

The IAEE, 1979–2009

By Paul Tempest

Editor's note: Paul Tempest was named recipient of the IAEE 2008 Outstanding Contributions Award. Following are his remarks on receiving the award at the San Francisco meeting.

In preparing for this occasion, I took the precaution of looking up the IAEE on the internet. If those of you out there are members of the International Association of Elevator Engineers, or of the International Association of Exhibitions and Events or of the International Association of Earthquake Engineers, I must warn you that you are probably in the wrong place at the wrong time and may find my forthcoming remarks irrelevant to your interest. Or maybe not!

In late-1979, when I attended the first Annual International Conference of the IAEE in Washington, the world was, in many ways, in the same state as it is today. A real mess and in danger of losing heart in a turmoil of uncertainty.

Panicked by revolution in Iran and the second oil price-hike, the top economists of the day flocked to Washington in 1979 to listen to the wisdom of their elders. Morry Adelman, Sam Schurr, Bill Hogan, Jim Schlesinger spoke at length. There was a letter from the White House, sponsorship money from Rockefeller; TV coverage in abundance. As a foretaste of what was to come (or possibly following an attractive discount on the hotel rate), we were housed in the old Sheraton Hotel where demolition was already in progress. Loud were the dire warnings of inexorable limits to growth, a drying-up of venture capital, energy famine, a bloodbath in the Middle East and a nuclear holocaust. Does this not sound familiar today? How very wrong we all were in our different ways! Can we do better today?

In the piece I have written for my plenary tomorrow, I highlight five fundamental geo-political changes over the last 30 years which, for me, give a strong indication that, over the next 30 years, planet earth needs a new kind of leadership, an enhanced sense of cohesion and accelerated new technology.

As a “problem-solver” and government relations pundit, I have, of course, in my back pocket, my three alternative scenarios. The failure scenario is a disaster movie and does not bear thinking about. The muddling through scenario will clearly not work. The success scenario depends on a collective consensus focused on solving each geo-political impasse, particularly regarding Iran, Russia, China, the Middle East and Europe. Without US wisdom and leadership in these areas, we are doomed to failure. Yet just as the rest of the world had more or less despaired of US-strong-arm coercion over the last decade, we suddenly find ourselves, with Barack Obama, and an astonishing new and unexpected ditching of the old half-truths and a refreshing political openness and sensitivity. No longer are we in a trapped world of bi-polar left and right-wing dogma, locked in a conflict of the industrialised rich and the so-called “developing” or “non-developing” poor. Ahead and upward lies a much more diverse path that can provide a quantum jump into a new, prosperous and sustainable world. Take, for example, the growing impact of the internet in states where fearful totalitarian dictators and regimes have hitherto relied on brute force to consolidate their power and to isolate their subjects. Men and women of global vision, mature judgment and profound goodwill, such as Barack Obama, are on the brink of being able to engage freely with individuals worldwide, and to be able to grasp much more intensely their common but multi-varied global aspirations and needs.

So what can the IAEE claim to have really achieved over the last thirty years? Allow me to leave you with three thoughts.

1. Energy Economics Has Developed into a Vital Tool

The ability to measure much more rigorously the economic value of energy and therefore to be able to identify the most viable mix of energy supply and use has been greatly enhanced, exposing many policy weaknesses and identifying much wider ranges of opportunity worldwide.

2. The International Status of the IAEE is a Role Model

With energy still the most significant feature of international trade, energy inter-dependence demands a corps of well-informed, motivated individuals worldwide. The spread of the IAEE embracing more than sixty leading countries worldwide and a highly developed state affiliate system within the United States has provided a useful mechanism and model for similar international institutions.

3. *The Membership Mix of the IAEE is its Hidden Strength*

Energy economics is globally far too important to be left either to the energy industries or to the economists. It has to be all-embracing as it again rises towards the top of the global economic and political agenda. Any analysis of the membership of the IAEE demonstrates convincingly what a wide variety of professional expertise is included therein – a vital crossing point for engineers, accountants, bankers, diplomats, journalists, civil-servants, academics and market operators from very many different countries, each intent on learning from the others.

So, returning to my starting-point, and as a thank-you for this Contributions Award, I end, as always, on a provocative note. Perhaps, after all, the IAEE should now be thinking, more in geo-political terms, about:

Elevator engineering, rather than old-fashioned flights of steps
Exhibitions and events addressed to a much wider public
Earthquake engineering and other global disaster contingency management

Thank you. Shukran.

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Promoting Understanding of Russia

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For more information contact:

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Going to the ASSA Meetings in Atlanta, GA ???

Please remember to tick off the box on your registration form indicating that you are a member of IAEE. This helps IAEE establish presence at the meeting and builds our case for having more IAEE sessions on the program.

Many thanks!!!