

Work in Progress



Hours after being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, Dr. ElBaradei sat down for a candid conversation with CNN anchor Jonathan Mann whose probing questions spotlighted the world's most contentious problems. Following are excerpts from this CNN broadcast.

Jonathon Mann (JM): Dr. ElBaradei, do you think of yourself as a detective?

ElBaradei (EIB): Well, I think of my organization as a detective. I manage this organization, so I'm referred to sometimes as a chief detective. I don't know all the detective tools, but I know how to work with detectives.

JM: Let me ask you about one of the cases in the news recently: North Korea. Your agency has been shut out for three years now. Since 2002, Pyongyang has not allowed any inspectors into the country. What have they been up to and what kind of weapons do you think they've built in that time?

EIB: Well, I think in North Korea, we're in a better situation to have an opinion, unlike India, Israel, Pakistan because we've never really done proper verification. In Korea, as we were there up until three years ago, we know they have plutonium. We know they have plutonium that could go into weapons; we know they have enough plutonium for fuel weapons. They said that they weaponized that material. We know they have the infrastructure to weaponize, so I would not be surprised that they have plutonium weapons.

JM: The detective work aside, why bother? Why bother getting all the scientific information and what faith should we have in all these efforts if, at the end of the day, we know they have something terrible, and it's been years, and there's been very little done about it.

EIB: I think that question has to absolutely be addressed. In 1992, we reported North Korea to Security Council. We said they are in non-compliance with their non-proliferation obligation. In 2003, again, we reported them back and said they are in further non-compliance; they kicked us out. I still need to hear from the Security Council.

JM: On that note, and you make an important point, let's go back to Iran. Does the IAEA have a bigger problem than Iran does? Everyone is talking about the threat of reporting Iran to the Security Council. What happens if the IAEA does exactly that? Reports Iran the way it reported North Korea, and again, nothing happens. Non-proliferation is exposed as a system that has no enforcement and no one really tried to make sure it works. Is Iran a crisis for your agency as much or more than it is for leaders in Tehran?

EIB: I think it's a crisis for the world, and not for the IAEA. Our role is an early warning system. We did sound the alarm as early as 1992 on North Korea. Nothing was done. We did sound the alarm in Iran three years ago. Things have not been going the way they should have been going.

JM: Let me interrupt you on that thought. How nervous are you about sounding the alarm this time? Not because of what you find in Iran, and not because of your anxieties, but because of your fear of the UN Security Council doing nothing again?

EIB: I have to sound the alarm because it is my job to sound the alarm. I hope then that somebody picks up the pieces, which is the Security Council. I mentioned this morning that you need a compliance mechanism so that countries cannot get away with murder. If a country is not fulfilling its obligation, they need to be taken to account. North Korea was not the best example, but again, when you talk about the Security Council, you really talk about different varieties of options. You talk about understanding the underlying issues, trying to have a peaceful settlement. You talk about sanctions; you talk about, ultimately, using force. So, the Security Council does not necessarily mean using force; it means coercive measures. It means sanctions, it means primarily, trying to get a dialogue going between parties and trying to find a peaceful solution. But, I agree with you. The system does not have enough teeth right now. It is on-again, off-again. In the case of North Korea, nothing was done. So, we need to have an even system of compliance.

JM: It has been an interesting year for the IAEA, Director General. You're sitting here, and you're the winner of the Nobel peace prize. One year ago this time, the Bush administration was trying to push you out of your job. Dr. ElBaradei, what was it like contradicting the president of the US, the Vice-President of the US, the entire administration on weapons on Iraq?

EIB: I think I was just simply doing my job. I was not supposed to be liked by everybody.

JM: Couldn't have been easy though. It had to make for a few sleepless nights.

EIB: It was not easy. I didn't lose sleep on that issue. I lost sleep over reports about being wire-tapped, not being able to talk to my daughter without being listened to. I did not really lose sleep about stating what I believed was absolutely the correct facts. We are not to be liked; we are to be respected. That's the key for me.

JM: Does the war in Iraq, does the entire experience change everything? And I mean that with respect to trusting the evidence of Member States, with respect to assembling a consensus about what the evidence might mean among countries as different as Russia, China and the US. Does it mean that sanctions are harder to impose because no one trusts the information that's now at hand? And because Iraq suggests, to countries around the world that if they don't have nuclear weapons, they're subject to regime change. Does Iraq change everything for you?

EIB: Iraq has changed a lot, not just for me, but for everybody. Lots of lessons to learn from Iraq. We need to be careful about intelligence. We need not jump the gun. We need to see if use of force is better than enduring with diplomacy. There are a lot of lessons we're all going through, but everybody understands that we cannot just focus on the past. We have so much ahead of us. Terrorism, dissemination of nuclear weapons; we just can't afford to disagree. We need to continue to work together—Member States, intelligence, international organizations, individuals. The threats we are facing are so overwhelming that we need to put our differences behind. That's what we did and that's what the new Bush administration has done.

JM: How badly would you like to talk to A. Q. Khan and what could he tell you?

EIB: I'd like to talk to him. I should add that the Pakistani government has been quite cooperative, providing us with information, acting as an intermediary between A. Q. Khan and us. Obviously, ultimately it would be good for us to talk to the man directly. But I'd like to say three things here. One: the technology is out of the tube. Controlling nuclear proliferation simply through export control does not work any longer because technology is out. What we have seen in Libya, what we have seen in Iran, was not really a failure of the agency as such; it was a failure of the countries to get control over what is being exported from their own countries. The A.Q. Khan network was all over the place. We found 30 companies in 30 countries everywhere in the world operating as part of the...

JM: Thirty countries? A nuclear supermarket with franchises in 30 countries?

EIB: In Europe, in Africa, in the Middle East, in Asia, everywhere. So that's one of the problems. Second problem, of course, is look at why countries are tempted to develop nuclear weapons. It is security. People feel insecure. If we settle the Palestinian issue; if we settle the Kashmir issue, if we settle the Korean issue 90 % of the problem of proliferation will disappear. The last 10% ...

JM: Someone is going to jump in and say that the Iranian govt does not need nuclear weapons to solve the Kashmir issue, the Palestinian problem. That's not really the problem. The problem is that governments can buy this form of security and can get it and no one really is able to stop them.

EIB: Iran might not need to solve the Middle East issue but Iran is in a very unfriendly neighbourhood.

JM: Let me just add to that. It's an unfriendly world. So even if those three problems you described went away, unless there was universal peace for eternity, nuclear weapons would be an extraordinarily tempting thing for a government to buy, and once again, the problem would be how to stop them.

EIB: Absolutely. If you feel insecure, if you want to project power...usually you develop nuclear weapons because you feel insecure or you want to project power or influence. If you want to do either of that, you look to those in the major league. And the people in the major league are still relying on nuclear weapons. You have these eight countries that continue to tell everybody else that nuclear weapons are not good for you but they continue to refine their nuclear arsenal.

JM: This is what the President of Iran, in fact, calls a nuclear apartheid — that some countries can decide on nuclear rights of other countries.

EIB: Well, I would not call it apartheid. We need a security system that's equitable. As the chairman of the Nobel committee said this morning, you cannot ask everybody not to smoke while you're dangling a cigarette from your mouth. It is not credible; it is not sustainable. You need to lead by example.

JM: The A. Q. Khan network was in talks with al Qaeda. What does that tell you about what terrorists are thinking about nuclear weapons?

EIB: It's very obvious that terrorists are interested in acquiring nuclear weapons, radioactive sources. If you have seen the sophistication we have seen with 9/11...then you have to be a very worried person indeed. We are in a race against time. The number one security threat in my view we are facing today is not more countries acquiring nuclear weapons as much as terrorists acquiring nuclear weapons. Because even if a country were to acquire nuclear weapons, one would hope they would still go through nuclear deterrence, the MAD, Mutual Assured Destruction. If you are a terrorist and you acquire a nuclear weapon, I don't think they will think twice about using it. That's precisely their message.

JM: You're making a very important point here. For all of the attention that we hear, that the newspapers, the diplomats and governments around the world pay to North Korea, to Iran, India, Pakistan or Israel, there are people who believe that the next time a nuclear weapon is used will be used by a terrorist group and potentially one that we don't even know the name of.

EIB: I think that's probable. And I hate to use hyperbole. There is more danger in nuclear weapons being used by a terrorist...than by a state, because we're still acting on this concept of Mutually Assured Destruction.

JM: So does the world have the tools it takes to address that problem, to stop that terrible threat?

EIB: We're doing as much as we can — and when I say 'we' I mean the IAEA in conjunction with the rest of the international community...we are working as fast as we can to make sure that every nuclear facility, every nuclear material, every radioactive source is adequately secured. We have done 50 per cent of the job. We still have a lot to do. We need to focus on this mission; we need to pool all the resources we have...because we are in a race against time.

JM: The Nobel prize confers enormous prestige. There is a handsome gold medal and a beautifully hand-made diploma that goes out every year. There is also the money — \$1.3 million that is split every year between the laureates in this case it will be Dr. ElBaradei and the Agency. What are you going to do with the money?

EIB: The agency part of the money is going to treating young people from developing countries, primarily women in fighting cancer and providing nutrition for young children. My part of the money... I'm going to use it to help an orphanage in Egypt. I come from a country with a lot of poverty. I know what poverty can do to people and that's where I'm putting the money. The prize has a lot of meaning for me. It is not the money. If it were about money, I would have been out of a job a long time ago. It really is the visibility, the credibility, and the added moral authority to go with all the difficulties we talked about: the limited authority, the limited budget. I think we got that prize not because we succeeded every time, but because of our consistent effort to try to have our world slightly safer, slightly more humane.

JM: One last question. On the front page of a local newspaper today, there's a very dramatic picture of your face, and it says, "Can he save the world?" Can you?

EIB: If you help me.

JM: That's a good way to close. I want to pick up on something you just said a moment ago. Every year, the Norwegian Nobel committee chooses a laureate for any one of number of reasons. But for one year to the next, there are some reasons that stay the same. One of them, we heard alluded to just a moment ago, is to reward achievement. Another is to reward effort when the achievement is not entirely at hand. The IAEA, it's safe to say, is a case in point. Governments around the world, terror groups, are still trying to acquire nuclear weapons and the Agency is itself a work in progress trying to accumulate the tools that will really stop them. It doesn't have all it needs yet. As a result, some of its critics say it didn't deserve the Nobel Prize. It's supporters say that is the very reason that it deserves the prize. Because in a world without any guarantees or easy answers, the IAEA or something very much like it, is our best hope.

Prize Money

to Fund Cancer & Nutrition Fellowships in Developing World

The Norwegian Committee awarded the 2005 Nobel Peace Prize on 7 October to the IAEA and Director General ElBaradei in equal shares.

The Nobel Peace Prize money awarded to the Agency will be used to create a fund for fellowships and training to improve cancer management and childhood nutrition in the developing world.

A special fund known as the "IAEA Nobel Cancer and Nutrition Fund" was established for receipt of the Agency's share of the prestigious million dollar prize.

The €525,000 will be rolled out to expand human resources in developing regions of the world. In the area of cancer management, it will be spent on training in radiation oncology to improve cancer treatment and care, as part of the IAEA's Programme of Action on Cancer Therapy (PACT).

In the area of nutrition, the focus of the training is on the role of nutrition to help ensure healthy development of children by using nuclear techniques to identify problems and evaluate the effectiveness of preventive measures taken.

Fellowship awards will be offered that target young professionals, particularly women, from developing Member States, through the Agency's Technical Cooperation Programme. It is also proposed to organize training courses in regional centres in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Dr. ElBaradei has encouraged Member States and donors to contribute to the Special Fund by giving additional resources both in cash and in kind. "It will be used to maximize the Agency's ability to build capacity and transfer the needed know-how to developing countries," Dr. ElBaradei said.

Dr. ElBaradei has previously stated he will direct his share of the prize money to charitable purposes.