

The spread of nuclear weapons

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THE WESTERN nuclear powers have never had an easy task in trying to stop other countries obtaining the nuclear weapons which they themselves possess. The task has now been made harder by the recent dispute in the International Atomic Energy Agency. This is the main body responsible for operating the system to check that countries put nuclear technology to peaceful use. The U.S. and other Western countries walked out of the agency's annual conference when it voted to exclude Israel from the work of the conference.

The U.S. is now attempting to ensure that the safeguards operated by the IAEA remain effective while at the same time reducing its participation in other activities of the UN body. Some officials have gone as far as saying they do not exclude U.S. withdrawal from its work—though this seems unlikely. The U.S. complaint is about the intrusion of politics into the agency; yet the protest vote against Israel involves the basic principles on which IAEA works. The Israelis, fearing that their national security was at risk, had bombed a nuclear reactor in Iraq. Yet the Iraqi reactor was subject to IAEA safeguards, whereas in Israel itself the government does not permit IAEA inspection of facilities potentially capable of refining nuclear explosive.

The case is thus fundamental to the problem of how to reduce the risk of a multi-nuclear world where terrorists as well as states could present an awesome threat to international peace.

Peaceful

In some ways efforts to reduce this risk have been relatively successful. Two decades ago few people were predicting that the nuclear weapons club would today have only five clear members—Britain, China, France, the Soviet Union and U.S. India asserts its device is peaceful. But three other countries—Israel, Pakistan and South Africa—are beginning to knock at the doors of the club. The IAEA has been the cornerstone of world efforts to limit the spread of nuclear weapons. Since 1957 it has balanced the offer of access to nuclear technology with demands for safeguards that the technology be only used for peaceful purposes. In 1968 the Non-

Proliferation Treaty (NPT), followed with nuclear weapon states agreeing to work for disarmament while non-nuclear states promised not to acquire nuclear weapons. Britain, the Soviet Union and U.S. signed the treaty, but France, China and India have not. Finally, the main Western nuclear suppliers have agreed to block supplies of goods and technology to non-signatories of the NPT.

Experience has shown the faults in this system but has also underlined the absence of any alternative. Instead the need is to strengthen the rewards and penalties which it involves. Countries which sign the NPT and abide by IAEA safeguards should know they can then count on full and reliable supplies of technology for peaceful purposes. But the corollary of this is that the safeguards themselves must be adequate, and seen to be so.

Safeguards

The criticism of these safeguards which erupted after Israel had bombed Iraq's Osirak reactor was over-stated, but improvements are needed. More inspection staff are required while the techniques of inspection must be constantly updated to keep up with the potential methods in which fuel can be diverted to weapons. A second major necessity is to extend the safeguards regime to all significant nuclear facilities in the countries concerned.

Any hope of movement on this last point depends on a much clearer message coming from the nuclear suppliers themselves. There is a need for tougher export controls affecting all significant new nuclear supplies to countries not accepting full-scope safeguards.

One helpful step to improve the credibility of the existing non-proliferation system would be for the superpowers to agree to reduce their own arsenals. But the fundamental problem is reducing the local tensions which feed the appetite for such weapons. The major countries should use their influence to bring about regional agreements, especially in areas of tension. One such model is the Latin American Tlatelolco agreement. The most urgent need for this is in the Middle East and the U.S. in particular should ensure that its agenda for peace also includes the issue of nuclear proliferation.

Starr optimistic on arms talks

HELSINKI — The chief U.S. delegate to the Vienna talks on mutual and balanced force reductions in central Europe said yesterday they could prove fruitful soon if the Soviet side matches a recent important concession by the West.

Ambassador Richard Starr said the Western countries presented a draft treaty for the first time shortly before the talks adjourned in July.

CONT. FROM PAGE 1

"One is deterrence, and the other is to push just as hard as you can for major arms reductions—not arms limitation formulae that allow them to expand, which is what's happening now and what has been happening all through the years . . . Nothing slowed them down during the 20 years period that is just closing.

"Mr. Brezhnev referred a number of times to detente and all of that, but all through detente they did enormous expansion year after year on every type of weapons systems, and they're continuing to do it. So his policy in his speech doesn't announce any new policy. His speech announces a continuation of what they've been doing for 20 years."

Voters in Arizona, California, Massachusetts, Michigan, Montana, New Jersey, North Dakota, Oregon and Rhode Island will decide Tuesday whether to urge Reagan to start talks with the Soviet Union on a mutual freeze of the manufacture and deployment of nuclear weapons.

Resolutions directing mayors to demand a freeze are on the ballot in 30 cities and counties, including the District of Columbia, Chicago, Denver, Miami, Philadelphia and Reno.