FOURTH SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
DEVOTED TO DISARMAMENT

Working paper submitted by the United States of America

I. NOTES ON THE UNITED STATES APPROACH

1. At its forty-ninth session, the General Assembly decided by consensus, in
its resolution 49/751, in principle, to convene, in 1997 if possible, the
fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, the date
to be determined at the fiftieth session.

2. At its fiftieth session, the General Assembly decided, in resolution
50/70 F, over the objections of the United States and with many countries
abstaining, to convene its fourth special session on disarmament in 1997, if
possible, and to establish a Preparatory Committee to submit its recommendations
thereon to the General Assembly at its fifty-first session. The United States
objected to the resolution because, in its view, the time was not ripe for
holding a special session on disarmament. The United States recalled in its
explanation of vote that there had been a general understanding that all
decisions concerning the convening, as well as the outcome or product of a
special session on disarmament, would have to be by consensus. The United States
went on to note that any decision on holding a fourth special session on
disarmament that is objected to by a number of States, including several major
Powers, is an advance invitation to failure of such a session. We asked, How
can a special session on disarmament result in anything useful if all major
Powers do not participate?

3. The General Assembly, at its fifty-first session decided, in resolution
51/45 C, over the objections of the United States, subject to the emergence of a
consensus on its objectives and agenda, to convene its fourth special session
devoted to disarmament in 1999. In addition, the Assembly decided that
decisions on convening a Preparatory Committee in 1997 were subject to the
outcome of deliberations on a special session on disarmament at this year's
session of the Disarmament Commission. In its explanation of vote, the United
States explained that it voted no because the sponsor's insisted on specifying a
date for the fourth special session on disarmament before there was any
consensus on the purposes, objectives and content of such a meeting. In the
absence of such a consensus on substance, the United States did not believe, and
still does not believe, that it is either appropriate or worthwhile to schedule,
even with a target date, a special session on disarmament at any time before the
end of the century. The United States does not want to hold another special
session on disarmament just for the sake of holding it, nor does it want to
repeat the failures of the second and third special sessions on disarmament.

II. DISCUSSION CHECKLIST: NEEDS, OBJECTIVES AND ISSUES
REGARDING A FOURTH SPECIAL SESSION ON DISARMAMENT

A. Elements of a common understanding

4. In the view of the United States, certain fundamental elements need to be
discussed fully, answered appropriately and resolved prior to any decisions on
objectives, issues, agenda and further preparations for a fourth special session
on disarmament. Any attempt to move forward prior to reaching agreement on the
following issues would, in the view of the United States, doom the United
Nations to repeat the failures of the past.

5. Elements include:

(a) Need. Agreement on the need for a fourth special session on
disarmament is fundamental to any subsequent decisions on the objectives,
issues, agenda, conduct, timing or anticipated results of such a meeting. What
is the point of such a meeting? Progress in arms control/disarmament/
non-proliferation endeavours has come largely when the international community
has agreed by consensus that one or another issue is ripe for negotiation. The
United States remains sceptical about the utility of trying to establish a long-
term course of action in the absence of international consensus on specific
steps, such as a fissile material cut-off treaty;

(b) Setting. Is the international climate propitious? If the prospects
for success are dim at the outset, the purpose in convening such a meeting is
questionable at best, unless it is designed simply to be an exercise in
polemical point-scoring;

(c) Success. What are its prospects for success? Of the previous three
special sessions on disarmament, the two most recent ones did not achieve
substantive results. Why? What could have been done differently? We note that
for the last two special sessions on disarmament, dates for the meetings were
fixed without agreement on object and purpose. A key determinant of success, in
the view of the United States, would be breaking the current logjam in
disarmament efforts, such as in the Conference on Disarmament, which for two
years has been blocked from implementing work on a fissile material cut-off treaty even though it established an ad hoc committee to initiate negotiations;

(d) **International consensus.** Consensus on the approach to the fourth special session on disarmament and consensus results:

(i) **Approach.** Is there a consensus on an international approach to a fourth special session on disarmament? Not at this juncture. Other special sessions on disarmament were convened by consensus decisions. Were such a meeting to proceed without such a consensus, it would be unprecedented and would signal that the sponsors were more interested in finger-pointing than in achieving concrete results based on consensus. Participation likely would be reduced and the results would not have an impact on non-players and would not be very credible. Furthermore, countries that did not support such a meeting and did not plan to attend would also be unlikely to pay a share for the meeting;

(ii) **Consensus results.** What would make this meeting different from many others? Consensus has also eluded other similar international endeavours. The current deadlock in the Conference on Disarmament provides no confidence that there would not be a similar deadlock on a fourth special session on disarmament. The same factors apply. If consideration of various agenda items is held hostage to agreement in advance on how to address nuclear disarmament issues, such a meeting is doomed to failure in advance. The record of meetings without recorded substantive results includes:

- 1982, Second Special Session on Disarmament: no final document;
- 1988, Third Special Session on Disarmament: no final document;
- 1990, Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons: no final document;
- 1991, Disarmament Commission 12-year item on nuclear disarmament: no final document;
- 1995, Disarmament Commission 5-year item on nuclear disarmament: no final document;
- 1995, Review and Extension Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons: no final document on review (at least for Main Committee I);
- 1996, fifty-first session of the General Assembly: no consensus on a resolution concerning the fourth special session on disarmament;
- 1996, 1997, Conference on Disarmament: no consensus to implement decision already taken to establish an ad hoc committee on a fissile material cut-off treaty;

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- 1997, Conference on Disarmament: no consensus to do any substantive work;

(e) **Appropriate preparations.** A fourth special session on disarmament should be well prepared. Consideration as an agenda item at the 1997 and 1998 sessions of the Disarmament Commission provides an opportunity to decide if there is a need for a special session and, if so, what objectives should be sought. The issues for consideration and the agenda should flow logically from clearly defined objectives. The objectives, issues and agenda would also need to be agreed in advance of setting a date for a special session;

(f) **Cost.** The duration and costs of a special session are key considerations (i.e., is the expense justifiable?). Costs are estimated at US$ 10 million to $20 million;

(g) **Relationship to other disarmament activities and organizations.** The relationship to other ongoing activities in the arms control/disarmament field needs to be borne in mind. A special session should not be redundant or attempt to supplant such ongoing activities. Should a special session actively seek to facilitate such activities? Could it detract from their prospects for success? Issues for examination include:

- Impact on existing negotiations;
- Universality of existing regimes. A special session on disarmament could be useful in efforts to widen participation in existing regimes, including bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral regimes, as well as non-United Nations and United Nations regimes;
- Global nature of existing regimes/new regimes, regional versus global efforts, need for comprehensiveness.

**B. Objectives and possible outcome**

6. The objectives and anticipated results of a fourth special session on disarmament also require agreement prior to any final decision on the holding of a special session. The objectives should be broad enough to provide for well-rounded discussion, while anticipated results should be realistically gauged. In the view of the United States, for example, one of the objectives of any special session should be to review and record past accomplishments, take note from lessons learned and establish a realistic and forward-looking agenda for pursuit of international security and arms control/disarmament in the post-cold-war era. The outcome of such a review would not, in our view, dictate a course of action to all countries, but rather would attempt to set out priorities and objectives. Such a review, as well as any new priorities and objectives, would necessarily need to take into account efforts at all levels (unilateral, bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral, both United Nations- and non-United Nations-related), and likely distinguish amongst them.

7. In establishing such objectives and anticipating results, the following questions come to mind:

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- Are countries seeking common ground and shared interests in moving forward; i.e., are they looking for concrete results or is it rhetoric?

- Is a plan of action sought? If so, what steps could be taken now to demonstrate a commitment to any new plan of action? For example, is the Conference on Disarmament now ready to initiate negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty, as already agreed at its 1995 session?

- Is a new final document an anticipated product?

- Are a series of recommendations to the international community desirable? Would this include recommendations to other disarmament fora?

C. Issues for a fourth special session on disarmament: approach to an agenda

8. Issues for consideration at any special session should be determined by consensus. In the view of the United States, any special session would offer an opportunity for a comprehensive review of the range of security/arms control/disarmament/non-proliferation items, including such issues as current status, lessons learned, need for universality, disarmament concepts and terminology, disarmament machinery, verification and compliance issues and a series of concrete substantive items. Inclusion of arms control/disarmament/non-proliferation items should be based on merit but, in the view of the United States, all issues, including those concerning conventional weapons, other weapons of mass destruction, transparency, confidence-building measures and other factors related to general and complete disarmament should be featured. The focus should not be unduly weighted towards nuclear issues, although those issues upon which negotiations have already been agreed, such as the fissile material cut-off treaty, should be addressed. However, the significant progress made in the nuclear arena to date, involving the United States and the Russian Federation, the extension of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and its approach towards universality, the signature of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, for example, might argue for enhanced focus by the international community on conventional issues where progress so far has been largely of a regional, limited nature. Transparency measures, including the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms and steps to ban anti-personnel landmines, are examples of such a focus. It would probably be useful if a fourth special session on disarmament, if held, focused on areas where there are clear gaps in concrete steps.