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GENERAL AND COMPLETE DISARMAMENT: MEASURES TO PROVIDE
OBJECTIVE INFORMATION ON MILITARY CAPABILITIES

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

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REPLIES RECEIVED FROM GOVERNMENTS

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

[Original: English]

[8 November 1983]

1. The United States joined with the vast majority of Member States in supporting resolution 37/99 G on "Measures to provide objective information on military capabilities". The United States Government shares the views expressed in the preamble to this resolution that misperceptions - and we would add, uncertainties - regarding military capabilities and intentions can contribute to heightened international tensions. The United States believes that the lack of objective information on the military strength of States can contribute, at least indirectly if not always directly, to an increase in arms. Objective information on military strength of States is extremely important in the evaluation of their military capabilities. If such information is lacking, the resulting uncertainties and mistrust heighten apprehensions, exacerbate tensions, contribute to the potential for miscalculation, and undermine international stability.

2. We are also of the view that by making available to the world objective, reliable, and accurate information on their military forces, States can contribute much to the strengthening of confidence among themselves and provide an important ingredient for successful negotiations on arms control and disarmament agreements. It is in this spirit that the United States co-sponsored resolution 37/100 D on confidence-building measures at the last General Assembly.

3. The United States, for its part, routinely makes public an enormous amount of information on United States military capabilities. Such material includes the several-hundred-page report of the Secretary of Defense to the United States Congress each January, and extensive supplementary material presented to support Defense budget requests. The United States makes this information, as well as a wealth of other information, available in the belief that such information will contribute to an understanding of the nature and purpose of our military forces, thereby allaying mistrust as to our intentions and activities. As already noted, such information, when provided by all Member States, would lay a useful foundation for efforts towards arms control and disarmament. In that connection, the United States also actively supports the United Nations efforts to encourage standardized reporting of military expenditures through the annual United States military expenditures submission to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and by United States participation in the expert groups established to work on standardized reporting.

4. The United States would like to encourage other countries to join with it in providing objective military information and supporting measures to encourage an expansion of the exchange of such information. Such measures, in the view of this Government, should envisage a step-by-step approach focusing initially on the exchange of basic information, such as on total national numbers of people under arms, numbers of major types of equipment, and other relevant basic indicators.

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After all States, and particularly the militarily significant States, provide such information, further information, such as that dealing with force structure, could be exchanged. The United Nations might well facilitate the collection of such information from Member States.

5. Clearly, efforts to make concrete assessments of comparative military capabilities now are premature. A reliable data base is required for any such effort to prove useful. Moreover, other types of information would be needed in addition to those cited above, such as the skill and readiness levels of combat units and the technical characteristics of military equipment. Furthermore, methods for making comparative assessments, given the availability of such information, are not yet at hand and would require development.

6. Nevertheless, the provision of the initial types of information would in itself constitute a major positive step, not only because of their basic importance and as a precursor for possible further steps, but also because this would constitute a signal of willingness to participate not only in the process of building confidence among States, but in the process of enhancing international peace, security and stability.

7. The fundamental problem however, is not so much the absence of institutional machinery for the exchange of military information, as it is the adamant refusal of the group of States led by the Soviet Union to participate in any way in the process. This has been made abundantly clear in many ways besides the vote on resolution 37/99 G - for example, by that group's record of non-participation in the widely supported efforts of the United Nations to encourage standardized reporting of military expenditures. It is clear that this refusal is a major obstacle in many ongoing and potential spheres of arms control negotiations besides that of the reduction of military budgets.

8. At the heart of the problem is the obsession with secrecy of the Soviet Union. The harmful effect of this secrecy pervades the present international scene. To give just one example, the Soviet intention to introduce into Europe a new and enlarged intermediate nuclear-weapon capability was made known to the world by the West, not by the Soviet Union, and after the fact, not before. If this intention had been revealed in a timely manner by the Soviet Union itself, then the excessive nature of this deployment, which Soviet positions have now amply demonstrated, might well have become clear earlier in the course of international discourse. As one of the most militarily powerful States on earth, the USSR carries special responsibilities for explaining its military posture to every State - as well as to its own people.

9. Because of the importance and the strength of the Soviet obsession with secrecy, the efforts of that large majority of the United Nations which seeks improvements in transparency must be redoubled. Means should be sought for raising the incentives for such improvements, beyond mere exhortation and patient waiting. The compliance of all States with General Assembly resolution 37/100 J, which calls upon all Member States to facilitate the flow of a broad range of accurate information on disarmament matters, would be a step in this direction.