

## **The Path towards Strengthened Safeguards: Experiences in Iraq, South Africa, and North Korea**

This video series is a collection of dialogues centered on the immense role played by the IAEA, and in particular how the Agency supports nuclear nonproliferation through the practice of safeguards. This current update is a chronicle of events during the 1990s, Iraq, South Africa, and North Korea, that led to the development of the Additional Protocol.

### **7.23 Information Credibility**

#### **Keywords: information management, verification of information**

Laura: One of the things I wanted to get back to, because we've suffered from it unfortunately, is the intelligence and the Agency's ability to evaluate, its responsibility for evaluating the goodness of information that is provided to the Agency by a member state.

Jacques: I think the sole key to that is the coherent picture. In other words, and that was our tremendous strength in 2002 we had such a deep knowledge of Iraq, we had spent so many years running around going anywhere, that we knew at least where Iraq was in 1998. We had through this information system, even in spite of the turnover that the team had faced, we had the possibility to see how a new piece of information provided by a defector, at the time many were talking to journalists, through serious intelligence network, we could very easily at the time gauge what was just a rehash of information that was valid fifteen years ago and what was really new.

When something is really new, and in total contradiction to the coherent picture, it's always worth digging into it, and this is where beyond the coherent picture it's our ability to perform additional investigations, through open source, through information collection, additional questioning in order to make sure an action that would be politically sensitive, we were sure that it is worth the risk. It was a great opportunity given the rights to check how far we could go, and I remember my first meeting with Rich, where the Agency teams had already, based on intel tips, gone to many places which actually had nothing to do with nuclear past nuclear program or capabilities, but in the context of Iraq it was not a problem. We had access anywhere anytime, we even used the possibility to access facilities and not find anything as a positive outcome in the context of the OMV.<sup>1</sup> We were going to a capable site, we wouldn't find anything, we verified that everything is fine. The challenge for the Agency is going to sites that, based on a not well based tip, that would end up to be with no relevance to anything related to a nuclear program, is something that we will always face and in particular in the context of the implementation of Special Inspections for instance, and in the context it seems to be a crown jewel and unapproachable these days.

Laura: I was there with you when you were analyzing these Niger documents.<sup>2</sup> I think people would like to hear your side of how things came about. I think the unfortunate thing is as a consequence of that, although in the early 90's we were finally able to get over the sensitivity member states had about our actually using and receiving intelligence information, were back fighting that battle again because of that.

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<sup>1</sup> Ongoing Monitoring and Verification

<sup>2</sup> Documents that reported an attempt by Saddam Hussein to procure "yellowcake" uranium power from Niger, later believed to be forgeries.

So the suspicions have risen again, but my own view is that we demonstrated that we have the wherewithal and the sense of capability and responsibility to evaluate this information and not accept it at face value. Tell us a little bit about that incident.

Jacques: Ok, maybe going into that case, I don't want to go into my traditional speech about proper information management and information analysis, but there is an understanding that anybody needs to have if there is a contribution into nonproliferation analysis and drawing safeguards conclusions for instance, or Security Council mandated conclusions, is the fact that whatever we collect is *data*. We collect data through even hard technical measures, because when a sample is taken in the field they could always be a false alarm or a false signal because there could be contamination in the field where it is collected. So it does not indicate that something that is an activity that has really taken place there. There could be a cross contamination in the handling of the sample in the field and affect the final result.

And Rich was in the front line at the Agency at the time, the Agency faced the type of contamination in the early days, and that's why the Agency with the financial assistance of a state was able to have a clean lab, to be able to handle this sensitive samples. So a declaration also may be misleading. Let's not talk about open source disinformation where we need to always try to validate. We try to collect data, only by thorough analysis by competent experts can turn data into information. So in this process, the Niger documents, it all started with statements that Iraq had imported Uranium from Africa. It took us a few months to obtain the source of that. And obviously the source, beyond probably some human source reporting and all the caveats we can put on the validity, somebody talking that may have as much interest in actually misrepresenting the truth than the country you are targeting.

We finally ended up with what was thought to be the main source, which was a dozen page document, letters, so on, that at some point in time, between a trip to NY, to London, to Moscow, with the DG we were traveling all the time. The day I could sit for a couple of hours, it was obvious that these documents were wrong. So my biggest disappointment or concern was the fact that I had to find that, when those documents had gone through many hands before, in national systems, and it was pretty blatant that there was something wrong with these documents. Why weren't they stopped before? My sole interpretation is one of my lines of communication these days, to make sure that analytical processes are correct, is the risk of stove pipe. It's when people who contribute to an analytical process actually shape their contribution to please the level above. I think that in this point in time there was an expectation there was a need to find proof that Iraq had resumed a nuclear program. And accepting these documents at face value was considered to be the right way to deal with them, until these documents ended up in the Agency. So one of the key challenges that we have today in implementing a proper way to draw conclusions is to make sure that at a lower scale we have the injection of competence and the approach to providing contradictory assessment of any piece of data that would lead to something that is real, the most probable evaluation.

We can always be wrong – we always have to draw conclusions out of a limited extent of information, but at least we put in place an evaluation of different scenarios. When we get information from anybody, one scenario is that is good information, we can go ahead with taking action on it, but the second scenario should always be, there might be a flaw in there, let's identify what that flaw may exist. And that applies to the declaration. It's overall assessing the correctness and completeness of a declaration. It's making sure that we are not misled by technical measures and results, talked about cross contamination. And

make sure we aren't misled by a lack of competence. You can interpret something wrongly simply because you do not have the technical background to interpret it properly. Or we are not misled by a 3<sup>rd</sup> party disinformation.

Laura: Or you are not looking for what you expect to see.

Jacques: Sure, that's the stovepipe. You take a piece of information and interpret it in a manner that is consistently leading to the already drawn conclusion. That is, in terms of credibility, absolutely lethal.