

An unsafe world

The International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) task at 60 — to balance the benefits of nuclear technology for human development against the irreversible risks to the planet's survival — could not be greater. In the historic 1953 Atoms for Peace address to the UN General Assembly, U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower proposed the establishment of the agency to harness nuclear science for peace. Eisenhower was apt to appreciate the rapid end to U.S. nuclear monopoly and underscore that the notion of mutual deterrence was a dangerous delusion. Nevertheless, the history of the Cold War and subsequent developments illustrate that global instability from proliferation and weaponisation may well be a reality, at least in the near future.

As the world's nuclear weapon states (NWSs) continue to flout their disarmament obligations with impunity, countries outside this elite club have felt encouraged to nurture their own big ambitions. The possession of the deadly bomb by four other countries, besides the five nations that founded the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT), testifies to the impediments to restrict the use of nuclear energy for civilian purposes. North Korean leader Kim Jong-un's defiance to expand the country's weaponisation programme is only the latest instance of erosion of the NPT's authority. Rather than engage diplomatically with Pyongyang, U.S. President Donald Trump is bent on ripping apart the 2015 agreement that the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany brokered with Iran. Against this backdrop, the prospects are remote that the 2017 treaty to legally ban nuclear weapons could win support from the NWS.

The IAEA Director General, Yukiya Amano, told the UN last week that lessons from the 2011 accident at Japan's Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant have been incorporated into safety plans. But Mr. Amano also emphasised earlier this year that countries could not outsource the safety and security framework on the deployment of nuclear technology. That cautionary remark should not be taken lightly across the developing world, where a culture of safety and public accountability is lacking. This is especially critical since the share of nuclear power is expected to increase as part of attempts to reduce countries' dependence on fossil fuels. Equally, the emphasis on nuclear science to promote the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals would be subject to the safety frameworks in place.

IAEA member states have evidently been slow to adopt measures to enhance the safety (from terrorist threats) of nuclear material transferred within and across national borders. For instance, an amendment to the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material came into force only in 2016. [The Fukushima disaster](#) has brought into sharp focus major concerns over the management of nuclear waste, with potentially dangerous consequences for human civilisation and the environment over the long term. The issue will pose questions on the merits and sustainability of nuclear technology as a credible source of energy. Governments ought to be more transparent on these matters.

The definition of harassment needs to be constantly updated, and the process for justice made more robust

END