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IAEA Postpones Decision on ElBaradei's Third Term

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The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) held a special closed-door session to decide whether to give its current chief, Mohamed ElBaradei, another term as director general. But the atomic agency decided not to decide.

The IAEA put off voting until June to give the United States time to join the growing consensus for Mr. ElBaradei, who would be serving a third term.

The United States says it is against the re-appointment of the Egyptian diplomat, because it believes heads of international organizations should serve no more than two terms. A U.S. official in Vienna, who did not want to be named, said the IAEA needs strong, efficient leadership to accomplish its non-proliferation mission.

Mr. ElBaradei has been criticized by some U.S. officials for not being tough enough on Iran, which Washington says has a covert program to make nuclear weapons. The IAEA chief also disputed U.S. assertions that Saddam Hussein's Iraq was intent on building nuclear weapons.

But most other IAEA members seem to be backing Mr. ElBaradei. During the meeting, Russia issued a strong statement in favor of re-electing him as soon as possible. China added its support, praising his leadership and objectivity.

The head of the Egyptian delegation to the agency, Ramzy Ezzeldin Ramsi, told reporters the meeting was a further step to the re-election of Mr. ElBaradei.

"We essentially believe a consensus exists, but we are willing to allow for more time for a decision to be taken in June," he said.

The European Union said it supported further consultations with an aim of achieving consensus. The United States delegation did not speak at the meeting.

As for Mr. ElBaradei, he was in Mexico for a meeting on nuclear weapons.

The IAEA board meets again in June for a final decision on the leadership issue. At the June meeting, the IAEA will also debate Iran's nuclear program.