

South Africa and the NPT

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Joseph Nye argues:

South Africa, along with a handful of major nuclear threshold countries, rejected the NPT because they considered it discriminatory and hypocritical for the superpowers to maintain weapons denied to other states [...] just as the existence of nuclear weapons has produced prudence that has stabilized the U.S.-Soviet relationship, the spread of nuclear weapons to other countries would stabilize regional rivals.



LESSONS/TRENDS FROM THE SOUTH AFRICAN CASE STUDY

1. South Africa originally had a commitment to non-proliferation norms

- Complied with early international non-proliferation norms.
- Supported emergence of a global non-proliferation order → founder member of the IAEA in 1957.
- 1965 → voted in UN General Assembly for a draft resolution urging all states to “take all steps necessary for the early conclusion of a treaty preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons.”
 - “Entirely in line with our basic approach to the question of disarmament.”



LESSONS/TRENDS

2. As minority white nationalism consolidated, it had the indirect effect of isolating the country

- Decolonization in Africa increased → South Africa became pariah due to apartheid → numerous UN resolutions of condemnation and embargoes.
- Crack-down on black opposition and refusal to give up South West Africa → international isolation.
- Argument: country's search for international status and recognition became a driver for its development of a nuclear program.
- Parallel to this → search for domestic security.
- Resulted in non-compliance with UN sanctions and provisions of the IAEA Statute.



LESSONS/TRENDS

3. South African decision-makers never questioned the morality of nuclear weapons.

- Focused on immorality of inter-racial contact and relations, and what they termed 'the immorality of communism'.
- Nuclear weapons regarded as instruments to maintain white supremacy, and achieve status, recognition and security.



LESSONS/TRENDS

4. No public domestic debate on South Africa's nuclear weapons program ever occurred.

- Public debates focused on perceived threats against the government and the white population.
- Decisions on the nuclear program remained secret and domain of the Executive, the nuclear scientific community, and the military establishment only.



LESSONS/TRENDS

5. South Africa, due to its international isolation, became a nuclear entrepreneur.

- Circumvented international sanctions and embargoes,
- Gained technological assistance and dual-use items from third countries,
- Developed unique nuclear science and technology.



LESSONS/TRENDS

6. Once the NPT was negotiated and entered into force, South Africa never formed international alliances against the provisions of the NPT.

- Only exception → South Africa and Israel's alliance on opposition to the NPT.
- Maintained relatively good nuclear-related relations with some states, in particular the United States and France, on a bilateral level.



LESSONS/TRENDS

7. South Africa's suspicion of the purpose and implications of the NPT influenced its early and later positions on the Treaty.

- Reluctant to “surrender, almost irrevocably, long-held sovereign rights without having precise details of all the implications”.
- Coinciding with consolidation of white nationalism and its perceived achievements → Pretoria was intent on self-sufficiency, autonomy and independence from external actors.
- ***Perceived the NPT as a threat to its sovereignty.***
- Also required more guarantees in respect of the protection of its nuclear technology to counter industrial espionage.



OVERALL LESSONS/TRENDS

- When conditions change and the deterrent is no longer required:
 - There must be the political will to dismantle the weapons,
 - International inspections must be allowed,
 - Country has to be totally transparent about the process of verification.
- All of these were present in the case of South Africa.

