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THE PREVENTION OF NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION

An Address by the Right Honourable L.B. Pearson,
Prime Minister of Canada, to the International
Assembly on Nuclear Weapons, Scarborough, Ontario,
June 25, 1966.

... During these last few days you have been discussing the broad topic of "nuclear proliferation" -- the dangers arising from the threat of the further spread of nuclear weapons. Tonight, for a few moments, I venture to place before you, briefly and, of course, in an oversimplified way, my views on these dangers and on possible measures at least to reduce them. I have no particular qualifications to undertake this task except that I am Prime Minister and as such I have available the views of all the experts in the Canadian Government service.

My only personal qualification would be that I have been associated in one form or another with disarmament conferences since I first went to the first Geneva Disarmament Conference in the early 30s as a very junior secretary in the Canadian delegation. At that time, with junior secretaries from other delegations, we had the answer to all the questions. We often used to meet for dinner after the day's sessions, at a café in Geneva, the Bavaria, where we exchanged views on the follies and misdemeanours of our elder delegates, and how, if we were only given the chance, we could have solved all these matters. I remember one night when we had been sitting during the day in a committee where our seniors had been arguing as to what constituted an offensive weapon and a defensive weapon in connection with naval disarmament -- if a gun was 8.4" calibre, it was offensive and, if it was 7.2", it was defensive. We agreed that this was all pretty silly and that the answer to this particular question was a simple one that could have been discovered within 15 minutes of the opening of the meeting -- namely, that the offensiveness or defensiveness of a weapon depended on whether you were in front of it or behind it. There was nothing else to be said about it.

So I was much more of an expert in those days than I am now. Each year, I confess, I find it more difficult to be sure that one has any of the answers to any of the aspects of this problem of disarmament.