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Addressing Immediate Concerns and Containment Measures for the Fukushima Nuclear Incident.

Authors: Andreas Drahotský, Matyáš Průdek

Introduction

The Fukushima Incident, an accident which took place at the Fukushima Daiichi plant ("Number One") on March 11, 2011, is considered to be the 2nd largest nuclear accident (after the "Chernobyl Disaster") to have happened in the history of nuclear energy. As a result 460 000 people had to be evacuated from the nearest areas to the plant, a large amount of nuclear waste was spilled into the Pacific Ocean, and over 360 billion dollars had to be spent on reparations following the disaster.

The goal of this committee will be to evaluate the possible consequences (immediate, gradual, and lasting) of the plant being destroyed, creating a resolution which will offer a fair and rational approach to the issue.

The debate itself will take place on March 15th, 2011, therefore delegates will have to work with the information available at the time. Whilst the use of hindsight is not strictly prohibited (It can not be prevented), delegates are expected to only use information current to the timeframe to back their arguments. That said, it is also highly recommended to use knowledge of the future by basing some of their solutions on "assumptions".

Timeline of Events and Plant Logistics

1969 - 1979

- The Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant is constructed by the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO). The plant is made up of six boiling water reactors (BWRs), which came online between the years 1971 and 1979.

2002

- TEPCO admits to falsifying safety records, however, no action is taken and the plant continues to operate.

March 11, 2011

- 2:46 PM JST: Off the northeastern coast of Japan an earthquake took place, measuring 9.1 on the Richter scale. This was the biggest earthquake recorded in Japan. Upon sensing the earthquake, four power plants, nearest to the epicenter, automatically shut down immediately.
- 3:27 PM JST: Following the earthquake a series of tsunamis hit the northeastern coast of Japan. Whilst The Fukushima Daiichi Power Plant had a protective sea wall, which could deflect waves as tall as 10 meters, it proved to be insufficient, as the tsunami waves caused by the earthquake reached upward of 15 meters. The Fukushima Daiichi

Power Plant had its electricity knocked out, so emergency diesel generators were used to power the pumps which allowed for the gradual cooling down of the reactor core.

- As a result of the power outage the reactors 1, 2, 3, which were operational at the time, experienced a failure of their individual cooling systems, leading to the gradual overheating of each reactor and an increase of pressure in the reactor vessels. TEPCO attempts to use batteries to restore the reactor cooling to full power, however fails.

March 12, 2011

- Morning: The lack of power to cool the reactors, temperatures and pressures continue to rise in the reactors, particularly reactor 1.
- 3:36 PM JST: A hydrogen explosion occurs in the building of reactor number 1. A reaction between the zirconium, encasing the reactor´s fuel rods, and water from inside the core caused a release and build-up of hydrogen gas. The explosion destroyed the outer building, yet did not cause significant damage to the reactor core itself.
- Officials are alerted to the potential release of radioactive material and begin an evacuation of residents within a 20 km radius of the plant. TEPCO begins venting out the gas buildup from all three reactors, which caused increased levels of radiation in the surrounding area.

March 13, 2011

- Reactor 3 begins to experience further cooling issues, increasing the chances of another hydrogen gas build-up. TEPCO starts pumping sea water into reactors 1 and 3 as a last-ditch effort to cool them and prevent further damage to the surrounding environment, however causing irreversible damage to the reactors themselves.

March 14, 2011

- 11:01 AM JST: A hydrogen explosion occurs in the building of reactor 3 further damaging the plant and releasing radioactive material into the environment.
- Reactor 2 is also experiencing issues with excessive pressure and any cooling efforts exerted have little to no effect on the heat generated by its core. However, no explosion happens at this time.

March 15, 2011

- 6:00 AM JST: A hydrogen explosion takes place in Reactor 2, however causing no major damage, as the explosion occurred inside the containment vessel. Still, more radiation was released and TEPCO reported damages to Reactor 4, which contained spent fueling rods, worsening the already critical conditions inside it.
- Reactor 4 catches fire due to the overheating of the spent fuel rods stored inside, releasing more radiation.

- The government of Japan extends the evacuation zone´s radius by another 10km, ordering anyone within 30 km of the plant to either leave or stay indoors.

March 16, 2011

- TEPCO announces its belief that the fuel rods stored inside Reactor 4 have begun to boil.
- Helicopters and firetrucks begin dumping water onto Reactors 3 and 4, attempting to provide, at least, minimal cooling, but failing to do so.
- White smoke is seen rising from the Fukushima I plant, which officials suggest may be from reactor 3. The radiation levels near the plant reach dangerously high levels, forcing TEPCO to halt most of its operations.

March 17, 2011

- Water spraying efforts continue, yet radiation levels are still rising.
- Attempts to restore power in the plants are continuing. Officials inform the IAEA that engineers are laying an external grid powerline cable to unit 2.

March 18, 2011

- The Tokyo Fire Department dispatches thirty fire engines and a group of 139 firefighters to aid with the watering down of all reactors. All previous efforts continue throughout the day

March 19, 2011

- A second group of 100 Tokyo and 53 Osaka fire-fighters is dispatched to replace the previous team. Water is sprayed for a total of 7 hours this day.
- TEPCO reports that the water was effective in lowering the temperature around the spent fuel rods at Reactor 3 to under 100°C.

March 20, 2011

- Power is restored in Reactor 2, TEPCO is still trying to make the equipment operational.
- Power is restored to the cooling systems of reactors 5 and 6, allowing for cold shutdown and mitigating all dangers posed by them.
- Sea water is still being pumped into Reactors 1-3
- The situation slowly begins to improve

March 21 - December 16, 2011:

TEPCO continues to attempt to cool down Reactors 1-3, and with the help of the Japanese government manages to achieve a cold shutdown in each by December 16th. The events post

March 20th, have also had significant impacts on the world, however, were not as severe as those prior.

World Impact

Environmental impact:

The Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster in 2011 had a profound and long-lasting environmental impact. The release of immense quantities of radioactive isotopes into the air, soil, and ocean caused significant damage to ecosystems near the plant.

In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, multiple events led to the release of radioactive steam and particles into the atmosphere. These contaminants spread widely, contaminating large areas of land and water. While the airborne particles soon dispersed, their long-lasting effects on the environment remained a concern. One of the most persistent contaminants is cesium-137, a radioactive isotope with a half-life of approximately 30 years. Decontamination efforts have been extensive but slow, and many areas remain unsuitable for human habitation or wildlife.

Marine ecosystems were also severely impacted. The initial release of radioactive water into the Pacific Ocean, combined with subsequent leaks (such as the one in 2013), contaminated the surrounding waters and disrupted local fisheries. Elevated radiation levels in seafood raised concerns about food safety and the potential damage to marine ecosystems.
Wildlife in the affected areas has been impacted as well. Radiation exposure increases the risk of cancer, particularly thyroid cancer, and can also lead to genetic mutations. While the impact on wildlife has been most severe in areas closest to the plant, some effects may be observed in regions further away.
Wildlife in the affected areas has been impacted as well, as radiation exposure leads to increased risks of cancer, predominantly thyroid cancer caused by overexposure to iodine-131. Furthermore, an elevated chance of mutations was recorded, due to radiation exposure. It is important to note, however, that apart from the areas nearest to the disaster site, no lasting impact on wildlife has been recorded.

Societal impact:

The Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster had a profound and lasting impact on Japanese society. Over 160,000 people were forced to evacuate from the contaminated areas surrounding the plant, leading to the breakdown of communities and economic hardship. The disaster also caused widespread psychological trauma, health concerns, and environmental damage.

One of the most significant impacts of the disaster was the forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of people. Many were unable to return to their homes for years, leading to a sense of loss in their lives. The displacement also increased the need for local resources and infrastructure, as communities struggled to accommodate the influx of refugees.

In addition to the physical and emotional trauma caused by the disaster, many survivors also faced long-term health concerns. Exposure to radiation can increase the risk of various health problems, including cancer and thyroid disease. The government has provided medical care and support to those affected, but the full extent of the health impacts may not be known for years to come.

The Fukushima Daiichi disaster also had a significant impact on the global outlook on energy. The event raised serious concerns about the safety of nuclear power plants and prompted many countries to invest into alternate sources of energy.

Economic impact:

One of the most significant economic impacts was the closure of businesses and industries in the affected region. The nuclear plant itself was shut down, leading to job losses in the energy sector. Additionally, the contamination of land and water made it difficult for agriculture and fishing industries to operate, further contributing to economic decline.

The disaster also had a significant impact on tourism, a vital sector of the Japanese economy. The negative publicity surrounding the disaster and concerns about radiation exposure had become a deterrent to many tourists, leading to a sharp decline in tourism revenue.

Moreover, the long-term costs of cleaning up the contaminated areas and compensating those affected by the disaster were substantial (approx. 200 billion dollars). These costs placed a burden on the Japanese government and taxpayers, further worsening the economic challenges faced by the country.

Definition of Key Terms

Nuclear Reactor: A device used to initiate and control a sustained nuclear chain reaction, commonly used in nuclear power plants for energy generation.

Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant: A nuclear power plant located in Fukushima Prefecture, Japan. It became infamous for the nuclear accident in 2011 following an earthquake and tsunami.

Boiling Water Reactors (BWRs): A type of nuclear reactor where water used as a coolant is heated to boiling by the nuclear fission process, producing steam that drives turbines to generate electricity.

TEPCO (Tokyo Electric Power Company): The company responsible for operating the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. It played a key role in the events of the nuclear accident.

Hydrogen Explosion: A chemical explosion resulting from the buildup of hydrogen gas, which can occur in nuclear reactors when zirconium cladding on fuel rods reacts with water at high temperatures.

Radioactive Isotopes: Unstable atoms that release radiation as they decay. Examples from nuclear accidents include cesium-137 and iodine-131, which have harmful effects on health and the environment.

Spent Fuel Rods: Used nuclear fuel rods that are no longer efficient for generating power but remain highly radioactive and require careful handling and cooling.

Radiation Contamination: The deposition of radioactive materials on surfaces, which can pose health risks to humans and the environment. It occurs when radioactive particles are released into the air, water, or soil.

Cesium-137: A radioactive isotope that is a byproduct of nuclear fission with a half-life of about 30 years. It is highly hazardous due to its long-lasting presence in the environment.

Iodine-131: A radioactive isotope that is released during nuclear fission. It is particularly harmful because it accumulates in the thyroid gland, increasing the risk of thyroid cancer.

Evacuation Radius: The distance from a disaster site, such as a nuclear accident, within which people are instructed to evacuate for safety reasons due to the risk of radiation exposure.

Cold Shutdown: A stable condition in which a nuclear reactor's coolant temperature is below boiling point, and no significant nuclear reactions are taking place. It indicates that the reactor is under control and poses minimal risk.

Half-Life: The time required for half of a radioactive substance to decay. It determines how long a radioactive isotope will remain hazardous.

Nuclear Fallout: The residual radioactive material propelled into the atmosphere following a nuclear explosion or accident, which then falls back to Earth, contaminating the environment.

Decontamination: The process of removing or reducing radioactive contaminants from affected areas, structures, or individuals to reduce radiation risks.

Marine Ecosystems: Communities of organisms that live in the ocean or other saltwater bodies. These ecosystems can be significantly affected by contamination from radioactive substances.
Zirconium Cladding: A material used to encase nuclear fuel rods. It reacts with water at high temperatures, producing hydrogen gas, which can lead to explosions.

Reactor Vessel: The container that holds the nuclear reactor core and coolant. It is designed to contain the energy produced by nuclear reactions.

Radiation Levels: The amount of ionizing radiation present in a specific area, typically measured in sieverts (Sv) or rem. High levels can be dangerous to human health and the environment.

Richter Scale: A logarithmic scale used to measure the magnitude of earthquakes, where each whole number increase represents a tenfold increase in amplitude.

Main Parties and Their Involvement

1. TEPCO (Tokyo Electric Power Company)

    Role: TEPCO owned and operated the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. They were responsible for maintaining and overseeing the plant's operations and safety protocols. After the earthquake and tsunami, TEPCO was criticized for its handling of the crisis, including delays in reporting the full extent of the damage and the risk to the public.

    Involvement: TEPCO faced strong scrutiny for not implementing stronger safety measures, despite warnings about the potential for tsunamis in the region. After the disaster, TEPCO managed the recovery and cleanup efforts, facing legal action and public backlash.

2. The Japanese Government

    Role: The Japanese government, including agencies like the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) and the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI), oversaw nuclear safety and energy policy.

    Involvement: In the immediate aftermath, the government declared a nuclear emergency and ordered evacuations. Japan's Prime Minister at the time, Naoto Kan, was directly involved in the decision-making during the crisis and faced criticism for the government's lack of preparedness. After the disaster, the government undertook extensive regulatory reforms, including restructuring Japan's nuclear safety agencies and shutting down all nuclear reactors temporarily for safety assessments.

3. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

Role: The IAEA is the international body responsible for promoting the peaceful use of nuclear energy and ensuring nuclear safety.

Involvement: After the Fukushima disaster, the IAEA conducted investigations, issued reports, and helped Japan coordinate the recovery efforts. It also provided technical support and worked on improving global nuclear safety standards in the wake of the incident.

4. United States

Position: The U.S. was a key ally in providing technical support and advice during the crisis. The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) sent experts, and the U.S. military played a role in humanitarian relief efforts through Operation Tomodachi, which provided food, water, and medical supplies to the affected areas.

Involvement: The U.S. closely monitored the situation, especially with concerns about potential radioactive fallout reaching the U.S. West Coast. The disaster also led to renewed scrutiny of U.S. nuclear plants and safety protocols.

5. France

Position: France, being heavily reliant on nuclear energy, had a vested interest in the outcomes of the disaster. It offered assistance and sent experts to help deal with the crisis.

Involvement: French nuclear companies, such as Areva (a multinational nuclear energy company), were involved in providing technical support, including specialized equipment to aid in the recovery efforts.

6. South Korea

Position: South Korea expressed concerns over radioactive contamination affecting its environment, particularly through seafood imports from Japan.

Involvement: The country implemented stricter radiation checks on Japanese products and collaborated with other nations in monitoring radiation levels. The disaster also prompted South Korea to review its own nuclear energy policies and safety measures.

7. China

Position: China was highly critical of Japan’s handling of the disaster and expressed concerns about radiation spread, particularly regarding food safety.

Involvement: China implemented stricter food import regulations from Japan, banning products from regions around Fukushima. The disaster also stirred domestic debates about China's own nuclear energy expansion.

8. Russia

Position: As a nearby neighbor, Russia shared concerns about potential radioactive contamination drifting toward its eastern territories.

Involvement: Russia offered assistance in monitoring radiation and sending specialized nuclear engineers to help manage the crisis. The event triggered discussions within Russia about nuclear energy safety.

9. Germany

Position: Germany's response was highly significant in the aftermath of the disaster. Chancellor Angela Merkel announced a shift in Germany's nuclear energy policy as a direct result of Fukushima.

Involvement: Germany decided to phase out nuclear energy entirely, shutting down its oldest reactors and speeding up plans to transition to renewable energy sources, reflecting a broader anti-nuclear sentiment in the country.

10. International Community and NGOs

Greenpeace and other environmental organizations strongly criticized both TEPCO and the Japanese government for their management of the crisis and called for a worldwide reconsideration of nuclear energy. They provided independent analysis of radiation levels and advocated for stronger environmental protections and a move away from nuclear power.

Questions a Resolution Should Answer

What immediate actions should be taken to assist displaced populations? How should affected populations be compensated for lost homes, jobs, and livelihoods? How can the international community assist in mitigating the health risks posed by radiation exposure? What protocols should be put in place to ensure the safety of rescue and recovery workers? What steps should be taken to manage and contain radioactive contamination in the environment (air, water, and soil)? How can local ecosystems and agriculture be rehabilitated following contamination? How can international organizations, such as the IAEA and UN, coordinate technical assistance and expertise to Japan?

What roles should neighboring countries play in monitoring and mitigating transboundary radiation risks? What regulatory changes should be recommended to prevent future nuclear disasters? Should there be a global reconsideration of nuclear energy policies, particularly in high- risk regions? What long-term plans should be implemented to revitalize affected regions economically? How can social stability be restored, and how should the government handle ongoing public mistrust in nuclear energy? What accountability measures should be taken against any parties responsible for negligence in the lead-up to the disaster? How can the international legal framework be strengthened to hold countries and companies accountable in the event of nuclear accidents? What protocols should be implemented to ensure the safety of food exports from affected regions? How can Japan and the international community reassure consumers about the safety of food products? How can the global community enhance disaster preparedness for similar incidents in the future? What lessons can be learned from the Fukushima disaster to improve the global response to nuclear emergencies?
How should the recovery efforts be financed, and what role should international financial institutions play?
Should a specialized UN fund be established for nuclear disaster relief?

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