

September 29, 1986

Letter, Ben Sanders to John Simpson

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Summary:

Ben Sanders sends John Simpson edits on the language of select clauses of the Executive Summary for the Programme for Promoting Nuclear Non-Proliferation (PPNN).

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29 September, 1986.

Dear John,

It was good to talk to you so soon after getting your letter of the 24th. You have done an impressive job and I hope you will take my initial reactions and the suggestions I make in this note as the kind of ideas I would have vented if we had had the opportunity to have a talk before you put it all down - rather than as criticism.

First, a few general remarks.

I believe that we should all be clear in our minds and in our write-up that we are engaged in a political exercise. The project (-programme, if you wish-) has important aspects of training, information exchange, research and analysis, which may give it a certain academic flavour, but its origin, purpose, working methods and the hoped for product are essentially political.

There is one reason why the "core group" (they are not merely consultants!) are so important: from them we must derive our political support, our respectability, and the major part of the information we must work with. They have political prestige and institutional stature and they are the central "nodes" of our network. They should be the true "core" of the exercise. I believe, therefore, that what I prefer to continue calling the "core" group must be the principal element of the programme, that we cannot skimp on their activities or their number, and that we must see much of the other elements as supporting their work. Remember, in our initial philosophy the need to maintain a continuous awareness of the issues was the central element. I continue to think that it is that function, in particular for which you need this gathering of high level advisors who provide we hope - a great variety of input into the exercise, especially the political, and on whom one should rely to give it its general direction. (Should one call it the "steering group?")

This realization should determine the balance in our approach and the weight to be given to the several activities. The subtitle of the write-up should reflect this for a start. This means it should properly read as "A Programme of Liaison, Information Exchange, Monitoring, Research and Education on Nuclear Non-Proliferation, particularly to Enhance" etc. etc. I agree with Enid Schoettle that the Treaty is only an element, albeit the main one, of the more general non-proliferation regime and I like your main title for that reason. I should avoid including "Training" in addition to "Education" and I also suggest omitting the advocacy implicit in "successful", which is, moreover, a bit fuzzy and subjective.

Further, and connected with my emphasis on the political nature of the project, I believe it should be clear that in co-operation with the core group – and of course with you – I would have the responsibility that the policy set by the core group is followed. I do not say this out of vanity or ambition, but I know I have a certain reputation in the international arms control and non-proliferation community and among diplomats, and have some credibility as an arbiter in that field; my contacts during the present IAEA Conference confirm this, and in all modesty, I have an impression that this is rather a condition for some of our support.

I shall try to make suggestions for textual changes, but I hope you will feel free to make any additional ones you think are called for in light of my general comments.

One more point of a general nature. I think we should avoid being overly ambitious, lest we give the impression that we are trying to establish yet another international anti-proliferation institution. That is one reason why I think we should try to reduce costs, which I feel are too high (although I agree they have been carefully calculated). Another reason is my concern that we may not get adequate funding. Could we not isolate some defined parts of the programme and make their execution depend on the availability of funds?

The "Executive Summary" contains some language which I should like to change, largely for reasons of political realism. At the peril of being long-winded, may I try to give my reasons for suggested changes?

First clause: this reflects a conundrum that has recently bothered me more and more: will world war necessarily break out with the advent of a new nuclear weapon State? Should the regime not be flexible enough to survive such an eventuality? Can one really assume that any regime would be so effective as to prevent the appearance of additional nuclear-weapon States? If the answer to any of these questions is negative – and I think it must be, lest we now already confess the game is up, because one or the other Asian or Latin American State is about to make the bomb – should we not reword the statement so as to imply that, first, the regime cannot be perfect, and secondly, it should be able to cope with its own imperfections? I think we should say something to the effect that "it is of great and immediate interest for the maintenance of world peace and the avoidance of nuclear war that the appearance of additional nuclear-weapon States be prevented or at least deterred (delayed?) and that, should such eventuality arise, its consequences are rigidly contained". I readily agree that this is a sticky point and one has to be very careful to find the right words. Why –further– only "into the next century"? Surely you do not wish to imply that after A.D. 2000, proliferation is alright?

Second clause: turn it around. "The present international non-proliferation regime and, within it, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, are the main bulwarks against the proliferation of nuclear weapons."

Fourth clause: I am not sure that the 1985 consensus is so fragile, but in any case I suggest avoiding to qualify it as such. How about: "There is no guarantee that the consensus reached at the third NPT Conference in 1985 can be sustained in 1990".

Fifth clause: be careful – the Depositories are not at all in favour of inter-sessional review. They do not see the absence of provisions to this purpose as an oversight or a "gap". Each of them, supposedly, follows events and at least the Big Two have periodic consultations. So: following events, yes. What is accepted as lacking is a continuity of shared knowledge, the survival of an institution of memory and an awareness of past history. So I suggest saying that: "The continuity of knowledge of (non-)proliferation developments between review conferences and of the rationale for the various elements of the regime, and a full awareness of previous events in that area among those involved must be maintained if that regime and in particular the NPT are to survive for as long as they are needed" (or something along these lines).

Eighth clause: (see above) – add: "... with the former being responsible for over-all policy."

Ninth clause: (see above) – "An international group of up to 15 distinguished diplomats and researchers well-versed in the issues involved will serve as the steering body and will set the over-all policy approaches to be followed in implementing the programme."

Tenth clause: "core" on "steering group".

Eleventh clause: "... about 35 experts on non-proliferation matters..."

First and second clauses: title of the group!

The financial clauses: any possibility of reducing costs?

Last clause: "... to sustain the non-proliferation regime and especially the NPT ...". I fear that "pressure group" may convey too strong an impression of advocacy and would prefer something like "the non-proliferation regime and in particular the NPT, and the creation of a well-informed and influential group committed to their maintenance and strengthening ...".

With respect to pp. 4-6, I have some relatively minor comments, which are inserted into photocopies of those pages, in the form of specific language. In some cases, mainly for policy reasons, I urge some deletion. Lest you think that some of these detract from the substance, I should tell you that in my experience, practical politics and diplomatic tact often require the omission of factual truths in favour of fuzzy language. It has taken me long to learn that lesson and longer even to accept it. It reflects a basic distinction between academic and political approaches.

In page 7 et seq. please check the nomenclature for the group.

On pg. 7, my only suggestion is for the insertion in the last but one line, between "overall" and "supervision" of "policy guidance,".

In pg. 9, I think there should be a footnote that the timetable will have to be open to adjustment and flexible in its execution, in light of the actual conditions which may pertain. I feel worried about the first few deadlines and should prefer deferring them all by one month or so. Thus, the first period should cover March – April, the second May – July and the third August – September, thus merging into the schedule you lay down.

As to the (name?) group write-up on pg. 11 and 12, we need several changes to avoid giving the impression that the group has already been selected. It "would consist of about 15" eminent scholars. Somewhere (footnote?) we should indicate that the selection is tentative and that, notably, several of the persons listed may shortly change employment, so that their participation might have to be considered. On page 12, the names of Jennekens, Pilat and Timerbaev could be added to those aware of the ideas expressed. On that page too, in the fourth and third lines from the bottom, I prefer replacing "rather than explode a bomb" by "and on topical developments".

In page 13:

- in the third full paragraph, first line, please eliminate the word "hectic" and the entire last sentence ("A single for this purpose.")
- in the fourth full paragraph, replace the first word of the second line, "many", by "several".

In page 14, third line from the bottom, insert "net" between "current" and "UN".

In page 15, seventh line after "offered" replace "a" by "an annual".

I enclose a slightly enlarged Annex, (my biodata) changed by hand to facilitate word processing.

And that is it! Once again: I greatly admire the job you have done; my comments are by way of improvement and my only basic disagreement is with the relative change in emphasis away from the core group - even since I wrote my initial reactions, at the start of this letter, I have had three expressions of support for the principal political importance of that body: from Jennekens, Morelli Pando and Scheinman.

Best,

Ben Sanders