

Earlier this session, in our statement of 21 February, we welcomed the Soviet proposal for on-site inspection of destruction of chemical weapons stocks. At the time, speaking immediately after Ambassador Issraelyan, we said that this Soviet initiative was a most welcome development in the ongoing negotiating process on a ban on chemical weapons, and represented a significant step forward. We also said that we hoped that this Soviet proposal had broader implications. We reaffirm our satisfaction at this Soviet initiative, which we are confident will assist in providing impetus, along with the recently-tabled United States draft on a chemical weapons ban, to our negotiations on this subject.

The unpalatable truth about chemical weapons is that restraint in their use in many cases has been motivated more by fear of retaliation than by legal considerations. Whatever one's legal position may be about the universality of the legal principles embodied in the Geneva Protocol of 1925, we must assume that there is sufficient general agreement on the need for the banning of the development, production, stock-piling, retention, transfer and use of chemical weapons that there is a realistic prospect for agreement. Similarly, however, it is our view that there must be acceptance of the principle that unless there is adequate assurance of verification of compliance with the terms of the Convention by all parties, States will be extremely fearful of giving up their deterrent.

Many are still studying the United States draft treaty submitted by Vice-President Bush last week; many are also awaiting further elaboration of the Soviet position on on-site inspection of the destruction of chemical-weapon stocks. The test is now whether these two related proposals will give the needed impetus to the negotiation — and, we trust, general acceptance — of the essential agreement we are pursuing.

The United States proposal is, as already pointed out, the most comprehensive and, not surprisingly, the most detailed. Like the USSR approach, it also embodies a bold step forward on the path we all wish to follow. With respect to the United States proposal, we should recognize this initiative as a genuine attempt on the part of a super-Power to bring about disarmament on chemical weapons. Whatever the reaction to the specific provisions, the draft treaty must be recognized as a development of major importance. While there are stipulations, particularly in the compliance aspects of the treaty, which may be viewed as stringent, nevertheless, these provisions are intended as mutually applicable, indeed generally applicable. By including them in the draft, the United States has signalled, in advance, its willingness to comply. It is fundamental, in our view, to recognize at the outset of our negotiations on treaty language that the alternative to effective verification is either complete trust or continuing reliance on a State's own capabilities; the former is perhaps the ideal, but is unfortunately unrealistic; the latter is the reverse of the ideal, and it is obviously undesirable. Clearly, only very stringent verification measures would motivate States to put their faith — and their national security — in treaty provisions rather than self-help. This is an apparent truism, but one which warrants most careful consideration. Stringent verification provisions may be not only our best alternative to self-help, with all the attendant horrors, but the only alternative.

If a CTB cannot be achieved at one stroke, we should make an in-depth study on a second-best measure, namely, a step-by-step formula, under which underground nuclear test explosions of a yield now considered technically verifiable on a multinational basis