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Is the IAEA's Safeguard Strategic Plan Sufficient?

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IAEA safeguards have much improved and the Safeguards Department is commendably planning to further its technical capabilities and to make full use of its authority. Will this be enough to keep countries from exploiting nuclear power programs to develop nuclear weapons, or to be in a position to do so rapidly should they so decide? Depending on nuclear programs developments worldwide, especially on expansions in enrichment and reprocessing, and on how international affairs unfold, the answer may well be no.

The fundamental limitations on the Department's ability to prevent proliferation are not technical, but conceptual. The Department is clearly motivated to carry out its technical activities competently. Yet it takes a relatively passive view of its role in the worldwide development of nuclear power—whatever technology comes into use, and whoever deploys it, the Department promises to exert its best effort to safeguard. In our view the Department should be more open about what it can or cannot realistically safeguard, and therefore what technology is permissible for deployment in national programs.

The Department's Strategic Plan says at the outset that its verifications assist the Agency to fulfill its statutory objective to "accelerate and enlarge the contribution of atomic energy..." The Department should judge itself by how well it promotes international security, not by its contribution to expanding nuclear power use.

The Department's Vision includes advancing toward a nuclear weapons free world. That vision should include keeping states from deploying technologies that put them within easy reach of nuclear weapons. Our paper will suggest how the Department might supplement its current plan to best accomplish this.

Country or International Organization

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