

Before briefly tracing the evolution of the current non-proliferation régime, and of Canada's non-proliferation policy as one part of that régime, one clarifying observation should be made. International efforts to minimize the risk of nuclear proliferation have taken place against the background of the spread of nuclear explosive capability, from the United States in 1945 and the Soviet Union in 1949 to the United Kingdom and France in the 1950s and the People's Republic of China in the early 1960s. As a result, two types of proliferation have generally been designated: "horizontal" proliferation, which refers to the spread of nuclear explosive capability beyond the five Nuclear Weapon States (NWS) identified above; and "vertical" proliferation, which refers to the growth of the nuclear explosive programs of the five NWS. This paper deals only with the evolution of the international non-proliferation régime designed to respond to the threat of horizontal proliferation.

A risk of horizontal proliferation emerges from the possibility that the nuclear material, facilities and technology used in nuclear research and in the power-generating industry might be diverted or misused to develop a nuclear explosive device. A major consideration is that the proliferation of nuclear weapons is one important factor in global and, even more so, in regional security, although it is not necessarily the most critical factor. The essential determinant of proliferation is the degree of political incentive or disincentive (rather than the technical means) which countries face. Thus, while diversion of nuclear items from the civilian nuclear fuel cycle is one possible technical route to the development of nuclear explosive devices, it is not the only, nor the most efficient, route. A political decision to proliferate would be better served by installing facilities dedicated solely to that objective. Controls on the diversion of nuclear items from civilian facilities are necessary, but it is clear that if a country has a sufficient political incentive, such controls would by themselves not stop that country. Any industrialized country and many developing countries could develop, if they so decided, a nuclear explosive capability. A general political commitment by a country not to proliferate is, therefore, as important as the specific controls that prevent diversion.