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**Report, South African Department of Foreign  
Affairs, 'A Balanced Approach to the NPT:  
Armcor/AEC Concerns Viewed from a DFA  
Standpoint'**

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**Summary:**

Analysis of South Africa's stance on the NPT, particularly in light of ARMSCOR and AEC concerns. Calls for a "strategy of uncertainty" to obfuscate South Africa's perceived nuclear weapons capability.

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A BALANCED APPROACH TO THE NPT : ARMSCOR/AEC CONCERNS  
VIEWED FROM A DFA STANDPOINT

THE ARMSCOR/AEC PERSPECTIVE

1. The emphasis of the Armscor/AEC document dated 30 August 1988 is primarily on the military/strategic aspects of the use of nuclear energy. Seen from Armscor's point of view this is understandable. Signature by South Africa of the NPT is regarded by Armscor as incompatible with its nuclear weapons programme.
2. The document therefore strongly recommends the continuation, for as long as possible of a "strategy of uncertainty" whereby a conflicting set of perceptions regarding SA's nuclear weapons capability is created. The greater the uncertainty created, the greater the deterrent effect of South Africa's presumed capability. Only once a situation is reached where the military threat against SA increases to a point where the conventional balance of power tilts against us, should consideration be given to moving into a posture of covert disclosure of capability and eventual overt displays of strength.
3. The timescale for this strategy to be effectively supported is closely linked to technological and tactical/strategic preparedness, and is currently set at approximately three to six years at minimum.

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4. When viewed from the standpoint of DFA and other instances which are directly affected (eg ESCOM, CSIR, other government departments etc) the proposed strategy neglects pressing social, political and other technological concerns.

#### AN ALTERNATIVE VIEWPOINT

1. It is suggested that the continued development of nuclear weapons can only be justified on the basis of three arguments. All three are problematical. These arguments are :

- A. The Certainty of Eventual Use
- B. The Deterrence Factor
- C. National Pride. (Not germane to the present argument)

#### The Certainty of Eventual Use

- This is a highly emotive "Armageddon" type argument fraught with national, moral and religious problems.
- In the Southern African context, the questions must be asked - against whom and how effectively can such a weapon be used in the sparsely populated openness of Africa.
- Practical problems of contamination and fallout would have a devastating effect on the entire sub-continent.
- The immediate international response to the use of a nuclear device would overwhelm and remove/destroy that component of South African society/government, both

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political and military, that had initiated the use of the device.

- This argument fails to convince. In essence, its logical end amounts to a no-win assurance of self destruction for those whom the nuclear device is designed to ultimately protect.

### The Deterrence Factor

- At face value this argument has some merit. Nuclear deterrence has, for years, been at the root of the superpower nuclear buildup. One view of this argument which is held with some conviction is that the maintenance of a deterrence factor has merit only if it is the express intention to use it as a bargaining chip. This position is however undermined by growing superpower admissions as to the danger and cost of maintaining their nuclear deterrent forces.
- In the South African domestic context, all the posturing and uncertainty created as a result of the present strategy does not appear to have deterred our enemies at all. ANC attacks on SA, FLS solidarity and statements, foreign boycotts and sanctions and increasing political and physical isolation are evidence of the inappropriateness of reliance on a nuclear deterrent to secure our future.
- The deterrence strategy has in fact led to increased pressure on SA and greater international condemnation of our nuclear policy. SA has become increasingly isolated from the international nuclear fraternity.



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- Should SA advance the deterrence strategy to its logical conclusion, i.e. the creation of a belief that a full nuclear weapons capability exists and that the use of such weapons (given a "desperate" situation) was imminent, we could not expect the superpowers (particularly the US) to sit by idly waiting for us to implement our threat. Intervention to prevent fulfilment of the threat would be a rational response.
- Indeed, mere confirmed knowledge of our capacity may, in the light of global sensitivity to nuclear proliferation and South Africa's unique political situation, provoke the superpowers into pre-emptive action.

National Pride

While this factor is not particularly germane to the overall argument, it is submitted that our National Pride would be more enhanced by SA becoming a respected member of the international community thereby taking its rightful place as a leader within the nuclear family than by the public realisation that (a) our situation had become so desperate that we needed to rely on nuclear weapons for protection and (b) that SA was now fully capable of destroying itself and thereby the region in which we live.

2. The vast cost and danger of developing a nuclear weapons capability when measured against social needs within the country creates a moral and political dilemma which, in time, is likely to have grave political consequences for the government.

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3. Without the assurance of a secure energy future, South Africa's economic base, which is inextricably linked to an ability to sustain political evolution, will be severely retarded.

The necessity for the expansion of SA's electricity grid as a pre-requisite for continued economic growth is not mentioned in the document. Minister Steyn has already indicated the impending depletion of SA's coal supplies within 15-20 years. The only viable alternative in SA, given the scale at which the grid has to be expanded, and the absence of alternative generating means on such a scale, is nuclear generation. Forward planning for the development of South Africa's next nuclear generating facility will have to begin in earnest very shortly. The three to six year weapons development timetable will clash head on with this programme. ESCOM's views in evaluating SA's continued nuclear commitment is in DFA's opinion imperative.

Should SA ratify the NPT there is a likelihood that the requisite technology for the construction of new nuclear power stations will be obtainable by ESCOM. In the absence of ratification it is almost certain that the sources of such technology will dry up.

Should SA's nuclear weapons capability become overtly known, the certainty of a technology cut-off can surely be guaranteed.

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CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons DPA is unable to endorse  
or sign the document at this stage.