CURBING THE NAVAL ARMS RACE: LIMITATION AND REDUCTION OF NAVAL ARMAMENTS AND EXTENSION OF CONFIDENCE-BUILDING MEASURES TO SEAS AND OCEANS

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INTRODUCTION

1. On 17 December 1984, at its thirty-ninth session, the General Assembly adopted resolution 39/151 I, the operative paragraphs of which read, inter alia, as follows:

"The General Assembly,

"...

"1. Appeals once again to all Member States, in particular the major naval Powers, to refrain from enlarging their naval activities in areas of conflict or tensions, or far from their own shores;

"2. Reaffirms its recognition of the urgent need to start negotiations with the participation of the major naval Powers, the nuclear-weapon States in particular, and other interested States on the limitation of naval activities, the limitation and reduction of naval armaments and the extension of confidence-building measures to seas and oceans, especially to areas with the busiest international sea lanes or to regions where the probability of conflict situations is high;

"3. Invites Member States, particularly the major naval Powers, to consider the possibility of holding direct consultations, bilateral and/or multilateral, with a view to preparing the opening at an early date of such negotiations;

"4. Invites Member States, especially those that have not yet done so, to communicate to the Secretary-General not later than April 1985 their views concerning the modalities for holding the negotiations referred to above;

"5. Requests the Disarmament Commission to consider this question and to report to the General Assembly at its fortieth session;".

2. Pursuant to paragraphs 4 and 5 of that resolution, the Secretary-General has to date received replies from the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, France, Lesotho, the Netherlands, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and Viet Nam, which are submitted herewith.
REPLIES RECEIVED FROM GOVERNMENTS

BYELORUSSIAN SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLIC

[Original: Russian]

[26 April 1985]

The Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic believes that curbing the naval arms race would be an important contribution to preventing war. This task could be accomplished through appropriate negotiations in which all major naval powers must participate. Other interested States could also take part in such negotiations. The position of the Byelorussian SSR on questions of limiting naval activities and naval armaments was set forth, together with proposals on that subject, in a note dated 25 April 1984 from the Permanent Mission of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General.

The Byelorussian SSR voted in favour of resolution 39/151 I at the thirty-ninth session of the General Assembly. It believes that, in accordance with the provisions of that resolution, the United Nations Disarmament Commission could prepare recommendations on specific steps to limit naval activities and naval armaments, and also on modalities for holding negotiations to elaborate those steps. The views of the Byelorussian SSR on such negotiations are contained in the above-mentioned note dated 25 April 1984 from the Permanent Mission of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic to the United Nations.

FRANCE

[Original: French]

[5 April 1985]

The General Assembly of the United Nations, at its thirty-eighth session, adopted resolution 38/188 G, which requested the Secretary-General to carry out a study on the naval arms race, which will be submitted to the General Assembly at its fortieth session. France is participating in the group of experts which has been established for that purpose.

On the other hand, it voted against resolution 39/151 I, which invites Member States to communicate to the Secretary-General their views concerning the modalities for holding negotiations on a limitation of naval activities, because:

1. That proposal prejudges the results of the study being carried out under resolution 38/188 G and therefore constitutes a very regrettable precedent with respect to the role of the United Nations in the field of disarmament. It is evident that either the study is capable of making a contribution to the consideration by States of the problem in question — as France believes — and it would be advisable to await its completion; or else the question is regarded as being not sufficiently advanced or too complex for governmental experts to discuss
it usefully within the framework of a study, in which case one fails to see why the objective sought by the sponsors of resolution 39/151 I would be more easily achieved by dispensing with any prior serious study by experts.

2. Resolution 39/151 I does not anywhere mention the need to take into account existing situations and balances in the naval field, or to preserve the legitimate commercial interests and security of the States concerned.

Finally, France believes that the suggestion to include the item in the agenda of the Disarmament Commission must duly take into account the rule of consensus which governs the work of that body. That rule cannot be ignored without seriously affecting the future deliberations of the Disarmament Commission.

LESOTHO

[Original: English]

[27 March 1985]

The Lesotho Government has no comments to make on the modalities for holding negotiations referred to in operative paragraph 4 of General Assembly resolution 39/151 I of 17 December 1984.

NETHERLANDS

[Original: English]

[25 March 1985]

At its thirty-eighth session the General Assembly adopted resolution 38/188 G which requested the Secretary-General to carry out, with the assistance of governmental experts, a comprehensive study on the naval arms race, on naval armed forces and arms systems with a view to analysing their possible implications for a wide spectrum of issues. The Secretary-General was invited to submit his final report to the General Assembly at its fortieth session. This study is well under way and can be expected to be finalized in the time-frame desired by the General Assembly. The importance which the Netherlands attaches to this study appears from the participation of a Netherlands naval expert in the study group.

Resolution 39/151 I recommends to invite States Members of the United Nations to communicate to the Secretary-General their views on a set of specific suggestions contained in that resolution and sets a deadline that does not allow Member States to benefit from the contents and conclusions of the ongoing study of naval experts.

The Netherlands is of the view that the adoption of this resolution has set a bad precedent, both in form and substance, for the United Nations system. Studies requested by the General Assembly and still under way would have no practical usefulness if recommendations were adopted encouraging Member States to ignore those studies.
A cause for even greater concern is the fact that this resolution confines the actual scope of the views which Member States are invited to express to the Secretary-General in such a way as to prejudge the results of the study considerably.

In the view of the Netherlands the resolution also gives rise to objections of a more substantial nature. While the Netherlands is in favour, in principle, of negotiations on aspects of naval armaments and their possible use, it believes that the measures indicated in operative paragraphs 1 and 2 of resolution 39/151 I would be incompatible with the existing geographical disparities concerning the major naval Powers and would hence run counter to the legitimate interests in the field of security and commerce of all States concerned. Also its preambular part contains partisan notions which would seem to preclude results in the negotiations purportedly sought. True negotiations, here as in other fields of arms control and disarmament, should be sought with an open mind and without preconditions.

The fact that resolution 39/151 I was adopted with 70 votes in favour whereas 72 countries voted against or abstained on it clearly indicates its controversial character.

For the reasons mentioned above the Netherlands voted against resolution 39/151 I. Therefore, the Netherlands finds it premature for the Disarmament Commission to consider this question at its next substantive session.

UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS

[Original: Russian]

[4 March 1985]

The Soviet Union proceeds from the assumption that the curbing of the arms race in maritime and ocean spaces could make an important contribution to the cause of preventing war. This mission can be accomplished through negotiations in which all major naval Powers and other interested States must participate. The USSR position of principle on the question of the limitation of naval activities and naval armaments was set forth in a letter dated 9 April 1984 from the First Vice-Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, Foreign Minister A. A. Gromyko, addressed to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, in which practical suggestions were also made on that subject.

At the thirty-ninth session of the General Assembly, the Soviet Union supported resolution 39/151 I in which the Assembly reaffirmed its recognition of the urgent need to start appropriate negotiations and recommended that the Disarmament Commission should consider the question and report to the General Assembly at its fortieth session. The Commission's conclusions could, it appears to us, include recommendations on specific steps to limit naval activities and naval armaments, and modalities for the conduct of negotiations to elaborate those steps. The Soviet views on such negotiations were set forth in the above-mentioned letter dated 9 April 1984.

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VIET NAM

[Original: English]

[28 March 1985]

1. Viet Nam invariably considers disarmament and the prevention of a new world war, with nuclear disarmament accorded highest priority, as an urgent task in the struggle for peace, international security and disarmament. At the same time Viet Nam strongly supports the efforts aimed at closing the other channels of the arms race and eliminating all sources of war. The present day's reality testifies to the need that appropriate attention be paid to and prompt, effective measures be taken for the prevention of the further escalation of the naval arms race.

2. For a long time now, the naval arms race has adversely affected the peace and security of the entire world and of each individual country. Imperialism, headed by United States imperialism, has again and again used its naval forces against independent countries and national liberation movements in various parts of the world since the end of World War II. What happened to Viet Nam in the past and is happening to Nicaragua at present are typical samples of that policy. The imperialist and international reactionary forces have used naval forces as means to deal with territorial disputes and their aggressive naval activities range from show-of-force manoeuvres to naval encirclement, blockade and direct military intervention against sovereign countries. The increased presence of Western countries' large fleets in the seas far from their own shores, especially in the areas where lie the important international sea lanes, erodes the safety and impedes the use of international maritime communications. Confronted with such threats from the sea, other countries are compelled to strengthen their defence capabilities, thereby further burdening their economies, first of all those of developing countries.

3. The above-mentioned situation requires early measures to limit and then to reduce naval activities in regions of tensions or conflicts. A situation in which the naval fleets of the great Powers are deployed for long periods of time far from their shores should be put to an immediate end. The establishment of zones of peace or free from nuclear weapons is of great importance.

4. The plans to curb the naval arms race and limit naval activities must also include measures aimed at limiting and reducing naval armaments, priority given to those vessels that are armed with nuclear weapons or have highly destabilizing effects.

5. All countries concerned, especially the major naval Powers, should participate in the negotiations to curb the naval arms race and limit naval activities. Those negotiations can be bilateral, multilateral or regional. For the time being the Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament is a suitable forum. The discussion at the forthcoming session of the Disarmament Commission in New York is useful in providing an opportunity for all countries to exchange their views on this issue and lay the initial basis for subsequent negotiations.

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6. Viet Nam has a sea-shore of more than 3,000 kilometers. For the past 40 years, Viet Nam has always been a victim of the imperialist aggressive naval activities. At present, Viet Nam is once again faced with a threat from the sea posed by an Asian Power and by the collusion between the international and regional reactionary forces and the United States. A new dangerous military collusion is emerging in the South Pacific. Therefore, Viet Nam unreservedly supports and will do everything in its power to contribute to the efforts by the international community to curb the naval arms race and extend confidence-building measures to seas and oceans.