



# international policy UPDATE

No.16, 1997

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## IS ARMS CONTROL STILL ON THE AGENDA?

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After the flurry of arms control successes of 1995 and 1996, disarmament has not been at the forefront of international attention in 1997. In fact, aside from the dramatic push for a ban on landmines, arms control and disarmament have scarcely made progress in 1997. South African policy in 1997 equally reflects this global trend.

### POSITIVE RESULTS IN 1995 AND 1996

In 1995, arms control efforts got off to an optimistic start as the international community agreed to extend indefinitely the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to prevent the expansion of nuclear weapon-capable states. While the treaty still lacks the signatures of key states - including Israel, India and Pakistan, which are widely believed to be nuclear-capable - extending the NPT endowed the treaty with increased moral weight against nuclear weapons. Moreover, as part of the NPT's new lease on life, members agreed to pursue a treaty comprehensively prohibiting nuclear testing, to pursue a nuclear weapons-free zone in the Middle East and to continue the drive for total nuclear disarmament. By the end of 1995, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) had already taken the NPT's goals one step further by drafting their own nuclear weapons-free zone (the Treaty of Bangkok). Moreover, the US continued helping Russia dismantle its weapons of mass destruction, and the former Soviet states of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine continued the repatriation of Soviet weapons to Russia.

In the realm of conventional weapons, in 1995 the European Union enacted a new agreement on export controls for dual-use goods and technologies that can be converted into or used in weaponry.

A banner year for arms control was 1996. In January, the United States ratified the second Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START II) that further reduces the number of nuclear weapons in

its arsenal. In March, three nuclear powers - France, Great Britain and the United States - joined the South Pacific nuclear weapons-free zone treaty (the Treaty of Rarotonga). The following month these three, together with China, also joined the Treaty of Pelindaba, which declares an African nuclear weapons-free zone. Late in the year, negotiators completed a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty to prevent nuclear testing. (Testing often leads to the creation of new or improved weapons.)

Also in 1996, a review was undertaken regarding the Convention on Conventional Weapons. While the negotiators agreed to ban laser blinding weapons and adopted amendments to the protocol covering landmines, the desired complete prohibition on landmines was not achieved. In addition, an international export-control regime for dual-use equipment was created: the Wassenaar Agreement. By the end of 1996, the final ratification needed to trigger entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention's (CWC) was granted, and the Canberra Commission of international experts released its report detailing pragmatic steps to achieve nuclear disarmament.

Throughout these successes, some countries still presented stumbling blocks to arms control. Russia has not ratified the START II agreement or the CWC yet. Russia also created some sticking points for the Wassenaar group, and failed to join either the Rarotonga or Pelindaba treaties. China's policy of missile sales caused concern for the Missile Technology Control Regime, and the US push for ballistic missile defences threatened its 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty with Russia. Finally, the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC) was not improved and updated as negotiators had hoped. Regardless, the increased awareness and activity in the arms control arena - sometimes due to disaster such as the Tokyo poison gas attacks - kept disarmament in the news and on the minds of policy makers.

Throughout these developments, South Africa played a key role. Pretoria helped negotiate the compromise that made NPT extension possible. South Africa was the first country to unilaterally disarm itself of its nuclear capability, thus providing a potent example for, and bargaining leverage with, other states. Additionally, South Africa is a member of the BWC and was one of the initial members of the CWC. In the 1990s, the Ministry of Defence created the National Conventional Arms Control Committee (NCACC), which, alongside the Non-Proliferation Council of the Department of Trade and Industry, aim to keep Pretoria on the straight and narrow regarding its arms control policy. South Africa began reporting its arms sales to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms in order to increase transparency. The government apparently did not wish to violate any of its international obligations nor to transfer weapons in a destabilising manner.

### 1997: AN EXCEPTIONAL YEAR

In 1997, the aims of the global and national arms control agenda seem to have faded, both in the number of issues under consideration and in terms of their importance, with one notable exception - landmines.

During the course of this year, solid progress has been made on the creation of a complete global ban on the use, production and sale of anti-personnel landmines. At the end of 1996, the Canadian government challenged states to sign a final treaty against mines by the close of 1997. Typically, such international agreements can take years or decades to draft. However, public awareness and intense lobbying were able to achieve a final draft in September, and the treaty will be signed in December 1997.

The landmine ban process was helped greatly by a series of unilateral bans on landmines by countries around the globe including Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Pretoria has moved remarkably quickly to destroy its stocks of mines and assisting neighbouring states in the removal of landmines from the ground. However, even with this remarkable achievement, a few hold-out states diminish the success of this treaty.

Notable landmine producers and/or users China, Russia, the United States, India and Pakistan have each refused to join the landmine ban due for signature this year. Other states such as Finland, Egypt and Australia have also declined to join the compact. Each state cites significant concerns about national security as the primary reason for choosing

not to sign. Other issues have been cited. China, for example, often is noted to be concerned about the future of its weapons manufacturing sector if mines are outlawed. India and Pakistan, on the other hand, refuse to take part in many arms control negotiations on principle. These two states believe that before any other arms control should even be considered, the issues that predate landmines on the international agenda - namely complete nuclear disarmament and a treaty to control fissile material - must be finalised.

Aside from these hindrances specific to landmines, or of a broader nature such as those raised by India and Pakistan, other global factors have had an important impact on the nature of arms control in 1997. Primarily, the continued increase in arms sales and weapons upgrades have created an environment that seems to place little importance on disarmament. Additionally, regional tensions have renewed some governments' desire to retain a range of military options. Domestic issues also play a role in government decision making. Despite its previous activism, South Africa's position is no different.

### MIXED MESSAGES

Despite the early successes on paper, many countries have lacked the follow-through to make arms control a reality. Although more than 130 states signed the CTB, key nuclear-weapon states have not ratified the treaty, nor has South Africa, and entry into force appears to be years away. The United States has even conducted 'subcritical' nuclear testing, allegedly within the CTB's legal limits. In addition, several nuclear-weapon states have failed to ratify their commitments to Pelindaba and Rarotonga. Even Pretoria has not yet received approval from the Parliament for the Pelindaba Treaty concerning Africa.

South Africa still has the spectre of chemical weapons hanging over it. The investigations into Project B, Delta G and Wouter Basson have dragged on for months or years. Deputy President Mbeki seemingly slowed the process down when he ruled that concerns for state secrecy had to prevail - despite Justice Minister Dullah Omar's previous ruling to the contrary - regarding the Office of Serious Economic Offences' investigation into Project B's privatisation. Basson's hearing has been postponed numerous times.

Another consideration is Pretoria's arms sales policy. Numerous deals have made headlines this year as the NCACC and their critics through the media squabble over whether sales should be

permitted, and if they should be transparent and thus open to public scrutiny. Rumoured or potential transactions with Syria, Saudi Arabia, India and Algeria raise questions about how to promote stability in tumultuous regions, and the role of arms sales. However, South Africa is not alone in entertaining this debate. Globally, states are upgrading existing equipment and pouring billions into advanced weaponry, especially aircraft and missile defence systems. Indeed, global overall defence spending has returned to 60% of the level existing in the late Cold War period. South Africa's aggressive marketing of the Rooivalk helicopter and desire to purchase upgraded naval equipment are thus simply characteristic of the broader international climate.

### THE BIG PICTURE

Together, these factors may signal either a trend or an anomaly. It may be that in 1997, the international community simply became so fixated with the very public campaign to ban landmines that little time was available for other feats. Or, perhaps nations and citizens were focused particularly on issues closer to home such as elections.

More ominously, however, it could be argued that these isolationist tendencies mark the beginning of a new trend in global affairs. The international community's reluctance to become involved in issues such as the civil wars in Zaire and Congo-Brazzaville, or the environmental devastation in Asia evident in the recent fires, may mean that the initial post-Cold War era is over. The initial euphoria at the end of the bipolar nuclear standoff, with its inherent promise of smaller arsenals, stability and a 'peace dividend', has passed. Cooperative ventures such as Bosnia may be a thing of the past. Nations have instead chosen to focus on international and domestic economics in this new phase. For example, today's international relations are conducted by Malaysia berating foreign investors, Europeans worrying about a common currency, Africans looking for a 'Renaissance', and the United States fighting with allies over trade.

As beneficial as such economic emphases may be, forgetting other aspects of the outside world may only lead to problems later. By neglecting commitments to arms control, or by reducing vigilance in export controls and treaty monitoring, the world could wake up to disaster. Simply arming a nation as a kind of defensive fortress will not prevent another Tokyo subway tragedy, the emergence of a new nuclear-weapon state like North Korea or the mass production of biological weapons in the Middle East, all of which may be in the offing. Each of these previous events were able to occur due to the international community's complicity or neglect.

Consequently, short-sighted or single-track policies on any topic should not and can not be allowed to replace a global commitment to arms control. In this case, South Africa is no exception.

#### STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

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*It seeks also to educate, inform and facilitate contact between people concerned with South Africa's place in an interdependent world, and to contribute to the public debate on foreign policy.*