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GENERAL AND COMPLETE DISARMAMENT: NAVAL ARMAMENTS AND DISARMAMENT

Note verbale dated 7 November 1990 from the Permanent Representative  
of Sweden to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

The Permanent Representative of Sweden to the United Nations presents his compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and has the honour to request that the attached document be circulated as a document of the General Assembly under agenda item 56 (i) entitled "General and complete disarmament: Naval armaments and disarmament".

Annex

NAVAL ARMAMENTS AND DISARMAMENT: MEMORANDUM BY SWEDEN

1. Nuclear arms at sea: the present situation

About every fourth nuclear weapon in the world, or a total of about 15,000, are earmarked for deployment at sea.

The five nuclear-armed navies currently are considered to deploy some 3,500 nuclear-capable platforms: approximately 350 surface vessels, 400 submarines and 2,750 aircraft.

Approximately one third, or about 5,000, of all sea-based nuclear weapons can be estimated to belong to the category "sub-strategic", comprising a variety of nuclear weapons intended for targets at sea, as well as nuclear-armed cruise missiles and other nuclear weapons for attacks against targets on land.

The remaining two thirds of the nuclear weapons deployed at sea are considered strategic and are based on submarines.

Sea-launched cruise missiles and anti-ship missiles make up a growing category of naval nuclear weapons. There are at present around 900 sea-launched cruise missiles with nuclear warheads deployed on more than 200 platforms. Sweden and many other States are particularly concerned about the widespread deployment of these increasingly sophisticated missiles. Sweden notes with regret the high ceilings established in principle between the United States and the Soviet Union on the limitation of such missiles.

The operational patterns of navies on the open seas, often navigating in close proximity to each other, imply particular risks. The option of early use in a conflict of sub-strategic nuclear weapons carried on board may be influenced by the notion that such weapons, therefore, can be used in a military encounter at sea without causing direct damage to civilian life or property. Nuclear weapons intended for targets at sea are considered to threaten to bring about a lowering of the nuclear threshold.

A new and positive tendency towards unilateral arms reductions at sea by nuclear-weapon States has been discernible over the past few years. The number of nuclear-capable ships has decreased and the construction of new naval platforms appears to be slowing down. Through unilateral measures, entire classes of nuclear weapons intended for sea warfare have been withdrawn and certain categories of ships, or even whole fleets, have been de facto denuclearized. Additional withdrawals would be welcomed. Sweden urges all nuclear-weapon States to consider such unilateral withdrawals. These developments should clearly facilitate negotiations on naval nuclear disarmament.

Strategic nuclear weapons at sea were subject to limitations under the SALT I and SALT II agreements, g/ and are now part of the ongoing bilateral Soviet-American

negotiations. The SALT agreements were complemented by agreed confidence-building measures, as well as agreements on the prevention of incidents at sea concluded bilaterally between the USSR and a number of States members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) between 1972 and 1990. Naval sub-strategic nuclear weapons have, however, so far not been seriously addressed in negotiations between the nuclear-weapon States.

2. The need for increased transparency and confidence-building measures

Naval confidence-building measures seem to be a natural step towards halting the naval arms race and enhancing security.

One objective of naval confidence-building measures should be to increase security by diminishing the risks of incidents and confrontation at sea.

Security on the high seas is a function of the interaction of all navies. The positive results of bilateral agreements in this area suggest that security at sea could be further improved through the multilateral application of principles embodied in existing bilateral arrangements.

In 1988, the Disarmament Commission adopted by consensus a set of guidelines for confidence-building measures. b/ These guidelines establish that a major objective of confidence-building measures is to reduce or even eliminate the causes of mistrust, fear, misunderstanding and miscalculation with regard to relevant military activities and intentions of other States, factors which may generate the perception of reduced security.

It should be recalled that in adopting resolution 44/116 E of 15 December 1989 entitled "Objective information on military matters", which commanded an overwhelming majority in the General Assembly, including favourable votes by four nuclear-weapon States, the Assembly expressed the belief that the adoption of confidence-building measures to promote openness and transparency would contribute to the prevention of misperceptions of military capabilities and intentions. The Assembly also expressed the belief that balanced and objective information on all military matters, in particular of nuclear-weapon States and other militarily significant States, would contribute to the building of confidence among States.

The great number of sub-strategic nuclear weapons on board warships is a cause of grave concern. One of the reasons is the policy pursued by nuclear-weapon States neither to confirm nor deny the presence or absence of nuclear weapons on board any particular ship at any particular time. Whatever the reasons for it may have been in the past, this outdated and dangerous policy should now be abandoned.

This practice has caused increased public concern in many countries, especially when warships of nuclear Powers, claiming innocent passage, pass through the territorial waters of these countries or when they call at their ports.

The policy neither to confirm nor deny does not build confidence between States. Instead, whereas naval visits are intended to be confidence-building, this practice in fact undermines confidence.

The selective application of a sanctuary of secrecy in one area of military activity may undermine the credibility of legitimate demands for openness in other military spheres.

Nuclear-weapon States have committed themselves to openness in all disarmament areas, but still stick to secrecy at sea. Sweden takes it for granted that the nuclear-weapon States which have voted in favour of the General Assembly resolution on objective information on military matters, will abide by this resolution and consistently display openness and transparency in all areas of military activity.

The ideal solution would be the complete prohibition of all nuclear weapons at sea. The practice of neither confirming nor denying would become superfluous through the prohibition of all non-strategic nuclear weapons at sea.

### 3. Naval nuclear disarmament measures

Sea-based nuclear weapons intended for targets on land pose special problems in relation to agreements involving land and/or air forces. Such agreements must not be circumvented by compensatory deployments at sea.

There is a growing awareness of the risks connected with sub-strategic nuclear weapons based at sea, as well as a discussion about the purpose or military utility of such weapons. The nuclear-weapon States should give the matter urgent attention and include this issue in disarmament negotiations.

At the 1990 substantive session of the Disarmament Commission, Sweden, Finland and Indonesia tabled a working paper on possible action in the maritime domain (A/CN.10/139).

Appropriate, universal and non-discriminatory verification is essential for the implementation of agreed measures in the naval field. The international community has a stake in all major disarmament agreements and a vital interest in the verification of compliance with them.

To further the cause of eliminating sub-strategic nuclear weapons deployed at sea, naval nuclear disarmament should occupy the place it deserves in the elimination of nuclear weapons everywhere.

There is now growing international recognition that negotiations on all naval nuclear weapons are long overdue. Limitations of sea-borne nuclear missiles are urgently required.

Sweden calls upon all States to take unilateral measures and/or to initiate negotiations to ban all nuclear weapons on all ships and submarines other than

those classes specifically designated by agreement, as an interim measure in anticipation of a complete denuclearization of naval forces. All sea-launched cruise missiles with nuclear warheads should in this context be completely banned.

Such measures would conform with the express agreement between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the United States of America to conduct bilateral negotiations, which ultimately "should lead to the complete elimination of nuclear arms everywhere".

Sweden now proposes negotiations, bilaterally or multilaterally, on the prohibition of non-strategic nuclear weapons at sea.

Notes

a/ See The United Nations Disarmament Yearbook, vol. 4: 1979 (United Nations publication Sales No. E.80.IX.7), chap. VIII.

b/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifteenth Special Session, Supplement No. 3 (A/S-15/3), para. 41 (para. 6 of the quoted text).

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