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Notes for a speech by  
Douglas Roche, Ambassador  
for Disarmament, to the  
United Nations Association  
in Canada

The Route To Peace

VICTORIA

December 6, 1984

Earlier this year, I wrote that stronger Canadian government involvement in U.N. issues could be a catalyst for the security and development the world longs for in the dangerous decade of the 1980's. Since then, I have spent the fall at the U.N., representing Canada at the First Committee which is responsible for Disarmament and related matters. This experience has made me realize how true are the words of the Throne Speech on the opening of Parliament November 5:

"Patience and perseverance we will need, for in this endeavor even the smallest progress is worthy of the greatest effort."

In its melange of hopes and frustrations, the United Nations reflects the anxieties of the modern world. These anxieties are heightened by the unchecked nuclear arms race. People everywhere want the promise of life to prevail over the suffocating threat of death. More and more, people want a "fast" solution. But it is my view that the solution will be slow.

Canadians should understand that a realistic role for Canada to play involves a long series of steps, not reliance on a "quick fix" to make the world a safer place. A commitment to the long haul, in which sometimes it is necessary to take one step back in order to take two steps forward, is the surest route for Canada to make a lasting contribution to peace with security and freedom and justice.

Determination is not the least of the qualities Canada needs in the search for peace and disarmament. We must constantly use our influence to reverse the nuclear

buildup and reduce the danger of destruction. This determination -- as the Rt. Hon. Joe Clark expressed it to the United Nations on September 25th -- "will be a constant, consistent, dominant priority of Canadian foreign policy."

Let us examine how Canada pressed that determination in disarmament work at the U.N. this fall.

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First, it should be recalled that, in his speech to the General Assembly, the Secretary of State for External Affairs put Canadian international security policy squarely within the U.N. context:

"Our government is committed strongly to the United Nations ... a dynamic United Nations system is essential for countries like Canada - and equally for the superpowers. Precisely because more communities are looking inward more often, we must strengthen global institutions which bring us together."

"Bring us together": this phrase is key. In U.N. parlance, it is known as consensus-building. With consensus, the United Nations is a powerful force for peace, and with consensus, the United Nations has achieved many victories. Indeed, it was a "historic consensus" achieved at the First Special Session on Disarmament in 1978 that brought forward the 129 paragraph Final Document which set out a comprehensive program for disarmament. Without consensus, the voice of the international community is blurred and

indistinct, and the United Nations seems helpless before the onward march of events.

Consider the nature of the United Nations. It is composed of 159 countries, ranging in size from states with a population of less than my home city of Edmonton to those over one billion. Yet each in the General Assembly has one vote. Canada belongs to the "lucky few" that possess both wealth and democratic institutions. However, we well realize that without the cooperation and collaboration of Third World states, which belong to the great majority, little can be accomplished.

For many Third World countries, the mundane imperatives of survival -- food for their populations, relief from debt, resources for development -- take priority over what many of them see as abstract Western preoccupations on arms control.

A further complication is the role played by the Eastern European countries who, for deeply-rooted ideological reasons often underestimated, are inclined more to conflict than to collaboration with the West. In these circumstances, the wonder of the United Nations is that a common voice is found at all.

The actual process of resolution-making is exceedingly complex, and the quantity of resolutions under consideration -- 72 in the First Committee and well over 200 in the whole General Assembly this fall -- makes the process even more complex. Often the resolutions compete and conflict, and compromise is not always possible.

The General Assembly is a forum for debate, and resolutions are the instruments of that debate. Competition

and cooperation are always in delicate balance. The Canadian objective is to synthesize, to bring together. In short, the Canadian objective is to seek consensus. Consensus is not sought at the U.N. for its own sake, but because only through consensus is it possible for the international community to express a common desire to achieve a common goal.

I want to focus on three areas where the United Nations succeeded this fall: in all three areas, Canada played a leading role.

1. Outer Space: The Canadian role in outer space matters is longstanding. In the 60's, the Hon. Howard Green, as Secretary of State for External Affairs in the Diefenbaker Government, was a chief architect in negotiating the Partial Test Ban Treaty which prohibited weapons testing in outer space. More recently, there have been Canadian technological achievements such as the Canadarm on the space shuttle and the ANIK series of communications satellites. The Department of External Affairs has undertaken to apply this expertise to the arms control aspects of outer space and in 1984 commissioned Spar Aerospace to study the feasibility of space to space surveillance as a means of verification.

Canada's objective at the United Nations is to encourage talks aimed at limiting outer space as an area for military competition and prevent the weaponization of space. We believe that the common, collective voice of the international community would assist in this endeavour and that such talks should take place at the Conference on Disarmament (CD), the multilateral negotiating forum in Geneva, where Canada is one of the 40 participating nations.

The outcome of the resolution-making process was a success. Negotiations in which Canada played a leading role produced a resolution around which virtual consensus was achieved that expressed the desire of the international community for talks to begin in the CD. Much more will need to be done before actual negotiations take place, but the adoption of this resolution is a clear step forward. The bilateral talks between the U.S.A. and USSR, which are complimentary to those taking place in the CD, will also have to be taken into consideration.

2. Comprehensive Test Ban: The achievement of a Nuclear Test Ban Treaty has also been a Canadian priority. There are many pitfalls, some technical, others political. On the technical level, the actual monitoring of a test ban to ensure compliance remains a problem still not completely resolved; on the political level, negotiations between the UK, USA and USSR were broken off after the invasion of Afghanistan in late 1979 and have not yet resumed.

Canada believes, however, that a Comprehensive Test Ban is a concrete, realistic -- and realizable -- measure which would constitute a major step in curbing the arms race. We believe, furthermore, that the way to achieve it is through realistic, step-by-step practical measures in the CD, such as in the area of verification, that would bring closer the day when a Test Ban could be implemented. Canadian strategy in this area is to concentrate on the U.N. process.

With Canada as cosponsor, a resolution was developed that would permit the Conference on Disarmament to resume immediately its substantive work on a Test Ban. After complex negotiations, this resolution was also passed by a

large majority, this will ensure that work will continue in Geneva towards the negotiation of a Test Ban Treaty.

3. Chemical Weapons: One of the few, substantive resolutions before the United Nations that unites all countries, East and West, North and South, relates to Chemical Weapons. Canadians have experienced first-hand the use of Chemical Weapons, and the memory is indelible. The Iran/Iraq war serves as a grim reminder that these weapons are still with us.

Negotiations in Geneva continue to grapple with the problem of ensuring that any ban on chemical weapons will stick; the full weight and encouragement of the international community for the negotiations would contribute to success. In 1983, under Canadian chairmanship, the Ad Hoc Working Group on Chemical Weapons of the Committee on Disarmament (now the Conference on Disarmament) produced for the first time a consensus document which contained major elements required for a comprehensive treaty and clearly outlined those areas in which there was agreement or disagreement. Canada, as one of the forty members of the Conference on Disarmament, continues to participate actively in the negotiations in Geneva and also supports the efforts of the U.N. General Assembly and the Secretary-General to ensure that the existing 1925 Geneva Protocol is not being contravened.

At this past session of the First Committee Canada and Poland shared the challenge of constructing a U.N. resolution that would give unified voice to this encouragement; again our collaboration proved successful, and

the unanimous support of the United Nations for these negotiations was confirmed.

Canada can be proud of these achievements, and others as well. At the October pledging conference of the World Disarmament Campaign Canada's contribution of \$100,000 constituted one third of the amount pledged by all countries; so great is our commitment to education on peace and disarmament issues. At this session of the First Committee, of a total of 64 resolutions that came to a vote, Canada cosponsored 13, voted in favour of 36, voted against 14 and abstained on 14. Each resolution was considered on its own merits, bearing in mind our desire to seek consensus. However, we should perhaps look at the areas and issues where consensus -- or near-consensus -- was not possible, or where controversy or the complexity of the issue raised deeply troubling questions.

1. Nuclear Freeze

No consensus was possible on the concept of a nuclear freeze, which expresses the desire of mankind to be free from the fear of nuclear war. The idea of capping the nuclear arms race and reducing the enormous number of nuclear weapons in current arsenals is, of course, attractive.

Three freeze resolutions were introduced. A Soviet proposal called on all nuclear States to freeze their nuclear arsenals. A Swedish-Mexican draft urged the Soviet Union and the United States to proclaim an immediate nuclear arms freeze as a first step towards comprehensive disarmament. An Indian draft called on all nuclear-weapon states to agree to a freeze on nuclear weapons and stoppage of any further production of nuclear weapons and a complete



cut-off in the production of fissionable material for weapons purposes.

The Soviet proposal passed with 95 yes votes, and 18 no and 13 abstentions. The Swedish-Mexican proposal passed 111 yes, 12 no, and 7 abstentions. The Indian draft passed 110 yes, 12 no and 9 abstentions.

Canada voted no on all three, the government stating that mere declarations of a freeze are not a meaningful response to the nuclear danger. Rather, as the government has said many times, Canada wants the immediate, unconditional resumption of negotiations on reductions. A return without preconditions to meaningful, bilateral negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union, which take into account the legitimate security interests of both sides and with adequate verification measures, constitutes the most realistic means of reducing nuclear arms.

Thus, Canada's vote reflected the genuine doubt about the practicality of the concept of the freeze as it is currently being advocated. Declaring a freeze rather than negotiating one would inevitably raise numerous and likely intractable problems about definitions, exclusions and inclusions. The negotiation of a freeze would be as intricate and as prolonged as would the negotiation of reductions.

Nonetheless, the voting patterns this year indicated that further study is needed to find a resolution which would have the effect of stopping the nuclear arms race without locking in unacceptable superior positions at different levels of armaments. The diverse votes of the

Western countries reveal that a debate is underway to find the correct course leading to collective security at lower nuclear levels. In the Swedish-Mexican proposal, two NATO countries Denmark and Greece, and Australia voted yes; four NATO countries, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway and Spain were among the seven abstentions.

It should be noted however, that the majority of NATO countries and all Canada's major economic summit partners voted against the Freeze resolution. Canada will continue to think about this issue and it will obviously be considered within the context of the upcoming foreign policy review.

2. Prevention of Nuclear War: Preventing nuclear war would seem an objective universally shared, and on which it would be easy to reach consensus in the United Nations. This did not prove to be so. The reasons are varied and serve as an object lesson on what is -- and is not -- possible at the United Nations. A draft resolution cosponsored by Canada and our European Allies sought to put prevention of nuclear war within the context of preventing all wars, and within the framework of the United Nations Charter. Some of the more radical Non-aligned states sought to turn the issue of preventing nuclear war into a critique of Western security policies and alliance relationships and, regrettably, efforts to reach a consensus had to be abandoned. A substantive and balanced discussion of an issue of central concern to the international community was thus put aside as the result of ideological conflict (as well as posturing) at the U.N.

3. Nuclear Winter: Canada's role in the Nuclear Winter debate provides an object lesson in the difficulties of obtaining consensus at the U.N.

A year ago, more than 100 scientists endorsed a study headed by Professors Carl Sagan and Paul Ehrlich, projecting that a nuclear outbreak between East and West, in addition to the human casualties the total of which might approach half the population of the world, would so damage the environment as to produce a "nuclear winter." The scientists said that a damaged ozone layer would leave a global wasteland where survivors would starve and freeze on a planet without sunlight, the air filled with toxic chemicals and penetrated by dangerous ultraviolet radiation. Under this hypothesis, a small drop in overall temperature on the Canadian prairie would virtually end any viable farming. The Canadian government commissioned the Royal Society of Canada to examine the Nuclear Winter theory, a report is expected this month.

It should be remembered that the Sagan-Ehrlich study has not met the unanimous support of scientists. Some are not convinced of the gravity of Nuclear Winter. In an effort to have all pertinent studies on this important subject brought into the U.N. for further dissemination, the Canadian delegation attempted to develop a consensus vote, which would give added weight to the Nuclear Winter material.

A draft resolution, introduced by Mexico, Sweden, India, Yugoslavia, Pakistan and Uruguay, accepted Nuclear Winter as a foregone conclusion and called on the Secretariat to compile a document consisting of excerpts from national

studies. When the spokesmen for this draft advised that it was not open for amendment, Canada introduced a similar resolution.

Canada's resolution was not intended to undermine the Neutral Non-Aligned (NNA) resolution; we proceeded with our draft because we believed the scope of the resolution should be broader and should also include the climatic effects of nuclear war, including nuclear winter. We also believed that the resolution should not attempt to prejudge the studies that countries might be asked to submit to the U.N. The western cosponsors of the Canadian resolution, the Federal Republic of Germany, Japan and Belgium, authorized the Canadian delegation to negotiate to find the basis for a consensus draft. Our delegation succeeded in negotiating a text with NNA sponsors and believed it had reached agreement. This however, turned out not to be the case, and a small but significant element of the Non-Aligned leadership objected to confining the compilation of the Secretariat's report "within existing resources."

Due to our serious interest in maintaining the scientific integrity of the U.N.'s approach to this important question and bearing in mind the financial implications of the resolution we put forward a number of amendments designed to improve and strengthen the resolution in order to achieve consensus. Unfortunately the NNA did not agree, and on this point, negotiations floundered.

Though the possibility of achieving consensus was lost, Canada voted for the non-aligned resolution, even in its weakened state, so great is our concern about spreading

knowledge about the possible effects on climate of a nuclear war.

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I have come back to Canada, from this fall's activity at the U.N., with a heightened sense of concern and yet with a feeling of hope for the future.

The U.N. is an imperfect institution, to be sure. But it reflects the "atmospherics" of our time. These atmospherics are dominated by the sense of antagonism and mistrust between East and West, which spill over into the various sets of multilateral relationships. There is too much confrontation in the U.N. debates, not enough cooperation. The process of consensus, as I learned, is an easy victim. And it is the people of the world who are the losers.

I am not daunted by the consensus and communication breakdown at the U.N., holding as I do to the belief that peace in the world requires much more than U.N. resolutions. But the U.N. is nonetheless a vital instrument in producing strategies for security and stability.

What the U.N. needs most of all is to be infused with the political will of the major countries, determined to implement the program of action which all countries agreed to at the 10th Special Session of the General Assembly in 1978, the first special session devoted to disarmament

What now of 1985?

The New Year will start auspiciously with talks in Geneva between Secretary of State Schultz and Foreign

Minister Gromyko. We must hope that this event will open a new door to genuine negotiations on the reduction of all nuclear weapons and on the prevention of the weaponization of space.

The third Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty will be held in September. This conference cannot be allowed to fail if we are to ensure that the spread of nuclear weapons does not extend horizontally to other nations. In recognition of the importance of non-proliferation and the upcoming Review Conference the United States and the Soviet Union have just announced that they will hold regular semi-annual talks on nuclear non-proliferation. This agreement formalizes what has been an informal practise since 1982. Canada recently had bilateral consultations with the Soviet Union during which the the NPT Review Conference was discussed at length. We will be taking up this issue again with the Soviets in the Spring.

NATO, under the new leadership of Lord Carrington, will doubtless take note of the new, important document "Managing East-West Conflict," issued by the Aspen Institute and signed by two dozen distinguished world citizens and former leaders. Holding that only the consistent application of will and courage can enable East and West to gain true security, the Aspen Report says: "...the search for positive alternatives to deterrence should continue, hand in hand with attempts to strengthen and stabilize deterrence."

Canada will continue to press for realistic steps to enhance security in the many diverse forums that are open to us. In this exercise of Canadian political will, it is my

hope that public opinion will express the common desire of the government and the people to gather around a national security policy that has as its preeminent goal, the prevention of all war, particularly war between the East and West, in the nuclear age. That is the goal that will unite all Canadians in the search for peace and disarmament.

I close with three small experiences this fall that, truth to tell, made a greater impact on me than many of the lengthy speeches I heard.

- One night at a dinner party, I was seated at a table of U.N. diplomats who, after fighting with one another all day, enlivened the party with common stories about their children and grand children. The antagonists by day became the proud parents by night.

- When I finished speaking to a Baptist Peace Convention in Port Hope, Ontario, a number of young people approached me to ask what specific areas of my work as Ambassador for Disarmament I wanted them to pray for.

- I received a letter from a young mother who, expressing her deep concern about the nuclear escalation, said she was nonetheless happy to be having another baby to manifest her hope in life itself.

Peace is not just the result of United Nations' strategies. It is the result of the love we carry in our own hearts.