

May 1993

**Africa and Nuclear Non-Proliferation: Some
Reflections of the Rapporteur**

Citation:

"Africa and Nuclear Non-Proliferation: Some Reflections of the Rapporteur", May 1993, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Contributed by Michal Onderco from the private papers of Benjamin Sanders. <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/260433>

Summary:

Summarizes the conference in Harare, Zimbabwe and poses questions on the future of nuclear energy in African countries and the role of African nations the international Nuclear game.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY)

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

AFRICA AND NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION
Some Reflections of the Rapporteur

Introduction

To someone from outside of Africa, the most striking impression left by the last two days discussion is the sense of change: that Southern Africa is undergoing a complete transformation of its political, security and developmental context. There appears to be an acceptance that perceptions from the past have to be abandoned both on a global and regional level and that the new and daunting task is to try to wrestle constructively and cooperatively with a new environment. At the same time, there is a sense of South Africa becoming one with the rest of Southern Africa, but, there are also indications that the views of North and South of Africa may not always co-incide.

The starting point of any discussion of the security and politics of Africa now appears to be Africa itself and the need for self-reliance. This appears to be a product of various factors:

- i) The Cold War is over, and competitive interventions will no longer occur in Africa. The problem now is no longer that the developed states will use the continent to work out their quarrels, but that they will ignore and marginalise it.
- ii) A realisation that only through co-operative industrialisation and using all the technological resources of the region can effective development be accomplished.

Given this changing situation, the following linked issues emerged during the discussions as central to security and nuclear non-proliferation in Africa.

- a) Are South Africa's explanations of its nuclear weapons programme and the decision to terminate it acceptable [ie can South Africa be trusted]
- b) How can confidence be built up between South Africa and its neighbours in the security and nuclear areas.
- c) How easy is it going to be for Africa to become a nuclear weapon free zone
- d) How is Africa to address its future security problems
- e) What relevance has nuclear energy and the global non-proliferation regime to Africa
- f) What are the issues that Africa needs to address in connection with the 1995 NPT extension conference.

A) Can South Africa be trusted?

This appears to be the starting point for the further development of the non-proliferation situation in Africa. Points raised in discussion in relation to this included:

- i) The technical explanation of South Africa's fissile material production and of the quantities that were produced has convinced the IAEA inspectors, and there appears to be no logical reason why material should have been held back.
- ii) The security explanation offered by the South African government for developing the weapon appears plausible, though not necessarily understandable.
- iii) A unique and puzzling feature of the rationale for the nuclear weapon programme was the idea that it would have generated deterrence in a staged manner, starting with uncertainty and then moving to deterrence as a consequence of a testing programme. This particular type of deterrence thesis has never been advanced before: how it was expected to work remains unclear, as is the impact of such ideas on future potential proliferators.
- iv) How can African and other states become convinced of a negative, namely that no weapon capability remains. In this respect, it might have been better for South Africa to have acted in a manner that enabled some international verification of the weapon dismantling and disposal process;
- v) On balance however, the detailed explanation of the weapon programme offered at this meeting appears to be plausible and there is no obvious reason to believe that fissile material produced by South Africa has not been accounted for. The significance of this is that nuclear weapons cannot be made without fissile material and no amount of non nuclear weapon components or design blue-prints can enable a state to produce nuclear weapons if it does not have access to such materials.

B) How can confidence be built up between South Africa and its neighbours

- i) A first step in this process appears to be the creation of transparency over South Africa's nuclear programme. It will probably now be necessary for the IAEA to send in a team of inspectors from nuclear weapon states to discuss details of the nuclear weapon programme with the South African personnel involved in order to convince the outside world that the programme

has been terminated and the weapons dismantled. Only such personnel could undertake the task, because of the proliferation risks involved if non-nuclear weapon-state inspectors were involved.

- ii) The next step would appear to be a rapid negotiation of a nuclear weapon free zone covering all of Africa. This would reinforce South Africa's NPT commitments, and provide a context within which regional collaboration on regional matters could be enhanced.

C) How easy is it going to be for Africa to become a nuclear-weapon-free zone?

The discussion suggested this was feasible, but a number of problems may need to be resolved first.

- a) the title of the zone. Although a nuclear-weapon-free zone is the usual terminology, this does not in itself specifically exclude the existence and development of nuclear explosive devices. Alternative names to a nuclear-free zone might be a nuclear-explosive-free zone or nuclear device free zone.
- b) How to draw the sea boundaries of the area: this poses significant difficulties unless the method used can be divorced from issues related to the law of the sea and territorial seas.
- c) Whether to include restrictions in the zone which are more demanding than those contained in the NPT. Restrictions on reprocessing and enrichment may be desirable, but they create obvious conflicts with the commercial interests of the South African Atomic Energy Corporation, especially over enrichment. Any attempt to prevent the development of laser enrichment on non-proliferation grounds will also cut across these commercial interests.
- d) What sort of regional body or organisation is to be created to perform verification and management tasks. Should this body also have a promotional role, as with the IAEA?
- e) What role should external powers play in regard to the treaty? Should they offer negative security guarantees as part of the free zone treaty? Should they also be asked for positive guarantees?
- f) should the issue of nuclear dumping be part of the treaty or dealt with separately.

D) How is Africa to address its future security problems

Africa finds itself in an odd position in 1993 as there is uncertainty over the future world security structure. Will it be a Pax Americana or a world of regions? On balance we appear to be drifting in the direction of the latter combined with a global security role for the members of the UN security council.

In the context of the African region, it may be desirable to capitalise on this fertile situation by :

- i) developing co-operative structures in all areas ranging from trade through industry finance and the environment to security and disarmament in order to produce a holistic concept of security.
- iii) in the military security area, looking to a CSCE type structure plus a nuclear weapon free zone.

E) What relevance is nuclear energy and the global nuclear non-proliferation regime to Africa.

Africa has three roles in relation to nuclear energy and non-proliferation:

- i) as a source of nuclear fuel. Africa has significant uranium reserves and there is a need to fit its producers into the system of transparency and monitoring of uranium movements. In addition, if the nuclear non-proliferation regime evolves further, issues of reporting production and stockpiles of uranium may also arise.
- ii) as an expanding user of nuclear energy in the non-power fields such as agriculture, medicine and food. Developments in these areas could occur either via the IAEA or on a regional basis - or both
- iii) as a source of power and fuel cycle services. There are some grounds for arguing that nuclear power is part of the answer to problems such as global warming. However, an expansion of nuclear power and fuel cycle services in South Africa might generate perceptions that material would be misused.

F) Africa and the 1995 NPT extension conference

- i) With 46 NPT parties, Africa collectively is in a position to play a major role in the 1995 NPT extension process. It is about 34% of the parties to the Treaty and about 58% of those needed for the majority of the parties. Clearly a very significant issue for African states will be to ensure that the PrepCom decides that the conference will be held in

New York in order to maximise their attendance without the need for elaborate schemes of financial support for delegations.

- ii) To exert the maximum influence, African states will need to have a collective view on the following issues:
- a) whether they favour a voted or consensual decision on extension.
 - b) whether they want an indefinite extension, a single fixed period, or some variation on renewable periods of extension. The latter will require agreement on how long these periods will be and what is to happen at the end of each periods?
 - c) what specifically African states will press for in terms of Article VI. Will it be a CTBT; a renewed commitment to eventual nuclear disarmament; a cut off of the production of fissile material for military purposes; or a speeding up of actual disarmament by the nuclear weapon states. What role will the only state to have voluntarily disarmed, South Africa, play in this debate [and the Ukraine, Khazakstan and Belarus, if they have joined the treaty by then?]
 - d) What is Africa seeking in terms of security assurances? Is it a restating of existing ideas, or is a new concept needed for any movement in this area? Might it be necessary, for example, to look at the option of a global non-aggression treaty, linked to positive and negative security assurances and a commitment to no first use of nuclear weapons?
 - e) what is Africa seeking in terms of the further evolution of the IAEA safeguards system? Might this include greater transparency following the lead given by South Africa? Or all states Parties to the NPT complete an INFICIRC/153 agreement; or even no supply of uranium without Full Scope Safeguards.
 - f) should other states of the region try to become part of the export control regimes as South Africa is now doing?
 - g) how should Africa react to threats to the non-proliferation regime, such as the North Korean withdrawal from the NPT? How will African states address the other difficult regional issues that may be encountered at the conference, especially those relating to the Middle East, and possibly

to states of the former USSR.

Above all, 1995 requires Africa to decide whether it needs the NPT. One possible answer is no, as with an African NWFZ it may be perceived to be irrelevant. An alternative answer is yes, because : a) it is vital to allow the completion of the integration of South Africa into the African system; b) because it is in the interests of no African states to be subject to additional nuclear threats from outside of the region, something which might follow any degeneration or collapse of this global regime; and c) the NPT underpins the global nuclear trading system upon which a number of African states are dependent for significant portions of their state revenues, and which may play an increasingly significant role in African development policies.

CONCLUSIONS

A large agenda of issues now faces Africa in the nuclear field. For it has little option but to be an active player in the international nuclear game. Central to these issues are the following questions:

- a) How does nuclear energy fit into Africa's security and economic future?
- b) what type of nuclear non-proliferation regime does it want to see both globally and regionally?
- c) what efforts is it prepared to put into agreeing what its objectives might be at the 1995 NPT conference and what resources is it prepared to commit for the achievement of those objectives?