

THE CONTROL OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

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Let me begin by summarising in very general terms some characteristics of the disarmament process since World War II. Typically the focus until very recently pitted the United States against the Soviet Union, or the United States and its allies against the Soviet Union and its satellites. And very typically there was much disagreement on the preferability of reducing nuclear weapons stockpiles or conventional arms. There was also a general suspicion that one would not really have an agreement that each side could be expected to live up to, unless there were some means of controlling and monitoring compliance to assure that neither side cheated, so that neither side would expose itself to sudden attack as a result of having been honest.

This unhappy pattern of efforts at disarmament is well known, continuing until 1963 when the United States and the Soviet Union indeed took a very memorable first step, a decision not to test weapons in the atmosphere any longer. The United States, Britain and the Soviet Union agreed to this, and most other countries in the world signed the same Test-Ban treaty even though they had no weapons of their own to detonate; these promised never to test nuclear weapons or to allow any other nation to test on their territory. South Africa was among these nations. The significant exceptions were France, which declined to sign and had already made its first atomic bomb in 1960, and Communist China which refused to sign and then detonated a bomb to join the nuclear club in 1964.

There was thus by the middle 1960's a sense that some co-operation between the United States and the Soviet Union, or between the East and the West if you will, would be possible when the benefits to mankind in general seemed to outweigh the particular national interests of the countries involved. The test ban would be good, because it would reduce the amount of radioactivity in the atmosphere; it might also be good in that it would slow down procurement and development of new weapons on each side, so that the United States and the Soviet Union would not have to spend quite so much money on new weapons.

Yet a second major change emerged in the mid 1960's, in that the attention of the two major countries -- actually the attention of a third also, Great Britain -- shifted away from limiting the combative competition between the major powers, toward limiting the spread of weapons to nations outside the great powers. As I said, four countries had already acquired nuclear weapons by 1960, a fifth, Communist China by 1964, and it seemed that many more nations in the future might start to acquire these weapons, and this might not be at all desirable. There was thus a lot of talk in 1965 and 1966 about a Non-Proliferation Treaty, a treaty by which agreement could somehow be reached not to allow any further spread of atomic weapons.

For a time it seemed that there would never be a final treaty draft acceptable to both the Russians and the Americans, because of unsolved questions about western Europe and West Germany. Many nations at this stage voiced vehement approval of an NPT in principle, saying: "Yes, we agree, it will be bad to have nuclear weapons spreading to more and more countries, and we are in favour of non-proliferation." Ireland had already introduced such resolutions in 1958, 1959, and 1960 at the United Nations General

Assembly, resolutions which were overwhelmingly approved. Countries made a great to-do about how much they agreed on the need to stop nuclear proliferation, until suddenly, to the shock of many, it appeared in 1967, that an agreement was going to be reached, that the Russians and the Americans were actually going to present a treaty that everyone else would be asked to sign.

It was interesting to talk to diplomats of various countries involved at the time, which suddenly had to do a double turn to say: "Well, as a matter of fact, it is very nice that the Russians and the Americans sitting in a smoke-filled room in Geneva have agreed; when we thought they would not agree, we always thought it was a good thing that they were talking about an NPT; but now that they have agreed, is it really so good?" The West Germans were quite unhappy because they could not learn anything beyond what they were reading in the newspapers, about what the Americans were agreeing to. Just to make it even, the Roumanians were similarly unhappy, because the Russians were not telling them anything either. Suddenly the Italians, who had been enthusiastically for the treaty, were enthusiastically reluctant to sign it. The Japanese said that this was the kind of thing they wanted to study very carefully, and were not going to say much else about it. Brazil announced that it was quite opposed. India announced that it was quite unhappy. South Africa said very little, Israel said very little; to say little at this moment indicates that one also was not too happy about the news that had come out of Geneva.

Since we all used to be in favour of disarmament in principle, and knew that every disarmament treaty was good, with the Russians and the Americans suddenly arm in arm and perfectly in agreement, was this really so good or was it really bad? Why for example, is it good to limit the nuclear club at five, why not fifteen, why not ten, why not zero, why not two? The basic NPT argument of course is that to have more and more nations possessing their own atomic bombs or hydrogen bombs would make war more horrible, whenever it happened, and also make war more likely.

If you can imagine a war between India and Pakistan, which is not such a hard thing to imagine, just visualise how bad it would be if both sides had atomic bombs: the Pakistanis dropping them on Calcutta or New Delhi, and the Indians on Karachi. It does not require a great stretch of the imagination to say that many more people would suffer and much more damage would be done in any war of that kind, or in any war in the Middle East or Latin America, if nuclear weapons spread. Secondly, there is a risk that as nuclear weapons spread certain kinds of war would be more likely, since there is something about this kind of weapon that encourages taking the offensive, beating the other fellow to the punch. If he has aeroplanes on his aerodrome, why not hit it with one of your bombs and destroy all his aeroplanes. Because he might do it to you in the next hour, you had better do it in this hour. We can imagine kinds of wars that neither side really wanted, when neither side really preferred war to peace, but each preferred it to the war they felt was about to happen.

But if it is so bad for India to get the bomb, for Israel or South Africa to get the bomb, why do we not go from five down to two or to zero? Well, there are limits of persuasibility on what any of us can do in the field of arms control. If any of you have suggestions on how we can persuade the Communist Chinese to give up the bomb, I will certainly be ready to collect them for my reference in future. When one tries to get representatives of the United Kingdom to entertain the idea that they might give up the bomb, one is received very coldly. Britain has frankly announced

that it is not giving up their atomic weapons, as have the United States and the Soviet Union. Certifying that the last bomb had been destroyed, of all those eighty thousand warheads on one side and what-have-you on the other, would be very difficult. So the answer, about what is so good about five, is probably that it is a lot better than six, fifteen or twenty, and that it is very hard to get from five to four to three to two. The Non-Proliferation Treaty is simply a treaty which freezes the number of countries that have nuclear weapons. It says quite boldly that anyone who has the bomb in 1967 can keep it forever legally, while any other country which signs the treaty renounces the right to make bombs, or to accept them as a gift. Is there anything wrong with the treaty? Are there any reasonable arguments against signing it, for you after all live in a country that until now has not seen fit to sign the NPT? Indeed South Africa has merely announced that it will study the question carefully, which tells the outside world something, but not a great deal. South Africa is not alone: there is a long list of countries that in one way or another have decided not to sign the treaty.

Before going through the various kinds of anti-NPT arguments that are presented, let me just remind you what kind of company South Africa is in. Of countries that have the weapon, France has not signed, but has said that she will behave just as if she had signed, which is not the most informative statement either, but it is reassuring compared to some other things that have been said. Communist China has not signed the NPT and has said that it is a terrible treaty, since the Russians and the Americans want to enslave the world. At an earlier point the Communist Chinese said that the best possible world was a world in which everybody had atomic bombs, but lately they have turned off that tune. In fact, ever since they made their own bombs they have stopped endorsing all-out proliferation, they now are instead saying that it is alright for a nation to build such bombs, but it must do so all by itself, the implication being: do not come to Peking asking for help.

Countries that could make the bomb soon, but have not yet done so, and in effect would be signing away something if they agreed to this treaty, constitute an increasingly long list. I should stress that almost all assumptions people used to make about how difficult it was to make nuclear weapons, or what an enormous departure it was from the normal pursuit of civilian goals, are obsolete. There was a time, perhaps ten years ago, where it would have been a substantial and costly venture to make nuclear weapons, something involving great sacrifices to us in the civilian sector. It is becoming more and more true now that one can easily have nuclear weapons simply as a by-product of what one is doing on the civilian side: indeed one would almost have to go out of one's way to avoid having such weapons. If you are going to generate electricity with nuclear power, you are going to produce a by-product called plutonium, which can be used as an explosive, which was used in the bomb that destroyed Nagasaki-- an atomic bomb.

Several countries that matter have signed the treaty, but have not ratified, West Germany and its Euratom partner Italy, and Japan. India has absolutely refused and said that it will never sign this treaty. Brazil has said the same thing. Australia has signed the treaty, but has said that it will think twice about ratifying, as it is not really certain whether it wants to be bound by the NPT.

The kinds of arguments listed in opposition take a number of forms. Firstly, it is politically undignified to have a treaty which says countries in the first class compartment get to have nuclear weapons and countries in tourist

class forever will not; some Italian diplomats I have spoken to have said that this is the first unequal treaty of the twentieth century. There is a general feeling that this forever freezes a distinction between the super powers and other political levels of statehood, and that this would somehow radiate into subservience on other questions. It is an argument that shows up in India, Brazil, Italy and many other countries.

There is also of course a military argument that says: "Well, we might need the bomb someday. What if we have a war with X? Or what if the Russians come storming ashore? Or what if someone threatens us with nuclear weapons? How will we threaten them back?" I am always impressed by the ingenuity of professional soldiers anywhere in finding use for any possible weapon, and I have never yet found a general or admiral who, if asked whether there was any possible use for an atomic bomb in his service, would say no. Japanese Naval Self Defence Force officials have discovered that perhaps they could use it for depth charges to destroy submarines; Turkish generals have visions of using atomic bombs up in the mountain passes, and so do Indians. There is a congenital tendency on the part of military officers to be ready to say: "Oh, yes, we could use that too, if the national interest requires, maybe we should retain the option."

Yet I think by far the most serious objection has been neither political nor military, but economic (an objection to which the South African government has come back most often) since it is actually going to cost money to give up the bomb. As I say, one used to have to pay money to get the bomb, and now one has to pay money to avoid getting it. How is that so? Well, since we have to show the outside world that we are not making nuclear weapons, we have to let people visit and conduct inspection safeguards. But this can be a big nuisance, because they may want to come at four o'clock in the morning -- bad enough four o'clock in the afternoon -- and so we may have to have a trained physicist there to show them around. They may ask us to shut the whole thing down so that they can take it apart to see whether everything is there that is supposed to be and what will you do for electricity in Pretoria that night? If you are Japanese you do not have many physicists that speak English, but the people from the International Atomic Energy Agency who will inspect these reactors do not often speak Japanese, and so you have to provide a bilingual physicist, to waste his time showing inspectors around instead of doing real physics.

There are various kinds of inspection costs. For example, we will have to design a reactor so that it will be more visible, with all the parts accessible for inspection purposes. This may be more expensive than one designed in the most efficient way. There is the further question of who is going to pay the salaries of the various inspectors involved. Related to that is the fear that the inspector will not just come to inspect, but will do some "moonlighting", i.e. make some money on the side by walking off with commercial secrets and selling them to commercial competitors. Typically, West Germans are diplomatic enough to say that they only fear commercial espionage, carried on by Russians; but one quickly sees that it is not the Russians they are worried about, but General Electric and Westinghouse, since the Russians could not make much use of what the Germans are doing -- the Germans are too far ahead -- but General Electric certainly could. When GE is trying to sell a reactor in Argentina by beating out Siemens, no holds are barred, and all tricks are clean. Such fears have been expressed in South Africa, in particular, as new processes are developed -- for example, new ways of enriching uranium. As soon as the South Africans showed such processes to an inspector, to prove that you were not making weapons, all the ideas might simply be lifted and

within a month or a year used all over the world, with not so much as a thank you and certainly no royalty payments to those people who devised it.

Well, that sets up the general form of the argument as it has gone. One group of nations is saying that they want to preserve peace, and that the way to preserve peace is to limit the number of people who can use the most horrible weapons ever devised. Another group of nations saying that we have to maintain political integrity, and that we have to maintain military options in case we ever need them, or that we have to protect our industry because otherwise we will be second-grade industrial societies; otherwise, the Americans will do all the major nuclear energy work and other states will just be making handicrafts or what-have-you.

The treaty at this stage is neither a success nor a failure, and it is important to avoid what I think are some premature conclusions by my colleagues on its progress. The treaty was signed in June of 1968 with elaborate fanfare. The invasion of Czechoslovakia took place in August; I keep reminding any Russians I talk to on the NPT that, but for that invasion, many more countries would have signed by now and many more countries would have ratified. There was a nice little chain going of countries regularly signing and ratifying, but everything came to a screeching halt, because this after all was not such a nice example of how big countries were going to respect the rights of little countries. I happened to be in India at the time and one Indian after another said: "You see, if Czechoslovakia had its own bomb, that would never have happened, and does this not prove that we should have our own bomb?"

Several nations that could have made the weapon a long time ago have been very forthcoming in signing and ratifying. Canada after all could have made atomic bombs in 1952. It had uranium, it had the technology, and it had participated in the American bomb projects of World War II. For various reasons Canadians decided a long time ago that it was much more beautiful not to make bombs than to do so. It was much more dignified never to touch the stuff, and Canada has now in effect promised forever not to make this kind of weapon, and to submit to an international inspection assuring all of its neighbours that it never will make the bomb, that the man from Vienna will be able to wander through Canada looking at reactors, looking at power plants and certifying in regular reports that no weapons are being made.

Sweden is another significant country that has done the same thing-- significant because it has a vast nuclear technology, and especially because in 1960 Sweden was on the verge of acquiring nuclear weapons. In 1960 Swedish public opinion was really in the mood to say: "Why don't we round out our military arsenal by having the very latest in weapons-- we Swedes have the very latest in everything else, in aircraft and tanks, and we shall have the very latest in atomic bombs if we make our own." And so you have the remarkable swing, showing how public opinion can sometimes really change, for by now Sweden has signed and ratified a treaty which says that it will never make atomic bombs.

As I suggested, however, most of the other important countries are remaining less firmly committed and let me close by discussing how much difference it has made that South Africa itself has not signed. For one thing, this does make it easier for other countries not to commit themselves. When anyone is out in the cold, in terms of world public opinion, it is easier if they have someone out in the cold with them.

Around the time the treaty was being put forward all the nations that had their qualms about whether they should sign took a look around and said: "Will we be the only ones who are staying out? Will we run the risk of the Russians and the Americans being very angry and taking various economic and political steps to make life miserable for us?" But they knew they were not alone, for there were others, there was Japan and there was South Africa and there was Israel quietly in the wings. And so a sigh of relief was heard and a massive retaliation did not come down on the non-signers and the United States did not cut off all aid and all trade, as each of these nations made it easier for every other one to stand back and to withhold its commitment, to withhold the pledge not to make weapons.

Much more directly related to South Africa are various fears expressed in various parts of the world that South Africans are making the bomb. For example, Black African leaders ask why South Africa refuses to sign this treaty: "Why do they not open up their labs to inspection? Why do they not show every bit of their uranium to an international agency? They must be making the bomb." Whether or not Black African leaders are really seriously worried about this, or whether they are just padding their list of worries, because longer lists look more impressive, is not entirely clear. I suspect that at the moment it is padding the window dressing, but whether it will be that in 1976 or 1978 is something else again. Now, your reaction may be: "Who cares whether the Central African Republic is worried or not, or whether Tanzania is worried. Maybe it is good that they are worried." I must simply remind you how easy it will be in the future for any nation to make an atomic bomb. If I repeat myself on this point, I apologise, but will reiterate that one cannot understress how easy it has become for anyone to make atomic bombs: It is no longer a major question of physics. It is more a problem of engineering and to some extent a problem of plumbing, simply a question of learning the trick of making the fluids go around in a way that they won't all leak and get mixed up; when it is all done you've got something that, if squeezed properly, will explode and kill off an awful lot of people if dropped in the right place. It is apparently the case that the peace-loving Swedes, who don't miss any tricks, have done research on hundreds of ways of making bombs explode, and have proven to their own satisfaction--all this mind you on a "defensive" basis--that almost any form of plutonium can be made somehow to explode if you know how to do it, and that it really is not that hard to design bombs. In fact, if I asked a physicist whether he could assemble a bomb, his typical answer would be: "Could I do it? Most of my graduate students could do it." It is just not that hard anymore; therefore, it is not beyond the realm of the imagination that some of these nations that now express fear that South Africa is making atomic bombs could be propelled by genuine fears--fears that are sometimes artificial and sometimes genuine--to launch a project which by 1982-1984 would produce the bomb in Black Africa. If India started working today to make the bomb, about two years from now at the latest you could have an explosion. And the Indian economy in terms of wealth per capita is considerably lower than the wealth per capita of most Black African states. One simply has to erase the image that a country has to be advanced all across the board, in order to be a menace in this regard. What was true perhaps ten years to fifteen years ago will certainly not be true ten years from now.

There is still one other possibility that exercises the minds of the outside world, about what these South Africans are doing vis-a-vis this grand

scheme of ours to make the world more safe by limiting the spread of this particularly obnoxious kind of weapon. After all, South Africa not only has an advanced technology, but she also has uranium. There are not many places in the world where large quantities of uranium are available, Canada is one; (the Canadians are good guys, remember they have signed the treaty, so that they cannot give it away to anybody except under supervision), and the United States is another country that has uranium and then you go down the list South Africa is the third. You have all this uranium, and whoever worries about any other country making the atomic bomb, asks the question: "Where would they get the uranium to make it with?" By force of circumstance the answer tends to come galloping back to South Africa. Many Arabs are worried about Israel making the bomb: Where would the Israelis get the uranium? Do they have it in their own country? No. Are they on generally good terms with anybody these days who has uranium? Yes, South Africa.

Brazilians say they must make peaceful explosives--which are virtually indistinguishable from atomic bombs--it is just a question of where you blow it up. If you blow it up over the canal it is peaceful, if you blow it up over here, it is a weapon. Do they refuse to sign the treaty? Yes. Do they say that they plan at some point to make these explosives? Yes. Where are they going to get the uranium? Is there a country that Brazil gets along with pretty well that has uranium, and has not promised never to give it away? Yes, South Africa. This reasoning will emerge simply by the force of facts. Any geographic atlas that shows where uranium is to be found shows a lot of blue marks in South Africa and very few elsewhere. If the thought did not occur to people naturally, there is always someone helpful enough to start it going. Those of you who listen to Radio Moscow regularly will know that every once in a while it has a "news item" about Israeli and West German, Brazilian and South African co-operation on nuclear weapons, and that now and then a Czech magazine or some other East European source makes the same charge, rumours which may be entirely malicious and falsified at the point of origin, but which strike a certain number of readers and listeners on the outside as being not impossible.

Israelis are being very cute about the treaty. They are not showing everything they are doing. Israelis spread rumours every once in a while that they are making the bomb. If they are doing all that, they must be getting uranium from some place, goes the reasoning. Maybe they have it under their sand and maybe they don't. If they don't, the mere fact that South Africa has not signed this treaty, for good or ill, brings the suspicion back to South Africa.

Now much of what I have spun out for you is simply the working of a malicious imagination which looks at these questions somewhat abstractly and then it says: "Since I cannot prove that what I have just imagined is false, perhaps it is true. If I cannot prove to myself that they are not making the bomb, and that they are not giving uranium away indiscriminately to people who are making the bomb, how do I know that they are not?" Now, we can do various things with that kind of imagination. The general viewer can say: "Well, I must be getting paranoid; it is time for me to study a different subject." If I am a responsible leader of a country, however, it is my job not to think of other things, but rather to stay with the question until it is somehow reassuringly answered. It is thus possible that a cycle could establish itself at some point whereby the rumours become selffulfilling. Because I

thought you were about to make bombs, maybe I had better do something on my own. Or because I know that you will not really trust me, maybe I had better protect myself, since you, as a result of your distrust, may do something that hurts me.

It isn't too far fetched to look back on various situations of this kind, on other weapons and other wars. An important explanation of why World War I broke out is simply that the mobilisation schemes were so effective on each side. I knew that if you started the mobilisation today, you would have an army twice as big as mine tomorrow; since I could not prove that you had not started mobilising, maybe I had better start myself. But then rumours go back and forth. How do I as the Kaiser assure you as the Tsar that I have not mobilised, and how do you assure me, and don't we both do things in a precautionary way that will lead us into a situation that is worse for both of us? If Argentina and Chile and Brazil refuse to sign the treaty -- they have indeed refused -- if they persist in their avoidance of international safeguards and international inspection, what is going to stop a rumor-mongering campaign from getting going in 1980, in which Argentina rumours lead to Brazilian action, which lead to Argentine confirmation of rumours, in ways that were never intended in the first place? And what is going to stop some sort of an entanglement in which South Africa suddenly gets involved?

I would like to close by referring to various side comments I have heard since being here in South Africa, comments which one also hears in the United States. "It is all very good to talk as you have, but are you saying the cold war is over? Whatever happened to the fact that the Russians maintain a political system that is very antithetical to ours so that we cannot really trust them? Whatever happened to the way the Russians behaved in the past and indeed not so far in the past? The same Russians let the Egyptians slip missiles forward in the Suez Canal zone, just a year ago. Can they be trusted to keep their word on a treaty of this importance and are you not in effect acting as though there were no problem here at all?"

I would suggest that there are at least two different kinds of situations in which the Russians or the Communist Chinese can be trusted, or anyone else should be trusted, regardless of the basic hostilities in which the political systems are involved. One is in the situation where everything that everyone is doing is quite visible, where we would instantly know whether they cheated. For example, we would know immediately if the Russians broke the Test-Ban Treaty by exploding a bomb in the atmosphere, and they would know if we had. As a result of certain kinds of reconnaissance satellites which have been put into orbit, we would pretty quickly know if they have doubled the number of missiles that they have in Siberia, and they will pretty quickly know if we doubled the number of missiles we put into Montana.

The second kind of situation is the case where the treaty does exactly what the Russians want. This applies to the NPT. There is good evidence that Moscow does believe in and want this treaty to take effect, so that it would gain nothing by double-crossing us, even when we cannot watch them. Ask yourself: would it make sense for the Russians to give nuclear weapons away, to their allies or to their friends? If you were a Russian would you really want to give atomic bombs to the Czech Army or the Hungarian Army, or to the East German Army? The answer is clearly and unchallengably, no. The Russians know very well that to give their satellites another kind of weapon is to create very great

potential trouble for the future, either in terms of some small country asserting its independence, or that country getting even for the way the Red Army treated them in World War II, or what-have-you.

I think the same goes vis-a-vis Egypt or India, or the countries of Black Africa: however the Russians feel about Black African states supporting insurgency in South Africa, or however they feel about the Arab states continuing war with Israel, one thing that they decidedly are convinced about is that to have nuclear weapons around in those areas would make everything unpredictable. Nuclear weapons might all too easily then spread to the opposing states, and the war might then get out of hand. In no time at all bombs would be dropping in the Ukraine and in the Southern Soviet Union, and this is just not the kind of a world that a country with so much of a vested interest as the Soviet Union has would want to allow to develop. Indeed, as I argued earlier, the Chinese views are very similar. They realise that it is just a little dangerous to give atomic bombs to Uganda, where next week the regime might be knocked off by some General and you would not know where the atomic bombs went to. This is just not the way anybody who has something going in the world is going to take chances. Therefore, the normal view that the Russians are putting one over on us, so that as soon as we have signed it--we, of course, will be law-abiding--they will on the sly violate it, leaves the question, why and where? Where are the Russians going to give atomic bombs away on the sly? What would they gain by it? They would lose much more than they gain. Indeed, as soon as it came out that they had given bombs to Egypt, the United States would forget about its Treaty obligations and go ahead and let the Israelis have the bomb. Or if the Russians were so foolish as to give East Germany atomic bombs, wouldn't the United States rush ahead very quickly to give bombs to West Germany?

Indeed, the Russians have done more than propose this treaty, they have given evidence that they really mean it. They have done some of the work of pushing a basically unpopular treaty. If the Russians had really been unscrupulous, they could have been in favour of the treaty and been in the mood to live up to it, but they could still have let the United States do all the work. I hear stories about three Americans who came to this country in 1968, to try and convince the South African government that it should sign the treaty, three American government representatives who tried to do the hard sell and did not succeed very well, indeed were making themselves slightly unpopular; that is exactly what happened in any place where the United States has reasonably good relations. But for any country with which Moscow have reasonably good relations, one gets the same story about the Russians. They have done their bit, from a great power point of view, in making themselves unpopular by trying to sell this treaty. In India one gets just as many nasty stories of how the Russians have been pushing this awful treaty as one gets about Americans pushing it.

I submit to you, this in some way is now an an issue that has nothing to do with the Cold War anymore. There are many Cold War issues left. The Cold War is not over, and day by day there are confrontations between the United States and the Soviet Union in the Middle East. There is a confrontation between somebody and the United States in Vietnam. Obviously there are many issues left, but the issue of whether or not nuclear weapons should spread is a much more complicated question than any that used to be batted around in the old days of Arms Control Negotiations during the Cold War. It is an issue on which the South African government and the South African people at some point will have to make a very serious decision, as to whether they want to say yes or no.