UNIT 16 NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROLIFERATION

Structure

16.1 INTRODUCTION

Non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) has been the cornerstone of Australia's foreign policy. It is an area where Australia has projected itself as an ideal middle power contributing towards multilateral efforts to check the spread of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and vehicles of their delivery. It is also an area where Australia has, since the end of Second World War, trumpeted its activism in the US-led Western alliance against proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The principal claim of Australia is that it contributes to nuclear non-proliferation through active participation in arms control verification and control over uranium exports. As has been described in this Unit, the Australian policy towards nuclear weapons proliferation can be usefully studied by dividing it into two phases – the policy during and after the Cold War.

Besides, Australia has also been active in preventing the production and use of biological weapons since the early 1970s. The threat of biological weapons has perceptibly increased after the terrorist events of 9 September 2001. Australia has suggested many improvements in the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) so as to close those gaps. Australia was also a key player in the conclusion of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) in 1997.

It has also been a promoter of the Ottawa treaty, which bans the production, sale, and use of anti-personnel landmines. Towards its disarmament efforts, it has also supported the establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC). Since 2003, it has also been a supporter and participant in the US-proposed and–led Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), under which the US and its like-minded countries have agreed to undertake interdiction of ships suspected of carrying material and equipment meant for the production of WMD.

16.2 OBJECTIVES

After reading the unit, you should be able to understand:

- Australia's nuclear non-proliferation and arms control policy;
- the emergence of anti-nuclear movements within Australia manifested in their protests against the Australian nuclear policies and opposition to the functioning of Australia-US joint facilities;
- Australia's role and initiative in the conclusion of South Pacific Nuclear Weapons Free-zone Treaty, known as Rarotonga Treaty; and
- Australia's nuclear arms control policy such as its strong support to NPT, IAEA, SALT I & II and START and its active role in the conclusion of Chemical Weapon Convention and Biological Weapon Convention.

16.3 AUSTRALIA AND THE NUCLEAR ARMS RACE

Historians differ in their views as to when the nuclear arms race between the US and the Soviet Union had begun. The US was the first country to develop nuclear weapons and use them during the Second World War against the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. When Soviet Union tested a nuclear bomb in 1949, one could then definitely say that the nuclear arms race had begun between the two super powers. In between, UK, France and China also went nuclear. India exploded its own 'peaceful' nuclear device in 1974. Many other countries, notably Pakistan, Israel, North Korea, Argentina and Brazil, were considered nuclear 'threshold' countries during the Cold War.

16.3.1 Features of Nuclear Arms Race

The nuclear arms race between the US and USSR had certain peculiar features:

i) It was a race without any fixed goal post; moreover, it was a race where rapid advances in technology made it possible to invent new types of weapons or improvise the old ones making them more deadly. When Soviet Union tested a nuclear weapon in 1949, the US went ahead developing a more devastating nuclear weapon viz. the thermonuclear or hydrogen bomb in 1952. Soviet Union followed suite the next year. In fact, during the 1950s, the two countries tested hundreds of bombs in the atmosphere. By the end of 1960s, the two super powers were believed to possess together about three thousand nuclear warheads.

ii) When a country develops a nuclear weapon, it also needs to develop the vehicle to deliver the weapon onto the enemy target. While testing and developing various types of nuclear bombs, the two super powers were also engaged in the race for developing varieties of delivery vehicles. First, they developed highly sophisticated aeroplanes, and kept them in round-the-clock readiness to drop nuclear bombs at their targets. From the late 1950s, they began developing various types of rockets, which could carry the nuclear devices to their targets with ever-greater accuracy and in ever-shorter time. Nuclear bombs can be delivered by rockets launched from the ground, or launched from the sea; nuclear bombs can even be safely put in the space and delivered from there by missiles. Space, missile, avionics and computer technologies are integrated in a manner that information picked up by a base, say, in Pacific is relayed to the US military command in Florida which, in turn, instructs the US forces in Iraq as to their immediate military operation. Technology has made all this possible. When based on land, these rockets—of various range, speed, and payload capacity—are called inter-continental ballistic missiles (ICBMs); when based on ships or submarines they are known as submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs); and when stationed and delivered from space, they become part of the missile defence system or, as the Americans call it, 'star wars.' These rockets are called ballistic missiles because they travel high in the atmosphere and even into the space before coming down on their targets.

iii) By the 1970s, the nuclear arms race between the two super powers had become technologically highly sophisticated. The two super powers had begun developing, what came to be known as, multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles (MIRVs). MIRVs could deliver several nuclear bombs in different directions at different targets from the same missile carrier. A single ICBM was capable of destroying a number of targets in the enemy country.

iv) In the 1980s, yet another area saw super power rivalry. The two super powers began developing and deploying intermediate-range weapons including Cruise missiles. The intermediate-range weapons can be fired at a distance between 500 and 5000 kilometres; and Cruise missiles are like pilot-less low-flying aircrafts, which can deliver a single nuclear bomb with great accuracy. The development of such weapons made the possibility of a nuclear war more probable as the target could be singled out and hit accurately.

From the above description, two points emerge: there are nuclear weapons and delivery vehicles which are meant for a war that could cause large-scale destruction, perhaps even extinction of human life, on Planet Earth. Together the nuclear weapons and their delivery vehicles are called 'strategic weapons'.

There is a difference between the 'strategic weapons' from the short-range 'theatre' or 'tactical' nuclear weapons, which are meant, for use in a geographically confined area. The Australian policy of arms control and non-proliferation is related more to the 'strategic weapons'. As for the development and deployment of 'tactical' nuclear weapons, it appears quite ambiguous since it is the US—Australia's strategic ally—which has on-and-off articulated the idea of a tactical nuclear war and remains engaged in the development and refinement of tactical nuclear weapons including 'bunker busters' etc.

16.4 AUSTRALIA'S PLACE IN THE NUCLEAR ARMS RACE

Australia had not been, in fact- could not have been, neutral or immune to the nuclear arms race between the super powers during the Cold War. It is not immune, therefore, to the arms control-related developments, which are taking place after the end of Cold War. In fact, it has not and could not have been immune to the nuclear programmes and doctrines of others too, namely Britain, France, China. All the five nuclear powers have conducted nuclear tests in the regions close to Australia. For that matter, the nuclear tests by India and Pakistan in May 1998 were also seen by Australia as taking place in its neighbourhood.

There are four principal elements in Australia's nuclear non-proliferation and arms control policy:

i) Australia has served as a nuclear test site. In 1952, it had allowed Britain to test a nuclear weapon in the Monte Bello Islands in Western Australia; and Prime Minister Robert Menzies was feted for Australia's contribution in the development of British nuclear weapons. Thereafter, Britain conducted major nuclear tests in the atmosphere, besides some 'secret' minor ones at various sites in Western parts and South Australia in the 1950s and early 1960s. Some of these 'minor' explosions caused considerable contamination of the Maralinga test site in South Australia.

ii) Australia owns some 40 per cent of world's uranium reserves—the raw material that is used to produce nuclear energy either for developmental purposes, like civilian power production, or for military purposes, like production of nuclear bombs. Australia is a leading exporter of uranium. Its export policy makes it a participant in the nuclear fuel cycle; based upon which one can regard Australia as a proliferator or a non-proliferator.

iii) Historically, Australia has remained dependent for its security on its alliance with the West—first on Britain and since the Second World War on US. There is a national consensus and successive governments have sought strong and binding alliance relationship with the US. One major way, in consequence of this alliance relationship, is for Australia to welcome the visit to its territorial waters of nuclear-powered vessels carrying nuclear weapons from US and other Western allies. Australia has consistently upheld the principle of visiting war flotillas neither to confirm nor deny carrying nuclear weapons on board.

iv) Most importantly, Australia hosts a number of facilities that are crucial in US strategic planning. Australia's geographic location has been used by the US to set-up the C3I – command, control, communication and intelligence – facilities. These C3I facilities played a crucial role in the preparedness of US for a nuclear war during the Cold War era. These facilities provide information about enemy's nuclear deployments, intercept electronic and radio communications, and provide early warning of enemy missile launches. During the 1960s, three major C3I installations were established: (a) set up in 1967, the facility at North-West Cape on Exmouth Gulf in Western Australia was linked to the American submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) system. (b) Established in 1966, Pine Gap near Alice Springs is an espionage station operated by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) since 1970. Its main function is signal intelligence; that is secret collection of all kinds of electronic messages and radar emissions by using a network of ground stations and satellites. (c) The facility at Nurrungar in South Australia, set up in 1971, provided the US the early warning of an attack by a strategic weapon. Nurrungar also monitored the testing of nuclear weapons and launch of smaller missiles anywhere.

In short, Australia's dilemmas and opportunities in containing the nuclear arms race and nuclear proliferation should be seen in the context of above-mentioned four aspects: British nuclear tests in the 1950s; nuclear-powered ships with or without nuclear weapons on board visiting Australian waters; export of uranium; and American C3I facilities on Australian soil.

16.4.1 External Dilemmas and Domestic Politics

During the period of Cold War, the above-mentioned four issues had created a scenario where both the governments and public opinion had come to believe that Australia has, probably unwittingly, come in the firing range of a nuclear war between the two super powers. In early 1980s, a strong global public opinion against nuclear arms race and in favour of complete nuclear disarmament had emerged. Australia was one of the countries where anti-nuclear sentiment had become very strong as the spiralling nuclear arms race between the two super powers posed, in a very major way, a threat to major Australian population centres. Once this became a major domestic political issue and no political party could defy taking a stand on the subject, other related issues also emerged. Many began raising questions about the need and nature of the alliance relationship with the US. Whether Australia's participation in US global strategic plans through the C3I facilities made Australia more, or less, secure?

Some other issues also came into play. As the Australian Nuclear Disarmament Party was formed in 1984 and environmental and Aboriginal groups mobilised, people began asking questions about the impact of British nuclear tests on the lives and livelihood of the Aboriginal people. The Royal Commission, headed by James McClelland, had concluded in 1985 that British government and the Australian scientists had conducted nuclear tests in the 1950s knowing very well the presence of the Australian Aboriginals close to the test sites and the effect of these tests on their lives and livelihood. The McClelland Commission had recommended decontamination of the Maralinga and Emu sites so as to make the area habitable for human beings. The British government resisted until 1993 any financial responsibility for the decontamination of roughly one million tonnes of radioactive soil; and then agreed to bear only part of the cost involved.

Likewise, uranium mining and export became a key domestic political issue with the emergence of anti-nuclear peace movement. When Gough Whitlam became prime minister in the early 1970s, Australia had two uranium mines. After internal debate and dissension, the Labour government agreed to open a third mine, at Roxby Down in South Australia. The issue in domestic politics since then is whether Australia should limit or expand uranium mining? and to whom it should export uranium and under what kind of guarantees and safeguards? Uranium export was banned to France in the 1970s until, the Labour government argued, France stopped all nuclear tests in the South Pacific. It was a principled position; but the policy was abandoned in 1986 as the private companies mining uranium were to be heavily compensated; and government found the compensation financially burdensome.

In the 1980s, protests also began to be organised against visiting nuclear-powered vessels of US, especially after New Zealand banned the visit of nuclear-powered ships to its ports and practically withdrew itself from the ANZUS treaty in 1984. The issue related to ship-visits, once again, was whether the alliance with US is enhancing or endangering the long-term security of Australia? and whether Australia at all has an independent foreign policy of its own?

16.5 JOINT FACILITIES

The issue of uranium exports no gainsaying is very important in Australia's non-proliferation policy. Similarly its intense opposition to French nuclear tests in the South Pacific during the 1980s was upheld as part of Australian commitment to non-proliferation. As for the British nuclear tests, they are now in the past. Of the four leading issues, most central to its policy of non-proliferation however is the issue of the functions and role of the Australian-American joint facilities. Officially, they are described as joint facilities; critics call them American bases.

Removing the veil of secrecy for the first time in 1984, Prime Minister Bob Hawke had defended these facilities, saying that they had contributed to the maintenance of nuclear deterrence. The doctrine of nuclear deterrence had emanated from the US during the Cold War. In simple terms, it meant that nuclear weapons are not meant for use; rather, paradoxically, they work to deter the outbreak of a war as both the super powers were arguably frightened of a full-scale nuclear exchange. The Labour government of Bob Hawke had thus agreed with the US doctrine of 'stable deterrence.' Bob Hawke presented a second argument in defence of these facilities. He said that these facilities were important in verifying various arms control agreements between the two super powers. Admittedly, inspection and verification of nuclear material and sites is a complex and ticklish issue. Under the various arms control agreements that were signed in the 1960s and 1970s, the two super powers had, for instance, agreed not to conduct nuclear tests in the atmosphere and not to deploy more than the agreed number of missile launchers. Now these facilities had a role to play in the verification of such agreements. It was argued that the highly sophisticated joint facilities are thus of a defensive nature and are not meant for offensive purposes.

By late 1970s, the US doctrine of nuclear weapons providing 'stable deterrence' was changing. The US administration of President Jimmy Carter (1976-80) and more clearly president Ronald Reagan (1980-88) had begun developing a different strategic thinking. There had emerged the concept of 'tactical' nuclear war. That is, the US could use nuclear weapons in a war fought otherwise with conventional weapons; or it could also go in for a limited nuclear war with Soviet Union using tactical nuclear weapons. It all depended on the circumstances and who the adversary was. Now it meant a very different thing for Australia and its stand on nuclear non-proliferation and deterrence. The US could as well start a limited nuclear war using one of the facilities in Australia. What did it mean? It meant that Australia could as well facilitate the start of a tactical nuclear war. It also meant that it could, as a result thereof, becomes target of enemy country's nuclear strike – limited or unlimited. This is when sceptics began asking whether the joint facilities worked as deterrence or as a destabilising factor? It is agreed that with the onset of détente, the two super powers were negotiating various nuclear arms reduction and confidence-building measures, but the fears that these joint facilities made Australia potentially a prime target of Soviet nuclear attack were real. It had become clear that both Pine Gap and Nurrungar had capabilities to be used not just for defensive but for offensive purposes as well. When actually used in a major way for the first time, these facilities helped plan American military campaigns against Iraq in 1991 and Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003.

In short, it was more on account of its alliance relationship with US that Australia, all through the Cold War, occupied a peculiar position in the US nuclear arms build-up and the arms race between the two super powers. What these C3I facilities had led Australia into was acknowledged begrudgingly by the government in the 1980s. It was admitted that the country might as well have become a prime target in case of a nuclear exchange between the two super powers in some other part of the world, say Western Europe. Critics alleged that the government had gone too far in its alliance relationship, neglecting national interest and even endangering the life of Australian population. For instance, no government could do anything for the protection of population in case of a Soviet nuclear strike on Pine Gap. The peace activists even suggested that the best course for Australia is not to renew the American lease of Pine Gap after its expiry in 1987; and that the government should seriously consider ending Nurrungar lease with a year's notice. But it was a situation where it is easier said than done. Especially Pine Gap was too important in the US strategic planning during the Cold War. In 1988, Bob Hawke extended the American leases on Pine Gap and Nurrungar for a period of another ten years.

16.6 END OF COLD WAR AND THE THREATS OF WMD PROLIFERATION

The decline of Cold War after 1985 and rapid speed with which the US and the Soviet Union went about reducing their nuclear and missile stockpiles at least mitigated, in the immediate, the fear that Australia was in the firing range of a nuclear exchange. This led to the weakening of peace movement in Australia and anti-nuclear stance as an issue in the domestic politics. With this also declined the popular opposition to the continuation of joint facilities. To the contrary, the government and the public opinion came to view these facilities positively. The first Gulf War of 1991, in which the US led UN-sanctioned multinational force to evict Iraq out of Kuwait and punish it for threatening international peace and security, brought in view a new role and function of the joint facilities. For the first time these facilities were used to conduct not a nuclear strike, as has been feared all through the Cold War, but a conventional albeit a high-tech war, and against a much smaller enemy. It was the Nurrungar facility of satellite communication that was directly linked to the launch of American 'Patriot' missiles from Saudi Arabia and Israel and also provided the early warning signals about the incoming Iraqi 'Scud' missiles into Israel and Saudi Arabia. Similarly, Pine Gap intercepted and collected radio and electronic signals from Iraqi forces and provided valuable strategic inputs to the US command in Florida which, in turn, instructed the US ground commanders in the Gulf as to their next military move. In the process, the myth that these facilities had a defensive role was broken. Pine Gap gave vital information about Iraqi troops and military hardware making it possible for the US military authorities to be always several steps ahead of Iraqi military manoeuvres. Both in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq since 2003, Pine Gap provided invaluable inputs in US bombing raids. Going back into the past, these two facilities in fact had also provided the necessary intelligence to the US seventh fleet during the Indo-Pakistan war of 1971.

The new role of the joint facilities met with popular approval and in the perception of government raised Australian importance in the strategic calculation of the US. Two elements in the changed perception were noteworthy: firstly, it was felt that Australia would contribute effectively to the maintenance of international and regional peace and security in a disorderly world and help the US build a New World Order. Secondly, as a result thereof, Australia would become even more close an ally, even if it be a junior one, in the post-Cold War strategies of the US. The lease on Pine Gap was extended until 2008 as the US decided to expand the facility and make it even more sophisticated to meet its strategic needs of the twenty-first century. Under an agreement in 1996, Nurrungar was to close down by 2000; its tasks were taken over by the extended facilities at Pine Gap, which now also provides space-based early warning about ballistic missile launches and tests. In 1990, Bob Hawke had announced that he would negotiate the return of the naval facility at North-West Cape to Australian control, which any way had become, by then, obsolete and of little value to the US. In brief, it is the Pine Gap, which remains the premier American C3I facility. Besides there are many more facilities, some estimate their number at thirty. Many of these facilities, for instance Lancelin in Western Australia, were used to test the high-tech weapons, which were eventually used during the US 'shock and awe' bombardment of Iraq in 2003. Even as late as 2004, Australia agreed to new US training facilities, for instance, at Shoalwater Bay in Queensland.

16.7 FRENCH NUCLEAR TESTS AND AUSTRALIAN NON-PROLIFERATION

For thirty years between 1966 and 1996, France regularly carried out nuclear bomb explosions in the South Pacific and tested at least 177 bombs. Until 1974, these nuclear tests were carried out in the atmosphere causing large-scale contamination throughout the southern hemisphere and on the islands in South Pacific. In 1975, France shifted its tests from the atmosphere to the underground. Popular protests in these islands as well as the growing indignation of the international peace and anti-nuclear groups, such as the Greenpeace International, kept the focus on the French policy. In Australia and New Zealand too the protests were strong and sustained against France.

A notable outcome of the French nuclear intransigence was the birth of the idea of 'nuclear-free Pacific.' The idea was quite popular among the island countries, many of whom, had just gained independence and considered French tests as neo-colonial threats. The idea of a 'nuclear-free Pacific' gained popularity in

Australia too, especially when many thought that Australia had become a prime target of potential Soviet nuclear strikes. However, the danger was that the public opinion could also turn against the alliance with US and the Australia-US joint facilities. The government of Bob Hawke saw in the rising popular support for a 'nuclear-free Pacific' a challenge to the American strategic interests in the region and to the ANZUS alliance. As several islands got into the mood of declaring themselves as nuclear-free, and Vanuatu actually did so, Hawke thought it fit for Australia to take up the issue of a 'nuclear-free Pacific' and direct it against French tests and away from American-held facilities. The Australian concerns to remain entangled with the US nuclear doctrines of the time and keep Pine Gap and other facilities from becoming a subject of national or regional discussion became particularly more acute when New Zealand withdrew itself from the ANZUS alliance. At the 1983 meeting of the South Pacific Forum, Australia suggested a treaty and the Forum eventually adopted the South Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone Treaty in 1985. Australia had succeeded in getting the kind of treaty it had wanted from its aid-dependent small island neighbours. The treaty focussed attention on French nuclear tests but overlooked American facilities in Australia. While the treaty prohibited testing or helping other countries test nuclear weapons in their territories, or possess or make such weapons or station them in the member-countries, it did not prohibit the existing or potential nuclear activities of US in the South Pacific. The treaty also said nothing about the testing of the missiles, the export of uranium, the existence of the American C3I facilities, and the movement of nuclear-powered warships, submarines and aircrafts through the region, or their visit to the Australian ports.

This was a sort of middle ground which the Labour government had thought would protect the American strategic interests located on the Australian soil and Australia's alliance relationship with the US while, at the same time, restrain French nuclear tests. This was the essence of the much-trumpeted Middle Power diplomacy of nuclear arms control and non-proliferation. Frankly, Americans did not like the Hawke government for taking such an initiative on their behalf. In the US perception, a nuclear-free South Pacific served Soviet interests. The US thus refused to sign the additional protocols, which had expected all the five nuclear powers to endorse the provisions of the treaty. However, the Labour government of Paul Keating continued to project the treaty a success; and when France announced in 1992 that it would suspend nuclear testing for a year, the Keating government branded it as an achievement of its multilateral diplomacy for a nuclear weapons-free world. However, in 1995, when the new French government of Jacques Chirac announced that France would conduct a final series of nuclear tests in the Pacific, Australia's relations with France soured. Prime minister Paul Keating maintained a high moral ground; and in that particular moment, invited a group of international nuclear and military experts to form what came to be known as the 'Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons'. Sceptics asked what a group of scientists and military experts could do to end nuclear weapons but the government projected it as a major diplomatic drive to attain universal nuclear disarmament. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that Australia was, in principle, committing itself to universal nuclear disarmament and a comprehensive test ban agreement; but ironically without uttering a word against the continued US facilities on its territory. Knowing the American distaste for a nuclear free South Pacific, the Liberal-Country coalition government of John Howard, after 1996, opposed the idea of a nuclear-free South Pacific. Howard argued that the treaty undermines the US military strength in the Pacific and weakens the Western nuclear alliance. He also went on to support the proposal of president George Bush for a national missile defence shield.

16.8 AUSTRALIA AND NUCLEAR ARMS CONTROL

Nuclear disarmament seeks total abolition of nuclear weapons whereas arms control is a process that insists on limiting the development, testing and deployment of nuclear weapons. Arms control does not mean elimination of nuclear weapons and the delivery system; arms control thus remains premised on the idea of nuclear deterrence, i.e. the belief that nuclear weapons could be stabilising and ensuring peace.

The first major arms control agreement between the US and the Soviet Union was concluded in the 1960s. The Partial Test-Ban Treaty banned nuclear tests in space, on the ground and underwater, thus leaving underground as the only place for nuclear tests.

In 1970, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) came into effect. It sought to build some kind of an equation between the five nuclear powers and rest of the countries. There are two elements in the treaty: it

intends to prevent the spread or proliferation of nuclear weapons beyond the existing five nuclear weapon states. At the same time, it makes the five nuclear powers commit themselves to abolish all their nuclear weapons in the long run. While non-nuclear states have the promise of nuclear disarmament in the long term, they have also been promised help in developing the nuclear energy for peaceful purposes under international safeguards. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is endowed with applying such safeguards to all such developments and transfers of nuclear technology and fuel in the NPT states. In sum, the NPT creates an inherently unequal and discriminatory regime; a new divide between the nuclear 'haves' and the 'have-nots' (and that precisely is the reason why India has all along refused to sign the NPT).

Under the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty of 1972, the two super powers had agreed to restrict the number of ICBMs and SLBMs. It was felt around that time that the super powers are engaged in arms control negotiations to essentially eliminate their out-dated weapons and induct new technologies and weapons in their nuclear arsenal. Critics wondered whether arms control is making the world at all safe as the two super powers still retained thousands of strategic weapons and were building more sophisticated tactical nuclear weapons.

In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in Soviet Union and the Cold War began declining. The Arms control agreements between the US and the Soviet Union gained a new momentum, and the two countries began removing and dismantling many of their nuclear warheads. Under the Intermediate Nuclear Force Treaty of 1988, the two countries agreed to remove a large number of nuclear weapons from Europe. The Strategic Arms Reduction Talks treaties (START-I and START-II) in the 1980s and 1990s saw further reduction in the size and deployment of strategic weapons. The START-III intended to bring the nuclear arsenal of US and Russia below 80 per cent of its peak during the Cold War. Laudable enough, yet what the two countries retain is still large enough to maintain their pre-eminent position and destroy the Earth several times over. Australia supports the process of arms reduction talks between US and Russia and also the way France and Britain have reduced their nuclear arsenal. It considers strategic arms reduction process as a step in the direction of eventual complete nuclear disarmament. It wants the process to continue and believes that bringing the arms reduction in the ambit of multilateral Conference on Disarmament will be premature and might unnecessarily impede the process. In simple words, when the US and Russia are reducing nuclear weapons through bilateral terms, why subject the process to a group of some 60 countries in the Conference on Disarmament and possibly delay it, is the Australian argument.

Australia has been an active country in the arms control negotiations at the multilateral level. As has been noted earlier, in the 1980s and 1990s, the Labour governments were active on the issue of arms control essentially to protect their alliance relationship with the US while attempting to deflect the strong domestic anti-nuclear sentiments. The government had built strong opposition to the French nuclear tests and committed itself to universal nuclear disarmament at the multilateral level to undermine the emergence of a strong anti-nuclear movement. Moreover, as international climate had begun changing from the mid-1980s, the Labour government could trumpet its commitment to universal nuclear disarmament in the international forums, something which it had avoided doing during the Cold War era.

With the end of the Cold War, Australia began championing vociferously against nuclear proliferation, nuclear testing and chemical and biological weapons. The Paul Keating government had committed itself to an international treaty banning the production and use of chemical weapons. It played quite an active role in the successful adoption by the UN General Assembly of Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) in 1992. The entry into force in 1997 makes the CWC unique among the arms control and disarmament treaties, as it is the first verifiable multilateral treaty banning an entire class of weapons.

The Biological Weapons Convention was the first major WMD banning treaty concluded in 1972 at the height of Cold War. However, the changing nature of threats emanating from non-state actors and other states as well as the development in the field of bio-technology have made it necessary to upgrade the BWC. Advances in biotechnology have made it cheaper and easier to develop, produce and conceal biological weapons. A new protocol added to the BWC provides for a credible and effective verification mechanism. Australia had taken a lead in negotiating the protocol, which involved complex technical issues and called for a balance between verification and the needs of biotechnology industry.

At the NPT review and extension conference in 1995, Australia once again played an active role in getting the NPT extended indefinitely. By the mid-1990s, the issue of banning all kinds of nuclear tests had become important in international negotiations. When the US president Bill Clinton announced US support for a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty in 1993, Australia followed suit. The issue at stake during the negotiations was to ban any and every kind of test or to allow some small tests of a limited yield. There was no agreement within US itself, or among the five nuclear powers. As a non-nuclear weapon state, Australia supported the idea of comprehensive test ban. In 1996, the Canberra Commission had even proposed a model of CTBT (comprehensive test ban treaty), as Australia tried to follow the example of its own diplomatic success on the chemical weapons convention. When the Liberal-National coalition under John Howard took the reigns of power from the Labour after the 1996 election, the new government maintained the Australian position on CTBT as well as South Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone Treaty. The reason was that US, Britain and France had all by then signed the additional protocols endorsing the nuclear-free zone in the South Pacific. Towards the end of 1990s, Howard government had also come round to support the enactment of a fissile material cut-off treaty, which would prohibit the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons.

16.9 SUMMARY

In sum, Australian policy on nuclear weapon proliferation has been guided by several considerations in the last five decades. It had first welcomed the British nuclear tests in the 1950s; opposed French tests in South Pacific all through, allowed the establishment of joint facilities with US, most importantly at Pine Gap. During the Cold War, it remained in the forefront of arms race in a peculiar manner, which even made the country a potential site of nuclear exchange between US and the Soviet Union. It subscribed to the doctrine of deterrence and not to complete nuclear disarmament. Keeping the US anchored in the region through the vital C3I facilities has been the goal most consistently pursued by both the Labour and the Liberal-National governments. Towards this goal, Australia shared the US doctrine of nuclear deterrence, endorsed the deployment of nuclear missiles in Western Europe, allowed nuclear ships into its ports and participated in the nuclear fuel cycle by exporting uranium.

Similarly, the joint facilities are very important for its alliance with the US and Australia's own role in the region and beyond. Commitment to non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament are subject to maintaining these facilities and alliance relationship. Pine Gap played its own key role in the US-led military campaigns in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq since the US invasion of 2003. Australia is the third major contributor in the US-led military campaign by the 'Coalition of the Willing' in Iraq. The Pine Gap has come to acquire an important place more so since the enunciation of the doctrine of 'pre-emption' by US administration of George Bush in 2001. The Pine Gap facility has now become 4CI facility – command, control, communication, computer and intelligence. It would play an important role in the US 'national missile defence' programme and 'pre-emptive' strikes.

In 2003, Australia also joined the US-led Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). It is a controversial US initiative and has no UN sanctions so far. Under PSI, US and its strategic partners could interdict ships suspected of carrying WMD material and equipment. Australia supports the PSI as a new kind of multilateralism, one which is aimed at checking the proliferation of WMD.

16.10 EXERCISES

1) What is nuclear arms race? Explain Australia's policy of nuclear arms control.

2) Write a note explaining the importance and functions of the joint facility at Pine Gap.

3) Make a critical assessment of Australia's uranium export policy.

4) Why was Australia opposed to the French nuclear tests in the South Pacific? Identify the reasons and the rationale of Australian policy.

5) Australia is a champion of nuclear non-proliferation. Do you agree? .

16.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

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