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It may be recalled that on March 16, 2011, the top US nuclear regulator asserted publicly that the situation at Fukushima Dai-ichi was much worse than Japanese authorities had indicated.

US Calls Radiation "Extremely High;" Sees Japan Nuclear Crisis Worsening

Thursday, 17 March 2011 08:04
By Hiroko Tabuchi, Matthew L. Wald and David Egan, The New York Times News Service | Report | name.



Gregory Jaczko, chairman of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, speaks at a House Energy and Commerce Committee meeting on Capitol Hill in Washington, on March 16, 2011. Jaczko discussed the dangers of a nuclear meltdown in Japan and said the US has no plans to shut down reactors in light of the disaster. (Photo: Philip Scott Andrews / The New York Times)

Gregory Jaczko, Chairman of the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission, told Congress that the spent fuel pool in Reactor No. 4 was dry, which meant that a radiation-spewing fire might start at any time.

As a result, Jaczko announced, US citizens would be subject to a wider evacuation zone than that set by the Japanese government.

Washington - The chairman of the United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission gave a far bleaker appraisal on Wednesday of the threat posed by Japan's nuclear crisis than the Japanese government had offered. He said American officials believed

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Much more outrageous is what I found in documents I examined. Transcripts of NRC conference calls show that on the evening of March 16, within hours of his testimony, Jaczko was informed of doubt about his assertions.

12 NRC CHAIRMAN JACZKO: So, at this point,
 13 you no longer believe that the pool is dry? Is that
 14 what I'm hearing?

CHUCK CASTO: I would say, as of five
o'clock yesterday, the pool had some water in it.


NRC CHAIRMAN JACZKO: Okay. Now I've said
publicly the pool is dry.

19 CHUCK CASTO: Yes, I know that.
 20 NRC CHAIRMAN JACZKO: Do you think that
 21 that's inaccurate?


22 CHUCK CASTO: We can -- it's so
 23 inconclusive, we really can't tell, either way. I
 24 mean --

25 NRC CHAIRMAN JACZKO: Well, so it's

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Chuck Casto,
 Leader of Tokyo-
 Based NRC team



Gregory Jaczko,
 NRC Chairman

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NRC CHAIRMAN JACZKO: Well, so it's
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1 inaccurate for me to say it's dry? Is that what
2 you're saying? It's okay if that's the case; just
3 tell me.
4 CHUCK CASTO: I would say it's probably
5 inaccurate to say it's dry.
6 NRC CHAIRMAN JACZKO: Okay.
7 CHUCK CASTO: It appears today, with the
8 video, that they had had some water in it at five

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What was the impact of Jaczko’s statement about the spent fuel pool?

- How much did it affect the Japanese government’s credibility with the media?—and ultimately, how much did it affect Japanese media coverage of Fukushima?
- How much did it affect the Japanese government’s credibility with the public?—and ultimately, how much did it contribute to emotional stress among Japanese who now feel they can’t believe official assurances about safety?
- The answer to these questions is impossible to determine with any precision. Japanese officials did a poor job of communicating, and deserve plenty of blame for the erosion of trust.
- Surely, however, the impact of Jaczko’s statement must have been substantial. It is hard to imagine any single blow so devastating to public faith in Japanese official pronouncements.
- If so, this episode also merits more attention than it has received.

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Much of the research presented here was published in articles I wrote recently for *Slate* and *Newsweek Japan*.

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?Fukushima’s Worst-Case Scenarios–Much of what you’ve heard about the nuclear accident is wrong?

?How a US mistake after Fukushima hurt Japan?

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A few conclusions...

- Japanese media gave Tokyo residents better information about their safety in March 2011 than did foreign media.
- Tokyo was never in danger, at least based on the best science available concerning the worst-case scenario. Claims by anti-nuclear activists that Tokyo came perilously close to evacuation are without merit.
- The fact that the media has ignored the US government’s worst-case scenario is evidence of how bad Fukushima coverage has been (especially in the case of media that hyped the “devil’s chain reaction”).
- My former colleagues in the foreign media did a grave disservice to Japan. So did a top official of my government. They should be held accountable.

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So: Which is better?

- A skeptical media that warns you too much of potential dangers, or...
- a passive media that doesn't warn you enough?
- To repeat: neither is good
- But in this case, the media that overstated the dangers has been guilty of much worse than the media that understated them

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