

## RETHINKING NON-PROLIFERATION

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THE Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) provides that five years after its coming into force a conference shall be held to review its operations. This conference will be held in Geneva in May 1975 in circumstances of growing scepticism not only about the Treaty but also about the wider endeavour to control the spread of nuclear weapons, of which it is part.

The most dramatic blow struck at the NPT was the Indian nuclear explosion of May 18, 1974. First, the Indian explosion demonstrates the 'failure' of the Treaty, if we take its central objective to have been to restrict the circle of states that had conducted nuclear explosions at the point it had reached in 1970. Secondly, the Indian explosion provides new incentives for other states to acquire nuclear weapons: Pakistan, for example, perceives the Indian explosion as a threat to its security, Japan views it as diminishing its relative status, and everywhere it is taken to confirm the idea that the spread of nuclear explosive technology is inevitable. Thirdly, India's action has indicated a new route to nuclear proliferation—that of conducting an explosion, and issuing a declaration that it is for peaceful purposes only, while resisting requests for international inspection to authenticate the declaration. Whether or not one takes seriously Indian assurances that no Indian nuclear weapons programme is being planned, this route has been opened up for other states. Fourthly, the Indian action confronts arms control planners with the problem of how to deal with peaceful nuclear explosions (PNEs) conducted by non-nuclear weapon states—a problem that the NPT sought to avoid by laying down, in effect, that nuclear explosions can be peaceful only if they are conducted by nuclear weapon states. Fifthly, by identifying the NPT as part of the system of super-power domination, and successfully defying it in the name of the rights of the underprivileged, India has helped to diminish the legitimacy of the Treaty and to make more respectable further acts of defiance by itself and others.

However, the most important factors working against the NPT would be having their effect even if the Indian nuclear explosion had not taken place. The capacity to make nuclear weapons, which the NPT does little to restrict, is spreading at an accelerating rate as a consequence of the rapid rise in the number of plutonium power

reactors, expected to increase fourfold in the next few years, and in the number of countries possessing operable reactors, expected to reach 30 by 1980; the decline of the nuclear weapon states' monopoly of uranium enrichment processes; the development of new methods of uranium enrichment, especially gas centrifuge; the availability of reactors of heavy water design, that consume natural rather than enriched, uranium which is widely available; the intensive development in a number of countries of fast breeder reactors that produce more fissionable fuel than they consume; and the declining effectiveness of controls imposed by the exporters of nuclear technology and materials.

The spread of the capacity to make nuclear weapons does not necessarily imply the spread of the will to do so, but a number of recent developments encourage it. The policies of the five nuclear weapon states continue to provide confirmation of the idea—from which the will to proliferate derives—that nuclear weapons are a vital strategic instrument, a vital source of great power status or prestige, or both: one may cite, for example, the 'Schlesinger doctrine' which has given a new lease of life to the idea of resort to nuclear war as an instrument of policy; the development by both the United States and the Soviet Union of missiles accurate enough to give some credence to the latter idea; the failure of the SALT negotiations so far to issue in any actual disarmament, or even—with the possible exception of the 1972 ABM Treaty—any restrictions on Soviet-American arms competition of a truly vital nature; and the continued nuclear testing programmes not only of the United States and the Soviet Union but also of China, France and Britain.

For many potential nuclear weapon states the alternative to a nuclear weapons system of their own is reliance upon guarantees of nuclear support from the United States or the Soviet Union. But these guarantees are at present eroding. The multilateral guarantee which the nuclear weapon state sponsors of the NPT sought to provide through UN Security Council Resolution 255 of June 19, 1968, was of the most feeble kind imaginable, and whatever meaning it had was destroyed when China became a permanent member of the Security Council. The bilateral guarantees of nuclear support, given explicitly or implicitly by the two super-powers not only to their respective allies but also to other clients or associates—one thinks, for example, of the United States implicit guarantees to Israel and Sweden, and Russia's implicit guarantees to India and certain Arab countries—are still an important factor working against proliferation. But confidence in these guarantees is declining as a consequence of the decay of the American and Soviet alliance systems, the consolidation of Soviet-American detente, and the development of a relationship of mutual

nuclear deterrence between China and the Soviet Union, if not yet between China and the United States.

Moreover, the NPT bears the marks of its origins in the mid-1960s when the ability of the United States and the Soviet Union, while working together, to mobilise support for their policies throughout the international political system as a whole was greater than it is now. The principal weakness of the NPT, as a means of controlling nuclear proliferation, is that it is not based upon a consensus of international society as a whole but is perceived by a very substantial segment of international society, especially in the Third World, as an instrument of super-power domination.

It is true that at the end of 1974, 106 states had signed the Treaty and 84 had ratified it. But three of the six states that have conducted nuclear explosions are outside the system. So also are some of the most crucial of the potential nuclear weapon states; the list of non-signatories includes, in addition to India, Israel, South Africa, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Spain and Pakistan, while the list of states that have signed but not ratified includes Japan, Egypt and Indonesia. If the chief test of a country's attitude towards the NPT is to be whether it accepts, or is willing to protest against, the hegemony of the super-powers, the Treaty is bound to go into decline, for antagonism to this hegemony is one of the most powerful emotions in the world today. An NPT which is regarded by the representatives of half the world's population as simply the instrument of the nuclear weapon Haves in their struggle to maintain their ascendancy over the Have Nots will have as little to contribute to the control of nuclear proliferation as the League of Nations had to contribute to the maintenance of international security when, in the 1930s, it became simply the instrument of Britain and France.

### **Critics of the anti-proliferationist doctrine**

In rethinking this subject one must begin by asking again the fundamental questions. Is the spread of nuclear weapons undesirable—in terms of the interests not of any particular section of international society, but of the world as a whole? And in what sense is control of the spread of nuclear weapons a feasible objective?

The case that may be stated by critics of the anti-proliferationist conventional wisdom is a powerful one.<sup>1</sup> It focuses first of all on the idea that an increase in the number of nuclear weapon decision-makers endangers international peace and security. The 'statistical argument'—that the more such decision-makers there are, the more likely

<sup>1</sup> See especially K. Subrahmanyam: *The Indian Nuclear Test in a Global Perspective*. New Delhi: India International Centre, 1974.

nuclear war will be—ignores differences in the political nature of the decision-makers and the strategic situation in which they find themselves: the acquisition of nuclear weapons by a country that does not threaten others but is itself threatened by a nuclear weapon state may make war less likely, not more. Arguments to the effect that new nuclear weapon states would prove less 'responsible' custodians of the weapons than the existing five (because they would be incapable of adequate safety measures, or because their political conflicts are more impassioned, or because their weapons would be vulnerable) are unproven and when applied to the countries of the Third World, it has been said, are 'modern versions of the doctrines of the white man's burden'.<sup>2</sup>

If the presence of nuclear weapons on both sides in the Soviet-American conflict has helped to preserve peace between the super-powers for a quarter of a century may this not also be true of other conflicts? Are not the protagonists of anti-proliferationist doctrine the same persons who in relation to the conflict between the super-powers have insisted on the positive role played by the nuclear 'balance of terror'?

The critics focus their attention not only on considerations of international peace and security, which lie at the heart of the anti-proliferationist doctrine, but also on considerations of international justice or equity, which this doctrine leaves out of account. Even if one accepts that the spread of nuclear weapons is likely to endanger peace and security rather than enhance them, the argument for halting it is an argument for consolidating the existing distribution of power.

This is, of course, why the argument appeals to the three original nuclear weapon states and their allies and clients, who provide the bulk of the supporters of the NPT. Behind the doctrine propounded by the super-powers about the general dangers of proliferation to the world, there lurks an awareness of the special dangers to themselves of a shift in the distribution of power. Implicit in their choice of proliferation as the danger to peace and security that must be curbed now—rather than, say, the danger inherent in the growth of their own weapons stockpiles—is the perception that curbs in this area will restrict others and not themselves.

For those who feel that the issues should be assessed in terms of international justice or equity as well as of international peace and security, and who recognise that the former calls for a redistribution not simply of wealth or resources but also of power, as between the

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

main sections of the world community, the anti-proliferationist doctrine will carry no conviction.

All the arguments of the critics may be accepted and yet there is a sense in which the control of nuclear proliferation is desirable in the interests not simply of the existing nuclear weapon states and their clients but of international society as a whole. If selective nuclear proliferation may in some cases serve to enhance international security, this does not mean that the process of proliferation as a whole does so—the process that began with the acquisition of nuclear weapons by the United States and would logically culminate in a world of 150 or so nuclear weapon powers. If the control of nuclear proliferation is not the only or the most important objective of arms control, and the propaganda of the super-powers has exaggerated its urgency, this does not mean that it is not an important objective at all.

The idea that the more states acquire nuclear weapons, the more international security will be strengthened, exaggerates the stability of the Soviet-American relationship of mutual nuclear deterrence, which can in principle be upset and which even while it lasts does not make nuclear war impossible but simply makes it irrational. The idea also wrongly assumes that proliferation would result in the duplication, in other international conflicts, of the kind of relationship of mutual nuclear deterrence that now exists between the two super-powers, rather than relationships in which one party has a nuclear monopoly or superiority over the others.

If the nuclear weapons club in its present membership perpetuates an unjust distribution of power, it has also to be recognised that so also would a club whose membership had been expanded. Perfect international justice with regard to the possession of nuclear weapons can be achieved only by complete nuclear disarmament, or by an international system in which nuclear weapons are available to every state. Since neither of these alternatives can be expected to come about, the world has to accept a situation in which some states have nuclear weapons and some do not. This does not mean that the present line of division is the only possible one, or that some other line of division could not be held to be at least relatively more just.<sup>3</sup> But whatever expansion of the nuclear weapons club takes place, the argument that it is unjust can always be used by those who are left outside.

That nuclear proliferation in general is undesirable is in fact recognised—in their actions if not always in their words—even by those powers that have been the strongest opponents of anti-proliferationist

<sup>3</sup> It may be argued, for example, that nuclear weapons would be more justly distributed if all countries in the world enjoyed the protection of one or another nuclear power.

doctrine. China has taken the position that whether acquisition of nuclear weapons by a state is good or bad depends on the purposes for which it wants to use them, but this is not a position that sanctions indiscriminate proliferation, and so far it has been used to sanction proliferation only in the case of China itself. France has stated that it will act consistently with the purposes of the NPT, even while remaining outside the Treaty itself, and India—while rejecting the Treaty and resisting any obstacle that might stand in the way of its own weapons option—continues to speak of proliferation as undesirable and of its own policies as serving to check it. None of them has done anything directly to disseminate nuclear explosive technology or material.

The recalcitrant or dissenting states, in other words, do not challenge the doctrine that the spread of nuclear weapons is undesirable, but rather—like the United States, the Soviet Union and Britain before them—seek to show that an exception should be made in their own case. The argument between supporters and opponents of the NPT is not about the desirability or otherwise of non-proliferation but about where the line should be drawn.

In considering how far non-proliferation is feasible it is necessary to distinguish between stopping the spread of nuclear weapons and controlling it. It has never seemed likely at any point in the nuclear era, and it does not seem likely now, that all further proliferation will be stopped. It is simply not credible that one of the most vital strategic and political instrumentalities of the time, which is technically within reach of many states, will remain permanently the monopoly of the few that first developed it. If nuclear weapons should cease to be vital political and strategic instrumentalities—either because arms control understandings have gradually pushed them into the background of international politics, or because new weapons have emerged to displace them—then we may imagine that nuclear proliferation may cease altogether.

But until they do the control of proliferation should include other objectives besides that of stopping it at a given point. It should include attempts to inhibit or discourage proliferation—to ensure that it cannot take place without the surmounting of certain obstacles; to slow the pace of proliferation—so as to gain time in which the limitation of existing nuclear weapons may develop; to absorb the effects of proliferation—to ensure that if it does take place, it does so with the minimum adverse consequences for international security (for example, by seeking to ensure that if two antagonistic powers are acquiring nuclear weapons, a balance is preserved between them, and by seeking to ensure that new nuclear weapon states are incorporated into the

structure of arms control agreements); and to set ultimate limits to the process of proliferation. If the argument is correct which leads us to prefer five nuclear weapon states to six, it should also lead us to prefer six to 20 or 50 or more. It may also be important to ensure that nuclear weapons remain the monopoly of the sovereign state, and do not proliferate beyond it to fall into the hands of sub-national or trans-national political groups.

How, then, can the control of proliferation be advanced at present? First, it is desirable to base whatever policies are pursued on a wider consensus that can be mustered in support of the NPT in its present form.

The NPT has made an important contribution to the control of proliferation by advertising the fact that the spread of nuclear weapons is not inevitable, and so strengthening the hand of anti-nuclear weapon forces in many countries; by enabling countries which wish to remain without nuclear weapons to reassure each other by an exchange of pledges; by contributing to the emergence of detente, especially in Europe; and by the encouragement it has given to the development of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards. The Treaty is not simply the instrument of the nuclear weapon states that are parties to it but also reflects the desire of many non-nuclear weapon parties to impose limitations on each other.

But the attempt to cajole non-nuclear weapon states into signing or ratifying the Treaty, to have Treaty parties cease all exchange of nuclear materials and technology with non-parties, or—as recently suggested by Mr. Fred Iklé—to have Treaty parties agree to give each other preferential treatment in nuclear assistance—might encourage the polarisation of pro-and anti-NPT forces.<sup>4</sup> The need is not for the NPT parties to band together as a league of the virtuous, but to enlist the co-operation of the three recalcitrant nuclear powers and the larger number of non-nuclear weapon states that are sceptical about the Treaty or hostile to it, in a wider system.

One approach to this objective is to seek revision of the Treaty so as to reduce the elements of discrimination in it—for example, by imposing more serious obligations on the nuclear weapon states to pursue disarmament than are contained in Article VI; to require them to subject their peaceful nuclear installations to IAEA safeguards, on the same basis as that accepted by the non-nuclear weapon parties in Article III; to prohibit assistance in acquiring nuclear weapons by one nuclear weapon state to another, as is permitted under the present phrasing of Article I (the outstanding case is American assistance to

<sup>4</sup> See speech of Mr. Fred Iklé, the Director of the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, Oct. 3, 1974.

Britain); and to strengthen those sections of the Treaty (Articles IV 2 and V) which provide for assistance to non-nuclear weapon states in peaceful nuclear matters in general and peaceful nuclear explosives in particular, but have not so far been acted upon.

Revisions of the Treaty along these lines could not be pursued at present without endangering the whole structure of agreement on which the NPT is built. Moreover, even if they were brought about, they would be unlikely to satisfy the more important dissenting states. Revision of the Treaty should best be pursued not at a conference of the parties to it, such as the Review Conference, but in a wider negotiation embracing non-parties at a later stage.

Rather than seek revision of the Treaty it might be advisable at this stage to play it down while seeking to involve the non-parties in a wider system of co-operation. The NPT would remain as an instrument available to those who wished to subscribe to it, but pending a revision conference that might ultimately take place the emphasis, in policies concerned to control proliferation, would shift to other areas.

### **The search for safeguards**

One field in which a wider system of co-operation may be sought is that of IAEA safeguards on peaceful nuclear activities. The IAEA is a global body of over one hundred members, both parties and non-parties to the NPT, including China, at least nominally, France and India. It has provided a system of safeguards against diversion of peaceful nuclear activities to military purposes in connection with the NPT, which requires non-nuclear weapon parties to accept IAEA safeguards on all their peaceful nuclear activities, and to conclude agreements with the Agency to this effect, and requires all parties not to export certain nuclear materials or equipment to non-nuclear weapon states, except subject to safeguards. However, the Agency had earlier developed safeguards for voluntary application, and its safeguard system may work independently of the NPT.

The ideal safeguards system, no doubt, would be one which was applied to all the peaceful nuclear activities of all states without distinction. This system, however, will not be realised so long as some states engage in nuclear activities that are not peaceful, and the question now is how to extend the role of safeguards while taking account of the political reality.

First, an effort may be made through the IAEA to promote international co-operation with respect to the physical protection of nuclear materials. The growth of peaceful nuclear materials and equipment in many parts of the world, and the growing traffic in these materials from one part of the world to another, create the danger that

items of potential military significance will be seized or stolen by non-governmental groups. A comparable and perhaps greater danger is that arising from the growth of the military nuclear programmes and stockpiles of the nuclear weapon states, which are also vulnerable to seizure or theft of this kind.

To ensure proper accounting of all peaceful nuclear equipment and materials and proper physical security over them is a national responsibility, which no state will be prepared to turn over to an international body; even more obviously is this the case with respect to the security of weapons programmes and stockpiles. Nevertheless, agreement might be sought to establish the principle that all nations controlling nuclear materials or equipment are responsible to the international community for proper accounting and safe custody of them; to co-ordinate national policies and establish guidelines; and to establish some direct role in this area for the IAEA itself.

In 1972 the IAEA did approve a set of recommendations for the physical protection of nuclear material, and the United States has proposed that it draft a convention which would make physical security at nuclear plants obligatory. Such a convention, if it is to serve any useful purpose, must cover the peaceful nuclear activities of the nuclear weapon states as well as of the non-nuclear weapon states. Moreover, the latter states will be within their rights if they insist that any obligations they undertake with respect to the physical security of their peaceful nuclear programmes should be balanced by obligations assumed by the nuclear weapon states in relation to their military programmes. A comprehensive scheme for international accountability for the physical protection of nuclear materials does not presuppose support for the NPT or agreement about any particular line of division between those states which are entitled to have nuclear weapons and those which are not. It is rather founded upon the solidarity of all states in seeking to preserve their position in world politics against challenges from non-governmental groups.

Secondly, agreement should be pursued among all states that are exporters of nuclear materials and technology to require all recipients to accept IAEA safeguards on the materials or technology that they receive. At present most nuclear exporters, including the nuclear weapon states that are outside the NPT, do impose safeguards requirements of some kind on their exports. But it is only those exporters that are parties to the NPT that are obliged to impose safeguards, and then only on non-nuclear weapon states. Moreover, the safeguards applied by exporters at present are in many cases bilateral ones, not involving the IAEA, which—although in some cases they are more stringent than the Agency's safeguards and in other cases less so—

cannot provide a sense of assurance in international society at large, since no international authority is involved in them and, in many cases, little is known about them. Furthermore, as nuclear activities grow throughout the world the number of significant nuclear exporters will grow also, and if a system is not devised into which they can be incorporated, the whole attempt to control nuclear exports may break down.

The aim should be a common obligation, accepted by all exporters, and not only parties to the NPT, to require Agency safeguards on all their nuclear exports. These safeguards should apply to nuclear-weapon state recipients as well as others. There is a need also to strengthen the Agency safeguards system, especially by providing for physical controls against diversion from peaceful to military purposes, as distinct from mere detection of it.

Safeguards should be required, not on all the peaceful nuclear activities of recipients (as is required in the case of non-nuclear weapon state parties under Article III 1 of the NPT), which would be unrealistic, but only on the source material and equipment that is transferred (as is required in the case of non-nuclear weapon states, whether they are parties or not, by Article III 2 of the NPT).

Some exporters or potential exporters of nuclear materials, including China, France and India, are unlikely to accept such an obligation at present, because to do so would be a formal admission that having conducted nuclear explosions themselves, they are now seeking to place obstacles in the path of others who might wish to follow in their footsteps. This is in fact what they are doing, but a decent interval may have to be observed before they are able to acknowledge it. In the meantime it may be possible to explore more informal means through which they might be involved in common export controls.

Thirdly, the ultimate goal should not be lost sight of: it is a system of IAEA safeguards that would apply not merely to international nuclear transactions, as advocated above, but to all peaceful nuclear activities of states. The only states which are at present obliged to accept Agency safeguards on all their peaceful nuclear activities are the non-nuclear weapon parties to the NPT. While the safeguards accepted by these states cannot be universalised at present, it is desirable to preserve the idea that they should be. If comprehensive safeguards of this sort are to be extended, this will surely require their application, on the same basis, to nuclear weapon states as well as non-nuclear weapon states. Perhaps Britain could make a contribution here by becoming the first nuclear weapon state to submit all its peaceful nuclear activities to IAEA safeguards.

### **Peaceful nuclear explosions**

The control of proliferation requires—again, outside the framework of the NPT—a common approach to the question of PNEs. Broadly, three approaches are possible.

The first is to reject the idea that any valid distinction can be drawn between military and peaceful nuclear explosions, and to seek to restrict or even prohibit the latter. This was the approach followed in the NPT, although only in relation to PNEs conducted by non-nuclear weapon states. Those who favour continuing with this approach sometimes couple with it the idea that PNEs conducted by the nuclear weapon states should be discontinued, and a moratorium declared on all PNEs, at least pending a study of their economic and safety aspects.

This approach rests upon the correct perception that whatever the economic promise of PNEs might be (it is, of course, widely disputed) it is their security, or arms control, implications that are paramount. The NPT regime is objectionable from this point of view, not only because it allows nuclear weapon states freely to conduct PNEs on their own behalf, but also because in the provision it makes for 'nuclear explosive services' provided by the nuclear-weapon states to the non-nuclear weapon states it confirms the ideas that PNEs are different from military explosions and are economically significant. If this regime were to be abandoned in favour of a general understanding that all states must forgo PNEs in the interests of the control of proliferation, this is an approach for which there is a lot to be said.

But while, in retrospect, it may be argued that this is the approach that should have been followed from the beginning, it is too late to adopt it now. A unilateral abandonment of PNE programmes by the nuclear weapon states, supposing it were possible, might help to discourage interest in them by others. But a general prohibition of PNEs could not be made viable, given the appeal the Indian explosion now has as a symbol of defiance of the super-powers, and the record of heavy involvement in PNE programmes which the super-powers have had up to this point, and which was recently reaffirmed in the exemption of PNEs from the limitations imposed in July 1974 by the Threshold Test Ban Treaty.

The second approach is to accept the Indian contention that PNEs conducted by non-nuclear weapon states do not involve proliferation, that any state has the right to conduct PNEs without international authentication or supervision, and that efforts to control proliferation should be restricted towards the control of the spread of weapons systems, defined in some different way. A nuclear explosion is, after all, only one particular stage in the route towards acquiring a nuclear weapons system. To choose—as the NPT did—the conduct of a nuclear

explosion as the essential test of nuclear weapon status, rather than possession of a chemical separation plant, or of weapons-grade fissionable material, or of a bomb or warhead stockpile, or an effective delivery system, is to a degree arbitrary. Why not lay the curse on some later stage in the process, while leaving states free to explore the economic potential of PNEs?

But while the conduct of a nuclear explosion is only one stage in the process, it is the particular stage which, politically and psychologically, is the crucial one in marking the emergence of a nuclear weapon state. In this respect the NPT did not create the identification of nuclear weapon status with conduct of a nuclear explosion, but reflected an identification that was already present in the international public mind. If every state is to be free to conduct a nuclear explosion, and to establish its peaceful nature merely by issuing a declaration to this effect, this is tantamount to abandoning the control of proliferation.

The third approach is to accept the idea that PNEs may be conducted, but to insist that they should take place only under international auspices and with safeguards to establish their peaceful nature. It is in this area that a solution to the problem should be sought, although no solution that is generally acceptable will be found in the near future.

Such an approach would imply observation of all PNEs by the IAEA, whose Board of Governors has already approved guidelines and procedures for such observation. Nuclear weapon states would relinquish the right to conduct PNEs unilaterally and without safeguards. The idea of nuclear explosive services provided by nuclear weapon to non-nuclear weapon states, enshrined in Article V of the NPT, might be preserved, but these services would be made available to all states and not only to parties to the NPT. The IAEA might be given a role not merely in safeguarding the PNEs but also in determining whether or not they should take place. It would still be important to discourage even safeguarded PNEs by non-nuclear weapon states, since they would have a proliferating effect whether they were safeguarded or not, while encouraging any non-nuclear weapon state that is determined to conduct PNEs to submit them to safeguards.

Serious obstacles stand in the way of this approach. The nuclear weapon states, and especially the Soviet Union, will not readily relinquish the right to conduct PNEs unilaterally. For some non-nuclear weapon states the attraction of PNEs is precisely that they are a symbol of nuclear weapon status and of defiance of the super-powers, and PNEs under international auspices hold no attractions. India could be induced to accept safeguards on its PNEs, if at all, only in the context of a comprehensive test ban. The motives that have led India, and may lead other non-nuclear weapon states, to conduct unilateral

PNEs, are much less economic than they are political and strategic, and the attempt to discourage unilateral PNEs must rest, in the last resort, not on international procedures for spreading the economic benefits of nuclear explosives technology, but on policies and arrangements that will dampen these political and strategic motives.

The control of proliferation might also be assisted by a re-examination of the question of security assurances provided by nuclear weapon states to non-nuclear weapon states. These can be of two kinds: positive assurances, in which the nuclear weapon states make undertakings of support to non-nuclear weapon states if they should be threatened by a nuclear weapon power; and negative assurances, in which they undertake not to use their nuclear weapons against a non-nuclear weapon state.

It has already been noted that the positive assurances afforded by the United States, the Soviet Union and Britain through a UN Security Council resolution in 1968 are virtually meaningless, and that those provided by the two super-powers to their allies and various other states, while still important, have declined somewhat in effectiveness. To this it may be added that positive assurances, even when they are effective in providing for the security of a non-nuclear weapon state, suffer from two grave defects from the point of view of the control of proliferation. First, positive assurances are an attempt to exploit and dramatise the political and strategic influence conferred by possession of nuclear weapons, and thus work counter to the long-term need, for purposes of the control of proliferation, to reduce this influence to a minimum. Secondly, positive assurances invite the non-nuclear weapon majority of states in the world to accept a position of dependence on others, at a time when a major theme of world politics is the revolt against dependence of this kind.

There are therefore strong reasons for preferring negative assurances. No assurances that the nuclear weapon states can give to others by way of verbal undertakings can be as effective in promoting their sense of security as the continued actual abstention of the nuclear weapon states from using these weapons, as the United States did against Japan, or from threatening to use them, as the United States did against China when it was non-nuclear. Nevertheless, verbal undertakings, whether unilateral or expressed in some multilateral declaration by the non-nuclear weapon states not to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states, could be of some help. They would serve to reinforce the expectation that nuclear weapons in the hands of certain states serve only to neutralise threats of nuclear war by other states, and not as instruments of wider political and strategic purposes. They would also serve to weaken the force of the argument that is sometimes advanced,

for example, in Israel, South Africa, and Australia, that acquisition of nuclear weapons is desirable so as to be able to deter threats from non-nuclear weapon neighbours.

Again, it is important that negative assurances of this sort be offered not merely to NPT parties as a reward for joining the Treaty, but to non-nuclear weapon countries at large. Because of the situation in central Europe, where super-power nuclear weapons are stationed in the territories of allied countries, it is sometimes suggested that the obligation not to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states be subject to some qualifications, such as that it does not apply if the country concerned has nuclear weapons on its soil, or is engaged in an armed attack in concert with a nuclear weapon power, or is allied with a nuclear weapon power. It might be best to aim at a simple declaration, to which particular nuclear weapon states can attach whatever qualifications they consider suitable.

### **What the nuclear weapon states should do**

Finally, the control of proliferation depends, more than it depends on anything else, on the practice of restraint by the nuclear weapon states. What is important is not so much whether the nuclear weapon parties to the NPT make sufficient progress towards disarmament to satisfy the non-nuclear weapon parties, but whether the nuclear weapon states as a whole are able to demonstrate to international society at large that nuclear weapons are of limited and declining utility.

To some degree the nuclear weapon states have already been successful in doing this. If nuclear weapons had been used in any of the post-1945 conflicts, on however limited a scale—or if explicit threats of the use of nuclear weapons had been made frequently, rather than rarely, as they have been—the impulse to proliferation in the world today would be very much stronger than it is. The first requirement of the nuclear weapon states' contribution to the control of proliferation is that they should continue to display at least as much restraint as they have done in the past. But can they move beyond this to create a sense that the role of nuclear weapons is diminishing? While they retain their nuclear weapons at all they can go only a certain distance. But three objectives suggest themselves, at least as policies which the nuclear weapon Have Nots should be urging upon the Haves, as a matter of priority.

The first is a comprehensive test ban treaty. This is the longest discussed of any arms control issue of the post-1945 era, yet it is still one of the steps most likely to advance the objective of removing nuclear weapons from the foreground to the background of international

politics, while it may also make possible an agreed solution to the problem of PNEs.

A second objective is an undertaking by the nuclear weapon states to refrain from the first use of nuclear weapons. Among the nuclear weapon Haves, China alone today embraces this policy, which reflects its position as a fledgling nuclear weapon state. The idea that the first use of nuclear weapons should be threatened to provide security against superior conventional forces to the east is one to which the United States, Britain and France are committed in Western Europe and which now also dominates Soviet thinking in relation to China. No first use declarations and policies, while no one will place any reliance upon them, will help to remove the immediacy of present feelings that nuclear weapons are a vital instrumentality. General acceptance of no first use of nuclear weapons is an objective which runs counter to some powerfully entrenched policies and thinking, but so did some of the arms control limitations that we now have, when they were first proposed.

A third objective is that an agreement be pursued in the SALT negotiations which, unlike the Vladivostok understandings, serves to stabilise the Soviet-American balance, to reduce the dynamic of the super-power arms competition and to produce some substantial actual reductions. Appeals to the nuclear weapon states to abandon their nuclear weapons will fall on deaf ears; indeed such appeals express not the belief or even the hope that nuclear disarmament will take place so much as the desire to rationalise the proliferation of nuclear weapons. But demands that the nuclear weapon states take some of these tangible measures of restraint will be heeded by some, and the nuclear weapon Have Nots, by refusing to co-operate in the control of proliferation if these steps are not taken, will be making a constructive contribution.