

Letters from Readers

From MAD to GLAD

TO THE EDITOR:

David Marples's article, "Chernobyl: Past & Present" (November-December 1987) prompts me to offer the following reflections. The 1975 Helsinki Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe was not a formal treaty. Instead, it was a political process and a compact—an ethical agreement governing the intent and proprieties of mutually beneficial, civilized behavior between nations in the related areas of international security and global interdependence. Although not a legally binding document, the Final Act provided both a context for interpreting formal agreements and a diplomatic tool, whose power derives from issues of honor and integrity in a court of global opinion.

In addition to declaring ten "Principles Guiding Relations between Participating States," the thirty-five signatories, in order to "eliminat[e]...the causes of tension...[and] strengthen...peace and security in the world" accepted "the responsibility of each of them to promote...and to implement" confidence-building measures (CBM) on security and disarmament which recognized the "complementary nature of the political and military aspects of security."

Although the Final Act does not explicitly refer to nuclear power safety, nor to international obligations regarding nuclear accidents, the signatories affirmed that "each of the participating States, in accordance with the principles of international law, ought to ensure, in a spirit of cooperation, that activities carried out on its territory do not cause degradation of the environment in another State or in areas lying beyond the

limits of national jurisdiction." Such environmental cooperations are to be implemented through "exchanges of scientific and technical information, documentation and research results [and]...joint...programmes and projects..."

The Madrid follow-up meeting mandated the "undertak[ing of]...new, effective and concrete actions designed to make progress in strengthening confidence and security..." through confidence- and security-building measures (CSBM), which "will cover the whole as well as the adjoining sea area and air space. They will be of military significance and politically binding and will be provided with adequate forms of verification..."

In order to regulate effectively, governing mechanisms must be capable of controlling at a level commensurate with the level of consequences of the associated policy decisions. With regard to nuclear power issues, the consequences of local or national choices are clearly transnational and interdependent.

Although the alternative to nuclear war is peace, the alternative to the peacetime use of nuclear energy involves other energy provision. Wise policies made by one country will not compensate for the global side-effects of poor decisions implemented by another. For us to evaluate our options more effectively, we need to set aside historical and emotional biases in favor of competent and comparative risk assessments. Such analyses are intrinsically difficult, but must be made. Whether a pro- or antinuclear energy advocate, one's evaluations are improved through better information.

In his public address on 14 May 1986, eighteen days after the nuclear accident at Chernobyl, General Secretary Gorbachev called for "creating an international regime of safe development of nuclear power on the basis

of close cooperation of all nations dealing with nuclear power engineering. A system of prompt warning and supply of information in the event of accidents and faults at nuclear power stations...should be established in the framework of this regime. Likewise it is necessary to adjust an international mechanism...for the specific rendering of mutual assistance when dangerous situations emerge."

Through eliminating certain classes of nuclear missiles and providing for verification through on-site monitoring, the recent Reagan-Gorbachev Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty implements a major, symbolic demonstration of confidence-and security-building; and, as such, it is an act of pragmatic and moral courage on behalf of both countries. Is it not almost a corollary to our cooperation regarding nuclear weaponry to extend its intent, mechanisms and on-site verification policies to encompass the nonmilitary use of nuclear energy?

Given proper intentions, the cooperative scrutiny of each other's nuclear industries might even enable our traditional predilections towards mutual suspicion and criticism to contribute positively to our awareness and understanding of organizational and design defects in our nuclear energy programs. Similarly, a sense of mutual cooperation could mitigate unwarranted responses based on ignorance, panic or fear, which further extend calamity and are directly or indirectly abusive to humankind.

A chapter of the Reagan-Gorbachev legacy might yet mark a transition in attitude, about our interresponsibilities and the shared consequences of some of our choices, from the perspective of mutually assured destruction (MAD) to one of globally linked, atomic decision-mechanisms (GLAD).

Eddie Oshins

Visiting Scholar, Department of Physics
Stanford University