

The Soviet Union, because of its policy of solidarity with the United States on matters concerning the prevention of the spread of nuclear weapons to other countries, also wanted to achieve a consensus and avoid a vote. But the Soviet Union and its allies were in a much better position than were the Western powers. They let it be known that if the consensus did proceed to a vote, they would vote for all three resolutions, which did in fact coincide with Soviet policy.

Of the 86 states participating in the conference, some 50 were non-aligned and neutral states, about 20 were Western states and some 10 were Socialist states. Thus it seemed clear that, with the Socialist states voting for the resolutions, as well as some Western states as was likely, they would probably be adopted by the necessary two-thirds majority. In these circumstances, in order to avoid an adverse vote, Ambassador Lewis Dunn of the United States found it necessary to make some concessions in an effort to reach a compromise consensus. He and Ambassador Garcia Robles together with some other delegates entered into negotiations to seek an acceptable solution.

In the final hours of the conference a compromise was worked out that made it possible to adopt a Final Declaration of some 26 pages by consensus.

The compromise language that was included in the Final Declaration was as follows:

“The Conference, except for certain states, deeply regretted that a comprehensive multilateral Nuclear Test Ban Treaty banning all nuclear tests by all states in all environments for all time had not been concluded so far and, therefore, called on the nuclear weapon states party to the treaty to resume trilateral negotiations in 1985, and called on all the nuclear-weapon states to participate in the urgent negotiation and conclusion of such a treaty as a matter of the highest priority in the Conference on Disarmament.”

The Declaration also noted that certain states considered deep and verifiable reductions in existing arsenals of nuclear weapons as having the highest priority. (The ‘certain states’ were the US and the UK.) It also noted the readiness of the USSR to proceed forthwith to trilateral and multilateral negotiations to conclude a Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.

It was also agreed that a declaration by the Group of Non-aligned and Neutral States as well as their draft resolutions calling for a moratorium on nuclear testing and for a nuclear weapons freeze should be included as an integral part of the Final Document.

The Conference also agreed that a fourth NPT review conference should be held in 1990.

ASSESSMENT OF THE CONFERENCE

Contrary to general expectations the conference was not a disaster or even a failure. It turned out in fact to be a success, albeit a partial one, somewhat similar to the first review conference in 1975. It differed, however, in an important respect from the 1975 conference. In that conference the non-aligned and neutral states could not command a two-thirds majority vote and they found it necessary to express their reservations to the consensus Final Declaration. In this conference the non-aligned and neutral states were confident they could obtain a two-thirds majority for their positions and thus were able to have their views reflected in the Final Declaration, while the United States and the United Kingdom found it necessary to express reservations.

Had the United States and the United Kingdom agreed with the non-aligned and neutral states to give a comprehensive test ban treaty the highest priority and to resume the trilateral negotiations in 1985, then the conference would have been an outstanding success.

Nevertheless, the 1985 review conference has demonstrated that voting power has now shifted, or is in the process of doing so, from the nuclear powers and their allies to the non-aligned and neutral states, together with such of the nuclear powers and their allies as may join them in seeking to halt the vertical proliferation of nuclear weapons by demanding a comprehensive test ban.

In the Final Declaration the parties solemnly declared their conviction that the NPT is essential to international peace and security and reaffirmed their continued support for the Treaty and its objectives — to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons and nuclear explosive devices, to halt and reverse the nuclear arms race, and to promote cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

As a result of the commitment and persistence of the non-aligned and neutral states, the Final Declaration for the first time focused primary attention on the disarmament aspects of the NPT and stressed the overriding importance of a comprehensive test ban as having the highest priority in “the cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date.”

The non-nuclear states have sent a clear message to the nuclear parties that they must abide by their treaty obligations to halt and reverse the nuclear arms race if the NPT is to endure. The NPT has been given a reprieve, not a clean bill of health. Since the future of the treaty must be decided in 1995 it is important that the nuclear powers receive and act on that message soon. If they do, then the 1985 NPT review conference will be regarded as a real turning point and not merely as a qualified success.