March 18, 1967

South African Department of Foreign Affairs, 'Nuclear Proliferation Problem'

Citation:

"South African Department of Foreign Affairs, 'Nuclear Proliferation Problem'", March 18, 1967, Wilson Center Digital Archive, South African Foreign Affairs Archives, Brand Fourie, Nuclear Proliferation Problems, F194, 18 May 1967. Obtained and contributed by Anna-Mart van Wyk, Monash South Africa.
https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114139

Summary:

Summary of the United States-South Africa Atomic Energy Bilateral. South Africa's sale of source material to France was the subject of some disagreement between the two parties, with the Americans worried that sale of this material would be in violation of the non-proliferation treaty.

Credits:

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

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Mr. Van Rensburg,
How ad.
18.5.67

THE NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION PROBLEM

In their discussions with us on the extension of the United States-South Africa Atomic Energy Bilateral, the Americans have laid major emphasis on the need for South African collaboration in preventing the spread of nuclear weapon capability, and have indeed been assured that it is South African policy to take no action which could in any way contribute to the spread of nuclear weapon capability. Where we have differed has been over the question whether the provision of source material to France on a basis not subject to IAEA safeguards does have the effect of adding to the danger of the spread of nuclear weapon capability. We have said, "No, this is not the case, because France is already a nuclear weapon power". The Americans have alleged that our policy vis-a-vis France does indeed add to the problems of nuclear proliferation, but have adduced no evidence in substantiation of this.

Mr. Taswell suggested in December that we should give serious consideration to the possibility that "South Africa should of its own accord publicly state that in view of our concern about nuclear proliferation, South Africa will sell nuclear material only subject to safeguards, except to those countries which already have nuclear weapons capability, where conditions of sale will be determined by bilateral arrangements."

Mr. Taswell argued that a declaration of this sort would forestall or negative a possible American move to condition the public mind to a refusal on their part to supply South Africa with enriched uranium by bringing into the open our refusal to go along with them in their demand that all sales of South African uranium be made subject to safeguards.

"Should/.....

"Should their refusal to supply South Africa with enriched uranium then become public knowledge, it will be against the background of a recalcitrant South Africa which refused to play ball on the nuclear proliferation issue".

Against this background the Department prepared a draft paragraph setting out clearly what our uranium policy is for possible inclusion in the State President's address to Parliament. The proposal was that this might be considered at the Atomic Energy Board meeting in December if it were felt that a statement on the matter was desirable as early as January. The draft was as follows :-

> "South Africa has again been accused at the United Nations and elsewhere by certain Communist and Afro-Asian States of using the nuclear research reactor at Pelindaba for the manufacture of atomic weapons. The Government wishes to emphasise once again therefore that South Africa's nuclear research activities are devoted to peaceful purposes exclusively.
>
> The Government is well aware of the dangers inherent in a proliferation of the countries possessing the capability of manufacturing an atomic bomb. Conscious of South Africa's position and special responsibilities as one of the three major producers of uranium in the Western World and determined that South Africa should do nothing which might conceivably add to the number of countries with nuclear weapon capability, the Government enforces strictly a policy of applying International Atomic Energy Agency or equivalent safeguards, designed to ensure that South African uranium uranium will not be diverted to military uses, to all sales of South African uranium to foreign countries excluding the three Western countries which already possess nuclear weapons. In the case of these countries, other appropriate bilateral arrangements are made."

The Atomic Energy Board felt, however, that the stage had not yet been reached in our discussions with the Americans where the issue of a statement on the lines of the above draft should be considered.

The present situation is that negotiations with the Americans remain deadlocked, but on the larger non-proliferation

issue/.....

issue the Americans are now pressing very hard in Geneva for the adoption of a non-proliferation convention. They are reported to have already obtained agreement to the draft text from the United Kingdom and the USSR, but, as mentioned in another note, there is considerable opposition from countries such as Sweden and India (who are represented on the Seventeen-nation Committee in Geneva) and even more opposition from the Federal Republic of Germany.

A decision on whether it would be advisable to issue a statement on the lines of the above draft, will depend on a number of factors which cannot be accurately foreseen in advance, including, inter alia, the progress or lack of progress in our relations with the Americans, the outcome of the deliberations in the Seventeen-nation Committee in Geneva, etc.

It is accordingly suggested that the Atomic Energy Board be apprised of the position and be asked to authorise the issue of a suitable statement should circumstances render this advisable, such statement to be drawn up in consultation between the Executive Committee of the Board and the Department of Foreign Affairs. It may also be necessary to hang the statement on a peg other than the accusation made at the United Nations and elsewhere that the Pelindaba Centre is being used for the manufacture of atomic weapons.

It should perhaps be emphasised that the time for the issue of such a statement has not yet arrived, but it may become necessary to say something between the March and the June meetings of the Atomic Energy Board.

P. 2/3