PREPARATORY COMMITTEE FOR THE SPECIAL
SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
DEVOTED TO DISARMAMENT

Letter dated 22 April 1977 from the Permanent Representative
of the United States of America to the United Nations
addressed to the Secretary-General

With reference to your note of 26 January 1977, concerning the convening
of a Special Session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, I have the
honour to submit the views of the United States on the agenda and other relevant
matters, as set out in the enclosed document.
The United States supported the adoption last fall of General Assembly resolution 31/189B, which called for the convening of a special Assembly session devoted to disarmament. At that time, the United States representative said that the United States would take an active part in preparations for the session and was willing to work co-operatively with other members of the United Nations to make it a success. In his address at the United Nations on 17 March, President Carter stated that "we will make a strong and positive contribution to the upcoming special session on disarmament ..."

Underlying this approach is our belief that the special session offers an important opportunity to come to grips, in a concentrated manner, with some of the fundamental problems in the disarmament field. The session can, of course, serve a great many valuable purposes, both for Governments and the public, including the deepening and sharpening of understanding of vital disarmament issues. But we believe the central objective of the session should be to give a genuine new impetus to productive multilateral negotiations on issues - old and new - of pressing concern. In our view, the over-all significance of the session's achievement will be measured primarily in terms of the specific stimulus it gives to such negotiations. More broadly, the session's value will in part be determined by the extent to which it promotes measures and approaches that can contribute to an improved international atmosphere and to greater progress in arms control and disarmament.

If these tasks are to be accomplished, the session will need to do more than seek agreement on abstract priorities determined without reference to their achievability, on general principles for disarmament that may or may not contribute to the solution of specific problems, or on a rigid programme and schedule of action seeking to determine a long-range process inevitably dependent on a multitude of factors subject to unforeseeable change. Such efforts, if not kept in perspective, could result in obscuring the session's paramount purposes and divert its attention from more urgent problems.

Whether or not the special session can successfully stimulate, broaden, and accelerate disarmament negotiations will, in our view, depend primarily on the ideas and attitudes that countries develop for and bring to the session. The tremendous difficulties that have made negotiations so slow in the past - difficulties of definition, of balance, of verification, of conflicting political purposes, of insecurity - are not artificial. They will not disappear. Rather, it is the approaches taken to their solution, to the extent that traditional approaches are inadequate, that must be changed.

We believe it will be essential for all Governments wishing to contribute to the success of the special session to review intensively all the possible approaches to arms control and disarmament arrangements that could contribute to their own security and that of others, or that could help reduce tensions, or limit expenditures and diversion of resources to armaments without prejudicing security.

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Governmental reviews of this nature should and obviously will cover an extremely broad spectrum of arrangements - including those dealing with restrictions on levels or types of armaments, restrictions on activities, deployment limitations, expenditure limitations, and tension-reducing measures. It will be equally important to identify a broad range of frameworks for such arrangements - including choices between global, regional, and bilateral actions, between formal treaty negotiations and less formal undertakings or mutual restraint, and between comprehensive and more limited undertakings.

Some approaches may not, of course, be applicable on a global scale. One of the potential benefits of the special session, in our view, could be to encourage Governments to consider how concepts developed for particular problems or regions might be adapted to situations relevant to their own concerns.

The national reviews that precede the session itself should be based on a recognition that arms control arrangements have the potential of enhancing, not merely preserving, the security of the participants. It will thus be important to consider ways in which arms control approaches can be used by States to deal helpfully with their own security concerns and those of others with whom they interact.

This review process, together with a pattern of broad and open consultations among countries of all political views, would contribute significantly to preparations for the special session. It should provide the necessary raw material to fashion general and specific objectives commanding a wide measure of consensus, to agree on meaningful priorities, to overcome some existing obstacles, to spur existing disarmament efforts where possible, to launch new efforts where desirable, and to begin consideration of any necessary new arrangements for carrying out future negotiations.

Clearly the primary focus of the session's work should be its examination of major substantive issues in the disarmament field and its search for practicable approaches toward their resolution. In his speech of 17 March, President Carter indicated some of the areas that the United States considers to be of particular importance in the field of arms control and disarmament. At this early stage, however, we believe it would be difficult to identify which specific problems might most usefully be concentrated upon at the special session.

Without prejudice to the paramount importance of contributing to productive negotiations on specific disarmament and arms control issues, we believe the session should also consider one broad area that has not yet been intensively explored in the United Nations - namely, measures to increase international confidence and reduce international tensions. It is clear that progress toward substantial disarmament cannot be achieved independently of progress toward a more peaceful world - a world in which problems are solved without recourse to force or threat of force, in which actions are governed by respect for law, and in which mutual understanding and negotiation replace mistrust and conflict. An examination of the problem of achieving broad disarmament should, in our view, take account of this underlying reality.

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In this connexion, we believe the special session could make an important contribution by giving significant attention to means of strengthening international confidence, both through practical measures that could be implemented in the near term and through steps that could be taken over a longer term. Such measures might, for example, include recommendations for greater openness with respect to military expenditures and activities, for reciprocal acts of restraint in various fields, for minimizing the risks of conflict through accidents or misunderstanding, and for the development of guidelines for consultation and mediation in times of tension.

The United States will take a flexible approach to the structuring of the agenda of the special session. In general, we believe it should simply establish an organizational framework for the work of the session, without seeking to predetermine the scope of discussion - particularly at this early stage. The agenda should, of course, provide time for a general debate, giving an opportunity for all members to set forth their views and to air new ideas. At the same time, it would be desirable for the arrangements to provide ample opportunity for informal discussions and negotiations.

The session's attention should be focused primarily on the preparation of its final substantive document. As suggested earlier, we believe it should identify practical approaches for solving pressing problems through negotiations and through other national, regional, and international actions. It might also, more generally, attempt to restate the fundamental interests of the international community in seeking progress in disarmament, identify long-term goals, and set out any generally applicable guidelines that might be helpful in working to achieve these goals.

The precise format and label of the session's final product is, in our view, less important than the quality, practicality, and significance of the ideas developed and reflected in it.

Negotiations and disarmament mechanisms, institutions, and procedures should not, of course, be a substitute for the development of substantive goals and concrete proposals. Nonetheless, the session should be prepared to undertake any needed improvements in existing machinery and practices. It should also be in a position to launch any new organizational steps, perhaps including the creation of additional machinery, that may be required to facilitate the achievement of the goals agreed upon at the session.

Important as the special session will be as a major international event, it still must be regarded as one step in a very long and arduous process. That process is nothing less than improving the security of all nations and their peoples and building a world order in which human energies and talents are devoted more fully to meeting the basic needs of all humanity. We face too many pressing challenges to improve the quality of life for all peoples to be satisfied with the indefinite perpetuation of the present situation.

The special session on disarmament could offer us an important opportunity for accelerating a basic change in direction. The United States will do everything in its power to contribute. But the determined and creative efforts of all will be essential.