



Statements and Speeches

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PROBLEMS OF PRESERVING PEACE AND SECURITY

Notes for a Statement by the Honourable Senator Michael Pitfield, Canadian Representative, Before the First Committee of the Thirty-Eighth Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, November 1, 1983.

In his report, the Secretary-General has rightly pointed to the central importance today of the question of disarmament and arms limitation, and particularly the prevention of nuclear war. Despite the considerable efforts that have been made over the years towards this crucially important objective — and there have been some notable achievements — there is a shared concern on the part of the international community about security. Anxiety over the threat of war has not been diminished — and for good reason. The accumulation of weapons of mass destruction has not stopped and we are witness to the development of more and more sophisticated nuclear and conventional arms.

Over the years, the focus has been on arms control and disarmament — on controlling and eliminating the technical means of making war. Arms control and disarmament have a simple but seductive appeal: reduce or destroy the tools of war and you will eliminate war. The problems of preserving peace and security, however, are extremely complex.

We have, of course, to continue the pursuit of ways and means of harnessing the technology that feeds arms competition as energetically as we can. In this forum our discussions take place in the context of certain given factors, particularly the established policies of our governments. We are, in a sense, captives of our histories. This is often an inhibiting element in our search for consensus. What, in essence, we are dealing with here and in other fora relates to the capabilities of nations to wage war in present circumstances. Our immediate goal is a lower level of arms and armaments at an equal or enhanced level of security.

What has been left largely to one side in our discussions is the more fundamental question of intentions which govern the use of arms. The issue of intermediate-range nuclear forces [INF] in Europe, which has taken a new turn with the Soviet Union's announcement of planned additional deployments of missiles in the German Democratic Republic and Czechoslovakia, illustrates how important this question is. While understanding intentions does not automatically guarantee peace and security, we should be concerned that intentions in this crucial area of policy are not misunderstood.

In the end, successful arms control and disarmament measures depend on a real intention to keep the arms lid on. This is hardly a revelation, but it is a truth we should constantly remind ourselves of as we, in fora of this kind, debate the issues of arms control and disarmament. As Prime Minister Trudeau pointed out in a speech in Guelph, Ontario on October 27, "We may at some point be able to freeze the nuclear capability in the world at greatly reduced levels. But how do we freeze the menacing intentions which might control those weapons which remain? Therein lies the inadequacy of the nuclear freeze argument."
