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THE NONPROLIFERATION TREATY: THE NEXT PHASE

The North Atlantic Council (NAC) has given the green light to the US to negotiate a safeguards article for the treaty to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons (NPT), but protracted negotiations are still in store before the treaty is ready for signing.

At the NAC meeting on 31 October, the allies agreed the US should work out a safeguards article with the USSR which would take into account the principles drawn up by the EURATOM members, excluding France. One of these principles is that safeguards shall apply only to the use of natural uranium and fissionable material. Another is that EURATOM itself shall have a role in negotiating a safeguards arrangement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to cover EURATOM's members. Finally, the IAEA shall only verify, and not duplicate, EURATOM's safeguards system.

While the West Europeans have been considering their position on safeguards, a number of other countries have raised problems and have proposed amendments to the treaty. Although their objections have focused mainly on the treaty's discrimination between states with nuclear weapons and those without, other issues that have been raised include the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, the absence of disarmament obligations for the nuclear powers, and security assurances for nonnuclear states.

Mexico, Brazil, Egypt, and Rumania have proposed amendments that reflect these concerns. The Mexican amendments would make it a duty of nuclear states to undertake disarmament measures and to contribute to the development of peaceful uses of nuclear energy in nonnuclear countries. Brazil wants a treaty that will permit a nonnuclear nation to conduct nuclear explosions for peaceful purposes. Rumania's amendments are in the same vein and may have been put forth as much to make a point of Bucharest's independence of Moscow as for any other purpose.

An Egyptian proposal would have the nuclear states pledge not to use nuclear weapons against countries that have no nuclear weapons deployed in their territory. India, reflecting its special concern with China, wants specific security assurances; to meet these, the US and USSR are beginning negotiations on an agreement separate from the NPT, possibly in the form of a UN resolution.

Given the numerous problems still to be dealt with, it appears unlikely that the Geneva disarmament conference will be able to present an agreed draft treaty to the current session of the UN General Assembly. The Geneva group, however, could forward the US-USSR draft along with the various amendments for preliminary consideration by the assembly.