PEACE, DISARMAMENT AND REGIONAL SECURITY

Address by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Senator Gareth Evans, Murdoch University, Perth, 9 March 1990.

The last decade has been a roller-coaster ride for disarmament and arms control. It began grimly with the United States concerned about its window of vulnerability, and East-West relations at its lowest ebb since the Cuban missile crisis. It ended in jubilation with the Berlin Wall breached, solid progress on nuclear and conventional disarmament in Europe, and the promise of even better things to come. Along the way arms control between the two superpowers evolved from a channel of communications grudgingly kept open, to the flagship of a new more cooperative era. It was a decade which went from "Evil Empire" to "Gorbymania", from closed doors to open skies.

The experience of the 1980s - like the lessons of the decades before it - clearly captures the organic link between arms control and the dynamics of East-West relations. It shows that, behind the technical complexities, arms control is, first and foremost, a political process. The quality of the fruit it bears depends to a large extent on the prevailing political climate.

What this means is that disarmament and arms control, at least as they relate to the superpowers, has entered a new era, because East-West relations have entered a new era. Put simply, East-West strategic competition, which for forty years has dominated the arms control agenda, is no longer the touchstone of international relations. The United States and the Soviet Union remain the world's pre-eminent military powers and therefore in an inherently competitive relationship. But within this framework cooperation has replaced confrontation as the leitmotif of East-West relations. This is a huge step forward and one that redefines what is possible in arms control and disarmament.

At the very least what we have now is an important breathing space which can be used to put in place confidence building measures and new agreements across the board: between the superpowers, and multilaterally, and regionally. More ambitiously, we may be witnessing the breaking, at least in terms of the central strategic balance, of the vicious circle that is the nuclear arms race. We have the opportunity, for the first time in the nuclear age, to replace this vicious circle with a virtuous circle where confidence builds on itself, cooperation extends and security is strengthened.

The new climate of East-West relations opens up the prospect at last of real progress towards the goal of "common security" as set out in the Palme Commission's visionary

Report of 1982. Common security is about taking account of and cooperating with potential adversaries. It is a recognition that security - lasting security - requires more than military capability; that, at the end of the day, nations cannot enhance their security by threatening other nations.

The overdue coming of age of the concept of common security is a reflection of a global environment which is increasingly interdependent. We all have a stake in global security simply because no nation will be spared in the event of a global nuclear conflict. Nuclear arms control and disarmament are not the exclusive concern of those major powers which possess nuclear weapons, although they clearly bear a special responsibility. For all the change in atmosphere, and for all the disarmament progress that has already been made, there are still in existence some 50,000 nuclear warheads with a destructive capacity of nearly 16,000 megatons - equivalent to 3.3 tons of TNT for every man, woman and child on earth or, to put it another way, 800,000 times the force of the bomb which destroyed Hiroshima.

As long as the possibility of nuclear war hangs over our world, like some continuously postponed execution, the peoples of all nations have, as potential victims, the right to demand real progress towards nuclear disarmament. They have the right to demand that the nuclear arms race not only is reversed - as is beginning to happen now - but also that it does not take new forms, including its spread into outer space.

Australia and multilateral disarmament. These are objectives and obligations that Australia takes seriously, because they touch our national security, our interest in contributing to global security, and our aspirations to be, and to be seen as, a good international citizen. Australia has a good record over many years in the field of disarmament and a very proud record indeed over the years of the Hawke Labor Government.

The only forum within the United Nations system for the negotiation of multilateral arms control agreements is the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva of which we became a member in 1979. Through the 1980s our involvement and influence in the CD has grown markedly, especially since the new Labor Government took the decision in 1983 to appoint a full time Ambassador for Disarmament based in Geneva. Our profile in Geneva and our input into the work of the CD are quite disproportionate to our size as a nation or our standing as a military power. They reflect the sustained commitment of the Australian government and the Australian community to play an active and constructive role on the vital issues of peace and security.

Our profile also reflects the importance we attach to the process of multilateral disarmament involving as it does the middle and small powers. This is not a matter of status or sovereign equality. Australia is active in global security issues because a collapse

of global security will envelop us all - big powers, middle powers, small countries and micro-states alike - wherever we are on the globe. More specifically, we wish to play a role in multilateral disarmament negotiations because there are some arms control issues which can only be dealt with effectively through multilateral negotiations. And we do so because we have a broader commitment to multilateralism as an effective and fair means of resolving international problems.

Chemical weapons. The outstanding example of the sort of role Australia can play in a multilaterally negotiated convention is the effort we are now making in relation to the abolition of chemical weapons. In the more than seventy years since chemical weapons were first used in the trenches of Europe, three generations of government leaders and diplomats have sought - with an urgency that has ebbed and flowed - to ensure that these peculiarly horrifying instruments of death are never again used. For twenty years, and particularly over the last five years, the Geneva conference process has been wrestling into shape a draft text for a comprehensive Chemical Weapons Convention.

Australia has been a part of this process, but we realised that if the time horizon for concluding the convention were not to be constantly receding, a fresh impetus would need to be given to the negotiations. With the graphic images of chemical warfare victims in the Gulf war very much on our minds, the world community decided that the conclusion of a chemical weapons ban ought to be an urgent priority in the Conference on Disarmament.

We have since considerably upgraded the effort and resources Australia devotes to the chemical weapons negotiations, and it is no exaggeration to say that today Australia has become one of the leaders in the international effort to ban all chemical weapons. The most graphic demonstration of this was our hosting last September of a successful 70 nation Government-Industry Conference against Chemical Weapons where, for the first time, the world's chemical industry collectively signalled its unequivocal commitment to assist governments to conclude a chemical weapons ban. But it has also been demonstrated by our continuing chairmanship of the so called "Australia Group" on the control of chemical weapons feedstocks; by our regional initiative to build support in the South Pacific and South East Asia for a chemical weapons convention; and by our current role of Western Group coordinator on chemical weapons issues in the Conference on Disarmament.

There is now wide agreement in Geneva that 1990 will be a critical year for the convention negotiations, and that the substantive outstanding issues should be able to be negotiated to resolution within that time frame. It is a reasonable hope and expectation that, as a result of all the developments in chemical weapons diplomacy last year, and in particular with the momentum generated by the Canberra Conference, the international community will get a better Chemical Weapons Convention, and get it sooner, than might otherwise have been the case.

Nuclear proliferation and testing. The increased attention we have given to chemical weapons has not diminished our involvement in multilateral nuclear issues, most notably our long standing support for nuclear non-proliferation and for a ban on all nuclear testing. At a time when the superpowers have concluded an agreement to eliminate an entire class of nuclear weapon, and are well on their way to an agreement which will drastically reduce their strategic nuclear weapon stocks, it is both ironic and dangerous that some countries appear poised to acquire nuclear weapons. The horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons represents a potentially serious threat to global security and to the security of several regions, including in the Asia Pacific. It has made the strengthening of the international non-proliferation regime as urgent as ever.

The centre-piece of that regime is the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the single most effective and widely supported international arms control agreement in existence. It is a remarkable achievement, in a world where self defence is a jealously guarded right, that some 140 countries - the overwhelming majority of the international community - have committed themselves never to acquire the most destructive of all weapons. They have done so because they recognise that the spread of nuclear weapons is ultimately corrosive of their own security. The world would be a very much more dangerous place without the NPT and the standards of international behaviour it sets. That is why Australia will continue to appeal to those States which have not already become parties to do so as a matter of priority.

Preparations have begun for the Fourth Review Conference of the Treaty to be held later this year. Australia is actively participating with other NPT members in this important process, with the aim of further strengthening the Treaty to meet the proliferation challenges of the 1990s. Such challenges are emerging strongly in a number of regions, including in South Asia and on the Korean Peninsula. There are also financial pressures on the International Atomic Energy Agency whose safeguards system is crucial to maintaining confidence in the international non-proliferation regime.

A comprehensive ban on nuclear testing occupies a central place in the quest for disarmament, and has been a long standing objective of Australian policy. We welcome the progress being made in the bilateral superpower negotiations on nuclear testing and the developments on a number of fronts on the key issue of verification. We have ourselves sought to make a contribution to the verification issue through our support for the linking up of seismic monitoring stations to create an international network capable of detecting nuclear explosions.

What is clearly lacking at present is a consensus in the Conference on Disarmament - the body that has the relevant authority and competence - to pull all these strands together and systematically put in place the building blocks for an effectively verifiable comprehensive

test ban treaty. We are continuing to try hard to make that happen.

Conventional weapons. It is perhaps inevitable that our efforts on disarmament and arms control tend to focus most on nuclear and chemical weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. And yet, the reality is that the weapons that are daily killing people are conventional weapons which are getting both "smarter" and easier to acquire. No one questions the right of nations to acquire weapons systems for the purposes of legitimate self-defence. But it would be tragic if the end of the Cold War were to signal the beginning of a new arms race in conventional weapons (perhaps fuelled by the ready availability of arms taken out of Europe), as individual nations and regions adjust to a new and more uncertain strategic environment.

Precisely because the pace of strategic change is so fast, we all need to give serious thought to the many difficult questions which arise in relation to controls over conventional weapons. Can they be regulated in ways consistent with the security of all states? Is there scope for international cooperation against, at least, illegal and covert arms transfers? What is to be done about the spread of missile technology and other new and potentially destabilising capabilities? How can we ensure that all states accept their responsibilities in these fields rather than merely criticising the nuclear powers? Australia has an opportunity to have an input into these, and other questions concerning conventional weapons, through our participation in a UN study on ways and means of promoting transparency in international transfers of conventional arms.

Regional Strategies. Efforts at the global level are important in securing the objectives of peace and disarmament. But constructive and balanced endeavours at the regional level can also achieve significant results: endeavours like our regional chemical weapons initiative - designed to build a regional commitment to a comprehensive banning convention, and - above all else - endeavours like the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty, in the negotiation of which Australia took a leading role. The SPNFZ Treaty signals to the world that the peoples of the South Pacific, while they may be remote from centres of conflict, are no less deeply committed to the cause of world peace.

One of the starkest of all differences in Australian foreign policy between the Government and Opposition is on the subject of the SPNFZ Treaty. The Opposition policy is to seek to renegotiate the Treaty (itself a wholly unrealistic objective, given the strong regional support for its present terms) so as to allow the possibility of the stationing of nuclear weapons on Australian soil. This is something the Treaty explicitly prohibits, which is unequivocally opposed by the Labor Government, and which I am sure will be regarded by the overwhelming majority of Australians as wholly unacceptable.

Australia's Regional Security

The Treaty of Rarotonga, as the SPNFZ Treaty is known in the South Pacific, is an example of the role arms control can play in enhancing regional security. But it is important to realise that arms control, like military capability itself, is just one among many instruments of security policy. The most effective security policy is a multidimensional policy: one in which all the components of Australia's network of relations - military and politico-military capability, diplomacy, economic links, assistance with development and so-called "non-military threats", and the exchange of people and ideas - all work together to help shape a security environment which is favourable to Australia's interests.

Australia's support for arms control and disarmament in the South Pacific, as elsewhere, should be seen in this wider context of nurturing broadly based relations in our region. This was the overarching theme of the comprehensive statement on Australia's Regional Security which I tabled in Parliament last December, and it is the conceptual framework within which we approach security issues within our region.

Indian Ocean security. "Our region" - as the people of Western Australia know only too well, and as I explained in my statement on regional security - is not just what lies to the north and the east. It also embraces the eastern reaches of the Indian Ocean where Australia has important national interests. The South Pacific, South East Asia and the eastern reaches of the Indian Ocean taken together constitute Australia's area of primary strategic interest.

It is true that the Indian Ocean region does not have a clear identity. There is even room for argument about where it begins and ends. It is, moreover, a region containing a variety of subregions. Its cultural and religious diversity is extraordinary. It contains the richest and the poorest of nations, and states ranging in size from India with 800 million people to the Seychelles with less than 80 thousand people. Change has been a constant in the region especially in the post War period: what my predecessor, Bill Hayden, called a kind of subcontinental drift.

The Indian Ocean is very different from the South Pacific, notwithstanding the similar development problems faced by island states in both Oceans. The South Pacific is what might be called a convex environment: small island populations in a limitless sea. The Indian Ocean, by contrast, is concave: defined by its littoral with very few people in the middle.

Australia is an Indian Ocean nation with strategic and commercial interests in the region. Our main security interest in the eastern reaches of the region is to protect our maritime approaches and ocean resources. It is for this reason that we now have a two ocean navy. We have particular concerns about the potentially destabilising effects of nuclear proliferation in the Indian Ocean region. And we wish to see superpower rivalry there

contained. The latter is perhaps a declining problem in view of the broader changes in East-West relations, but it has been a persistent feature of the Indian Ocean strategic environment for the last several decades when the Cold War extended to these warm waters.

We also have an interest in maintaining the security of trade and communications routes through the region - some 60 per cent of our total foreign trade crosses the Indian Ocean, and access to airports and airspace in South Asia and the Gulf region are important to our civil aviation links with Europe. Overall our goal is to see a stable regional environment which provides maximum scope for economic development and trade; where difficulties are resolved peacefully; and where internationally recognised standards of human rights are observed.

The stability of the Indian Ocean cannot be discussed in isolation from the role of India. India - it should be stressed - has never threatened and does not now threaten Australia, but it is perhaps the most under-rated of the likely great powers of the 1990s. By the year 2010, India's population is expected to outstrip that of China. It already has a middle class consumer market of close to 100 million people. It has a substantial land mass, increasingly educated population and a developed manufacturing and industrial sector.

India's already significant military capabilities, which make it the predominant power in South Asia, will be followed by increasing strategic reach, including into South East Asia. India sees itself as a great power and a major actor on the global scene. It will show greater interest in South East Asia and even - at least in the context of Fiji - the South Pacific, and it will increasingly claim a voice in these regions of primary strategic interest to Australia. For all these reasons -India's role in the region, its influential position in multilateral diplomacy and its potential as a commercial market - this government has sought to expand and deepen our relations with India.

For the last twenty years, states of the Indian Ocean region have held to the ambition of creating an Indian Ocean Zone of Peace. For a number of reasons - great power rivalry, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the diversity of the region, differences on how to define the area - the concept has made little progress. The UN Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean, of which Australia was a foundation member, cannot be said to have made even ad hoc progress towards a Zone of Peace. It has kept the issue alive but has been unable to find the necessary consensus to put in place a viable and fully thought through framework establishing a Zone of Peace.

It may be that the thaw in East-West relations will act to break this log-jam and give fresh impetus to the negotiations. Australia hopes that this proves to be the case, although it must frankly be acknowledged that there are any number of other problems which could cause yet further delays. What is needed is for the littoral countries and the pertinent

players with legitimate interests in the region to agree on measures which build confidence. The European experience demonstrates that confidence building measures can work and lend themselves particularly well to regional arrangements. The 1990s present an ideal opportunity to make confidence building measures ("CBMs") - tailored to regional needs and circumstances - an established feature of regional security arrangements, not just in the Indian Ocean region, but also in other areas of tension such as the North Pacific.

Here, as elsewhere, it is important to understand that lasting security demands more than just military capacity. It rests ultimately on forging broadly based, multidimensional relations between neighbours and among regional states; relations which both reassure and benefit all sides. This is the starting premise of our approach to Indian Ocean security, just as it is to our security policies in South East Asia and the South Pacific.

Disarmament in the 1990s. What does the future hold for disarmament and arms control? The 1990s are likely to constitute a decade of extraordinary change, as the implications of the end of the Cold War work their way through the strategic crevices of a world joined together in many complex ways. We are at a watershed in international relations. Things could of course go horribly wrong, particularly in the Soviet Union. But if current trends continue, the '90s promises to be a period of solid achievement, one which opens the doors to further significant agreements between the superpowers, far reaching conventional disarmament in Europe, an improved climate for multilateral negotiations on chemical weapons and nuclear testing, and at least the prospect of a healthy spill-over into regional arms control.

But change of the magnitude we now face, while it heralds great promise, also evokes great uncertainty. In the early 1970s Alvin Toffler coined the term "future shock" to describe the disorientation caused by accelerated change. The shock of peace, for which the end of East-West confrontation has paved the way, may have a similarly disorienting effect, at least in the short term.

In this environment of change and uncertainty, arms control and disarmament can play a useful and stabilising role. It represents an ordered and structured means of coping with a shifting strategic environment in a way which can reassure all sides. It can help ensure that rapid change does not result in a strategic vacuum which other nations, for whatever reason, may be tempted to rush in and fill. And it can act as a means of locking in gains thereby making it more difficult to turn the clock back.

None of this is to suggest that the road ahead is all down hill from now. The prospects may have improved greatly, and progress may no longer be measured in geological time-scales, but the process will remain a hard grind of patient negotiation and technical detail. Nor does the work stop once the agreements are signed. The effective verification of

agreements will be as important as ever if the new climate of confidence is to be sustained. Verification does not come easy or cheap as the INF experience shows, and as the European disarmament process is almost certain to demonstrate.

Peace, Disarmament and the Australian Community

The search for peace and security involves not only governments but the entire community. Public opinion has always been an important part of the disarmament process, and informed public debate has a useful role to play in the development of national policy. As a government, we have sought to maintain a dialogue with the peace movement and to play a part in encouraging a serious discussion in the community about the vital issues of peace and disarmament.

During the International Year of Peace in 1986, the Government provided $3.25 million for community based projects to foster the cause of peace. A regular and formal dialogue on peace issues between the Government and the community has been established through the National Consultative Committee on Peace and Disarmament (NCCPD). My Department regularly publishes a Peace and Disarmament newsletter with a wide distribution among the community. And we have funded the establishment and operations of the Peace Research Centre at the Australian National University to the extent now of some $450,000 per year.

As a further contribution to this process of study and dialogue, the Commonwealth Government is presently giving close consideration to the possibility of funding a Peace Research Centre in Western Australia. The principal purpose of such a Centre would be to carry out high quality research and analysis on issues relating to the conditions for establishing and maintaining peace, with special priority given to the Indian Ocean and the regions bordering on it. Through its focus on the Indian Ocean, such a Centre would complement the Asia Pacific focus of the Peace Research Centre at the ANU. We will be undertaking further discussions about the siting and funding of such a Centre, and hope to be able to make an announcement about its establishment early in our next term of Government.

Conclusion

This year we begin the last decade of a century of unprecedented armament. In both myth and history, the dawn of a new century is often associated with the dawn of a new age. A decade is not going to turn the tide of history or transform human nature. But we do have before us a window of opportunity to enter the next century a more secure nation in a more secure region and a more secure world.

Whether we do so will depend on our capacity to join together in the cause of peace and

common security. Peace in a global village is indivisible. If it is to be secured it must be the product of many nations, the sum of many acts. Australia remains committed to this collective process; to playing a constructive and active part in the quest for lasting peace.

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