



NUCLEAR WATCHDOG WINS NOBEL PEACE PRIZE

October 10, 2005

Mohamed ElBaradei and his team of nuclear inspectors, who angered the Bush administration by disputing its claims that Saddam Hussein's regime had an active nuclear weapons program, won the 2005 Nobel Peace Prize Friday.

ElBaradei heads the United Nations' International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

In a statement released along with the announcement of the award, the Nobel committee said, "At a time when disarmament efforts appear deadlocked, when there is a danger that nuclear arms will spread to both states and to terrorist groups ... IAEA's work is of incalculable importance."

Created as an independent nuclear organization in 1957, the IAEA works to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and encourage peaceful use of nuclear energy.

As the agency's director, the Egyptian-born ElBaradei has led the struggle with nations, including North Korea and Iran, on ending their pursuit of nuclear weaponry or verifying their nuclear programs are for civilian uses only.

Nuclear Nonproliferation

The IAEA is composed of representatives of 137 countries, all of whom have signed the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Nearly 200 countries have signed the treaty since 1970.

The NPT states that only the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, the United States, England, France, China and Russia, are allowed to have nuclear warheads.

These countries pledged in 2000 to eventually eliminate all their atomic weapons.

When countries sign the NPT, they promise to destroy any current nuclear weapons program and develop no more weapons. South Africa signed the NPT and dissolved its nuclear program in 1991.

After the fall of the U.S.S.R. in 1991, former Soviet republics such as Ukraine and Kazakhstan either destroyed their nuclear arsenal or transferred the warheads to Russia.

Israel, India and Pakistan have declined to sign the treaty.

North Korea and Iran

North Korea signed the NPT, but pulled out in December 2002 after IAEA inspectors found evidence of a nuclear program.

At the time, ElBaradei called North Korea a "serious and immediate challenge to the nuclear nonproliferation regime." Last month, the country agreed to talk with five other nations about reducing their atomic arsenal.

The IAEA is still investigating reports of a nuclear weapons program in Iran, which has long claimed that its nuclear operations were for energy production only.

The United States alleges that the Middle Eastern country is developing atomic warheads.

IAEA and the United States

Although the United States was once a supporter of ElBaradei and his leadership of the IAEA, conflict developed when ElBaradei questioned the U.S. claim that Iraq held weapons of mass destruction.

He called the start of the Iraq war "the saddest day of my life."

Last year, the Bush administration said ElBaradei should step down when his term ended, but other countries disagreed and he was reinstated.

Despite these differences, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice called to congratulate ElBaradei on his accomplishments and released a statement that said that the United States was "committed to working with the IAEA to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons technology."

The Nobel Prize

The Nobel committee used a benchmark anniversary of the 1945 atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to recognize organizations devoted to the end of nuclear warfare.

Other contenders for the prize included rock stars Bono and Bob Geldof, who were nominated for their efforts to end Third World poverty.

The prize is the work of Alfred Nobel, famed Swedish inventor and philanthropist, who created the Nobel committee to award prizes in chemistry, physics, literature, medicine and peace.

The winners receive \$1.3 million.

--Compiled by Brian Wolley for NewsHour Extra

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