

# Failure at UNSSOD II

by William Epstein

The United Nations Second Special Session on Disarmament (UNSSOD II) opened under inauspicious circumstances, despite the massive public rallies in Europe and North America in support of peace and disarmament. Hopes held by the public as to what the UN General Assembly might achieve were much higher than those held by governments.

Both the President of the General Assembly, Ismat Kittani of Iraq, and the new Secretary-General of the United Nations, Javier Perez de Cuellar, in separate but strikingly similar opening addresses, drew attention to the "sorry record of failure" of the nations of the world to implement the disarmament program that had been adopted by consensus at UNSSOD I in 1978, to the acceleration of the arms race in the intervening four years and the deterioration of international and national security, to the wars raging on several continents, to the dangerous advances in military technology, and to the increasing acceptance in some circles of the insane notions that a nuclear war could be "limited" or, indeed, was "winnable." They considered that the present situation was more dangerous and the need for disarmament greater than at the time of UNSSOD I. They stressed that what was required to assert and reverse the process was political will, boldness and rationality. The two UN leaders also thought that the presence of so many Heads of Government and world leaders was a hopeful sign, as was the great upsurge of public concern and the "impressive" activities of non-governmental organizations.

These remarks were echoed by many of the government leaders who came from their capitals to present their policies and proposals to the Special Session. Some sixty member states made formal proposals and suggestions of one kind or another for halting the arms race, and, in the first place, the nuclear arms race, and for making progress towards disarmament. As was to be expected, the states were divided into three broad groupings: the Soviet group, the Western group and the non-aligned nations. Differences of substance among the three groups were deep and abiding, but differences of approach were also evident within each group — least within the Soviet group where only Romania put forward any independent ideas — and most among the non-aligned (or Third World) countries where there was a spectrum of different ideas and proposals.

As at UNSSOD I, it was agreed that decisions would be taken by consensus, although voting by a two-thirds

majority was not entirely ruled out in case of need. In the result, because of the wide gap between the main groups, no major decision of substance could be reached by consensus, and no decisions were taken by vote because of the lack of agreement among the members of the non-aligned group, which could easily command a two-thirds majority if its members could reach agreement among themselves.

## Squaring off

Nineteen Heads of State or Government and forty-four foreign ministers addressed the Special Session. The statement by the Soviet Union attracted most interest. Foreign minister Andrei Gromyko delivered a message from President Leonid Brezhnev which dramatically declared: "The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics assumes an obligation not to be the first to use nuclear weapons. This obligation shall become effective immediately." The message called on the other nuclear powers to assume the same obligation, which "would be tantamount in practice to a ban on the use of nuclear weapons altogether."

President Reagan, who made his first visit to the UN, delivered the US statement. He provided no new ideas and no surprises but repeated his "deep concern" over Soviet conduct.

Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau of Canada was the only NATO member to deal with the issue of a freeze of nuclear weapons. He recalled the "strategy of suffocation" of the nuclear arms race that he had proposed at the First Special Session in 1978 (agreement on a comprehensive test ban, on banning flight testing of new strategic delivery vehicles, on banning the production of fissionable material for nuclear weapons), which he described as a "technological freeze." He proposed that the technological freeze in the development of new weapons systems be "unfolded into a more general policy of stabilization." The policy of stabilization would have two complementary components: the suffocation strategy and the current negotiations aimed at qualitative and quantitative reductions in nuclear arsenals to achieve a stable nuclear balance at lower levels. He also

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