

arms transfers a complex series of interlocking dependency relations has arisen among industrialized and developing countries. The latter, as jealous and sensitive about their sovereignty as any other states, and just as concerned about their security, are perhaps even less disposed to accept restraints on the transfer of conventional arms than are the suppliers, who, despite many accusations to the contrary, are not necessarily motivated by purely commercial considerations.

Here, too, Canada has tried to adopt a positive and constructive approach. It has suggested that there be an international register of arms transfers, that there be regional conferences between recipients and suppliers on how to restrain such transfers, and that there also be regional conferences seeking to restrain local arms races.

As a further parallel measure designed to ensure confidence, Canada has also supported the development, under United Nations auspices, of a uniform system of reporting, comparing and monitoring military budgets. Should such a system be adopted and receive the full co-operation of countries of military importance, it could well represent a solid first step in the process of negotiating reductions in military budgets on a known and equitable basis.

Disarmament machinery

"Democratizing" disarmament negotiations – primarily by extending and strengthening the authority of the United Nations over them – is seen by many as the obverse side of the substantive issues and an aim to be pursued for the sake of ensuring greater progress. The Geneva Disarmament Conference (formally the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament (CCD)), over which the United Nations does not exercise authority, has come in for special criticism. Its unique U.S.-U.S.S.R. dual chairmanship, its membership, limited for the purposes of negotiation, and the self-imposed absence of France and China, as well as its unenviable record as a meeting where things rarely happen, have combined to make it a target difficult to miss. However, it may be illusory to place exclusive onus on the institution, taking into account the issues that are before it. Indeed, there appears to be a strong human temptation to look to organizational "fixes" for deep-seated political problems, as if motivation – political will – might be created through alterations in negotiating structures. Majority votes are unlikely to have much effect if vital security issues are involved. Institutional arrangements are far more amenable to adjustment than are the problems with which they are supposed to deal.

The need for reform of the CCD and the First Committee of the UN General Assembly, which annually debates disarmament issues, does, however, exist. With other like-minded countries, Canada has put forward a number of specific proposals, including the strengthening of the role of the United Nations Disarmament Centre and more clearly defining the link between the CCD and the United Nations. Whatever the new name and chairmanship of the CCD arrangement might eventually be, Canada remains strongly of the view that it must continue to operate on the basis of consensus, and not run the risk of irreconcilable division – and hence immobility – through vote.

Special session

The special session is charged with responsibility for embodying a commonly-accepted approach, reached through consensus, in a basic document, or Final Act. It may turn out to have four parts: Preamble; Declaration; Program of Action; Machinery.

In anticipation of the special session, the General Assembly established a 54-nation Preparatory Committee, of which Canada is a member, which, during its fifth session before the opening of the special session, has begun work to give shape to the basic document.

The variety of interests represented in the Preparatory Committee is matched by the diversity of objectives and preoccupations. The informal political-geographical groupings of UN members – East, West and Neutral and Non-aligned – have been indispensable in simplifying a negotiating process that involves, ultimately and at last count, some 149 member states. The amount of agreement can vary from topic to topic within each group and from one group to another.

Here it might be noted that a plenary United Nations body is not automatically the most productive or appropriate venue for disarmament talks and that, despite its unquestioned responsibilities under the Charter, the United Nations has certain limitations on its abilities in this field. The United Nations membership does not, in its collectivity, reflect world power relations – which are inextricably linked, through measures of collective security, to disarmament and arms control. The United Nations principle of equality (one state, one vote), while just, bears little relation to the structure and dynamics of an international-relations system interlocking security relations with regional preoccupations.

The Group of 77 is capable of wielding, through its votes, the "power of the automatic majority". There is some concern that

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