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**INTERNATIONAL PROBLEMS OF NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION
and the South African Position**

J E Spence

OCCASIONAL PAPER

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**DIE SUID-AFRIKAANSE INSTITUUT VAN INTERNASIONALE AANGELEENTHEDE
THE SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**

Professor J E Spence, who is Research Adviser to the Institute, is Head of the Department of Politics at the University of Leicester in the U K, a position which he has held since 1974. Prior to that he taught at the University of Natal and then at the University College, Swansea. On two occasions he was Visiting Professor at the University of California in Los Angeles.

Professor Spence has written widely on Southern African affairs and on strategic matters, and he has a special interest in the field of nuclear proliferation and South Africa's position in this regard.

This paper is the edited transcript of a tape-recording of a talk to the Witwatersrand Branch of the Institute in March 1980, during the two months Professor Spence spent at Jan Smuts House as Visiting Jan Smuts Professor of International Relations at the University of the Witwatersrand. He also visited all the Institute's other Branches.

It should be noted that any opinions expressed in this article are the responsibility of the author and not of the Institute.

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J.E. Spence

ISBN: 0-909239-70-3

The South African Institute of International Affairs
Jan Smuts House
P O Box 31596
BRAAMFONTEIN
2017
South Africa
July 1980

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The discipline of strategic studies might be described as both a cold-blooded and a seductive one. It has a jargon all of its own, embodying concepts such as nuclear deterrence, limited war crisis management, escalation ladders, overkill capacity. It deals with abstractions, with megadeaths and there is the danger of becoming fascinated by the bizarre minutiae of nuclear technology to the exclusion of the very real moral and philosophical problems that the study of war presents. Further, there is the added difficulty that an over-emphasis on concepts such as nuclear deterrence will lead the analyst into believing that the only relationship that really matters between super-powers is the strategic, the military, relationship. There is, thus, a tendency to see these relations as an elaborate ritual of strategic move and counter-move in a game of nuclear chess, and this is a tendency to be resisted.

It is not without significance that the major writers in this field - most of them Americans - have come to the study of strategy from disciplines such as mathematics, economics and physics, and it is possible that they lack the necessary historical and philosophical background, which is evident in the true strategist such as Clausewitz.

To illustrate the point in question, it is commonly claimed in the literature of the Cold War and the literature of strategic studies that it is nuclear deterrence that has, in fact, kept the peace between the Soviets and the United States over the last thirty years. And it is said with such a degree of finality and authority that one is, in a sense, compelled to accept that proposition at face value. However, reasoning on the assumption that international relations - let alone strategic studies - is not a science, there is no way in which that proposition can be proved. The Cold War can not be recreated in a laboratory, and the variable of nuclear weapons abstracted, to see whether nuclear weapons have had the influence of keeping the peace that strategists commonly ascribe to those weapons.

It is important to recognise, therefore, that there are other relationships between states which are as important - if not more important - than those of a purely military or strategic nature. There are economic, diplomatic, political, cultural and sporting relationships. The fact that one cannot quantify these relationships in the way that one can quantify military and strategic relationships, should not blind one to their importance. If one is going to study strategic aspects of international politics, it is important to realise that strategy is only an aspect of international politics and that it is mistaken to study strategic matters in a political, social and economic vacuum.

The issue of the role of nuclear weapons in international politics, whether they can be abolished or controlled, is part of a much longer historical debate about the role of arms races in causing wars. Consider the years between the wars - between 1919 and 1939: during this period there was a profound faith placed by many politicians, observers, publicists and academics, in the merits of disarmament as a way of securing peace and security for all time. The effects of World War I on the survivors' aspirations partly explains why so much faith was placed in disarmament as a way of bringing about the establishment of peace and security on a permanent basis. The assumption

governing their thinking was simply that arms races cause wars; abolish the arms races and, by definition, you will abolish wars from the international system and ensure a degree of peace.

However, although disarmament conferences were held throughout the 1920s and 1930s, they achieved little in trying to bring an end to arms races. Except, of course, for the Washington conference in 1922 between the major naval powers of the day and leading to the incorporation of arms control arrangements and disarmament measures into the ensuing treaty. The success of the conference greatly encouraged those who believed that disarmament was a going concern and that it could be brought about in additional areas, other than naval competition. But one has to recognise that the powers represented at the Washington naval conference were all satisfied powers, status quo powers, which accepted the existing balance of power; which had no fundamental ideological or political differences separating them, and for which, therefore, the business of agreement on a measure of arms control and disarmament in naval matters was relatively straightforward. The fact that Germany and Russia were not represented there, mostly for domestic reasons in both cases, partly explains why success was assured at that time.

After the Second World War, there was a renewed faith in disarmament. It was said, particularly after the explosion of two atomic weapons over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, that something serious had to be done to bring about an end to arms races; again on the assumption that arms races cause wars, and that, therefore, war would be eliminated by the abolition of arms races. The record of these disarmament conferences, which started in 1946 with the Baruch discussions at the United Nations and continued right through the fifties until about 1960 showed, however, that the cleavages, the differences, the level of distrust was simply too great between the two super-powers for any significant measure of disarmament to take place. From this there emerged the belated recognition that arms races and arms themselves were symptoms, rather than the cause, of conflict. Arms races, when carried to uncontrollable lengths can, of course, accelerate existing tension, mistrust and hostility; but the basic cause, after all, of hostility and distrust between states does not lie in the fact that states are indulging in arms races, but in more profound ideological, economic or political differences. It was generally recognised in the late fifties and early sixties that no further disarmament could take place - that there was no prospect of getting a measure of disarmament that would work to bring a desired measure of peace and security between states in international politics. If there was to be disarmament, this would depend upon the prior settlement of the political, economic and ideological differences between the super-powers. It was also recognised that if we were to wait for the achievement of that degree of international security - if that was the price of disarmament - then it was likely that states and their peoples would have to wait for ever.

Thus a new concept - arms control - was developed. This, although bearing some relationship to disarmament, assumes that the arms race between the super-powers - and indeed arms races in regional conflicts - is a fact of international life and must be accepted as such. In these circumstances it is best, therefore, not to try and wish the arms race away, but rather to try and impose some degree of control, some degree of constraint upon the arms race through tacit agreements or by formal treaties.

Tacit arms control tries to impose some control on an arms race by trying to get the states concerned - either unilaterally or bilaterally - to accept the need for constraint in their joint participation in an arms race. An example would be, for instance, the way in which the two major super-powers over the last thirty years have adopted what is, in the language of strategy,

called a "second strike posture". That is to say, the Soviets and the United States have tacitly agreed that the most useful way of deploying their nuclear weapons is to do so either under the sea (on submarines, which cannot be damaged by direct hit), or deep in silo pits heavily protected from a direct hit from the other side. If both sides follow this strategy by tacit agreement, then the net effect is that both give up the option of an aggressive, or first strike against the other, because rationally it makes no sense to strike against the other side if you know that by such action you will expose your cities and your state to retaliation from the protected, invulnerable weapons your adversary possesses. Deterrence, therefore, is allegedly strengthened by this posture because both sides have rejected the option of an aggressive first strike. This kind of tacit agreement cannot be embodied in a formal treaty, but it is significant that both the Soviet Union and the United States have imitated each other in deploying their weapons in this way.

An example of a more formal type of arms control would be the signing of the Test Ban Treaty in 1963, where both the super-powers, together with Britain, invited other states to sign a treaty which meant that the signatories gave up the right to test weapons in the atmosphere or above ground. The assumption was that if a state signed that treaty, it gave up the right to test and therefore the right to make nuclear weapons - since unless a weapon could be tested, it was really rather a doubtful asset.

Arms control generally - in a very broad definitional sense - relates to controls and restraints which states either by tacit agreement or by formal treaty, accept with respect to three things : the manufacture of nuclear weapons; the deployment of nuclear weapons; and even the use of nuclear weapons.

As an example of the control of the manufacture of nuclear weapons one could cite the debate that took place in the late sixties and early seventies about the desirability of building an anti-ballistic missile system. At that time, both the Soviets and the Americans were pouring research funds and skilled expertise into the development of a missile system which was designed to ring the major centres of the state in question; the assumption was that one could then destroy the enemy's retaliatory missiles as they came in, thus ensuring the option of the first strike being restored. Implicit in this course of action was also the assumption that it would make sense to strike first because the end result would be the neutralisation of the enemy's retaliatory capacity. Thus a rather worrying and dangerous arms race was developing between the two super-powers with respect to anti-ballistic missiles, with the attendant danger of destabilization in the deterrence relationship between them. And one of the key developments in the discussion leading to the signing of SALT I was the decision to call a halt to research and progress in the area of anti-ballistic missiles, as both sides wished to maintain a deterrence relationship. This was the major achievement of the first SALT treaty.

With respect to deployment, there are other examples in addition to the way in which second strike postures have been adopted as a way of maintaining the stability of deterrence. One such example would be the agreements which have been signed not to deploy nuclear weapons in space, nor in the Arctic or Antarctica, and to designate certain areas - for example Latin America - as nuclear free zones (a nuclear free zone is an area in which the states agree to forbid the deployment of nuclear weapons by others and undertake not to develop them themselves.)

Finally, there is arms control with respect to the use of nuclear weapons. In both the Korean and the Vietnam Wars, and to a degree in the Middle Eastern conflicts that have occurred in the last thirty years, one has witnessed the curious spectacle of the two super-powers engaged in a complicated pattern of both competition and co-operation. Both try to press home the claims of their

proxies, but at the same time both recognise the danger of allowing their proxies to score an overwhelming victory over their opponents because of the danger that this would act as a catalyst, bringing the super-powers into direct confrontation with each other. The result was a degree of tacit agreement to refrain from certain actions when limited wars like those in Korea, Vietnam and in the Middle East occur. The most important and obvious limitation is the non-use of nuclear weapons. In Korea, for example, it was clear that the United States understood that if it were to deploy tactical nuclear weapons in the war there was a likelihood that the Soviets would supply tactical nuclear weapons to the Koreans. In Vietnam there was the recognition that if tactical nuclear weapons were employed against the North Vietnamese infantry battalions, (a strategy which would have made sense militarily but certainly not politically), this would have invited massive incursions of Chinese and perhaps Soviet volunteers. Thus a bargaining relationship has developed between the super-powers, so that even in the course of conflict, each side in effect established tacit agreements with the other as to which weapons will or will not be used. Clearly, this is a form of arms control insofar as it places limitations on the use of weapons that states will employ in particular kinds of conflicts. The Cuban missile crisis and its outcome provided a major impetus for arms control. Its importance was that it raised the level of tension to a very considerable degree, and the tension persisted between the two super-powers even after the crisis was resolved, so giving them the impetus to consider ways and means of stabilizing their relationship. (Both Kennedy and Khrushchev later confessed to having peered over the abyss of nuclear war and drawing back at the last minute, an experience which had some impact on their thinking about the future of the world and of their own countries). In thinking of the historical origins of arms control, it is interesting that the first arms control agreement - the Test Ban Treaty - was signed in June 1963, some nine months after the successful resolution by crisis management of the Cuban missile crisis. The discussions to stop testing in the upper atmosphere and above ground had been going on for some years - (largely sparked off by Prime Minister MacMillan's insistence that some agreement be made on testing, if only to stop the Russians and Americans from exploding bigger and worse bombs and spraying the world with radiation) - but up until the Cuban crisis there had been little prospect of agreement being reached.

The second assumption behind arms control is that arms control agreements between two states are possible when tension is at a certain point in the relationship between them. Above that point, arms control is impossible because the tension is too high, and below that point, arms control is unnecessary. This proposition put forward by Hedley Bull in his book The Control of the Arms Race, claims that the virtue of arms control is that it can operate when tension is at a certain point. Disarmament, on the other hand, can only work when there is no tension at all between states. (And, as was said earlier, if one bases one's hopes on the achievement of a tension-free international society as a condition for disarmament, one could wait forever). The virtue of arms control is that it assumes that there is a point of tension where paradoxically it becomes possible. It is paradoxical because it could, for example, be argued that there is a likelihood of substantial arms control agreement between the Soviets and the United States (the tension level is appropriate in this context). But between the Soviets and China arms control is not possible because they are so profoundly at odds with each other. There is not even that minimum level of common interest which is ultimately essential for any kind of arms control arrangement. Above the specific point of tension nothing can be done, and beneath that level arms control becomes unnecessary. After all, the United States and Britain are engaged in an arms race, but they do not need to sign an agreement to limit that arms race. They are allies and friends and are not likely to threaten each other in any significant military way.

It is interesting, in passing, to remember that when Germany became a member of NATO in 1954 - (and, after all, in joining such an alliance a state may assume that it is entitled to all the rights and privileges attendant upon membership) - a clause was written into the treaty which forbade the Germans to manufacture nuclear weapons on German soil. In other words, while Germany was accepted as a member of NATO and expected to make a major contribution to NATO, there was still a residual fear, a residual hostility to Germany - especially on the issue of nuclear weapons. So even in that context, between allies, one can see arms control agreements as being necessary.

The third assumption behind arms control is that if the super-powers can be persuaded to agree on an initially very obvious and symbolic agreement, which does not really mean very much - (and this may be said to be true of the Test Ban Treaty) - and if they observe that agreement for some length of time, an increment of good faith and trust is injected into their relationship, facilitating a greater measure of arms control agreement at a later stage. By the same token, if that agreement is observed in good faith for a period of years, yet another increment of faith and trust is injected into the relationship and yet more substantial arms control measures can be embarked upon.

It is thus hoped in the long run, all things being equal, that the Soviets and the United States will enmesh themselves into a network of arms control agreements which will so improve the political relationship between them that real disarmament can begin in earnest. The assumption is that arms control can pave the way for disarmament over the long term, because arms control agreements do not only stabilize the military balance of power, but they also help to create a climate of trust for the establishment of new arms control agreements and ultimately a measure of disarmament. Arms control agreements are, however, always at the mercy of the other relationships, as mentioned earlier, namely the political, diplomatic and economic relationships between states.

For example, it is no accident that the SALT II Treaty - signed and sealed by the United States and the Soviet Union some time ago - has been deferred for Senate consideration by President Carter because of the crisis in Afghanistan; the assumption was that the progress that arms control agreements were making towards the establishment of détente between the two super-powers had been set back drastically by the Russian action in Afghanistan, and therefore, for the time being at least, there seems to be little prospect of any measure of substantial arms control agreement - SALT II - taking place until relations between the Soviets and the United States return to a measure of normality. One realises, therefore, that arms control agreements are always at the mercy of other forces operating in international politics between super-powers at any one time.

As has been said, the outcome of the Cuban missile crisis and the first arms control agreement - the Test Ban Treaty - forced both Krushchev and Kennedy to the realisation that they had to do something to stabilise the relationship between their countries, to inject a measure of détente into the relationship between them. There was little prospect of agreement on economic, on political or ideological issues. There was, however, the prospect of agreement in the strategic/military field, an area in which they did have a very precarious common interest - that of preventing an arms race from getting out of hand, preventing their relationship from becoming so unstable that it would provoke crises which might ultimately escalate to the level of nuclear confrontation. It was the knowledge that future crises might lead to nuclear confrontation and - to use the jargon of strategic studies - mutual assured destruction (or MAD, as it is sometimes called), that provided a common interest

(albeit a precarious one) in the military/strategic field, which led to the establishment of the early arms control agreements, and subsequently later ones in the course of the 1960s.

The arms control agreements in the sixties can be considered to have paved the way for the other measures of détente which marked the late sixties and early seventies; for example, Willy Brandt's policy of aussenpolitik - and the settling of his differences with East Germany and the Soviet Union. Arms control agreements have provided the necessary prelude to the economic and technological agreements that the Soviets have signed with the West over the last ten years or so. Admittedly, Soviet action in Afghanistan may have placed these agreements at risk, but at least the historical record is clear. Because arms control was the one thing on which they could agree, it paved the way for more substantial agreement - not simply in the field of arms control, but also in the general area of economic and political co-operation, and that is why so much faith and trust has been placed in it. The major arms control agreement following the Test Ban Treaty was the Non-Proliferation Treaty, which was sponsored, as the Test Ban Treaty was, by the Soviets, the United States and Britain. They took the view that the time had come to invite all the states of the international society which were not nuclear powers, to sign a treaty of non-proliferation. The effect of signing that treaty was to announce to the world that a state gave up the right to become a nuclear power by legally contracting out of the nuclear arms race in advance.

The Treaty's history has been rather checkered. It met immediate opposition from the French who took the view that this was just a super-power condominium; it confirmed their belief that those powers aimed at ruling the world in the interests of their own peoples only, ignoring French claims etc. Hence a brilliant French strategist, Pierre Gallois, evolved the remarkable thesis that far from trying to stop the spread of nuclear weapons by signing treaties, it was more sensible to encourage the spread of nuclear weapons - to let everybody who wanted them have them. He argued, logically, that the West and the Soviets had not gone to war for over twenty years largely because their nuclear weapons deterred them from doing so. They were conscious of the threat of mutual assured destruction if nuclear weapons were invoked. Thus he argued that if nuclear weapons were injected into every regional conflict - the Middle East, South Asia, white versus black Africa - then a measure of nuclear deterrence would develop to ensure peace in those parts of the globe. In other words, deterrence would be symmetrical, right across the globe. This argument impressed many Frenchmen, and distressed many Americans, because it ran contrary to the American commitment to stop the spread of nuclear weapons.

The thesis was punctured by Hedley Bull, who argued that following Gallois' thesis to its logical conclusion, was like saying that the best way to keep death off the roads was to put a small pile of nitro-glycerine on every car bumper. Everybody would drive infinitely more carefully, but accidents would occur - people being human, and cars breaking down - and the results would be infinitely nastier as a result. Gallois ignored the fact that the conflicts that have occurred - in the Middle East, South Asia and Africa - are not really comparable to the Cold War conflict that went on between the Soviets and the United States in the fifties and sixties. Even at the height of the Cold War there was a sense in which the Americans and the Russians, despite their ideological differences, accepted the right of the other to exist as a state. There was a sense in which Russians, despite their hatred of capitalism, acknowledged that the United States was a legitimate state with a right to exist. By the same token, the United States took a similar view of the Soviet Union. So there was an acceptance of each other's right to a place in the system.

The difficulty of spreading weapons à la Gallois to Israel or Egypt in that period, or to black Africa and white South Africa, or India and Pakistan, is that these regional conflicts are qualitatively different from the Cold War in the sense that they are life and death conflicts. The parties very often refuse to acknowledge the legitimacy, let alone the legality, of the other side's right to exist. This seems to me to be true, particularly of certain Arab states in the past on the question of Israel's right to exist as a state in the Middle East, and true of the OAU in relation to South Africa as presently constituted. If a nuclear element were to be injected into those relationships, it would promote a very dangerous propensity to conflict and ultimate self-destruction. There is in these regional conflicts a real political and strategic objection to the states concerned acquiring nuclear weapons, because, involved as they are in life and death conflicts, the incentive to use such weapons would seem to me to be much greater than they were in the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the United States.

The other factor which helps explain why the super-powers have been hostile to the spread of nuclear weapons is related to technology. As was said earlier, the Americans and the Soviets have both deployed their weapons in second strike postures. In other words, they have both clearly indicated that their weapons are there for retaliation and not for aggression and they have tried to rule out aggression as an irrational strategy, because of the cost that would be incurred by a protagonist who strikes first.

The problem of spreading weapons around pairs of conflicting states in the Third or Fourth World is that those states cannot, in the nature of things, afford the very expensive command or control systems in which the United States and the Soviet Union have invested. Nor can they afford the very elaborate and heavily-protected second strike nuclear capabilities that the United States and Soviet Union have developed. The probability, therefore, is that if these states acquired nuclear weapons, they would establish them in what is called a first strike posture, and, of course, once each side has nuclear weapons which are vulnerable to the other side's aggressive strike, the political relationship between them deteriorates. The deterrence relationship between them becomes very unstable because there is a premium in those circumstances on striking first and destroying your enemy before he does the same to you - precisely because both are vulnerable. The analogy is that of two gunmen in a Western. The gunman who draws fastest and first, and shoots more accurately, wins. Each gunman obviously has an interest in being able to draw faster than his opponent, which is precisely what happened in the Arab-Israeli war of 1967. The Israelis, without nuclear weapons at that stage, struck first at Egyptian and Syrian airpower, destroyed it on the ground, and were able to mop up in the Sinai Desert and the Golan Heights, because they had air cover and the Egyptians and Syrians had none.

Professor Ali Mazrui has put forward the view that if Nigeria, Zaire and Azania - (he was assuming a change-over in South Africa) - acquired a nuclear capability, they would be in a much stronger bargaining position with the Soviets and the United States. There is a certain amount of merit to that argument, because there is no doubt that many Third World states who have the capability of developing nuclear weapons object profoundly to attempts by the Soviet Union and the United States to prevent them from acquiring them. Thus they object to the Non-Proliferation Treaty on the grounds that the two super-powers are trying to manage the world in their own interests, regardless of the aspirations of other states and other peoples. By signing the Treaty and thus giving up the right to nuclear weapons, they would in effect be acknowledging a frozen status quo, in which the Soviets and the United States are the dominant powers and the rest rate virtually nowhere. Before signing, Third World countries wish to see a change in the status quo; they want (for example), to

see the super-powers exercising a much greater degree of arms control, and ultimately engaging in some serious disarmament. Otherwise, they argue they would be giving the super-powers carte blanche to continue vertical proliferation - that is to say, the super-powers could continue making new technological breakthroughs and building new weapons systems - while paradoxically, horizontal proliferation - the spread of nuclear weapons across state boundaries - would be regarded as undesirable and immoral. This argument has been put with some force by Third World states who have the capability of becoming nuclear powers and is their principle objection to signing the Non-Proliferation Treaty. States like China and France, for example, have refused to have anything to do with arms control agreements between the super-powers. They have reasoned, just as Germany did in the 1920s and 1930s - (the historical analogy is exact) - that "you cannot expect us to accept your arms control arrangements until we (the Chinese and the French) have acquired parity with you (the great powers). Once there is parity and once we have counters with which to bargain in the SALT negotiations, or other arms control negotiations, then we will think about signing arms control agreements." This view is reflected generally in the Third World and partly explains why the Non-Proliferation Treaty has not been the success that people hoped it might be.

There are real problems about stopping the spread of nuclear weapons. One can understand the super-power reluctance to see nuclear weapons proliferating, particularly into regional conflict, because there is always the danger that if they are allowed to spread freely, super-powers would find themselves dragged in unwillingly to support proxies unable to defend themselves from extinction.

The other difficulty inherent in the stopping of, or slowing down of, the spread of nuclear weapons, is that it is very difficult to put a halt to technological innovation. For example, having reached agreement on one area of weapons systems, and having signed a treaty to limit production and deployment of those weapons, states very often then get involved in a new arms race in some other area, which becomes equally difficult to control. The example was given earlier of the anti-ballistic missile system, where there was agreement because both super-powers realised how destabilizing that development might become to the relationship between them.

We should note, more positively, how over thirty years the Soviets and the United States have developed what one writer has called a "common strategic ideology". While both have been in conflict with each other for many years, there is a sense in which paradoxically they have come to understand each other. Thus arms control and the degree of order provided by nuclear deterrence depends ultimately on the great powers' accepting each other's definition of what constitutes rational behaviour. That is a big assumption, but by and large it seems that in the nuclear field (and its attendant dangers), the super powers have come to accept a common definition of rationality. In other words, each one knows more or less what constitutes a gain or a benefit for the other side and what constitutes a loss or a cost. This has developed from a long joint historical experience of both conflict and tacit co-operation. Yet if nuclear weapons proliferate indiscriminately, one cannot rely on that common rational appreciation of an opposing states' intentions and capabilities operating to the same degree.

Finally, we should consider South Africa's position in this context. Clearly, any state electing to become a nuclear power has to balance up the incentives to do so versus the constraints that operate against it. It is difficult to see what military utility a nuclear weapon would offer the Republic, since the threat that faces it is not a nuclear one from another

state in Africa, nor from the super-powers, but rather a threat of guerilla infiltration and penetration i.e. the threat of insurgency, whether internally or externally-inspired, or through a combination of both internal and external action. It is very doubtful whether nuclear weapons make any kind of sense when dealing with that kind of threat.

There is an argument, of course, advanced by scholars who work in this field that there is some utility in South Africa's developing a tactical nuclear weapon. The argument is that the Republic may one day find itself facing the massed ranks of the OAU's infantry battalions drawn from Nigeria, Cairo, points east and west, and that tactical nuclear weapons would be very useful in such a situation. This is unlikely since it is doubtful that the OAU has any strategy of conventional attack against South Africa. That theory was given up a long time ago, for political and logistic reasons.

Of course, when one comes to the question of political incentives and political constraints, one is operating in a rather murky and difficult area - a speculative area. In certain circumstances there may well be a political incentive to acquire a nuclear weapon, even if only for political value. For example, Britain developed nuclear weapons for its political advantages vis-à-vis the United States, rather than for its military strength or significance vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. Similarly, in certain circumstances in the South African context there might be a real political incentive to acquire nuclear weapons. On the other hand, there is a real political constraint: as long as South Africa places faith and hope in its relationship with the Western Governments, and believes that its links with Western Governments matter and are important to it, the constraint against acquiring nuclear weapons publicly by declaring it, as it were, through testing, is very considerable. Because although Western Governments may well be distancing themselves to some degree from South Africa, on the whole they have shown a willingness to continue with trading and investment in a stable situation. They do not want existing stability disturbed by unorthodox South African behaviour, and the exploding of a nuclear weapon in the Kalahari or Indian Ocean, followed by a public announcement to that effect would surely disturb the normal relationship which the West wants with South Africa. Therefore, so long as the South African Government values its relationships with Western Governments, including, of course, the trade investment, etc., that flow from that relationship, there does seem to be a constraint against South Africa's acquiring nuclear weapons, because the West would then have to explain why they were trading with a country which was manifesting such an aggressive attitude.

On the other hand if, over the next five years, South Africa finds itself becoming increasingly isolated because Western Governments take the view that the only way to encourage change in South Africa is through a process of economic or political disengagement, then the political incentive to acquire nuclear weapons might become stronger, more pressing; in those circumstances a South African Government could plead the cause of isolation in support of a public demonstration of nuclear strength (in the Indian Ocean or the Kalahari) in order to show the world that it is not to be trifled with. But South Africa has not reached the stage where that kind of political strategy has to be adopted. It is true that the Government is not a signatory of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. One good reason for their abstention is that its leaders genuinely do worry about having foreign inspecting teams investigating South Africa's nuclear plants. They believe, I think quite wrongly, that inspection would lead to industrial espionage.

On the other hand, it is not reasonable to expect the South African Government to sign the Treaty blind - just because this would be the moral thing to do. Canada and Sweden sign the Treaty happily because that confirms

their liberal image as good states in international politics - bridge builders, mediators, nice states in international politics. But if South Africa signed the Treaty, this would not really improve its image; in fact people would be slightly puzzled and astonished that it had done so. It would only make sense for South Africa to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty if it is likely to get a quid pro quo, something that it values and wants from the West - a resumption of arms sales, recognition of the Transkei, a general softening of hostility of the United Nations and elsewhere. At the moment, however, no Western Government is willing to pay that kind of price, which exposes a very interesting contradiction in Western policy: on the one hand, the West wishes to encourage states not to acquire nuclear weapons - on the other hand, South Africa presents a difficult case because by encouraging it to refrain from becoming a nuclear power, entails giving it something which might engender difficulty for the West in the Third World.

In certain circumstances a public declaration of nuclear status could occur if there was a sudden acceleration in the number of nuclear weapon states over the next five years. It is interesting that proliferation in the past has been slow. There have been thirty years of atomic and nuclear weapons, but only five or six states have publicly become nuclear powers. One would expect the rate of proliferation to have been higher and yet that has not occurred. There may be an acceleration in the future simply because some states feel uncertain in a difficult world. Pakistan might now have incentives that it did not have four years ago, with the turmoil in Iran and Russians in Afghanistan. In those circumstances states may start declaring themselves to be nuclear as a kind of last form of protection. Now, if there is a sudden surge to become nuclear weapon states, it would not matter whether South Africa was the eleventh, twelfth or thirteenth and she would probably not encounter any opposition from the outside world.

At the moment, however, there still is a kind of unwritten norm which says that by going nuclear a state does incur moral opprobrium. And while that norm holds, it acts as a constraint on any policy-maker concerned with deciding whether or not to go nuclear.

South Africa has so far adopted an ambiguous position as to whether or not it has nuclear capacity. I suspect that it is adhering to what is sometimes called a "bomb in the basement" posture, which is what the Israelis do. In other words, a state does not actually say that it has a nuclear weapon, but on the other hand, neither does it deny that it has one. It adopts an ambiguous posture to the outside world; it is a very interesting deterrence posture - what might be called deterrence by uncertainty; it is better than no deterrence posture at all, but it is a very tricky form of deterrence to operate, because it partly depends on bluff and counter-bluff. But it is a form of deterrence in that it causes uncertainty in the opponent who therefore perhaps hedges his bets and does not do what he might otherwise have done if he had been absolutely certain. The problem is, though, that this kind of deterrence by uncertainty posture is really very dangerous: it is bad enough not being able to calculate an opponents' intention, but it really is very difficult indeed if one is not even sure if the other side has such a weapon. Then one cannot be sure about either capabilities or intentions, and that is in some ways the worst position for any state to be in. In other words, the real problem is that there is not the possibility of a common strategic ideology developing between South Africa and her opponents in this respect (assuming that South Africa took the view that nuclear weapons had utility) as there has developed a common strategic ideology between the Soviets and the United States, where there is certainty about capabilities and some rough certainty about intentions, as well. Thus the lack of knowledge about capabilities and intentions makes the future very dangerous and very difficult for all concerned.