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AD HOC COMMITTEE ON THE REVIEW OF
THE ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS
IN THE FIELD OF DISARMAMENT

STRENGTHENING OF THE ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS
IN THE FIELD OF DISARMAMENT

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

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REPLIES RECEIVED FROM GOVERNMENTS

AUSTRALIA

/Original: English/

/26 May 1976/

Australia believes that the Committee should in the first instance consider what kind of role the United Nations Organization should play in disarmament. It might then consider the organization and structure which would enable the United Nations to fulfil this role. The review might then consider whether these requirements are adequately provided by the existing arms control machinery available to Member States.

Australia considers the role of the United Nations Organization in relation to disarmament matters to include the following elements:

(a) The United Nations through its actions and those of its Member States should foster a climate of international co-operation and security wherein positive measures to limit the growth of armaments, including where appropriate measures of actual disarmament, become feasible;

(b) The United Nations should provide a forum in which all States which see themselves as possible members of international arms control régimes and which are concerned with the consequences of such régimes can study, explore and debate the broad concepts and issues relating to particular arms control and disarmament measures;

(c) The United Nations Organization and the appropriate specialized agencies should, where requested to do so, be able and willing to assist in the negotiation and/or implementation of specific arms control and disarmament measures.

It is the view of the Australian Government that this present review provides an appropriate opportunity to examine thoroughly the effectiveness of existing United Nations machinery with a view to improving it, before any decision is made on whether or not the creation of new bodies should be considered. The disarmament machinery of the United Nations has undergone an evolutionary process over the years; the present bodies have developed an expertise which could be lost in any restructuring process that does not adequately take into account the many intricate factors that have of necessity influenced the nature of the present machinery. In the first instance, therefore, Australia looks to the further improvement of the present machinery rather than its substitution.

Australia believes that the First Committee of the General Assembly provides a suitable universal forum for the discussion of broad principles and the establishment of priorities. Australia further believes that many States share its concern at difficulties many delegations have experienced in dealing with the proliferation of agenda items, with their accompanying resolutions, which has

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marked the Committee's debate in recent years to the detriment of the effectiveness of the Committee's proper function.

In order to improve the working of this Committee, Australia would suggest that the disarmament debate be divided broadly into separate parts dealing with nuclear arms control and non-nuclear and conventional arms control respectively and that, where practicable, the Committee report separately to the Assembly on these questions. Australia further suggests that once the Assembly has endorsed the broad concept relating to a measure of arms control, it then be referred to an appropriate subsidiary body or, in the case of regional arms control agreements, to the regional organization concerned, for further detailed consideration and negotiation. It is in our view important that debates of the First Committee should not develop into a mere ritual devoid of practical effect.

We believe that no single negotiating body can or should fulfil the objective of arriving at specific disarmament agreements. Indeed it is the view of the Australian Government that the basis for the majority of such agreements can ultimately only be negotiated directly between the States most involved. Australia believes that in certain circumstances the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament (CCD) in either its present or an expanded form is an appropriate body to assist in the negotiation of specific multilateral agreements provided that in its considerations the views of all interested States are taken into account. In putting this view, Australia recognizes that on occasion other bodies of either a standing or ad hoc nature may be both more appropriate for this task and provide the Assembly with added flexibility in dealing with disarmament negotiations. It is suggested that the present Ad Hoc Committee pay particular attention to the outcome of the present discussions with the CCD on the organization and structure of that body.

Australia welcomed the opportunity of participation in an expert study conducted last year under the auspices of the CCD and believes this approach could be applied in the future to the study of other arms control measures. Australia also believes that the CCD could play a more useful role to Member States generally if its annual report to the General Assembly more clearly indicated the progress made and problems outstanding on individual issues considered during the year.

Australia reaffirms the importance it attaches to the role of other specialized bodies such as the International Committee of the Red Cross in humanitarian matters and the International Atomic Energy Agency in questions relating to international nuclear safeguards and the proposed international service for the conduct of peaceful nuclear explosions. Furthermore, as indicated above, Australia believes that regional bodies can play a greater role in the negotiation of arms control agreements and that the United Nations Organization should facilitate this role wherever possible.

BULGARIA

/Original: English/

/31 May 1976/

The Government of the People's Republic of Bulgaria has repeatedly stated its views on the important role of the United Nations in the efforts to establish a lasting peace among nations and to achieve general and complete disarmament.

In today's age of the ever more successful reaffirmation of the principles of peaceful coexistence among States with different social systems and of the consolidation and expansion of the process of détente, the task of making also a decisive progress in the field of disarmament assumes utmost urgency. In line with their policy of strengthening peace and international security, the socialist countries, including the People's Republic of Bulgaria, have been consistently and untiringly making their constructive contribution to the work on those questions.

In the past few years the United Nations, in faithfully reflecting the requirements of our time, has been more and more turning towards these problems. Foremost on the United Nations agenda now are a number of widely recognized questions of priority, such as the conclusion of an agreement on complete and general prohibition of nuclear-weapon tests, an agreement on the prohibition of the development and manufacture of new types of weapons of mass destruction and of new systems of such weapons, the adoption of a convention on the prohibition of action to influence the environment for military and other harmful purposes, the prohibition of the use of chemical weapons and the destruction of such weapons etc.

In the opinion of the Bulgarian Government, the attention and efforts of States should be focused on discussing and giving practical effect to these tasks and should not be diverted towards unimportant issues of procedural and organizational nature. The United Nations has at its disposal the necessary means and possibilities in this respect and should make the fullest use of them.

The long experience of the United Nations and the established international institutions in conducting negotiations in the field of disarmament have proved their ability and efficiency. It is well known that it was not the organizational or other causes of such kind which impeded the successful implementation of measures aimed at halting the arms race and at achieving disarmament. The lack of political will and readiness on the part of certain States, putting preconditions and raising artificial obstacles - these are the fundamental impediments that stand in the way of making a real headway in this field.

The world disarmament conference, the idea for which has gained wide support among the majority of countries in the world, will help the solution of a number of problems of vital importance for all mankind and will give a new impetus to the work of the Organization as well. That is why, the People's Republic of Bulgaria is firmly in favour of its early convening with the participation of all States.

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FRANCE

/Original: French/
/4 June 1976/

The Governments of States Members of the United Nations having been invited, in resolution 3484 B (XXX) adopted on 12 December 1975 by the United Nations General Assembly on the report of the First Committee, "to communicate to the Secretary-General ... their views and suggestions on the strengthening of the role of the United Nations in the field of disarmament", the French Government wishes to stress the following points:

I. There can be no question - and, indeed, it is being questioned less and less - that the disarmament endeavour is not meeting the hopes which the peoples of the world have placed in it. Indeed, many resolutions of the United Nations have highlighted this state of affairs. It should suffice to cite, among innumerable other examples, resolution 3462 (XXX) of the most recent session on the "Economic and social consequences of the armaments race and its extremely harmful effects on world peace and security": "The arms race, particularly of nuclear armaments, has continued to increase at an alarming speed, absorbing enormous material and human resources from the economic and social development of all countries and constituting a grave danger for world peace and security".

II. It is not the intention of the French Government to draw up a detailed balance sheet of the disarmament endeavour over the past decade.

However, a few remarks of a general nature may be made:

(1) A rapid survey of the international undertakings concerning disarmament in the formulation of which the United Nations has directly participated might create the impression that our activities in this field have produced significant results. The list of treaties and other conventions would appear at first glance to be quite impressive. It should suffice to mention the following texts:

(a) The Antarctic Treaty, of 1 December 1959;

(b) The Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and under Water (Moscow Treaty), of 5 August 1963;

(c) The Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and other Celestial Bodies, of 27 January 1967;

(d) The Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America (Treaty of Tlatelolco), of 14 February 1967;

(e) The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, of 1 July 1968;

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(f) The Treaty on the Prohibition of the Emplacement of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction on the Sea-Bed and the Ocean Floor and in the Subsoil Thereof, of 11 February 1971;

(g) The Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction, of 10 April 1972.

(2) The French Government does not fail to recognize the value that some of the agreements concluded may have. Indeed, it is a party to some of them.

Nevertheless, a closer examination and a more thorough analysis shows that the scope, both theoretical and practical, of a number of these texts is on the whole limited.

Only the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction has the specific character of a disarmament agreement. Even in this case it must be noted that the Convention relates to types of weapons which, by their nature, are difficult to control and the importance of which in the arsenals of States - where they have actually been produced - has been entirely marginal.

Similar observations may be made with regard to a number of the items included in the agenda of the First Committee of the General Assembly, such as the Prohibition of action to influence the environment and climate for military purposes.

In short, it would appear that these endeavours have related essentially to collateral, partial or subsidiary aspects of disarmament, while its essential aspects - in the circumstances the reduction, the prohibition and the production of existing weapons, particularly of the most destructive among them, namely, nuclear weapons - have not been confronted. The disadvantage of the practices followed by the United Nations is that they divert attention from the most important matters and create a feeling of false security by concentrating efforts and energy on matters with respect to which, in reality, no really significant progress has been made.

(3) If one wishes to judge objectively the results of the efforts of the United Nations concerning disarmament, there is only one rational way of doing so: to consider the impact of our work on the disarmament endeavour and view from a certain distance developments with respect to the arms race.

Such a balance-sheet has frequently been drawn up before the General Assembly and the diagnosis has always been the same: the situation is disastrous and the arms race, far from slowing down, is tending, on the contrary, to accelerate. The essential points on which it is easy to find near-unanimity of opinion are the following:

- The increase in stocks of nuclear weapons. Despite the strategic arms limitation talks (SALT), the proliferation of nuclear weapons has continued, both

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quantitatively and qualitatively. The latest developments in nuclear weapons technology have, in particular, had the effect of enormously increasing the destructive capacity of these weapons.

- The pursuit of the "conventional" arms race by the industrialized countries. In this field too, new discoveries have appreciably increased the destructive power of modern weapons.

- The maintenance at high levels of military expenditure by the principal military Powers.

- The acquisition by more and more countries of a military capacity. In addition to the fact that this situation may be conducive to the outbreak of local conflicts, the expenditure which it implies for countries with limited resources places a heavy burden on their economies and jeopardizes their peoples' possibilities of raising their levels of living.

In submitting these purely factual observations the French Government is not making any value judgement on the particular conduct of one State or another: it is aware of the pressures imposed by the international situation and the imperative requirements of national independence which lead States to equip themselves with the necessary means of defence. It wishes only to draw attention to the most important aspects of the present situation.

III. Responsibility for the stagnation of the disarmament endeavour which has thus been observed lies with States, and it is essential to recognize clearly the limitations to which action by the United Nations will inevitably be subject.

This in our view does not make the United Nations de facto abandonment of the objective of general and complete disarmament under effective international control any the less regrettable. It represents a retrograde step when viewed in the light of the tasks entrusted to the General Assembly under Article 11 of the Charter, which states that the Assembly "may discuss the general principles of co-operation in the maintenance of international peace and security, including the principles governing disarmament and the regulation of armaments".

In addition, the United Nations, even if it is not itself in a position, because of the considerations set forth above, to offer solutions to the problem of general disarmament and of nuclear disarmament in particular, can pursue three courses of action in this field:

- It can provide information;
- It can conduct studies, such as an examination of the necessary preliminaries for general disarmament (e.g., study of control and verification procedures at the international level);
- It can provide a stimulus by striving to promote everything which can contribute to the achievement of true disarmament.

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IV. This situation, which is harmful from every point of view, has various causes. Among those which come within the responsibility of our organization, and which are the only ones on which we can exert direct action, the most important is the structural inadequacy of the existing disarmament machinery.

The structural problem, as well as the procedural problem, is of primary importance because it largely determines the solution of the substantive problems. There would be little point in attempting to improve the functioning of the United Nations in the field of disarmament while ignoring this aspect of the matter. Furthermore, the need for an international body concerned with research and negotiation in the field of disarmament is almost universally recognized. What is important is to determine its composition, its procedures and its relationship with our Organization in order to provide the conditions necessary to ensure its effectiveness. This is an extremely complex matter. In the opinion of the French Government, an effort must be made to reconcile what are sometimes conflicting demands in order to arrive at a coherent policy; in doing so, the following criteria should be taken into account:

(1) A relatively limited number of permanent members in order to ensure an indispensable level of efficiency of operation;

(2) A geographically and politically balanced membership;

(3) Participation by all the militarily significant Powers, without, however, allowing them a de jure or de facto predominance over the countries that are less well armed. This is a problem of crucial importance which must be regarded as the major dilemma of disarmament, for:

either the specialized disarmament body will be subject to the preponderant influence of the military Powers, in which case those Powers would no doubt be able to initiate and carry out effective action in the field of disarmament, but the fact that such action would necessarily affect them more than the others could not help but influence their attitude. Disarmament in these conditions would likely be limited to very subsidiary matters and would be more apparent than real;

or the specialized body will be dominated by the militarily insignificant Powers, in which case those Powers would doubtless have the will to advance the cause of disarmament but would not likely be able to do so. Who can imagine, for example, that the pressure brought to bear on the nuclear Powers by the non-nuclear Powers would be sufficient to induce the former to reduce their stocks of delivery vehicles and nuclear warheads?

To strike a balance here is thus a difficult and highly delicate matter.

(4) Preservation of the "open" character of the negotiating body. There is, after all, no reason why a State should be deprived of the opportunity to make known its views and suggestions to the disarmament body or even to participate in studies and discussions of particular interest to it.

(5) An organically dependant link with the United Nations General Assembly, which bears the ultimate responsibility for disarmament.

V. The Conference of the Committee on Disarmament (CCD) does not, in the opinion of the French Government, meet these criteria. To be sure, the Geneva Committee does have a relatively limited membership, and the competence of delegations made up of outstanding specialists in the field of disarmament is undeniably a positive factor.

On the other hand, certain other aspects of its membership and some of the ways in which it functions have given rise to serious reservations on our part. When CCD was established in 1962, the French Government made unmistakably clear what, in its opinion, were the drawbacks of the new machinery thus brought into being. These concerned the tripartite membership of the Committee, namely, one third to consist of socialist States, one third of Western States and one third of non-aligned States. Although the original imbalance was gradually remedied as new members were admitted, the fact remains that the present membership of CCD does not, either geographically or from the point of view of political balance, properly reflect either our organization or the world as it is today.

Furthermore, the circumstances attending the establishment of CCD and the determination of its procedures, which induced France to refrain from taking its place in the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament, also caused another nuclear Power not to apply for membership in that body. Without the participation of two of the nuclear Powers, a disarmament negotiating body does not meet the conditions indispensable to enable it to do full justice to the role which it should be performing.

Having been set up on the basis of agreements arrived at by Mr. McCloy and Mr. Zorin on 20 September 1961, CCD was required to function under a joint United States-Soviet co-chairmanship. It was under the guiding hand of this co-chairmanship that the items to be included in the agenda were decided upon and that the problem of general and complete disarmament was put aside, while the sectoral and marginal aspects of disarmament were instead given prominence. While not denying the merits of what has been accomplished by CCD, especially in the fields of science and technology, the French Government feels that the practices just referred to are partly to blame for the shortcomings now being brought to light.

VI. It is, moreover, apparent that even within our own organization the debates on disarmament suffer from certain short-comings. The representatives of the French Government have been particularly struck by the following facts:

- Excessive proliferation of agenda items. Taking into account the fact that the item "General and complete disarmament" itself comprises several different topics, a total of 25 to 30 different questions were submitted to the First Committee for consideration at the most recent session of our organization. The resulting impression was one of divided attention and confusion.

- The manifestly differing degree of importance recorded to the items considered, some of them having been inadequately prepared and having been taken up as a mere formality.

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- Abuse of the consensus procedure, which in some cases serves to mask fundamental differences of opinion.

- The establishment of "working groups" or "ad hoc committees" on a haphazard basis according to dissimilar procedures and methods, such groups and committees thus lacking the necessary authority for carrying out their tasks.

- The occasional tendency on the part of the Assembly to refer to other bodies the consideration of matters that fall within its own competence. A case in point is the regulation and prohibition of certain types of weapons, a matter which was referred to the Diplomatic Conference on Humanitarian Law Applicable in Armed Conflicts.

These short-comings, despite all that has just been said, are still minor ones that could easily be remedied by bringing the Disarmament Commission back into operation and setting up within it, on a basis of equitable geographical representation, a specialized committee that would:

- Carry out an initial examination of draft resolutions submitted (at the appropriate time) by Member States and report thereon to the Commission. The agenda would thus be cleared of minor points not giving rise to any discussion, and delegations, not all of which include disarmament specialists, would be better informed concerning the particulars of the various problems;

- Propose the deletion from the agenda of items which clearly are no longer relevant.

In the same way, the various "ad hoc committees" entrusted with particular problems would be converted into specialized committees of the Disarmament Commission that would be directly answerable to the Commission and would work under its direct supervision.

The French Government does not, however, intend to formalize this suggestion (which, it feels, would, in the light of the present structural situation, be met with an insurmountable objection - the existence of the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament:

- On the one hand, since CCD does not owe its origin either to the First Committee or to the General Assembly, and since it operates according to procedures other than those which are customary in United Nations bodies, it obviously cannot be asked to perform such tasks;

- On the other hand, it does not seem feasible for two specialized permanent bodies each concerned with the consideration of disarmament problems to exist at the same time. A situation of this kind would inevitably involve overlapping and jurisdictional conflict which, aggravated by inevitable differences in approach, would not be likely to contribute to the desired improvement in the functioning of our Organization.

Reform, even on a modest scale, along the lines indicated above presupposes that the disarmament negotiating and research body would be directly answerable to the Disarmament Commission, would be linked to it in an organically dependent way and would function according to procedures compatible with those of our organization.

This would necessitate either a radical modification of the structure, procedures and, very likely, the membership of CCD, or its replacement by another body.

Although reform of this kind is undoubtedly desirable in absolute terms, there seems to be little likelihood in the present circumstances that our organization is prepared to embark on this course.

The French Government has merely wanted to draw attention to some of the difficulties arising from the present state of the existing disarmament machinery and to point out that, in its opinion, the strengthening of the role of the United Nations in the field of disarmament is a question of all-embracing scope that demands an approach on a universal basis. Reforms in matters of detail, such as those set out in paragraphs 3 (b) and (c) of resolution 3484 B (XXX), may indeed prove to be quite useful, but they are obviously inadequate in view of the magnitude of the problem at hand.

Even an exhaustive in-depth study of the entire problem, including the organizational structure, can be productive only to the extent that it gives rise to the kind of awareness that is needed to give impetus to the reforms which are indispensable if real progress is to be achieved.
