that had a chance of winning wide acceptance, Washington began discussions with allies and associates in the “Western” nuclear world: Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and apartheid South Africa, several of which had significant uranium export interests.

By the end of 1958, the five powers leaned toward the Canadian position that “100% effective control was impossible under any system and that audit and spot inspection would provide as effective control as could reasonably be expected.” The Canadians believed that deterrence would be the chief aim of the safeguards system. As one of them explained, their concept was “analogous to having available policemen in sufficient
number to deter the criminal but not to have one policeman assigned to each potential criminal.” U.S. officials accepted this approach because they, along with the Canadians, believed it would be less expensive and more acceptable internationally than a system involving the permanent stationing of inspectors.

During 1959 and 1960 the IAEA safeguards division and secretariat drafted iterations of the safeguards policy document, which were the subject of intense debate at the Agency’s Board of Governors and the General Conference. The archival record indicates that even the lighter safeguards system favored by the U.S. and its allies was nevertheless controversial. India saw them as threatening national sovereignty through a virtual reimposition of Western colonialism. While the Soviet Union had no interest in safeguards whatsoever. During a private discussion with U.S., British, and French officials, one of the chief Soviet representatives, Vasilii Emelianov, displayed “complete indifference to safeguards and complete skepticism [as] to the effectiveness of any system.”

In January 1961, the IAEA’s Board of Governors approved the safeguards document as INFCIRC 26. During the entire process, it was subject to amendment and revision, to the point that one of the early safeguards officials later wrote that the INFCIRC was “one of the most convoluted pieces of verbal expression in history” which “few people could comprehend, except in long discussion with the handful that did.”[4] Whatever the stylistic defects may have been, U.S. government officials were satisfied with its provisions, although they had worried that further debate might delay the policy to death. Opponents of the policy, however, never commanded enough votes to prevent final approval of INFCIRC 26.

While the U.S. and its close allies were trying to develop support for IAEA safeguards, various developments threatened the prospects for a commonly agreed system. U.S. and British officials worried that France or the Soviet Union would sell India an unsafeguarded reactor. In the last months of 1960, the Eisenhower administration discovered Israel's secret Dimona reactor project, which operated with virtually no safeguards. That represented a significant challenge to the IAEA system, as did another development, which the U.S. discovered in 1960 but which stayed secret for many years: a reactor that India had acquired from Canada, and which went critical in the summer of 1960, was virtually unsafeguarded [Document 29]. Both projects were negotiated at a time when safeguards were just entering into the picture and governments had not taken firm positions on what the requirements should be.

READ THE DOCUMENTS

1. The Creation of an International Agency


As background for the October 1956 conference, which approved the Statute for the IAEA, the State Department prepared a detailed account of Eisenhower’s “Atoms for Peace” proposal, the Dulles-Molotov talks during 1954-1955, and the drafting of the IAEA
Statute during 1955-1956 by a Negotiating Group comprised of the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, France, South Africa, Australia, Belgium, and Portugal, leading to the “working level” meeting in February 1956 (see document 6A).

**Document 2:** David Wainhouse to Gerard C. Smith, “NSC Study Concerning Whether and Where to Proceed with the President’s December 8 Proposal in the Light of the Soviet Note of April 27,” 17 May 1954, Top Secret

Source: Record Group 59, Records of the Special Assistant to the Secretary of State for Atomic Energy and Disarmament, 1948-1962 [SAE], box 140, 10.19 Exchange of Notes Between the U.S. & the USSR 1953-1954

Prepared by an international lawyer working in the State Department’s United Nations bureau, this memorandum went to Gerard C. Smith, a former AEC official, who had become adviser to the Secretary of State on atomic energy matters. The Wainhouse memorandum provides a sense of official thinking about the perceived incentives for pursuing “Atoms for Peace.” The recent Soviet reply to Eisenhower’s proposal focused on the arms race and the danger of nuclear war as well as the certainty that the use of nuclear reactors for producing electric power would increase supplies of fissionable materials. [5] Wainhouse did not see the note as a rejection of Eisenhower’s proposal, but as a search for “some indication on our part of the way in the conversations would be carried on.” In the wake of the frightening “Castle Bravo” test in the Pacific and Secretary of State Dulles’ rhetoric about “massive retaliation,” Wainhouse believed that dialogue with Moscow was essential. The United States “badly needs to demonstrate its interest in helping the world realize the benefits of the peaceful uses of atomic energy, in order to counterbalance fears that we are set on a course of unloosening atomic and thermonuclear weapons.”

While Secretary of State Dulles personally believed that the Soviets were not interested in “Atoms for Peace,” in September 1954 they surprised him by indicating that they were amenable to participating in talks on a new international agency. In December 1954, the Soviets took another step by supporting a UN resolution favoring the early creation of an IAEA and an international conference on the peaceful uses of atomic energy.[6]

**Document 3:** Report for Atomic Energy Commission Meeting, 13 September 1955, with excerpt from 14 September 1955 meeting record attached, Confidential

Source: Department of Energy declassification release

During the August 1955 United Nations conference on the peaceful uses of atomic energy, U.S., British, French, and Soviet officials held private talks on the problem of safeguards to prevent the diversion into weapons production of nuclear fuel from IAEA-approved reactors. Among the chiefs of delegation were leading physicists Isidor Rabi (U.S.), John Cockcroft (UK), and Dimitri Skobel’tsyn (USSR).[7]

According to a report by senior AEC official Spofford English on the private talks, the U.S. and British delegates brought ideas about the responsibilities of a new international agency and a suggestion for preventing diversions by planting radioactive tracers such as U-232 and cobalt-60 in sensitive materials so their movement could be tracked. English reported that the Soviet delegates treated the proposals with “nit-picking criticism,” but had no suggestions of their own. The Soviets “do not like the idea of an Agency but feel they have to become involved in case it is established.” The perception that Moscow did
not want to be left out of a potentially important international development was, in fact, an important element in the Soviet leadership’s thinking.[8]


Source: SAE, box 161, 10. A2 Meeting of Six Governments Geneva 1955 General Correspondence

Gerard C. Smith had attended the discussions in Geneva, keenly recognized the risk of diversion. Believing that “Atoms for Peace” posed “a worldwide security problem that has not yet been squarely faced,” Smith saw the proposed IAEA as a “control mechanism” to prevent diversion and favored internal U.S. government studies on the safeguards that would need to be implemented before Washington began making nuclear reactor technology available overseas. While he believed that Moscow and Washington had a “clear community of interest” in preventing the dispersal of nuclear weapons capabilities, Moscow’s “reluctant interest” in an IAEA meant that the studies should take into account the possibility of Soviet nonparticipation.

In light of ongoing thinking about nuclear disarmament, Smith argued that “international control of atomic energy” was an “essential part of a truly safeguarded disarmament program.” That meant that an “Atoms-for-Peace program should avoid moves which may make it more difficult to attain this ultimate goal.” To achieve that, Smith did not rule out “military means to remedy [a] dangerous situation,” presumably to quash the activities of an uncooperative state.

**Document 5:** Memorandum of Conversation, “International Atomic Energy Agency,” 3 February 1956, Secret


With a conference to finalize the IAEA statute scheduled for later in February 1956, the Eisenhower administration had to finalize its basic position on the Agency’s authority. Proposals to donate to the Agency quantities for HEU to support overseas atomic energy development were part of the discussion, but the central theme was whether the Agency “should operate with limited controls” to prevent diversions or whether Washington should also seek to “prevent fourth countries from producing nuclear weapons.” Gerard C. Smith favored broader controls and doubted that the limited approach favored by the AEC would be effective, but others at the meeting questioned whether other countries, such as France, would join the new Agency if they had to sign a “no weapons” pledge. Similarly, Dulles believed that “it would be difficult for nations to forego their right to make nuclear weapons while the U.S., the USSR, and the U.K. continued to make them.” Favoring a more limited mandate for the Agency, Dulles nevertheless believed it was worthwhile to attempt to negotiate a parallel “stand-still” agreement against further nuclear proliferation.

Documents 6A-B: The IAEA Statute


James J. Wadsworth, Deputy Chief of the U.S. Mission to the United Nations, led the U.S. delegation to the 12-nation conference that finalized the IAEA statute. According to Wadsworth, the statute incorporated “the substance of the more important United States proposals,” such as provisions for safeguards, but the U.S. team accommodated the thinking of other participants on matters such as the principles governing membership in the Board of Governors. While the U.S. and its associates estimated a state’s fitness for Board membership by its nuclear development, India pushed strongly for geographical balance. Wadsworth found that the compromise, based on Indian suggestions, was in the U.S. interest: “the orientation of the majority of this Board for the foreseeable future can be considered to be pro-Western for all important political and technical decisions.”

Wadsworth reported that an “outstanding aspect of these negotiations was the spirit of cooperation” and that “led to the final unanimity” on the statute. This was true of the Chair of the Soviet delegation, Ambassador Gregory Zarubin who “exhibited a willingness to be cooperative and to seek agreement.” For example, while the Soviets had proposed that the Agency “operate under the control and supervision of the [UN] General Assembly and the Security Council,” they drew back from that and accepted a looser relationship with the United Nations. Moreover, the Soviets accepted modification of their proposal that the “Agency's activities be carried out with due regard for the sovereign rights of states,” because that would have unduly restricted the Agency’s ability to conduct inspections.

Included in Article XX are definitions of “source material” (e.g., natural uranium), “special fissionable materials” (e.g., plutonium and uranium-235), and enriched uranium that were highly important for the construction of safeguards policy, but whose wording had been controversial because countries such as India that favored minimal controls preferred more elastic language.[9]

Document 7: [Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs C. Burke] Elbrick to [Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Robert] Murphy, “Austrian Interest in Selection of Vienna as Permanent Site for IAEA,” 24 May 1956, Confidential [Referenced telegrams not attached]

Source: RG 59, Central Decimal Files, 1955-1959, 398.1901-IAEA/5-2456

With the Statute nearly approved, selecting the physical location for the new agency became highly salient. The major choices were between Geneva, where UN organizations
were already located, and Vienna. Austria already had support from other governments and, according to Elbrick, “Significant political factors ... favor active U.S. support for Vienna and ... make it extremely difficult to oppose Vienna (probably unsuccessfully) in the face of the strong campaign which is being waged in its behalf.” Among the considerations in Austria’s favor was that, its neutral alignment notwithstanding, it was “overwhelmingly anti-Communist and pro-western.” Moreover, unlike Switzerland, Austria was a UN member and the “The Austrian Government is so keen to have the IAEA located in Vienna that it is prepared to spare no effort to make available all facilities desired.” It was not until February 1957, however, that the Agency’s Preparatory Commission, chose Vienna as the site for the headquarters.

**Document 8:** Department of State telegram 180 to U.S. Mission to the United Nations, 18 October 1956, Confidential
Source: RG 59, Central Decimal Files, 1955-1959, 398.1901/10-1856

In the midst of the 82-nation conference in New York City that gave final approval to the **IAEA statute**, Secretary of State Dulles personally approved and signed a message laying down the law on the new organization’s governance. According to Dulles, the “role of [the] U.S. in conceiving and developing [the] Agency and making major material contributions clearly entitles [the] U.S. to role of leadership during Agency’s early years.” Therefore, the IAEA’s top officials, Director General and Secretary General, should be Americans. The first Director General was Sterling Cole, a former U.S. Congressman. The IAEA never had a Secretary General, but the Deputy Director General for Administration (Management) has been an American since the early 1960s.


Observations on the Conference

U.S. officials believed that the Soviets played a more negative role at the New York conference, especially by supporting safeguards language that removed all mention of inspections.[10] While the Soviets accepted the Statute and inspections, according to Smith, Moscow and Washington “were in effect cooperating to advance opposing political interests.” Smith interpreted the Soviet propaganda approach as an attempt to weaken the new Agency because the Soviets were more interested in creating a “record of championship for underdeveloped countries and for the integrity of the sovereign rights of all countries.” In that context, safeguards were the subject of “fairly widespread attack,” although after a “slight modification,” the article was adopted. Smith found the Statute “comprehensive and acceptable,” but he believed that the “real business of atomic energy in international affairs will be done on a bilateral basis.” He was doubtful that an organization with an “unwieldy” 23-member governing board could “compete in attractiveness with bilateral arrangements with the United States or the United Kingdom.”

**Document 10:** Under Secretary of State Christian Herter, “Memorandum of Conference with Admiral Strauss,” 2 August 1957, with memoranda by Executive Secretary Fisher Howe attached, Confidential
Source: RG 59, Central Decimal Files, 1955-1959, 398.1901-IAEA/8-257
At the IAEA’s forthcoming General Conference, the membership would fill key posts such as the Agency’s Director General. Consistent with U.S. policy that the Director General should be an American, since the fall of 1956 Eisenhower and his advisers had Congressman Sterling Cole (R-NY) in mind. Recruited for the job by AEC Chairman Lewis Strauss, and as a member of the Joint Committee of Atomic Energy and the Armed Services Committee, Cole had developed expertise on nuclear energy and nuclear weapons issues and the administration backed him “to the hilt.”[11] No “deal” with the Soviets would be made, but Washington would support Soviet staffing at the Agency once there was “evidence of the amount of cooperation and contribution the USSR is going to make.”

**Document 11:** Harold C. Vedeler, U.S. Embassy, Austria, to Francis Wilcox, Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs, 19 November 1957, with Wilcox’s response attached, 9 December 1957, Confidential

Source: RG 59, Central Decimal Files, 1955-1959, 398.1901-IAEA/11-1957

U.S. diplomat Harold Vedeler participated in the Agency’s first General Conference (October 1-23, 1957) and wrote a “frank assessment” of the role played by the U.S., the Soviet Union, and other delegations. “The United States emerged from the General Conference with its major objectives generally attained but it paid a price for this accomplishment.” For some delegations, Washington had too long a list of objectives, such as the Director General post, a $40,000 total emolument for the Director General, and an organizational chart, among other desiderata. Some of the delegations had gone along with this because they wanted to preserve “good relations” with Washington, but they became disgruntled and the U.S. lost “some standing” when they realized that Sterling Cole would not begin serving as Director General until December and was leaving before the Conference concluded.

Vedeler further reported that the Soviet delegates were “moderate in their political efforts and never pressed any political interest to a bitter fight.” They “acquiesced” in Cole’s selection and “tried to pick up credit with other Delegations by appearing reasonable and constructive in discussions and cloaking longer-range Soviet interests.” Those interests, Vedeler suggested, were a “position of major influence and leadership in the Agency’s activities.” By contrast, he was critical of the roles played by the British and French delegations because they caused “unnecessary difficulties” in relations with other countries, among other problems. By contrast, “Canada proved our best friend and most effective proponent in our behalf at the Conference.”


Source: RG 59, Central Decimal Files, 1955-1959, 398.1901-IAEA/4-1858

Some months later, Robert M. McKinney, the chief of the U.S. delegation turned in an official report on the General Conference. Vedeler’s letter was more candid, but the final report gave more comprehensive coverage. On the Soviet role, they were “in general restrained in their political efforts and ... presented the appearance of a reasonable delegation willing to consider a compromise on certain points at issue.” On Cole’s
election as Director General, the Soviet “decision not to oppose [it] was generally greeted as a statesmanlike act.”

2. IAEA Safeguards Policy and its Origins

**Document 13**: U.S. Resident Delegation [United Nations Economic and Social Council]

Geneva, Switzerland Despatch ECOSOC 8, “Australian Comments IAEA,” 4 August 1958, Confidential

Source: RG 59, Central Decimal Files, 1955-1959, 398.1901/8-458

A confidential Australian report, provided to U.S. diplomats by officials from another country, reviewed the implications for IAEA safeguards of the recent U.S. negotiations with the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM). Under the arrangements, EURATOM would establish and “police” its own safeguards with no role for the IAEA. In light of strong U.S. interest in promoting European integration and the peaceful uses of atomic energy and the U.S. role in providing light water reactors to EURATOM members, the Australians correctly assumed that it was “unlikely” that the U.S.-EURATOM negotiations would break down. Yet if agreement was reached “it will mean that international arrangements to assist atomic energy development and guard against its diversion of nuclear materials … for a most important part of world …will be completely outside control of [the] Agency.”

The impact of EURATOM self-inspection could be “serious” and lead to confining the Agency to the “minor task of assisting underdeveloped 'countries which will not be able to make significant use of atomic energy for considerable time.” Moreover, countries such as India could conclude that Agency safeguards would apply only to “have-not” countries while the United States could be exposed to a “Soviet charge of insincerity [for] its sponsorship of Agency safeguards.” This problem had already caused angst in the U.S. delegation to the IAEA, the British, and the Agency’s leadership to the point where Director General Cole wrote a plea to President Eisenhower. EURATOM, however, had refused to drop self-inspection and the U.S. commitment to European integration was so fundamental that it was unwilling to override European sensitivities.[12]


As part of an on-going U.K.-U.S.-Canadian discussion of safeguards systems for the IAEA, the Canadians circulated a paper that became highly influential. They argued that an elaborate inspection system involving full-time resident inspectors would be too “onerous” and incompatible with the “amour propre and sovereignty” of many governments that would receive nuclear assistance. What would be more acceptable, however, would be “a regular periodic audit of nuclear materials supplied to a recipient country supplemented by spot checks by travelling inspectors” to confirm audit reports. “Such a system could probably not with certainty detect diversion of below 5% - 10%” [margin of error].
The Canadians recognized the risk that “recipient countries might take advantage of the margin of uncertainty ... to divert quantities of fissile material,” but they believed that audit and spot inspections would be enough to “reinforce the moral and legal obligations undertaken by recipient countries in bilateral agreements, by making it unlikely that detection could be evaded in the long run.” They also believed that because of the “difficulty of hiding a clandestine atomic programme and of the political opprobrium which the discovery [of] an attempted diversion would entail it seems more likely that a country determined on a weapons programme, but without its own uncontrolled means of carrying one out, would rely on seizure rather than on diversion.”


Representatives of the U.S., the U.K., South Africa, Australia, and Canada, the five Western suppliers of nuclear technology and materials, met in Ottawa (hence the moniker “Ottawa Group”) to discuss the requirements of an effective IAEA safeguards system. One of the U.S. delegates, J. Robert Schaetzel, emphasized the importance of not wasting a “precious moment” to develop a safeguards system, which he saw “as part of the effort to bring modern implements of war under some kind of control.”

Because of divisions within the AEC over the degree of inspection required, the United States had not prepared a position paper. During the discussion, the Canadians explained the rationale of their audit/spot inspection proposal: their proposal was “analogous to having available policemen in sufficient number to deter the criminal but not to have one policeman assigned to each potential criminal.”

The delegations wanted to assist Roger Marshall Smith, the chief of the IAEA safeguards branch, but they agreed that it had to be done in “such a way that neither he nor his staff were compromised.” One tactic that was discussed was for London and Washington “to favor a rather rigorous system while the other three countries advocate a system which would in fact be acceptable to all five countries.” That would enable the U.S. and the U.K. to “appear to compromise and thus increase the chances of gaining general acceptance for a reasonable system.”


In light of the discussions in Ottawa, pressure from allies who wanted to know where Washington stood, and the need for the IAEA to make progress on safeguards, the State Department concluded that the ideas developed in the Canadian paper, “placing primary responsibility upon the receiving country subject to audit and spot checks” would be consistent with NSC policy and the Atomic Energy Act, “adequately protect U.S. security and other interests ... and have the greatest support among the supplying nations.” Moreover, the Canadian approach would have “minimum” economic costs and minimize
the “adverse political aspects inhering in a more far-reaching system involving ... the stationing at various facilities of permanent resident inspectors.”


Continuing their discussions from November, the Ottawa Group reached general agreement on “uniform standards” for safeguards to be applied when nuclear exporters sold designated “trigger items” (uranium, fissile material, reactors, or isotope enrichment plants.) A basic principle was that “safeguards should be presented not as an imposition by the supplier but as a joint duty of supplier and recipient flowing from the fundamental responsibility of Governments to ensure that fissile materials are not misused.” The five powers did not envision a “foolproof system,” but one that would enable the world “to buy time” before East and West reached agreement to control the production of fissile materials.

The group agreed to a draft safeguards agreement that included provisions for an IAEA right to “examine the design of equipment (including nuclear reactors)”, to “require the maintenance and production of adequate records to assist in ensuring accountability for identified material,” and “to send representatives [who] shall have access at all times to all places, equipment and facilities where identified material is used, stored or located... to determine whether such identified material is being used for peaceful purposes only.”

**Document 18:** United States Embassy Vienna 988 to State Department, “IAEA Safeguards,” 11 March 1959, Confidential

Days after the Ottawa Group had met in London, Harold Vedeler and a Canadian official met with Roger Marshall Smith, the chief of the IAEA safeguards division. A former Canadian government official, Smith had been involved in the formulation of Canadian safeguards policy and probably leaned towards the idea of audits and spot inspections. After cautioning Smith not to discuss with others the fact of the Group’s existence, Vedeler and the Canadian briefed him on a few points in the report, such as the “evolutionary approach” to safeguards, the need for short reports (“minima”) on reactor operations, and principles for frequency of inspections. Smith said he had drafted a 125-page report on safeguard regulations, but Vedeler and the Canadian advised him to develop a “summary of the principles of safeguard controls” so that the Board of Governors did not get bogged down in discussing a lengthy study.


Apparently, Smith made cuts in the study that he mentioned to Vedeler, but the resulting document, GOV/334, exceeded 50 pages, with sections on health and safety and the “general privileges of Agency inspectors” that would later be treated separately. The section on safeguard regulations embodied the audit/spot inspections approach that the Canadians had developed and which Washington supported along with other members of the Ottawa Group. Safeguards would be applied to significant quantities of materials, production of fissionable materials, and nuclear facilities, including nuclear reactors. The tables (PDF pages 43-44) on reactors indicated that 100 megawatts would be the upper limit for the application of safeguards, although the Agency would eliminate that ceiling in 1963.

Director General Cole requested the Board of Governors to approve Section III of Annex I, the “general principles for determining the relevancy of Agency safeguards,” which required safeguards for “significant quantities” of source material (natural uranium and thorium), for the utilization and production of special fissionable materials, and for Agency-aided nuclear facilities (e.g., reactors, isotope separation plans, and reprocessing plants). According to Cole, once the Board had agreed to principles, it could make decisions on safeguard regulations

Documents 20A-C: Reviewing the First Safeguards Document

Document 20A: U.S. Embassy Vienna telegram 3024 to State Department, 26 June 1959, Official Use Only

Document 20B: U.S. Embassy Vienna telegram 3046 to State Department, 27 June 1959, Confidential

The Agency’s Board of Governors discussed the “principles” of Smith’s safeguard report at series of meetings in June 1959. According to the U.S. mission’s report, the Indian representative rejected wholesale the notion of safeguards, while the Soviet’s representative “vitiolic” speech accused the United States of “originating safeguards system to serve its own political ends.” By contrast, Japan, the Netherlands, Pakistan, and Australia spoke in favor of safeguards. The Board agreed that the report would be revised for consideration at the September meeting. While the U.S. mission found that “no point of importance” to the U.S. was rejected, it worried that delay could “prejudice [the] ultimate success [of the] safeguards objective.”


Source: SAE, box 303, 12H Peaceful Uses Subject File 18 Safeguards June-August 1959 Part 2 of 2

While IAEA experts worked on the safeguards document, U.S. and British officials discussed the problem of the French and Soviet positions, among other concerns. The Western nuclear suppliers were taking a “common front” in applying safeguards to their
exports and the British believed that France would “in practice substantially follow the concept,” but Philip Farley wondered whether the French wanted the safeguards system to “collapse.”

The Soviet attitude was more worrisome because Moscow attacked the safeguards concept as an “infringement” on sovereignty. Moreover, with India likely to be “shopping around” for a nuclear reactor in a year if London or Washington imposed conditions that the Indians saw as “onerous,” they would “inevitably turn to the USSR.” To try to influence Soviet thinking, the British suggested that Eisenhower bring the safeguards problem up when he met with Khrushchev in September or that U.S. officials raise the matter with senior Soviets during the next IAEA General Conference.

**Document 22:** British Embassy, “Safeguards,” 14 December 1959, enclosing “Record of Discussion on October 29” and “Record of Discussion on November 1” Confidential Source: SAE, box 304, 12H Peaceful Uses Subject File 18 Safeguards Sept-Dec 1959

Worried that India’s prospective reactor purchase might force the Western powers to compromise their support for safeguards on nuclear exports, leading U.S. and British physicists Isidor Rabi and John Cockroft met with their Soviet counterpart, Chairman of the Council of Ministers’ State Committee on the Utilization of Atomic Energy Vasilii Emelianov to probe his thinking. The latter declared that the Soviet Union “accepted the principle of control to prevent plutonium produced from materials supplied by the Agency being used for military purposes.” Not supporting the Western position, Emelianov favored a “case by case” approach; for example, an audit and accountability could be required for a laboratory that received 100 grams of plutonium from an agency. Safeguards for reactors, however, would not be necessary unless a country had a “plutonium separation plant.” For the latter, controls would be necessary to measure inputs and outputs.

Emelianov claimed that he was speaking only personally, but the British wanted to find out what Soviet thinking “really is.” If the they did not apply controls to their nuclear exports, the British would not be able to continue their present safeguards policy.

Documents 23A-B: Reaching Agreement on the Safeguards Document

**Document 23A:** Paul F. Foster, U.S. Representative to the IAEA, to John Hall, Assistant General Manager for International Activities, AEC, 19 February 1960, enclosing report “IAEA Working Group of Expert Representatives on Safeguards,” 24 February 1960, Confidential


In September the Board had approved a safeguard “principles” paper, but a procedures paper prepared by the Secretariat underwent heavy criticism. At the January 1960 Board
meeting India and the Soviet Union attacked the “principles” paper, which led the Board to authorize a working group chaired by Norwegian physicist Gunnar Randers to redraft both documents. That Emelianov had nominated Randers gave the Norwegian a strong position to follow an approach that took safeguards seriously.[13]

Paul Foster’s letter and the U.S. mission’s report on the Randers group indicated clear approval of Randers’ role in redrafting the document that became GOV/510. The working group accomplished its task in spite of the Soviet attitude which, according to Foster, implacably held that “safeguards are essentially unworkable and unnecessary and in any event, they should be applied only on a case-by-case basis.” The report reviewed the performance of other working group members, e.g. Brazil and India, who leaned toward the Soviet approach, while France supported the U.S. “uniformly.”

The Randers working group provisionally settled some essential matters, by setting floors for safeguards on nuclear materials, e.g. over two metric tonnes of uranium or 4 metric tonnes of depleted uranium. However, only “nominal safeguards” (reports, no routine inspection) would be required for quantities between 4 and 10 metric tonnes, with regular safeguards applied to larger quantities. Those provisions would be changed later in the year owing to South African pressure (See document 35). Safeguards would also be required for fissile material produced in reactors with Agency assistance. The working group could not agree on a number for the frequency of inspections, but agreed that it could be “obtained on the basis of technical considerations.”

Source: SAE, box 304, 12H Peaceful Uses Subject File 18 Safeguards January-March 1960, Part 1 of 3

An interest in grasping Soviet thinking about safeguards and apprehension that Moscow would sell a large unsafeguarded reactor to India encouraged high level U.S., British, and French atomic energy experts to hold an extended discussion with top Soviet atomic energy official Vasilii Emelianov. Hall, who would soon become the Agency’s Deputy Director General for Management, reported that “since my first dealing with Soviet officials .... I have never witnessed a more open and frank discussion with a high member of the Soviet regime on this subject.” When asked about India, Emelianov admitted that Moscow did not intend to “include safeguards in any bilateral agreement and it would be difficult politically for the Soviets to ask India to accept safeguards.” He further suggested that selling reactors was not a high priority because of the “press of internal commitments.” On IAEA safeguards generally, Emelianov “eventually admitted that the only reason the Soviets supported safeguards was because they were a member of the Agency.” He claimed that Moscow had never studied the issue or given “any formal consideration of safeguards.” Throughout the discussion, he “continued to display complete indifference to safeguards and complete skepticism to the effectiveness of any system.” A significant part of the problem, he acknowledged, were the “difficulties he had within his country to maintain and develop relationships with the West in the field of atomic energy.”
Document 25: U.S. Embassy Telegram 2081 to State Department, 14 March 1960, Secret
Source: RG 59, Central Decimal Files, 1960-1963, 398.1901-IAEA/3-1460
Some British officials more and more concerned whether “safeguards have a future” in
light of concerns about an unsafeguarded Indian-Soviet reactor deal, among other
portentous developments. The British attitude worried officials at the U.S. mission to the
IAEA who believed that without “strong, unwaivering [sic] support” from the British
Commonwealth countries the safeguards proposal would fail at the Board of Governors
meeting in April. The mission supported “all-out effort” on behalf of an amended
GOV/510 but believed that the “changes [were] exceedingly remote for final BG
approval.” The Soviet attitude toward safeguards, the possible Indian-Soviet deal, and
West German development of gas centrifuge technology, among other developments
influenced the Mission’s pessimism. Nevertheless, to move GOV/510 through the Board
of Governors, the Mission recommended reaching agreement with the Australians,
British, Canadians, and South Africans on restricting amendments to the minimum and to
give up efforts to reach “compromise amendments” acceptable to Moscow or New Delhi.
Moreover, the State Department should exert “diplomatic pressure” on behalf of a
safeguards agreement.

Document 26: State Department circular telegram 1195 to U.S. Embassy Venezuela et al.,
21 March 1960, Confidential
Source: RG 59, Central Decimal Files, 1960-1963, 398.1901-IAEA/3-2160
Agreeing with the U.S. mission that a number of developments were threatening
prospects for a safeguards system, the State Department began to follow through on the
recommend “diplomatic pressure” by sending talking points to embassies for use in talks
with government officials in key countries. Arguing that GOV/510 was “generally
acceptable,” the Department believed that action by the Board of Governors to adopt it
was of “great importance” and that “further protracted debate in Board beyond next
session unlikely produce better document.”

Document 27A-C: Approval of GOV/510
Document 27A: State Department telegram 403 to U.S. Embassy, Australia, “IAEA,” 4
April 1960, Confidential
Only
Document 27C: Agency Safeguards, Note by the Director General GC(IV)/l08, Annex,
“Agency Safeguards,” 14 April 1960, unclassified
Sources: A-B: RG 59, Central Decimal Files, 1960-1963, 398.1901-IAEA; C: International
Atomic Energy Agency.
Worried that Australia might abstain from the Board of Governors safeguards vote (a
1959 Cabinet decision constrained the representatives in Vienna), the State Department
sent background information to the embassy in Canberra reporting that a “majority”
supported approval, a “favorable situation created in part by strong U.S. demarches [to]
governments members of Board other than Soviet Bloc.” As it turned out, Australia did
not abstain and GOV/510 won the “provisional approval” of 16 members, with 5
governments (Soviet Union, Poland, Czechoslovakia, India, and Ceylon) withholding their
votes. The Board would later give its final approval of the document in light of comments from the IAEA’s General Conference in the fall of 1960.

**Document 28**: Philip J. Farley to Secretary of State “Safeguards on Large Nuclear Reactors,” 8 April 1960, Confidential
Source: SAE, box 304, 12H Peaceful Uses Subject File 18 Safeguards April–August 1960, Part 1 of 3

India was still shopping for an unsafeguarded large nuclear reactor and was holding discussions with the French. In light of the recent action by the IAEA’s Board of Governors to provisionally approve the annexes of the safeguards policy document, “if France were to go ahead and offer a large reactor and fuel to the Indians without safeguards it would have the effect of rendering Agency safeguards meaningless.” The French had supported U.S. safeguards policy at the IAEA, but “in spite of strenuous efforts to persuade them to adopt bilateral safeguards consistent with those of the Agency they have refused.” Farley urged Secretary of State Herter to meet with his French counterpart, Maurice Couve de Murville, to “emphasize the importance we attach to the application of bilateral safeguards consistent with those of the Agency.

**Document 29**: Memorandum of Conversation, “Safeguards,” 26 April 1960, Secret
Source: SAE, box 304, 12H Peaceful Uses Subject File 18 Safeguards April–August 1960, Part 1 of 3

Another threat to the IAEA safeguards system came to light when Canadian diplomat Harry Williamson disclosed the weak controls over the CIRUS (Canadian-Indian Reactor Uranium System) reactor provided to India in the mid-1950s. In response to questions from State Department official Robert Winfree, Williamson said that the safeguards were essentially a handshake deal: Canada and India agreed that the reactor would be used for peaceful purposes only and the Indian Atomic Energy Commission would “exercise self-inspection.” Moreover, “Only plutonium produced from the Canadian fuel elements will be audited,” which was unworkable because both “Indian and Canadian fuel elements … [are] used in the reactor and there is no way of telling what plutonium comes from what elements.”

Winfree told Williamson that this meant that Canada had “no safeguards” and that “would greatly increase our difficulties in getting IAEA safeguards.” Moreover, if “it became known that the Canadians had negotiated such a weak agreement with India they would be in a poor position to fight strongly for comprehensive IAEA safeguards.” In Canada’s defense, Williams later explained that safeguards were not an issue when the agreement was negotiated in 1955, that India was a difficult negotiating partner, and that to “keep Canadian advisers on the job and to have Canadian fuel elements in the reactor – at least at start up – the Canadians felt that they had to reach agreement with the Indians.”[14]

The lack of safeguards was of continuing concern to Washington, but the arrangement stayed secret until May 1974, when Indian conducted its first nuclear test, using plutonium derived from the CIRUS reactor and unsafeguarded heavy water provided by the U.S. during the 1950s.
**Document 30:** U.S. Embassy New Delhi Despatch 1043 to Department of State, “GOI Position re IAEA Safeguards,” 2 May 1960, Confidential
The Government of India bluntly rejected the U.S. request for Indian support of an IAEA safeguards system. While India professed support for measures to prevent the diversion of fissile materials for military purposes, it was totally opposed to the proposed safeguards system. Because the burden of safeguards would fall upon developing nations, they were seen as “[d]iscriminatory in character and, in consequence, repugnant to the charter of the United Nations.” Moreover, safeguards on reactors were “unnecessary and redundant” because of the widespread availability of nuclear technology. While India would support “world-wide controls applicable to all nations without distinction,” it could not support the IAEA system.

**Document 31:** Department of State Instruction CA-10127 to Various Embassies, “Background on IAEA Safeguards Document to Be Considered at Fourth IAEA General Conference, September 1960,” 3 June 1960, Official Use Only
To win the broadest support possible for the new IAEA safeguards policy, the State Department sent embassies detailed information on the production of General GC(IV)/I08 as background for use in discussions with their host government prior to the General Conference meeting in the fall. Seeking “definite action” by the General Conference, the Department wanted to avoid a reprise of the Board of Governors meetings when each paragraph of the document was subject to “substantive debate.”

**Document 32:** Memorandum of Conversation, “Atomic Energy Safeguards; Problems Raised by Activities of India,” 12 July 1960, Confidential, with routing slip attached Source: SAE, box 305, 12H Peaceful Uses Files File 18.5 Safeguards April-August 1960
During a meeting at the State Department, British minister Viscount Samuel Hood expounded on British concerns over the continuing Indian effort to purchase a large, unsafeguarded reactor and Prime Minister Macmillan’s unsuccessful effort to persuade Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to accept safeguards. Efforts to influence the French position on bilateral agreements had failed; they refused to “commit themselves.” The British worried that a Soviet-Indian reactor deal would give Moscow so much influence in India that it raised the question of whether holding the position on safeguards was “not outweighed by the political and economic advantages of denying the Soviets an opportunity further to penetrate the Indian economy.” In reply, Farley argued that if a “clear consensus” on safeguards developed at the IAEA General Conference, it “would undoubtedly exert pressure on the Indians.” London and Washington “should not sacrifice safeguards until we are absolutely sure that no other course of action is open.”
**Document 33**: Department of State Instructions CA-640, “IAEA Safeguards Document to be Considered at IAEA Fourth General Conference, September 1960,” 21 July 1960, Confidential

Source: SAE, box 305, 12H Peaceful Uses File 18.5 Safeguards April-August 1960

Determined to move the safeguards plan through the IAEA, the U.S. government did not believe that action by the General Conference was necessary because the “Board of Governors is the competent body to elaborate and put into effect the Agency safeguards system as required by the Statute.” Washington, however, went along with the “majority view” that the General Conference had to play a role but it did so by supporting a “procedural resolution which takes note of” GC(IV)/108 and left the matter to the Board of Governors for further action. The U.S. did not want an approval resolution because that “would open the door for further delaying tactics” by the opponents. To win support for the resolution, Washington worked closely with London and Ottawa in developing a “tactical plan” aimed at securing the “maximum number of co-sponsors for the draft resolution” with a “broad geographical distribution...including some of the underdeveloped countries.”


Source: RG 59, Central Decimal Files, 1960-1963, 398.1901-IAEA/1-561

When the General Conference met, the United States had won the support of fourteen other governments, including Mexico, Japan, Brazil, New Zealand, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands, for a resolution taking “note of the principles and procedures provisionally approved by the Board” in GC (IV)/108 and inviting the Board to take into account views expressed at the Conference. To mitigate charges of discrimination, McCone offered to subject four U.S. reactors to Agency safeguards.

Opposing the fifteen-nation resolution was an “alternative approach” to safeguards prepared by India and introduced jointly with Afghanistan, Burma, Ceylon, and Indonesia. The resolution included “a simple undertaking by recipient Member States that source materials or special fissionable materials, or fissionable materials produced therefrom, received through or from the Agency would be used solely for peaceful purposes.” Only “special fissionable materials of weapons strength” would require inspections.

The United States prevented the Indian resolution from being brought to a vote and the fifteen-nation resolution, with an Austrian-Swedish-Swiss amendment, prevailed in plenary session, 43 to 19. Voting against the U.S.-supported resolution was the Soviet bloc, Afghanistan, Burma, Ceylon, Cuba, India, and Indonesia among others.


The British called this meeting of the Ottawa Group, joined by Belgian observers, so that it could take an “agreed Western line” during the forthcoming Board of Governors discussions of safeguards. The U.S. delegates affirmed “that no retreat should be made on the principles of safeguards,” but were willing to be “flexible” on details, and hoped that “all Western governments could present a united front.” There were divisions, however, with the South Africans, backed by the British, seeking to eliminate the nominal safeguards on source material that the Randers working group had developed. For the South Africans minimal safeguards were a hindrance to the uranium export trade. The United States was reluctant to change the language, but South African support for safeguards was important, so compromise was not far off.[15]


Following its “no retreat” position on safeguards policy, the State Department stated its opposition to “attempts by opponents of safeguards [to] change basic principles contained in [the] document,” and to “oppose amendments,” except for the South African proposal on nominal safeguards. Washington would also oppose “all attempts to defer final approval .... to future board meetings or future general conferences.”

After more debate, on 31 January 1961 the Board of Governor finalized the IAEA safeguards document with a “decisive vote” of 17 to 6. India and the Soviet bloc countries made “strong statements” that the policy was “discriminatory” while Moscow and its allies introduced a number of amendments that were voted down. India reintroduced its resolution from the General Conference and that was defeated. By approving INFCIRC/26, the Board of Governors put in place the system that would be expanded and strengthened during the years that followed.

As a working safeguards system would need guarantees that inspectors could perform their assignments overseas, the Board of Governors had approved a document on “The Agency’s Inspectors” providing ground rules for inspection visits and inspector’s “rights of access and inspection.” While states with facilities slated for inspection would receive due notice and their representatives could accompany the inspectors while they worked, the inspectors would have access “to all materials, equipment and facilities to which Agency safeguards against diversion are applied.” Moreover, they would be able to
review reports and records and verify through physical inspection, measurement, and sampling the “amounts of material to which Agency safeguards are applied.” Through the insistence of South Africa (which wanted to avoid the possibility of visits by African inspectors), the provisions allowed governments to exclude individual inspectors “without giving any reasons.”

Categories:
**Nuclear Proliferation and Accidents**

Regions:
**United States and Canada**

Project:
**Nuclear Vault**
Sterling Cole, the IAEA’s first director-general (1957-1961). A former Republican member of Congress from New York, Cole had been Chairman of the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy and a member of the Armed Services Committee. (Source: U.S. National Archives, RG 59, Decimal Files, 1955-1959, box 1501)

Karl Gruber (center), Austrian Ambassador to the U.S. and President of the IAEA’s first General Conference, with the leaders of the Soviet and U.S. delegations: V. S. Emelianov (left), Corresponding Member of the Academy of Sciences and Chief of the Central Atomic Energy Utilization Board of the Council of Ministers, and Lewis L. Strauss (right), Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission. (Source: U.S. National Archives, RG 59, Decimal Files, 1955-1959, box 1501)
According to the original caption, “The Viennese public is enjoying a sidewalk view of the scientists and diplomats from 55 nations who are attending the first General Conference of the new International Atomic Energy Agency now meeting at the Konzerthaus, one of Vienna’s most famous concert halls.” (Source: U.S. National Archives, RG 59, Decimal Files, 1955-1959, box 1501)

NOTES


[7]. For details on the UN conference, see Krige, “Atoms for Peace,” 174-180.

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