

A Non-Proliferation Norm

The Agency's experience suggests the importance of a strong and broad consensus about both the general nature of the phenomenon to be controlled and the means by which this control is to be accomplished. Failure to achieve a consensus may produce possibly fatal strains within a control regime.

In the nuclear area, a crucial, if intangible, factor in nuclear safeguards is the existence of a broad, although not necessarily universal, presumption against the spread of nuclear weapons. The sense, however general, that nuclear weapons are not like other weapons, that they should be controlled, and that their spread would be neither desirable nor wise, should not be ignored as a factor in efforts to contain nuclear proliferation. Such a norm has a number of positive effects. It increases the likelihood of a negative reaction to proliferation, thus increasing the expected cost of a violation. It legitimates specific safeguards requirements, explaining in part the willingness of states to accept the intrusions represented by safeguards. The voluntary co-operation of states with Agency safeguards helps to make problems in their application more manageable. By reducing the fear of proliferation, it reduces the pressure on technically imperfect and limited safeguards systems. Where states are perceived to share this norm, their civilian nuclear activities may be seen as less threatening, tolerance for some ambiguity is increased, and the burden on safeguards is reduced. As for the Agency, such a norm may help protect it against intrusions of political issues extraneous to the safeguards function. The Agency has been relatively sheltered from such intrusions, compared to other international bodies; given the political importance of its activities, this should not be attributed solely to its technical nature.

Such a norm has its problems, however, some of which have already been noted. The definition of the objective, whether non-proliferation or disarmament, or end-use versus latent proliferation, is a continuing difficulty. Problems also exist in the implementation of the norm, whether in transfer controls or in perceived inequity in the distribution of the safeguards burden.

A chemical weapons control regime would gain from the general revulsion which surrounds these weapons. As in the nuclear area, the broad norm seems to present little problem; the real difficulties arise in the implications of implementation measures.