



Statements and Speeches

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REDUCING THE CREDIBILITY OF WAR AS A TOOL OF GOVERNMENT

Statement in the First Committee of the Twenty-eighth Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations in New York on October 24, 1973, by Mr. W.H. Barton, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the Conference of the Committee on Disarmament at Geneva.

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The repeated outbreaks of war in the Middle East vividly illustrate the point which is fundamental to our discussions -- that war is a futile instrument for the resolution of differences between states. Moreover, each new outbreak of warfare, wherever it takes place, presents a danger of spilling over into an even wider area, with all that implies in escalation in size of forces and armaments employed. Mutual deterrence and self-restraint on the part of the nuclear powers are powerful factors preventing the extension of a regional war into a general war. But can we take it for granted that these impediments will always suffice? For most of the world they are not good enough. We want effective international action to reduce and ultimately remove the threat of war -- which is why we are here today and no doubt will be back next year and in the years ahead.

This annual debate provides an opportunity to look back over developments during the preceding 12 months, to draw a balance-sheet of the current situation, and to give thought to approaches that may contribute to progress in the period to come.

It has been the custom of this Committee to devote its particular attention to the work of the Committee of the Conference on Disarmament (CCD). This is fitting, since that Committee reports directly to the General Assembly and in a sense acts as its continuing and expert forum on arms control and disarmament between sessions. At the same time, however, the Assembly's assessment of the current situation would be incomplete if it failed to take into consideration developments elsewhere in pursuit of limitations, reductions or restrictions on the instruments of war.

As will be clear from the report of the CCD (Document A/9141), two subjects dominated discussion in the CCD during the past year -- the question of a comprehensive nuclear test ban and the question of a prohibition of chemical weapons. These are the issues the General

Assembly at its last session invited the CCD to consider as matters of priority, and the record shows that this wish was respected. With what degree of success is, of course, another matter.

I should like to offer some comments on these two issues. First, because in the view of my delegation it has greater significance, let me treat the question of a comprehensive ban on testing nuclear weapons. For several years now, the Canadian delegation, like most others here, has been convinced that the most constructive and immediately available contribution to the deceleration of the arms race and to the promotion of arms control which would be made multilaterally through the CCD would be the negotiation of a treaty providing for the complete cessation of nuclear-weapons tests. The considerations that have led us to this position are well known. First, by placing an obstacle in the way of the development of new varieties of nuclear weapons, such a ban would be a factor in slowing the nuclear-arms race. Second, such a ban would be a measure of self-restraint by the nuclear powers, consistent with the obligations and spirit of the non-proliferation treaty; it would thus serve to strengthen this important instrument. Third, a comprehensive test ban, adhered to by all nuclear powers, would eliminate from the world a source of anxiety about threats to the environment. A comprehensive test ban would thus contribute to the safety of this planet, not only today but for the generations to come.

The CCD's consideration of the test-ban issue has been lengthy, detailed and frequently constructive, but it is striking that, notwithstanding the undertakings of the nuclear powers in the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the initiative has always come from its other members, never from the super-powers. This year, for instance, the most that was achieved was a meeting of technical experts to review developments related to the complex problems of verifying an underground test ban. This meeting was called, not at the initiative of any of the nuclear-weapon states but at the urging of the delegation of Japan. Once again, as was the case in past meetings of this kind, only two of the nuclear powers on the CCD, the United States and Britain, participated; disappointingly, the Soviet Union again held to the line that it would only join in promoting scientific exchanges in the field of seismic monitoring of underground nuclear-weapon tests as part of an accepted comprehensive test-ban treaty. In short, nothing that occurred this year in the CCD -- whether statements, working papers, or participation in technical discussions -- produced any evidence of a change of position by any of the nuclear-testing states.

There is another dimension to the nuclear-testing issue. This is the continuation of nuclear testing in the atmosphere by two nuclear powers. The possibility of being exposed to radioactive fall-out from these tests has created a sense of deep apprehension among peoples of many countries, and this has provoked insistent demands from round the world that this kind of testing in particular must stop. My Government once again calls on the nuclear powers concerned to reconsider their position on the Partial Test-Ban Treaty (PTB) and to abandon this particularly objectionable kind of nuclear testing.

Briefly then, non-nuclear states have done all they can in the CCD and outside to bring about an end to testing. It is up to the nuclear powers. Three of these nuclear powers have repeatedly pledged -- in the Partial Test-Ban Treaty, in the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and in numerous statements -- that their objective is an agreement on the cessation of all nuclear-weapon tests; we should like to believe that great powers do not make such commitments lightly.

In this situation, it seems to a number of delegations, including my own, that the step the Assembly should take this year -- the tenth anniversary of the PTB -- is to unite in the adoption of a simple but sharp resolution reiterating in the clearest possible terms its determination that nuclear testing in all environments should be brought to an end. (We hope to join a number of other delegations in tabling a resolution to this effect.) Of course, our message is not new, but we cannot fail to remind the nuclear-testing powers of our firm and continuing expectation that they will take measures aimed at halting the nuclear-arms race. (I shall have more to say on this subject when the Committee debates the draft resolution to which I referred a moment ago.)

It is clear that the nuclear-testing issue is closely linked to attempts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons that find their embodiment in the NPT. This important agreement, multilateral in nature, seeks to reduce the danger of nuclear war by restricting the number of states that have access to nuclear weapons to those that possessed them at the time the treaty came into force in 1970. Non-nuclear-weapons states which adhere to the treaty recognize that it is not in their interest to possess nuclear arms, but their right to benefit fully from advances in peaceful, nuclear technology is guaranteed. To date some 80 countries have adhered to this treaty, reflecting a collective judgment that such an agreement must be in the interests of the whole world community. We must not forget, however, that several countries with advanced nuclear technology still have not ratified the treaty or concluded safeguard

agreements pursuant to the treaty; it is disturbing, as well, that two nuclear states remain unwilling to accept even the very limited obligations that would be placed upon them if they chose to accede to the NPT. My delegation earnestly hopes that such states will, as a minimum, maintain policies consistent with the objectives of the NPT and that they will respect the efforts of the parties to the treaty to fulfill their obligations, particularly with regard to Article III, concerning the application of International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards.

I should like now to turn to the other item that has been before the CCD as a matter of priority -- the banning of chemical weapons. Again, the CCD has not made the progress we had hoped for in its efforts to negotiate a treaty prohibiting the development, production and stockpiling of chemical weapons. But my delegation, for one, has yet to be satisfied that any of the proposals so far envisaged will provide the necessary security guarantees for a treaty to be generally acceptable and effective.

Let us consider the current situation regarding chemical weapons. The Geneva Protocol of 1925, forbidding their use, has been in effect for nearly 50 years and is widely accepted as expressing a norm of international law. Unquestionably, its effectiveness has been reinforced and given substance by the fact that, by and large, nations have been reluctant to use chemical weapons, not simply for moral or political reasons but also for practical military considerations. Their use carries with it the probability of retaliation and the necessity to adopt difficult protective and defensive measures. It is evident that a key factor that has led certain countries to chemical-weapons development, production and stockpiling programs has been the desire to deter by the threat of retaliation the possible use of chemical weapons by potential enemies.

In attempting to draw up a treaty banning development, production and stockpiling of chemical weapons, the CCD is aiming to make a contribution to the ultimate goal of general and complete disarmament and in the interim to limit the dimensions of war-making. But, more specifically, it is seeking to find a way of reinforcing the Geneva Protocol by eliminating the weapons of chemical warfare. This would mean that trust in the effectiveness of such a treaty would replace the deterrent value of maintaining chemical weapons. If governments are to be persuaded to abandon the right to exercise this measure of deterrence, they must be satisfied that the treaty will provide an equal or better standard of protection; in other words, there must be an effective system of verification, in which all parties to the treaty will have confidence.

But, as we have come to realize in the course of our studies in the CCD, the problem of devising an effective system of verification is proving to be extremely difficult -- if not intractable. Facilities for development and production of chemical-warfare agents are not essentially different from those required for many industrial chemical processes -- indeed, some industrial chemicals can be used as chemical-warfare agents. Chemical weapons in many cases do not differ in external appearance from other munitions. Clearly, in these circumstances, adequate verification would be difficult and would seem to need some kind of internationally-supervised system of "on-site" inspection. But such a system is anathema to certain governments. Even if this problem did not exist, it is evident that, by the nature of the task to be carried out, adequate verification will require a system that is intrusive and expensive, and will be difficult to reconcile with the requirement that it should not hinder unduly the operations of chemical industries throughout the world, or constitute an undue burden on the international community.

From this, it is evident that the question of the adequacy of verification will seem by many states to be related directly to the scope of a prohibition. Unless the system of verification is found adequate, those states now having the protection of a deterrent chemical-weapons capacity may be unwilling to accept a scope of prohibition that would include their existing chemical-weapons capacity. On the other hand, states which do not have independent access to a chemical-weapons deterrent capacity may be unwilling to adhere to a treaty placing restraints on themselves without there being at least some reduction in potential chemical warfare threats they fear.

Then there is another problem that has not been faced up to by any of the proposals submitted so far to the CCD. Is the treaty only to come into effect if all members of the UN adhere to it, or do we have to envisage a situation whereby a nation would be expected to forswear its right to chemical weapons even if its potential enemies did not do likewise? What provisions, if any, should be put into the treaty to deal with this situation? These are hard questions, but they must be answered if there is to be any hope of negotiating an effective treaty.

It will be evident from what I have said that my delegation does not see any instant solutions to this difficult set of problems. We believe that the CCD should proceed with all deliberate speed in its search for the elements of a treaty, and to this end it should continue its meticulous examination of the complex issues involved.

Long-standing efforts to eliminate the use of chemical weapons stem largely from the feeling of repugnance about the suffering which they have caused, and from fears about their possible indiscriminate use. Similar concern has led to proposals that strictures should also be placed on the use of napalm and other incendiary weapons. A committee established by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is reporting on this question of weapons of indiscriminate effect. The substance and conclusions of this report, and also the report prepared by the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the use of napalm, will warrant detailed and objective examination by governments in order to determine what measures might be taken with a view to placing effective restraint on the use of the weapons in question. In our view, such an examination would be of particular value if it were to reflect a wider concern with the dangers, especially for non-combatants, arising from the broad range of weapons now employed in conventional war.

A further factor to be considered is the relation between the question of the use of such weapons as napalm and other incendiaries and the broader question of principle concerning the use of all types of weapons in ways which could be indiscriminate in effect or cause unnecessary suffering.

My country has demonstrated its concern that efforts to promote, define and reaffirm international humanitarian law in armed conflict should meet with the greatest and most rapid success. We have stressed at various conferences of the ICRC the importance we attach to international efforts to promote general restraint by military forces in order to avoid unnecessary injury to combatants, and indiscriminate use of weapons that would cause injury to non-combatants.

It seems to my delegation that, if the most expeditious progress is to be achieved, both in the search for the solution of the question of napalm and other incendiary weapons and in the promotion of the further development of international humanitarian law in armed conflict, the examination of possible limitations on the use of incendiaries and other particular types of weapon should be carried out by governments as energetically as possible, but in a body other than the 1974 Diplomatic Conference on Humanitarian Law in Armed Conflict. My delegation has an open mind about the type of forum that could most appropriately consider limitations on the specific weapons in question, and would be agreeable to any decision by this Assembly which provides for separate consideration of the two groups of issues.

We are faced with a situation where the CCD has not been able to make any discernible progress on the main items before it. This is a distressing situation. However, in order to come to a balanced assessment of the wider prospects for arms control, I think it is necessary to look beyond the CCD to other bodies or negotiations that are now taking place. It is fair to say that outside the CCD there have been some encouraging developments.

The world can only welcome the efforts that are being undertaken by the super-powers to avert the risk that differences between them could lead to nuclear war. I have in mind the agreements signed in Washington last June, and the resumption of strategic-arms-limitation talks with a view to completing the Moscow agreements of 1972. Progress in the talks is vital to world security.

While the need to reduce the danger of strategic nuclear confrontation between the super-powers must remain a principal objective, a formidable and related problem is to reduce the major military confrontation in Central Europe, and to devise stabilizing measures that can reduce tensions in that area. In a few days time, representatives from European and North American states with forces in Central Europe will enter into negotiations in Vienna with a view to bringing about mutual reductions of forces and armaments and associated measures. My Government will participate actively in these talks, and looks to them to bring about an increased sense of security and a reduction of tension, first of all in Europe but also in the rest of the world. The talks on force reductions in Central Europe, like those on Strategic Arms Limitations (SALT), deal with the essential elements of the security of states; they cause very serious problems for all participating countries. At the same time, however, they hold open the prospect -- if they can be brought to a successful conclusion -- of the most far-reaching and significant arms-control measures yet achieved. On the same continent, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, while mainly concerned with other matters, is giving attention to military aspects of security in Europe, and in particular to certain confidence-building measures that could reduce the possibility of misunderstanding ensuing from military activities.

Other regional arrangements of various kinds can also have a fruitful role to play in the search for global arms control, since they can be designed to meet needs and take advantage of opportunities that may be different in various parts of the world. A pioneering venture of this kind is the treaty prohibiting nuclear weapons in Latin America. Since none of the states of that area possesses nuclear weapons, the co-operation of existing nuclear-weapons states is an important factor in its effective implementation.

It was, accordingly, with considerable satisfaction that my delegation learned that China and France had adhered to Protocol II of the Treaty of Tlateloco. There remains only one nuclear state that has not done so. We are also watching with sympathetic interest the efforts of the *ad hoc* committee on the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace.

Briefly then, it cannot be denied that there have been some encouraging developments in the area of arms control and disarmament. But we are not satisfied with them: how can we be satisfied until the tide is turned and the level of armaments is in a general state of decrease? It is important that this committee not approach its work in a state of discouragement. We must attempt rather, with clear heads, to determine where the real obstacles lie, to identify those areas where progress can be achieved, and to remain prepared to seize upon promising circumstances as they arise.

Let us consider the CCD in this manner. I have made it abundantly clear that my delegation shares the disappointment of others that this body has made no progress in resolving the issues at present before it. That the CCD as constituted can be productive when the right circumstances exist is amply demonstrated by the PTB, the NPT and the Biological Weapons Treaty. Nevertheless, some delegations have concluded that the reason for the current lack of progress in the CCD is that the machinery is at fault and that a thorough overhauling would transform the CCD into a more productive body. My delegation is perfectly willing to consider, on their merits, any proposals for increasing the efficiency of the CCD's work. But we are under no illusions that minor changes related to the size or organization will add fundamentally to the Committee's effectiveness. It is not that adequate machinery is lacking; what is lacking is a readiness on the part of the major military powers to make use of existing machinery at this particular time, whether to deal with the issues that are already under consideration or to introduce new ones. My delegation would be warmly receptive, however, to suggestions that could lead to the active participation in arms-control and disarmament negotiations by France and China, since it is clear that, without the participation of all the nuclear powers, the effectiveness of any negotiating forum in bringing about arms-control measures that can be adhered to by all states is bound to be restricted severely.

The same considerations guide my delegation's views on the holding of a world disarmament conference -- or, for that matter, the convening of a United Nations disarmament conference.

Sharing as we all do the feeling of frustration at the lack of positive action in the CCD, it is not surprising that there is wide support for a world disarmament conference in which all nuclear powers should participate. Faced by the fact that some nuclear powers have made it clear that they are not yet ready to do so, there are some delegations that believe that this need not be an obstacle and that the planning for such a conference should proceed regardless. My delegation sympathizes with those who feel this way but we believe that to follow this course would be a case of the heart ruling the head.

The hard fact we must face is that proposals for disarmament may be endorsed by 100 or more nations but would be valueless unless the nuclear powers supported them. Indeed, such proposals could be harmful if the consequences were to make more difficult the enlistment of the support of all nuclear powers. It is for this reason that the Canadian delegation believes that, under the circumstances, we should continue each year to take advantage of the General Assembly to review the situation with respect to arms control and disarmament, and express ourselves forcibly on desirable measures and on obstacles to progress, but that we should reserve our judgment on the timing of a world disarmament conference -- or any substitute -- until the prospects for progress become brighter than they are at the moment.

In conclusion I should like to echo the thought I expressed in this debate a year ago. Security does not lie in the possession of ever-larger arsenals. The real national interest of every country on this earth will be furthered by seeking a broader international interest -- by making effective agreements to limit and reduce the levels of armaments and the size of forces in the context of other measures that can promote constructive and stable relations between states. In this way the threat of war will cease to be a credible tool in the hands of governments. This is the goal we must all pursue. Even if our annual debate at the General Assembly at times sounds tedious and repetitious, -- even if the UN's negotiating body, the CCD, appears to be making no headway, we must keep up the pressure. We cannot afford the luxury of yielding to boredom or discouragement and in so doing neglect the vitally important issues with which we are grappling.