



General Assembly

Distr.: General
29 August 2000

Original: English

Fifty-fifth session

Item 74 (m) of the provisional agenda*

General and complete disarmament

Reducing nuclear danger

Note by the Secretary-General

1. In paragraph 4 of its resolution 54/54 K of 1 December 1999, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to seek inputs from the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters on information with regard to specific measures that would significantly reduce the risk of nuclear war and to report thereon to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session.

2. Pursuant to that request, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit herewith the summary of the discussion held on the subject by the Advisory Board at its thirty-fifth session as conveyed to him by the Chairman of the Board (see annex). The discussion was based on papers prepared by three members of the Board, which are appended to the summary.

* A/55/150.

Annex

Summary of the discussion of the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters on specific measures that would significantly reduce the risk of nuclear war, as approved by the Chairman of the Advisory Board on 7 August 2000

Summary

Pursuant to resolution 54/54 K, the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters prepared a summary of its discussion on information on specific measures that would significantly reduce the danger of nuclear weapons. Appended to the present report are three background papers prepared by members of the Board for the discussion. The Board concluded that it was vitally important to raise the visibility of the need to reduce nuclear danger. All members concurred that nuclear danger would only be eliminated once nuclear weapons were eliminated. There was broad agreement on four measures for reducing nuclear dangers that should receive particular emphasis. The Board also discussed a wide assortment of other measures and broad approaches that received varying degrees of support. The Board believed it would be useful to continue its discussions on the subject.

1. At its thirty-fifth session, held at Geneva from 5 to 7 July 2000, the Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters held an exchange of views on specific measures that might reduce the risk of nuclear war. Its discussion was based on papers prepared by three members of the Board, which set the framework for consideration of the item and are attached to the present report in full. Members felt that the Board could do useful work in discussing many of the items that are enumerated below in more depth at future meetings.

2. Most members of the Advisory Board strongly agreed that there was a need to raise the visibility of the issue of reducing nuclear danger. In that context and without detracting from other areas of disarmament, the Board welcomed the Secretary-General's renewed emphasis on nuclear disarmament. The Board also suggested that the Secretary-General encourage full compliance by States parties with all treaties in force, ratification of negotiated treaties not yet in force and their early entry into force, and continued negotiations on disarmament measures. Such measures were indispensable to creating a climate based on peace and mutual respect.

3. Most members welcomed the proposal made by the Secretary-General in his report to the Millennium Assembly for the convening of a major international conference that would help to identify ways of eliminating nuclear dangers (A/54/2000, para. 253). Should Member States agree with that proposal, the Board agreed that such a conference would contribute to raising the visibility of this issue.

4. All members of the Board concurred that it was fundamental to stress that the danger of nuclear war would be eliminated only when nuclear weapons were eliminated. Thus steps towards their complete elimination should be constantly encouraged.

5. There was broad agreement in the Board that emphasis should be given to the following four measures for reducing nuclear dangers:

- (a) De-alerting of nuclear weapons;
- (b) Review of nuclear doctrines;
- (c) Eliminating tactical nuclear weapons of the two major nuclear-weapon States and, as a first step towards elimination, drastically reducing and removing them to central storage;

(d) Creating a climate for implementing nuclear disarmament measures. Programmes of education and training on the dangers of nuclear weapons would foster an informed world public opinion that would be able to exercise a positive influence on the political will to eliminate nuclear weapons.

6. The following assortment of specific measures and broad approaches received varying degrees of support from the Board:

(a) The prevention of the further proliferation of nuclear weapons;

(b) Banning the use of nuclear weapons;

(c) Changing military doctrines to no-first use of nuclear weapons;

(d) Withdrawal of all nuclear weapons deployed abroad back to the owner's territory;

(e) Eliminating all but a very small stock of reserve warheads;

(f) The creation of additional nuclear-weapon-free zones on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among the States of the region concerned;

(g) Unconditional negative security assurances to all non-nuclear-weapon States;

(h) Abolishing the policy and practice of nuclear sharing and nuclear umbrella;

(i) Reducing the number of nuclear-weapon systems, including eliminating multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles;

(j) Measures to enhance transparency of nuclear weapons and related facilities;

(k) Keeping nuclear submarines deployed in a mode that would make the firing of nuclear ballistic missiles from close range on depressed trajectories more difficult;

(l) Detargeting;

(m) Shaping communication practices so as to make immediate strikes difficult or impossible;

(n) Keeping nuclear forces in a low status of alert;

(o) De-mating nuclear warheads from launchers;

(p) Removing essential parts from launchers or nuclear warheads (such as batteries, fuel, connection cables, and computers);

(q) Confidence-building measures between neighbouring States in territorial conflict, including disengagement of forces, stationing of neutral (peacekeeping) forces on either side of the demarcation line, refraining from supporting armed non-State actors within the contested territory.

7. Members of the Board also noted the final document of the 2000 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, in which States parties to the Treaty agreed on measures that could lead to reducing nuclear dangers and to the elimination of nuclear weapons.

Appendix I

Discussion paper by Harald Müller dated 8 June 2000

1. Nuclear dangers are inherent in the existence of nuclear weapons; that is why, in paragraph 4 of resolution 54/54 K, the General Assembly states that it is convinced that nuclear disarmament and the complete elimination of nuclear weapons are essential to remove the danger of nuclear war.

2. The States parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, in reviewing article VI during the 2000 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, concluded in the Final Document that:

“The Conference notes that, despite the achievements in bilateral and unilateral arms reduction, the total number of nuclear weapons deployed and in stockpile still amounts to many thousands. The Conference expresses its deep concern at the continued risk for humanity represented by the possibility that these nuclear weapons could be used.” (NPT/CONF.2000/28 (vol. I, Part I), Review of the operation of article VI, para. 2.)

3. In other words, nuclear dangers emerge from the particular factors, circumstances or “triggers” that would lead to the use of nuclear weapons. There are four clusters of factors that come to mind as favouring nuclear use and thereby creating nuclear dangers:

- The introduction of nuclear weapons in regions where serious territorial disputes exist between neighbouring countries;
- Doctrines and postures that contain features facilitating or possibly precipitating nuclear use;
- Weapons technologies that are vulnerable to unauthorized or accidental use.
- Lack of transparency.

Introduction of nuclear weapons in regions where serious territorial disputes exist between neighbouring countries

4. Contrary to the prevailing theory of nuclear deterrence, the impact of nuclear weapons on State rivalries is ambiguous. On the one hand, the enormous devastation invested in these weapons may make

Governments shy to enter crises and thereby lead to more conflict-averse policies. On the other hand, the possession of these weapons may make Governments confident that an opponent would not push an armed conflict to extremes and may lead Governments thus to a policy of brinkmanship in the belief that nuclear weapons guarantee that every war would be limited and that existential risks for one’s country would thereby be excluded even if an armed conflict did occur. This risk is all the greater the more contested a given piece of territory is among neighbours, and it is furthermore enhanced through the operation of armed non-State actors within the contested territory. The danger of escalation in such a constellation must be rated as grave.

Doctrines and postures that contain features facilitating or possibly precipitating nuclear use

5. Doctrines containing the possibility of first nuclear use create distrust and fear and lead inevitably to attempts to preserve one’s deterrence capability if an attack is under way, in particular favouring a launch-on-warning strategy and the consequent status of alert. The situation is exacerbated if the first-use doctrine is underlined by a large number of high-alert, pinpoint-accurate nuclear warheads. Asymmetries such as the deployment of territory-wide missile defence on one side may exacerbate the motivations for the weaker side to strengthen the launch-on-warning posture. In crises, such a constellation contains very high risk for precipitating inadvertent nuclear use or use built on misperception, in order to prevent a supposed devastating first strike from the other side. Excessive reserve warhead holdings with a rapid upload potential may also contribute to perceptions of first strike.

6. First-use doctrines combined with large numbers of tactical nuclear weapons present another cause for concern. By their very nature, tactical nuclear weapons are meant to be used to influence the course of a war. On a fluid and deep battlefield, they risk constantly being pre-empted by the enemy. There is thus a tactical incentive to use them early in a conflict to avoid their loss; “use them or lose them” was a common phrase in the West during the darkest years of the East-West conflict.

Weapons technologies that are vulnerable to unauthorized or accidental use

7. Such weapons may be prone to go off in response to external impact (fire, explosion, a bullet, a shock from falling down or from accident) or to lack security features that prevent their unauthorized firing. Deficient early-warning systems could also precipitate an unwarranted nuclear response out of misperception.

Lack of transparency

8. While the refusal of transparency may emerge from a feeling of weakness and vulnerability, lack of transparency usually led potential rivals to an overestimation of another State's nuclear capabilities and may lead to countermeasures with a view to counter supposed (but possibly real) options. Such countermeasures may then include unstable and use-prone postures as discussed above.

9. The following measures can be considered to mitigate the three clusters of causes for danger:

- Confidence-building measures between neighbouring atomic Powers in territorial conflict, including disengagement of forces, stationing of neutral (peacekeeping) forces on either side of the demarcation line, refraining from supporting armed non-State actors within the contested territory;
- Change of doctrine to no-first use. It has to be recognized that this may require a convincing international response to the supposed threats against which countries may wish to retain the first-use option. In particular, the international community would have to take a more explicit common stance on measures that would be taken against an actor using chemical or biological weapons;
- Change of postures away from first-strike configurations. This may include:
 - Reduction of numbers; eliminating multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles;
 - Reducing alert status, through measures such as detracting; shaping communication practices as to make immediate strikes difficult or impossible (present British posture); keeping forces in a low status of alert; de-mating warheads from launchers; and removing essential parts from

launchers or warheads (such as batteries, fuel, connection cables, computers);

- Keeping naval forces deployed in a mode that would make firing from close range on depressed trajectories impossible;
- Eliminating all but a very small stock of reserve warheads.

10. These measures are meant to be illustrative, not exhaustive. De-alerting studies enumerate a couple of other steps. It would require too much space here to go into all the necessary details:

- Refraining from deploying territorial missile defences in a way that would compromise the deterrence capability of strategic partners, unless deployment occurs in an agreed and simultaneous mode;
- Eliminating, or at least drastically reducing and storing away from conflict zones, tactical nuclear weapons;
- Eliminating all weapons that are not immune to accident or unauthorized tampering;
- Granting transparency on doctrine, posture, and plans as far as compatible with basic national security;
- Entering confidence-building measures such as doctrinal seminars, crisis prevention/communication centres, warning data exchanges or joint stations, exchange of liaison officers to strategic command and/or launch centres.

11. The preceding proposals all serve three objectives simultaneously:

- (a) They, alone or in combination, help to reduce nuclear dangers, and thereby
- (b) Contribute to international stability and a sense of security on all sides, and
- (c) Present, or at least open the door to, further contributions to nuclear disarmament.

Appendix II

Discussion paper by Guillermo González, dated 26 June 2000

1. Since the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, the international community has been and remains committed to the total elimination of nuclear weapons.
2. Proof of the commitment of almost the entire international community is the fact that the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons has 187 States Parties.
3. As stated in the final document of the 2000 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, "the total elimination of nuclear weapons is the only absolute guarantee against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons" (NPT/CONF.2000/28, vol. I, part I, *review of article VII, para. 2*).
4. Moreover, the Review Conference agreed on practical steps for the systematic and progressive efforts to implement article VI of the Treaty and paragraphs 2 and 4 (c) of the 1995 decision on the principles and objectives for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament.
5. Fortunately, consensus exists among the vast majority of members of the international community regarding steps to be taken that, without any doubt, will contribute not only to reducing nuclear danger but also to eliminating nuclear weapons.
6. After such an impressive agreement, it would be a stretch of the imagination to try to identify new steps that would, most importantly, enjoy consensus.
7. Perhaps it would be wiser to identify the areas that can contribute to creating an appropriate climate for putting those measures into practice.
8. There are two areas in which States and the United Nations can work in this regard: confidence-building measures and education.
9. International security has to be based on mutual confidence, not on mutual fear. The existence or creation of an atmosphere of trust and confidence, the maintenance of undiminished security for all States and its gradual enhancement, and the peaceful settlement of disputes play key roles in promoting a climate of understanding, confidence and cooperation conducive to peace and nuclear disarmament.
10. A regional approach can be an important complement to multilateral efforts towards nuclear disarmament. Moreover, owing to the complex nature of the problems involved and the changing political and security considerations in different regions, it is more suitable to address some issues in a regional framework rather than to apply general concepts to completely different regional situations.
11. The other area in which work can be done to contribute to creating a climate for putting into practice the measures referred to above is the area of education. As the Secretary-General told us last February, education is, quite simply, peace-building by another name. It is the most effective form of defence spending there is.
12. There is a need to expand international awareness of the dangers of nuclear weapons in order to foster an informed world public opinion that will be able to exercise a positive influence in creating the political will to eliminate nuclear weapons.
13. Programmes of information, research, education and training, including publications, seminars, conferences, meetings, film shows, photo and art exhibits, stamp issues, and the like, are some activities, not new in themselves, that can help people know each other better, understand fears and create confidence.
14. In the long term, people will start demanding from their Governments that the money they pay in taxes be applied to their health and education, rather than be used for arms and weapons.
15. The concept of accountability, already settled in the framework of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, will also be demanded of Governments regarding their actions towards nuclear disarmament.
16. A momentum for nuclear disarmament still needs to be built. While it is true that civil society is starting to play a more important and very useful role, more is needed.

17. Since the end of the cold war, security is being viewed more and more as a comprehensive phenomenon, the focus of which is the human being. That is why there should now be an emphasis on generating in civil society a momentum for nuclear disarmament.

18. It is time for Governments to build and strengthen confidence among each other to bring about a broader exchange of ideas, trade, science, technology, culture, knowledge and information for the benefit of their people.

19. It is time for Governments and the United Nations to educate people with a view to generating public understanding and support for the objectives of the United Nations in the field of arms limitations and disarmament.

20. The approach proposed in this paper might be judged as naive. However, only through the achievement of real stability and development will the justifications for possession and use of nuclear weapons be eliminated and nuclear disarmament made a reality.

Appendix III

Discussion paper by Arundhati Ghose, dated 4 July 2000

1. Nuclear danger exists because nuclear weapons exist. This fundamental fact needs to be accepted as this alone provides the direction to efforts to reduce nuclear danger. Approaches that shift the political onus to transparency or technological development are mere *cul de sacs*, just as non-proliferation has proved to be *vis-à-vis* nuclear abolition.

2. In his report to the Millennium Assembly (A/54/2000), the Secretary-General pointed to the fact that 35,000 nuclear weapons still remain in the arsenals of the nuclear Powers, with thousands still deployed on hair-trigger alert. He stressed the need for reaffirmation of political commitment at the highest levels to reduce the dangers that arise from existing nuclear weapons and from further proliferation.

3. The Advisory Board, in discharging its functions as requested by the General Assembly in paragraph 4 of its resolution 54/54 K, should focus on specific measures that would initiate the process of progressive delegitimization of nuclear weapons, including by reducing their salience in the security policies of possessor States. Non-proliferation measures assume meaning only when they contribute towards nuclear disarmament. Consideration of specific measures should be in the context of furthering nuclear disarmament, not those that create additional impediments to its achievement.

De-alerting of nuclear weapons

4. The de-alerting of nuclear weapons has been widely recognized as a measure that would contribute significantly to a reduction in dangers of their accidental or unauthorized use, emanating from doctrines based on hair-trigger alert inherited from the cold war. This could be achieved through a review of nuclear doctrines, followed by modest, practical and achievable steps aimed at the reduction of the operational status of nuclear weapons and their support systems contributing to an improvement of the international climate for nuclear disarmament. A considerable wealth of proposals exists in the form of studies/reports on de-alerting which could be profitably collated for further consideration by the Advisory Board.

Global no-first-use agreement

5. Nuclear weapons governed by first-use doctrines, in particular strategic nuclear weapons on hair-trigger alert for launch on warning, as well as tactical nuclear weapons for battlefield use, constitute the most dangerous elements in the nuclear spectrum and thus should be addressed as a priority. Unambiguous no-first-use commitments concluded multilaterally among the concerned States and reflected in their doctrines and force postures would impart stability and predictability, enhance the prospects of a legally binding prohibition of the use of nuclear weapons, thus furthering the process of their progressive delegitimization.

6. There is no denying that the issues raised above require substantive in-depth consideration, often involving entrenched approaches to national security based on doctrines of the cold war, complex issues of confidence building and verification, which would necessarily have to be addressed at a subsequent stage.

7. The Advisory Board has not been able to devote sufficient attention to this important issue. Therefore, the Advisory Board can submit an interim report to the Secretary-General stating that it has given consideration to the request for inputs as per paragraph 4 of resolution 54/54 K, and that given the complexity of the issues involved as well as the interest that this issue enjoys in the international community, the Advisory Board is of the view that it needs to continue deliberations on this issue in 2001.