



# Statements and Speeches

---

No. 78/7

## DISARMAMENT: THE PROBLEM OF ORGANIZING THE WORLD COMMUNITY

A Speech by Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau to the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Disarmament, New York, May 26, 1978.

Canada takes its place in a world discussion on disarmament as an industrial country, geographically placed between two heavily-armed super-powers, with an obvious stake in the prevention of war in a nuclear age.

We are a member of a regional defensive alliance that includes three of the five nuclear-weapon states. We are, nonetheless, a country that has renounced the production of nuclear weapons or the acquisition of such weapons under our control.

We have withdrawn from any nuclear role by Canada's Armed Forces in Europe and are now in the process of replacing with conventionally-armed aircraft the nuclear-capable planes assigned to our forces in North America. We were thus not only the first country in the world with the capacity to produce nuclear weapons that chose not to do so; we are also the first nuclear-armed country to have chosen to divest itself of nuclear weapons.

We have not, for more than a decade, permitted Canadian uranium to be used for military purposes by any country. We are a country that maintains strict controls over exports of military equipment and does not export any to areas of tension or actual conflict. We are, on the other hand, a major source of nuclear material, equipment and technology for peaceful purposes.

It has been an assumption of our policy that countries like Canada can do something to slow down the arms race. But, obviously, we can do a great deal more if we act together. That is why a great responsibility rests upon this special session.

It is not the business of this session to negotiate agreements. That will be the task of others. What we are here to do is to take stock and to prescribe. High expectations are focused on our deliberations in all our countries. To do justice to these expectations we must impart a fresh momentum to the lagging process of disarmament. The time could not be more opportune for doing so.

One of the most important instruments of arms control we have been able to put in place is the Non-Proliferation Treaty. It is also one of the most fragile because any party may withdraw from it on three months' notice. The treaty reflects a delicate balance of undertakings. Many non-nuclear-weapon states regard it as an unequal treaty. It is all the more important for the nuclear-weapon states to strengthen confidence in the treaty. The best way to do so is to take early and effective steps to bring the nuclear-arms race to a halt. That is the undertaking the nuclear-weapon states assumed when they signed the treaty.

---

Non-proliferation is not the only dimension of the international system that is put at risk by an unrelenting arms race — *détente* also is in danger. The dominant premise of a policy of *détente* is confidence. That is how it is defined in the Final Act to which 35 heads of state and government subscribed in Helsinki in 1975. Only in a climate of confidence will it be possible, over time, to transcend the harsher realities of divergent ideologies and to fashion the links of a co-operation based on common interests and concerns. The arms race cuts across these purposes. The development of each new weapons system carries the risk of unbalancing the existing security equation. A policy of political *détente*, which has to be based on confidence, cannot be expected to withstand such strains indefinitely.

The arms race also defies the logic of an interdependent world. It is hardly credible that nations that have learnt that their destinies are linked, that national aims can no longer be wholly realized within national boundaries, that beggaring our neighbours is the surest way of beggaring ourselves, should have discovered no better alternative to assuring their security than an escalating balance of terror. And it is even less credible that, in a world of finite resources, in so many parts of which basic human needs remain unsatisfied, nearly \$400 billion in resources should have to be spent year by year for purposes of security.

Security, even absolute security, is not an end in itself. It is only the setting that permits us to pursue our real ends: economic well-being, cultural attainment, the fulfilment of the human personality. But those ends are all incompatible with a world of neighbours armed to the teeth.

On all these counts, we are right in having chosen this moment in time to pause and survey the disarmament scene. What we face is a general tendency to add to arsenals as the only way of correcting perceived imbalances in security. That way lies the logic of the arms-spiral. We must recognize it for what it is: a search for security, however elusive. And we must deal with it on its own terms. To attempt to divorce disarmament from security is to be felt only with the bare bones of rhetoric.

**Achieving  
security  
through  
disarmament**

How to achieve security through disarmament is the theme of the great debate that has been waged through much of the present century. We are taking up that debate again at this special session. The terms of the debate have been drastically altered in the last 25 years by two developments. One was the advent of nuclear weapons, which has forced us to assimilate the concept of unusable power. The other was the transformation of the political map, which has brought a whole host of new international actors into the disarmament debate. Perhaps it is useful, nonetheless, to review the principal strands of the historic debate to see what relevance they may have for our efforts at this special session.

The broad spectrum of proposals to achieve greater world stability and the reduction of tensions ranges all the way from what is sometimes called the "declaratory approach" to the notion of general and complete disarmament.

The "declaratory approach" encompasses the whole complex of non-aggression pacts, treaties of guarantee, security assurances and bans on the use of certain weapons. The

---

classic example of this type of approach was the Briand-Kellogg Pact of 1928. The parties to it, which included all the major powers of the time, renounced war as an instrument of national policy and pledged themselves to settle disputes by peaceful means only. The Pact was regarded as the portent of a new era. The more devastating judgment of historians is that it clouded the vision of the statesmen of the 1930s.

The declaratory approach is not dead. It is implicit in the idea of a commitment to non-first-use of nuclear weapons. That idea is being seriously advanced by some and seriously entertained by others. It is difficult to dismiss because it would give expression and authority to a widely-shared perception of international morality.

It may have a part to play as an assurance to countries that have renounced nuclear weapons. But it is important not to mistake the shadow for the substance. Declarations of good intent are no substitute for real disarmament. They need be violated only once. At that point they become scraps of paper. They have no impact on capabilities or on the resources those capabilities consume. Indeed, their effect may be negative, by diverting attention from the requirement of real disarmament, which is to reduce armed forces and armaments.

If the declaratory approach places an unreasonable reliance on the value of good intentions, the notion of general and complete disarmament has proved to be equally unrealistic in its expectations. The term was coined at the World Disarmament Conference of 1932. But the notion was at the heart of the Covenant of the League of Nations. The Covenant spoke of the "reduction of national armaments to the lowest point consistent with national safety".

The perspective shifted with the coming into being of the United Nations. With the experience of the Second World War still fresh in mind, the emphasis of the Charter was on collective security. With the development of nuclear weapons and the failure of the ideas embodied in the Charter, general and complete disarmament again emerged as the dominant theme in the disarmament debate. It has since been reaffirmed in countless resolutions as the basic principle and ultimate goal of the world community.

It is important to remember how wide a range of vision was embraced by the concept of general and complete disarmament in the early 1960s. What was envisaged was not only the disbanding of armed forces, the dismantling of military establishments, the cessation of weapons-production and the elimination of weapons-stockpiles. The counterpart to global demilitarization was a global security system involving reliable procedures for the peaceful settlement of disputes and effective arrangements for the maintenance of peace in accordance with the principles of the Charter.

The vision is not to be faulted. General and complete disarmament remains the ultimate goal of our efforts to advance the reality of disarmament. In practice, it raised serious questions in the minds of the negotiators: What should be the military balance at each stage of the process? What kind of inspection system could be relied upon to give assurance that engagements were being carried out? How would an

---

international disarmament organization be composed and with what powers would it be invested? What would be the shape of arrangements for keeping the peace in a disarmed world? In sum, what would be the impact of this ambitious concept on the security — not to speak of the sovereignty — of the parties at the end of the day?

In the fulness of time we have to find answers to these questions. But the fact remains that the answers have so far eluded us. It was natural, therefore, that we should have lowered our sights to the more practical aim of making progress towards a disarmed world by building it brick by brick.

This is the course we have pursued over the past decade or so. Over that period, we have managed to negotiate a number of instruments of arms control on which we can look back as useful milestones in the construction of an international security system. As a result, the deployment of nuclear weapons on the seabed and in outer space has been precluded; biological weapons have been prohibited; environmental warfare has been outlawed in large measure; agreements have been reached to ban nuclear tests in all environments except underground, and to halt the proliferation of nuclear weapons to countries not yet possessing them. These are not negligible measures, even though all militarily-significant states have not yet adhered to them.

The measures we have taken are sometimes described as peripheral. I believe that to call them peripheral is seriously to underrate them. They are a great advance over declarations of intention because they deal with capabilities and they are, therefore, verifiable, which intentions are not. They have an effect on the arms race by closing off certain options. It is true that the measures taken so far have foreclosed options that were, in large part, hypothetical. But they do set the stage for an attack on the heart of the arms race — which is how to foreclose options that are real and, in the absence of restraint, inescapable.

**Nuclear-arms  
race**

Against this background, let me turn to the nuclear-arms race. The preservation of peace and security between the nuclear powers and their allies today rests primarily on the mutual balance of deterrence between the two major nuclear powers. Simply put, that balance means that any act of nuclear war by either would be incalculable folly. Nevertheless, the apparent success so far of this system in preventing a global war should not close our minds to the problems it raises.

What particularly concerns me is the technological impulse that continues to lie behind the development of strategic nuclear weaponry. It is, after all, in the laboratories that the nuclear-arms race begins.

The new technologies can require a decade or more to take a weapons system from research and development to production and eventual deployment. What this means is that national policies are pre-empted for long periods ahead. It also complicates the task of the foreign-policy-maker because of the difficulty of inferring current intentions from military postures that may be the result of decisions taken a decade earlier. Thus, however much governments declare that they intend to pursue a policy of peace, their declarations cannot help but be called into question: for they have

---

allowed the blind and unchecked momentum of the arms race to create and to put at their disposal military capabilities of an order of magnitude that other governments cannot prudently ignore.

In such a situation, there is a risk that foreign policy can become the servant of defence policy, which is not the natural order of policy-making.

There is also a high risk that new weapons systems will revive concerns about a disarming first-strike capability; or that they will tend to blur the difference between nuclear and conventional warfare; or that they will increase problems of verification.

All this suggests that stable deterrence remains an inadequate concept. And an inadequate concept is a poor substitute for genuine world security.

These dangers have been perceived by both major nuclear powers. I believe that both are serious in wanting to arrest the momentum of the nuclear-arms race. They have been engaged in a dialogue on strategic arms limitations for several years. The dialogue has produced some useful quantitative limits and others are under negotiation. But the process is painstaking and, as I have watched it, with a full appreciation of its importance to the security interests of my own country, I have wondered whether there may not be additional concepts that could usefully be applied to it.

The negotiations under way between the major nuclear powers have shown that it is possible to confirm or codify an existing balance of forces. But they have also shown how difficult it is to go beyond that and to cut back on weapons systems once they have been developed and deployed. That is not only because they are there and vested interests have been created in their deployment. It is also because it has proved immensely complex to achieve the magic formula of equal security by placing limits on what are often quite disparate weapons systems.

The conclusion I have reached is that the best way of arresting the dynamic of the nuclear-arms race may be by a strategy of suffocation, by depriving the arms race of the oxygen on which it feeds. This could be done by a combination of four measures. Individually, each of these measures has been part of the arms-control dialogue for many years. It is in their combination that I see them as representing a more coherent, a more efficient and a more promising approach to curbing the nuclear-arms race. The measures I have in mind are:

First, a comprehensive test ban to impede the further development of nuclear-explosive devices. Such a ban is currently under negotiation. It has long been Canada's highest priority. I am pleased that the efforts of Canada's representatives and those of other countries stand a good chance of success during 1978. The computer can simulate testing conditions up to a point. But there is no doubt in my mind that a total test ban will represent a real qualitative constraint on weapons-development.

Second, an agreement to stop the flight-testing of all new strategic delivery vehicles. This would complement the ban on the testing of warheads. I am satisfied that, in the present state of the art, such an agreement can be monitored, as it must be, by national technical means.

---

Third, an agreement to prohibit all production of fissionable material for weapons purposes. The effect of this would be to set a finite limit on the availability of nuclear-weapons material. Such an agreement would have to be backed up by an effective system of full-scope safeguards. It would have the great advantage of placing nuclear-weapon states on a much more comparable basis with non-nuclear-weapon states than they have been thus far under the dispensations of the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Fourth, an agreement to limit and then progressively to reduce military spending on new strategic-nuclear-weapon systems. This will require the development of the necessary openness in reporting, comparing and verifying such expenditures.

It is arguable that the credibility of such an agreement could be strengthened by placing the sums released from national accounts on international deposit, at least for an interim period, possibly in the form of special loans to international development institutions. Such an idea would be in line with conventional thinking about what should be done with at least some of the savings from disarmament. But I do not think it makes good sense to penalize countries that act responsibly by cutting back on armaments.

I am much more attracted by the logic of the ideas advanced earlier this year by the President of France. I believe that, if penalties are to be exacted, they should be exacted from those who, by excessive military spending and in other ways, contribute to the insecurity of others. I hope that further thought can be given to these ideas before this special session draws to a close.

A strategy of suffocation seems to me to have a number of advantages. It is not merely declaratory because it will have a real and progressive impact on the development of new strategic-weapons systems. It will have that impact in three ways: by freezing the available amount of fissionable material; by preventing any technology that may be developed in the laboratory from being tested; and by reducing the moneys devoted to military expenditure. It is also a realistic strategy because it assumes that, for some time to come at least, total nuclear disarmament is probably unattainable in practice. It avoids some of the problems encountered in the negotiations currently under way in that it does not involve complex calculations of balance but leaves the nuclear-weapon states some flexibility in adjusting their force levels using existing weapons technology. It has at least the potential of reducing the risks of conflict that are inherent in the technological momentum of strategic competition.

The ultimate intent of a strategy of suffocation is to halt the arms race in the laboratory. But an offer to halt the arms race at any stage is a step in the direction of genuine disarmament. The President of the United States has shown the way in recent weeks with his farsighted postponement of a decision to produce a special battlefield nuclear weapon. We must all hope that the response of the Soviet Union will be such as to make it possible to extend that postponement indefinitely.

**Non-proliferation**

So much for the vertical dimension of the nuclear problem. Let me now say a word about the horizontal spread of nuclear capabilities.

---

---

There are those who have a fatalistic view of the proliferation of nuclear weapons. They argue that nuclear proliferation is ultimately unavoidable and that there is little sense in putting undue constraints on the international flow of nuclear-energy resources in the hope of being able to stem the process.

I do not share that view. I note with satisfaction that the list of countries said to be on the verge of a nuclear-weapon capability is not very different today from what it was a decade or so ago. I believe world security would be seriously diminished by the further spread of nuclear weapons and that it is the responsible course for governments to pursue policies based on the presumption that proliferation can be stopped.

We in Canada have perhaps gone further in our support for an effective non-proliferation system than have most other countries. In part, this is the result of national experience. But in much larger part it is a reflection of public opinion in Canada, which does not believe that we should be serving the cause of a rational world order by being negligent in the requirements we place on Canadian nuclear exports.

I make no apology for Canada's precedent-setting safeguards policy, though it has been criticized by some as being too stringent. Canada is asking of others no more than what we have ourselves accepted voluntarily as a party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty. We have not manipulated our safeguards for commercial advantage nor have we hesitated to accept commercial loss where our safeguards have inhibited nuclear sales. We have shared our technology freely with developing countries and we have applied our safeguards to all on a non-discriminatory basis and without trying to distinguish between capability and intention.

Canada judged it necessary to adopt a national policy even though nuclear transfers were already within the compass of international regulation. Canadian action was based on genuine concern about our role as a nuclear-supplier. We did not think that the international safeguards system, as it stood, was likely to be equal to the problems posed by the advance of nuclear technology. Our object was to bring about a new, more effective international consensus. Canada recognizes that the international system will need time to adapt to the new energy situation. It is now accepted by all that nuclear energy will have to play an increasing part in meeting incremental world energy needs in the remainder of the century. It is equally accepted that the benefits of nuclear energy must be accessible to all countries having no alternative energy options.

It is understandable that, with the experience of another energy crisis still fresh in their minds, many countries would like to aim at a high degree of energy independence. In particular, they will expect to be protected against the interruption, without due cause, of essential supplies of nuclear fuel. Any new system will need to accommodate these aspirations.

But we shall also have to consider that we are hovering on the threshold of a plutonium economy. We shall have to make sure that the vulnerable points in the fuel

---

cycle are capable of being adequately safeguarded by technical means and that, where that cannot be effectively done, we can devise institutional arrangements for international management. I believe that, in the end, the best prospect for countries to assure their national energy security lies in an international system that carries the confidence of nuclear-suppliers.

There are limits to the contribution that can be made by nations acting unilaterally. I believe that Canada's efforts to date have been constructive and effective. But further achievement can be made only through multilateral agreement. We intend to play our full part in the working-out of the assurances and the constraints that will inevitably have to form part of an enhanced international system of non-proliferation.

While nuclear proliferation remains a source of concern, it has shown itself amenable to control. That is more than can yet be said about the transfer of conventional weapons.

**Conventional  
restraint**

The problems of conventional weapons is serious. This special session cannot afford to leave it unattended. Conventional weapons are the germs of a highly-contagious disease. Eighty per cent of the world's military expenditures are for conventional purposes. Some 15 per cent of those expenditures are accounted for by developing countries. Well over half the developing countries devote at least 10 per cent of their public spending to military purposes; nearly a quarter of them spend in excess of 25 per cent. It is with conventional weapons that 133 wars have been fought since 1945, involving 80 countries and killing 25 million people.

Meanwhile the transfer of conventional weapons is assuming massive proportions; in the aggregate, some \$20 billion is being expended on it each year. There can be no first and second priorities, therefore, as between the nuclear and a whole series of conventional arms races. Both are relevant to the maintenance of world security; both are absorbing resources better devoted to other purposes; both are the legitimate business of an organization whose purpose it is to harmonize the actions of nations.

The traffic in conventional arms involves producers, consumers and the transactions between them. What can we do about it?

The more closely we look at the problem, the more clearly we can see that the question of sales is not easily divorced from the question of production. The production of military equipment is attractive for countries with an appropriate industrial base and with requirements of such equipment for their own armed forces. It contributes to national security; it reduces external payments; it creates jobs. Moreover, the attraction of production for defence is enhanced by the fact that some 70 per cent of new technology today derives from the military and space sectors.

The problem is that, the more states go into the production of weapons to meet their own security needs, the more tempting it is for them to try to achieve lower unit costs and other economic benefits by extending their production-runs and selling such weapons abroad. Almost every country that produces some military equipment finds

---



itself, to a greater or lesser degree, caught on the horns of this dilemma. My country is no exception.

Of course, any particular country intent on making a contribution to world security could decide to abstain from producing arms. But what significance would such a gesture actually have? So long as arms are being bought, arms will be produced. There is no particular moral merit in a country that is buying arms not producing them. And if the main reason for not producing them is not to be involved in selling them, it will have no practical impact on the arms race because other suppliers will readily fill the gap.

One way out of this dilemma would be for suppliers, acting in concert, to practise restraint. That is easier where the incentive for arms sales is mainly commercial. It is more difficult where considerations of foreign policy are involved. Canada is not an important exporter of military equipment. We could accept any consensus that might be arrived at among suppliers to cut back on military exports. We recognize that our position differs from that of others.

The major powers, in particular, sometimes see arms sales as a means of maintaining a balance of confidence in situations where political solutions continue to elude the parties. But the major powers must also recognize that a balance of confidence can be achieved in such situations at lower levels of cost and risk. I welcome the recent decision of the United States and the Soviet Union to look for a basis of mutual restraint in their sales of conventional weapons.

Restraint by suppliers will help. But it is an incomplete answer to the arms-traffic problem. It may also cause resentment among potential arms-purchasers. For better or for worse, much of the arms traffic takes place between industrialized and developing countries. The purchasing countries seek, as is their right, to ensure their own security. In many cases, they seek no more than to maintain law and order on their national soil. To curb their right to acquire arms by purchase — even to place qualitative restraints on such purchases — would revive much of the acrimony of the North-South dialectic. It would be regarded, rightly or wrongly, as another instance where the rich are trying to substitute their judgment for that of the poor. Moreover, attempts to curb the transfer of conventional weapons would do nothing to change the incentive for acquiring them.

It is at the level of incentives that we are likely to manage best to come to grips with the problem of conventional weapons. The incentive to acquire arms is rooted in apprehensions of insecurity. The best way to allay such apprehensions is through collective regional arrangements. The countries of Latin America have set the world a useful example in turning their continent into a nuclear-weapon-free zone and in persuading outside powers to respect that status. Similar arrangements are conceivable, in Latin America as elsewhere, to deal with the acquisition of conventional arms. It would be for regional decision-makers to devise incentives for restraint and sanctions for excess in the accumulation of conventional arsenals and in the build-up of conventional forces. That, in the long run, seems to me the best prospect of curbing the conventional-arms race without damage to the relations between nations.

---

Peace-keeping  
and security

While we are exploring these and other ways of making progress on disarmament, we must also strengthen our joint capacity to maintain international peace and security. Substantive progress on disarmament is at best a matter of years, if not of decades. Meanwhile the security of nations is bound to remain precarious. In a world of a 150 or more states, many of which have claims upon their neighbours, and where resource shortages and population movements raise questions of life and death for millions of people, violence within and between states is a regrettable fact of life.

The United Nations was created to restrain and, if possible, to prevent war. Its record is a mixed one. But, whatever we may think of its capacities, we must work as best we can to improve and to strengthen them. Recent events have demonstrated once again both the uncertainties of peacekeeping operations and the continuing need to make these operations a success. It must be our objective to create the conditions that will permit all members to respond quickly, impartially and effectively to threats to peace whenever they are called upon by the United Nations to do so. I make this plea on behalf of a country that has made peace-keeping a special plank in its defence policy and has participated in every major peacekeeping operation of the United Nations.

I want to add a brief postscript on the matter of institutions, which is also before our special session. It is easy enough to change institutions. It is important to recognize, however, that new institutions do not necessarily make intractable issues less intractable.

I believe that it is right for the United Nations to deal with disarmament at two levels. Disarmament is a common concern of the world community, and there must be a deliberative body in which the member states, in their totality, can periodically bring their views to bear on the disarmament process as we are doing here. Actual negotiations, however, must continue to be pursued in a body of more manageable size, operating on a basis of consensus. Canada considers it of major importance that France has decided to rejoin the disarmament dialogue. It is a promising omen for the success of our deliberations. We also hope that the People's Republic of China will see its best interests served by joining its efforts to those of others in advancing the cause of disarmament.

Proposals have also been made to strengthen the capacity of the United Nations for research on disarmament matters and to make the results of such research more widely available. We welcome proposals of this kind. In this as in other matters of public policy, governments can only benefit from more informed discussion. Disarmament is the business of everyone, but only a few are able to follow the issues. The consequence is that special interests dominate the debate and distort the conclusions. We must make sure that they do not carry the day. Dispassionate research and analysis, presented in terms that people can understand, would do much to right the balance.

As long ago as 1929, that most eloquent of advocates of disarmament, Salvador de Madariaga, spoke of disarmament as being "really the problem of the organization of the world community". In the larger sense of the word, history has proved him right.

The arms race we are here to stop is a symptom of the insecurity of nations. But it is more than that — it is a latent source of world catastrophe.

That is why this special session has been called together. It is the first major assize on disarmament to have been held since the end of the Second World War. We must not allow the opportunity to pass without putting our imprint on the course of events. We cannot expect to settle all the issues in our deliberations. We shall certainly not settle them by producing paper.

What we must try to achieve is a reasonable consensus on broad objectives and on a plan of action for the next few years. If we can do that, if we can hold out hope that the arms race can be reversed, we shall have taken a significant step towards the better ordering of the affairs of our planet.

---

S/C