

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
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NO. 51/47 DISARMAMENT PROPOSALS BEFORE THE UNITED NATIONS

Text of a statement by the Chairman of the Canadian Delegation to the Sixth Session of the United Nations General Assembly, and Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mr. L.B. Pearson, on disarmament proposals, made in the First Committee of the General Assembly in Paris, on November 21, 1951

This is not the first time that the question of armaments limitation has been before this Committee, and before other organs of the United Nations nor will it be the last. It is a subject that has received a great deal of international attention in recent years. One's mind goes back to the protracted and fruitless discussions of Geneva when, among other things, we argued long and vigorously over the question, whether political security or disarmament should come first. The question is as pertinent today as it was then. Indeed, it may seem unrealistic to the point of absurdity for us to be talking here about disarmament when fighting is actually going on against aggression and banditry in more than one part of the world - and when fear and bitterness and enmity separate so many nations from each other.

Nevertheless, we are wise, I think, in tackling this subject again, however unpropitious the climate may seem to be. If we could only agree, not on the desirability of some limitation of arms in principle, because we are all agreed on that, but on how this could be made effective in practice, then by that very agreement we would have made an important contribution to the easing of political tensions. That, in its turn, would make easier the solution of some of the specific political problems which now divide us, which finally would facilitate and ensure further progress in the limitation of armaments. The fact of course is that we all know that these two questions, limitation of armaments on the one hand and political security and international confidence on the other hand are closely inter-related; that they are almost dependent on each other.

It is I think clear, therefore, that disarmament negotiations are unlikely to be successful, at least without attempting the beginning of political settlements. One obvious first essential is to stop the fighting in Korea, fighting which began, I would remind the delegate from Czechoslovakia, with the attack of North Koreans on South Korea. The place for cease-fire negotiations is, of course, on the spot, and it is there that negotiations rightly are taking place. It is there that I hope they will be shortly successfully concluded. Once that is done it would be possible to begin consideration in the United Nations, and in a calmer atmosphere, of other political and diplomatic

questions in that general region of the world; as, indeed, was visualized in the Statement of Principles approved by the Political Committee on January 13, 1951, during the debates on Korean questions.

A settlement in Germany and Austria and elsewhere is also desirable.

I agree with Mr. Vishinsky that we should not delay the study and negotiation of disarmament agreements pending political settlements, but if international tension could be eased, effective disarmament would be made easier of achievement than it is otherwise likely to be.

The resolution of the Three Powers now before us provides, in the opinion of my delegation, a solid foundation for progress in this vitally important field. It is difficult to believe that any government represented at this Committee could validly object to its principles or to its purposes though there may be, of course, a legitimate difference of opinion over some of its details. By this resolution we accept principles which would govern, and set up machinery which would direct negotiations for the balanced reduction of arms and for the effective control and elimination of those instruments of mass destruction, particularly atomic weapons, which could destroy mankind. So my Delegation earnestly hopes, as, I am sure, other delegations do, that we will adopt the principles embodied in this resolution and that we will set up this new Disarmament Commission to begin its work at once, the work of implementing these principles. It is difficult to understand how any delegation can oppose such a step, which could, if it is accepted by all the great powers, lead to such far-reaching and beneficial results.

It is true that the good faith and sincerity of those who have put forward this resolution has been questioned. That is a depressing and discouraging fact. If, however, good faith in connection with a resolution of this kind is questioned, then, of course, surely it is arrant hypocrisy for those who do the questioning to argue that resolutions on the same subject, which depend for their results merely on unsupported declarations, could themselves have the slightest possible effect.

A U.S.S.R. resolution, which is also before the Committee, states that membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is incompatible with membership in the United Nations. Therefore, according to the authors of that resolution, those of us who are signatories to the North Atlantic Pact must be acting in bad faith, must be insincere in putting forward proposals for arms reduction here, especially at the very time when we are about to meet in Rome to discuss our own defence preparations.

Well since I happen to be at the present time the Chairman of the North Atlantic Council, I would like to clear up any confusion that may exist on this score. I speak, of course, only for my own Delegation, and not for my colleagues in NATO, but I am confident that the other members of the North Atlantic Organization will share my profound and sincere conviction that the effort we are making to build up our power for collective self-defence, and our effort, and our hope, to achieve agreement on effective disarmament through the United Nations, are not inconsistent, but are, indeed, complementary and essential parts of the same single policy designed to ensure peace and security for all.

Our determination in the North Atlantic group to become strong for defence when we have every reason to feel that strength for defence is necessary in the world of today, and our readiness to consider and make clear in advance the principles on which we believe an effective limitation of armaments can be achieved, are two parts of the same policy. No single subject that we have discussed or will discuss in the North Atlantic Council will prevent or even make more difficult the type of agreement which is sought in the resolution which we are now considering before this United Nations Committee.

Indeed the confidence which certain free states are gaining by the increase of their own defensive strength through collective action should make it easier for them to negotiate a settlement of political difficulties which, if achieved, would make some of this military strength unnecessary. This growing confidence, based on collective strength and action of a limited group of nations, is, I think, a much stronger basis for such a settlement than the anxieties and fears which it has replaced.

Nevertheless, we admit that it is only a second best, forced on us by the dangers and fears of the international situation, and much less desirable than the universal collective security which we still hope to achieve through the United Nations. The resolution which we have before us today, if it could be accepted and acted on, would be one step in the achievement of that larger objective which would make the more limited efforts of such organizations as the North Atlantic Council unnecessary.

Our objective in that Council is not to build up armed strength with which to threaten the Soviet Union, or anybody else - we have no intention of diverting anything like the manpower or resources which would be needed for such a mad purpose. Our objective is solely to create sufficient forces to make impossible any sudden knockout blow against us and to ensure that aggression, if it occurs, cannot subjugate the free peoples in any part of our community. Our military plans, therefore, are keyed to the limited strength needed for defence. Our plans are measured in scores of divisions and not in the hundreds that would be essential for any offensive action.

We believe that now our strength is growing. And it is our belief that as it grows the time will come when other and now unfriendly governments will realize, as we for our part realize, that negotiations are desirable for limitation of armaments and for many other things.

It is, I think, precisely because the armed strength of the Western Powers is increasing, and will continue to increase unless and until the international climate improves and an effective and fool-proof system of disarmament is negotiated and implemented, that we take very seriously the resolution before us; and this effort to formulate principles and to set up machinery on the basis of which limitation of all armaments and the abolition of some can take place.

Knowing as we do that our own North Atlantic plans are solely defensive, and that they are an alternative which has been forced on us, we do not for one minute admit any charge that they are inconsistent with our loyalty to and our work in the United Nations; the kind of work in which we are engaged today in this Committee. It is the

hope of my Delegation, as it must be the hope of others, that this work may be successful, and that by it we may be able to avoid wasting on armaments those economic and financial resources which could be used to lift the standards of living of peoples everywhere in the world, especially in the under-developed areas of the world.

The draft resolution submitted to this Committee by the Delegation of France, the United Kingdom and the United States seems to us a good resolution for the purposes which we all have in mind, and my Delegation is prepared to support it. We do not, of course, insist that this particular formulation is the only possible one that could be devised. We are anxious to hear, and will seriously study, any other sincere suggestions that may be put forward.

We attach the greatest possible importance to setting up without delay the simplified machinery for negotiation on all aspects of disarmament which is envisaged in the report of the Committee of Twelve. We support the proposal that the functions of the Atomic Energy Commission and the Conventional Armaments Commission should be merged, and that a new single organ, with the same membership should be responsible for the formulation of effective proposals and controls in both inter-related fields. My Delegation also supports the general principles enunciated by Mr. Acheson in the General Assembly and again in this Committee the other day as a guide to the lines along which we believe real progress can be made.

Until recently, my own Delegation had expected that the members of this Committee would set up at this session of the General Assembly the necessary co-ordinated machinery for disarmament negotiation, both on atomic and conventional weapons, in a relatively simple resolution such as that recommended to us in the report of the Committee of Twelve.

The Delegations of France, the United Kingdom and the United States have now suggested that after crystallizing and agreeing on a set of general principles to guide the work of this new Disarmament Commission, we should embody these principles not under a separate resolution but in the terms of reference of the new merged Commission itself. And that seems to us a satisfactory procedure, if not the only possible one. In any case, whatever course the Committee prefers on this question of form, we strongly support the proposal that such a set of guiding principles be worked out and adopted at this session.

My Delegation is also attracted by the idea of finding certain general criteria for the maximum size of armed forces - say a percentage of population, with a ceiling for very large nations - and for the maximum percentage of national production which any nation can devote to equipping its forces - again with a ceiling for the larger nations.

Regarding the establishment of the new Disarmament Commission, whose function it will be to bring together, and prepare the way for coordinated progress in both the atomic and conventional weapons fields, it is obviously desirable I think that its terms of reference should not be so rigid as to prejudice its consideration of any serious, sincere and practicable proposals, which may be put forward from any quarter, and within the agreed principles.

It is also of course desirable that the new Commission should not degenerate into a propaganda forum, and that it should not have to go over once again all the old and discredited charges made against effective proposals for atomic energy control and prohibition during the past five years. We want our new Commission to go forward, not to go backward or to be vitiated by fighting again over all the old propaganda grounds of the unhappy past.

We should also, I think, all agree that one matter which the new Commission should arrange to deal with from the beginning, is the question of a census of armaments, and that this census must include provision for verification and checking, on a continuing basis. And in this connection, I suggest a census could be worked out including the question which seems to arise in certain quarters of military, naval and air bases: military, naval and air bases set up in one country after agreement with another country, in the territory of that country including, if you like, the United States bases in my own country, in Canada, under joint control, and including, of course, Soviet bases in Czechoslovakia and Poland that could be dealt with as part of the census duties of our proposed Commission. There does not seem to me to be any point in making an extravagant bogey-man of this question. Agreement that the question of an armed census must be dealt with at the beginning need not, of course, imply that consideration of other important questions should be postponed. The Commission will, I think, have full powers to create its own committees which will work simultaneously on certain aspects of the overall problem. Decisions on these details can well be left to the Commission itself.

There is another point on which I think we can all - or almost all - agree. This is that the question of confidence lies at the root of effective disarmament. As Mr. Acheson pointed out effectively the other day unless the governments of the world can be convinced that their disarmament will not be unilateral, they dare not disarm. But this question of confidence is the most difficult of all questions with which we have to grapple. The vicious circle of fear, as I ventured to suggest in my statement last week in the General Assembly, is now complete - and we must find a way to break through. For this reason paper agreements to disarm are not enough. It is, for instance, impossible to take very seriously resolutions which state that within a given time we will all reduce our armaments by a given fraction. Apart from the fact that it is quite impossible to reduce armaments when there is no agreement as to exactly what armaments are being reduced, paper declarations of this kind can only be accepted if and when there is complete confidence that they will be carried out. If such confidence now existed between all states, there would not be any swollen armaments which required reduction. We would have reached the millennium.

Therefore, in a world in which such confidence does not exist, the crux of the matter lies in effective guarantees to ensure that any commitments undertaken will be honoured; in effective controls which will give to all parties the assurance that other governments, as well as their own, will carry through any treaty which is negotiated. It would be quite impossible for governments which are responsible for the security of their states and their people to accept any undertaking to disarm merely on the strength of unilateral statements from other governments that they too will disarm.

This does not mean that reduction of armaments is impossible. It does mean that it can be achieved only if we can create independent international bodies for the continuing inspection and verification of each government's action to ensure the treaties signed will be honoured, and that any breaches can be quickly detected. Such international control and inspection organs can be so devised and established that governments, no matter how much they suspect each other, can have confidence in this machinery. To say that such agencies will be the instrument of this or that power or group of powers, or of "American monopolists", is merely a somewhat crude attempt to prevent their consideration and establishment. To say that they will "snoop" and "spy" is to refuse to accept any effective inspection or international control, because the whole basis of such inspection and control is "snooping" applied to all countries without exception and without favour.

The essential test of whether a government is or is not sincere in making a proposal of the kind which we have before us is whether it will accept adequate international controls with limitations on its sovereign power to make sure that the proposal agreed on is carried out. In any such controls the United Nations agency applying them must be given complete authority and facilities to move about the territory of any state, to inspect where and when it will.

That seems to me to be the very heart of the question of inspection and control - and if we cannot agree on it, we are not going to get agreement on any effective limitation of armaments or indeed on the prohibition of any armaments. Only by the establishment of such agencies for continuous and effective international control, with the most precise powers, can the circle of fear be cut through. We must begin by putting our trust, not in each other, because that for the time being is impossible, but in the United Nations agencies which we hope to set up. That is why this question of effective control and fool-proof safeguards is far more than a technical detail in a disarmament discussion. All other questions, such as the timing of the various stages of armament reduction can be worked out without too much difficulty if this fundamental question of international inspection and control is settled. To refuse to accept such inspection and control, independently administered and impartially applied to all countries, on the ground that it is an unjustified interference with national sovereignty is to make any form of limitation of armaments and also the prohibition of the use of atomic energy for war-like purposes quite impossible. No amount of violent argument or forensic skill can obscure that fact.

Nor is it to any purpose to argue that the proposal in the resolution before us for proceeding by stages nullifies its value on the ground that as these stages are from the less to the more important, the latter will never be reached because the proposal is not put forward in good faith or will it be carried out by the U.N. agency in good faith. The whole purpose of international control, applied fairly to all countries, is to ensure that there can be no bad faith on anybody's part, and that therefore we can proceed smoothly and steadily from the easiest to the most difficult stages, step by step with a minimum of delay.

Progress by stages is essential, and for two reasons. In the first place, it would be a physical impossibility to implement any effective disarmament agreement

overnight, or indeed over-year. And it is implementation that interests us - not mere paper undertakings. The time element is inherent in any policy that is intended to be realized in deeds rather than in words.

A further reason why progress by stages is, in my Delegation's view, an essential feature of any practicable programme, lies in our need to remove fear and suspicion by finding safeguards, in which we can each put our trust in each other. This concept makes it possible for us to make progress by a series of steps, each one of which singly involves a real, but nevertheless limited, liability or risk. While a certain degree of international faith will be essential in this, as in all other creative human acts, we need none of us be called upon to place too great confidence, at any one step, in the good faith of the other party. But as we advance step by step, the confidence of each of us in our agreed international procedures and safeguards, and simultaneously our confidence in each other, will grow and that is how we can get results and not merely resolutions.

For both these reasons, the principle of stages is, I think, unchallengeable if we are all seriously interested in achieving disarmament rather than in scoring points.

The opposite procedure which is advocated by the Soviet Union and friends is to accept at once categorical commitments without, presumably, any confidence in each other's good faith, and then later but only later to work out arrangements by which these commitments could be supervised and carried out internationally. And that is putting the cart before the horse with a vengeance. Not, Mr. Vishinsky, putting the cart before the buffalo, which is an expression I have never heard before in my country. In Canada our carts are usually pulled, not by buffalo or even bears, but by horses, but whatever animal we adopt I suggest that this procedure is putting the cart before the horse. Between the two procedures there can be no question as to which promises the better and more lasting results.

It is, of course, essential to this procedure by stages that the stages themselves should be carefully planned to provide at each step an equitable balance of risk and safeguards on both sides. At each step, both sides should make disclosures of real and equivalent value.

Once this realistic and essential principle is accepted, then the Soviet Delegation, if it is seriously interested in disarmament, but does not agree with the details of the stages which might be suggested by certain other powers, can make its own suggestions for appropriate, balanced and equivalent stages in our Disarmament Commission and these suggestions will, as they should, be given careful examination. On such details of stages, our Delegation's mind is not at all rigid. But agreement on the principle of stages, as on the necessity of watertight international inspection and controls is, I think, a basic test of our sincerity in this question of limitation of armaments and prohibition of some armaments.

It is because among other things these principles and this necessity are well and truly recognized in the

resolution before us. In general terms it is true, but in general terms it can be worked out in detail by the commission which we would set up. It is because the resolution embodies these principles and these factors that my Delegation is very happy to support it, and hopes that other delegations will feel the same, as one step - one important step - out of the morass of fear and suspicion and animosity which divides so many members of our United Nations and which, if unchecked, may frustrate all our hopes for peaceful co-operation.

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