

III NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Trends in the Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

John Simpson of the University of Southampton (United Kingdom) addressed the question of why there are not about twenty nuclear powers by now, as was forecast at the time of President Kennedy. The proliferation rate has been substantially below predictions of a generation ago, even though nuclear technology is now fifty years old and can no longer be kept secret, stocks of highly fissionable materials are rapidly increasing, and some countries have acquired nuclear weapons. Mr. Simpson pointed to five factors that have contributed to the slow rate of proliferation: 1) the security guarantees provided by the United States have reduced the need to have one's own nuclear weapons, especially in Europe; 2) military leaders hesitate to embrace nuclear arms because they reduce the resources available for conventional weapons; 3) nuclear energy in general, and the pressure groups that promote it, has lost favour; 4) nuclear weapons are no longer considered essential; 5) the system to prevent proliferation and the NPT have created obstacles to acquiring nuclear weapons.

Nevertheless, proliferation remains a problem. Some "latent proliferators" possess sufficient fissionable materials to create a minimum nuclear arsenal (at least twenty-five bombs). Fortunately only India, Israel and Pakistan remain in this category after the withdrawal of Argentina, Brazil and South Africa. A second category is "slow proliferators" which have been more vulnerable to international sanctions, such as North Korea. "Unpredictable proliferators," such as Libya, want the bomb but do not have the means to produce one. They hope to purchase or steal what they need. Finally, there are a number of countries that have all the necessary resources for building nuclear weapons but choose not to do so.

Mr. Simpson discussed the effects of export controls on these various categories of countries. Such controls impede the "latent proliferators," which are more vulnerable to