

March 14, 1961

**Memorandum to All Missions by the Department of
External Affairs, 'Arms Control' (Confidential)
(408/264B), Dublin**

Citation:

"Memorandum to All Missions by the Department of External Affairs, 'Arms Control' (Confidential) (408/264B), Dublin", March 14, 1961, Wilson Center Digital Archive, National Archives of Ireland, Department of Foreign Affairs/PMUN 331, published in "Documents on Irish Foreign Policy," Volume XI, Document No. 375. Contributed by Mervyn O'Driscoll. <https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/300652>

Summary:

The arrival of the new U.S. president, John F. Kennedy, in office in 1961 encouraged Aiken to redouble his efforts. He searched for signs of change in the Kennedy administration. He was nevertheless guarded, appreciating that the arms control ambitions of the United States did not necessarily or completely align with Ireland's disarmament aspirations. He understood that progress required educating public opinion to recognize that general and complete disarmament could, given the vested interests, take generations. A step-by-step, gradualist approach therefore had to be adopted. He reiterated his philosophy of expanding areas of law, adopting a regionalist approach, and assuming a preventive orientation in a commentary on Kennedy's article in the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists in November 1960, which was itself based on Kennedy's campaign speech earlier that year.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY)

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan
Transcript - English



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

Archives are subject to copyright and should not be copied
or reproduced without the written permission
of the Director of the National Archives

umh. 245.

Refce. No. ^B

498/264

ConfidentialAN ROINN SHÓTAÍ EACTRAÇA
Department of External Affairs,

bairle áca cúač

Dublin.

14th March, 1961.

To all Missions.Arms Control

P/A 9/11

The following outline of the Minister's views on Arms Control has been prepared in response to enquiries from certain Missions and will be found useful to all Missions having occasion to report on subjects falling within this general field. The outline is in the form of a commentary on the following extracts from an article contributed to the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists in November 1960 by President Kennedy:

"As I look at the future, I am convinced that the United States must lead the way in a world-wide effort to bring military weapons under effective international control".

"..... We must mobilize first-rate talents and ample research and development resources to develop and put forward detailed proposals for arms control".

"..... We should also be aware that the spread of nuclear weapons to additional powers is recognised as a danger by Moscow".

The Minister believes that the policy indicated in these quotations is capable of leading mankind away from war and towards prosperity and stable peace.

It is clear, however, that there are considerable difficulties in the way of securing general support for such a policy. There is a vital difference between the aim of "bringing military weapons under effective international control" and the aim of "general and complete disarmament under effective control". The latter aim has for the last two years been the declared official policy of the United States and the Soviet Union and proclaimed by both as not only desirable but immediately practicable - if only the other side would agree.

It seems to the Minister that the time has come for a new approach to the problem of disarmament which has been so long discussed at talks and conferences with little results. Rather than giving verbal support to disarmament policies impossible

- 2 -

of achievement, responsible leaders should impress on the public that they must face living in an age in which the Great Powers possess nuclear weapons and are not likely to relinquish them.

The Minister is convinced that no nuclear power would in fact trust its opponent to destroy all its nuclear weapons under any system of inspection and control within our power to devise; and that no honest nuclear power would sign an agreement to destroy or surrender all or a significant proportion of its nuclear weapons unless there existed in full and effective operation a world authority, in which it had learned to trust, and which had the military capability of dealing with a nuclear "cheat". The evolution of such an authority may take many generations.

These truths need to be brought home to the public - sooner rather than later - and should also constitute the frame of reference within which the detailed study of arms control problems, and policy planning, should be carried on.

The problem to be put to researchers for solution is therefore not how to control and inspect "general and complete disarmament" in the foreseeable future, but how best now to tackle the problem of building up a system of world security that will give every nation at least the same protection as its weapons now give it.

It goes without saying that no one not possessing the vast resources of information and skills, and not burdened by the vast responsibilities of a great power, can attempt to define in any detail along what lines work on armaments control may proceed. The Minister, nevertheless, suggests two lines of attack on this problem which seem to him more promising than disarmament by categories of weapons and forces across the whole world. These are what might be termed the limited geographical areas of law approach and the preventive approach.

The general principles of the geographical approach might be stated as follows:-

- 3 -

The growth of international law and disarmament can best be thought as a gradual process and the aim should be to secure a gradual area by area limitation of arms and the application of the rule of law. A beginning can most easily be made with non-nuclear states which are not so sensitive on issues of inspection and control as nuclear states are. Ultimately it may be hoped to persuade nuclear powers gradually to surrender their nuclear weapons, or a proportion of them to a world authority. But it would be foolish to expect them to do so until they have learned to trust that authority by seeing it enforce law and international security successfully for a period of years.

An area of law may be defined as a limited geographical zone in which a group of nations agree to limit arms to police level, to settle their differences peacefully and to keep out all foreign forces on condition that the great powers would support the United Nations in the inspection and control necessary to ensure that the agreement was being kept. Such areas would not only be prototypes or working models of the disarmed world of law which it is hoped ultimately to achieve, but they would also act as fire-breaks in a world threatened with total destruction and as carpets of peace between the great powers now occupying or threatening to infiltrate into sensitive areas.

There are many such areas where a beginning might be tried:-

- (1) Central Europe, including all Germany, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Rumania and Bulgaria.
- (2) The Middle East, Israel and Arab States.
- (3) West Africa south of the Sahara.
- (4) Laos, Cambodia and other contiguous States.

In none of these areas are permanent advantages to be gained by either side from building up offensive or defensive forces that would outweigh the disadvantage of mounting tension due to the presence of foreign troops and arming of Governments or revolutionaries in the countries concerned.

What may be called the preventive approach refers to the idea, which Ireland and other countries have urged in the United Nations, of the restriction of nuclear weapons. At its last session the General Assembly carried by 68 votes to none with 26 abstentions an Irish Resolution co-sponsored by Ghana, Japan, Mexico and Morocco, which - in summary - urged the present nuclear nations not to transfer control of these weapons, or information regarding them, to non-nuclear nations and urged non-nuclear nations not to manufacture or acquire these weapons, and urged them also to permit inspection of their territory to ensure that these undertakings were being carried out.

The Minister feels that nothing could be so effective to prevent the further spread of nuclear weapons as a declaration by the nuclear powers, possibly led by the United States, that they are prepared to respond to the above Resolution by declaring their readiness "to make every effort to achieve permanent agreement on the prevention of the wider dissemination of nuclear weapons" and further "as a temporary and voluntary measure pending its negotiation of such a permanent agreement, to refrain from relinquishing control of such weapons to any nation not possessing them and from transmitting to it information necessary for their manufacture". The Minister believes that if such a declaration were made, it would at least help to prevent the situation getting worse while ways of improving it can be sought.

Tension would be further relieved if each nuclear power made a further declaration that it is prepared at once to enter into negotiation for an agreement, under international inspection, to cut off production of nuclear weapons as soon as (1) all the other nuclear states declare their readiness to embark upon such negotiations and (2) the non-nuclear powers declare their willingness, "on a temporary and voluntary basis, to refrain from manufacturing nuclear weapons and from otherwise attempting to acquire them".

- 5 -

The Minister has brought and is bringing the above ideas to the attention of responsible statesmen through United Nations channels and in other ways. When suitable opportunities occur Heads of Mission should advance the Minister's views and report any useful reactions.

Seán G. Ronan
aps Rúnaí.

14th March, 1961.

Confidential

To all Missions.

Arms Control

The following outline of the Minister's views on Arms Control has been prepared in response to enquiries from certain Missions and will be found useful to all Missions having occasion to report on subjects falling within this general field. The outline is in the form of a commentary on the following extracts from an article contributed to the Bulletin of [the] Atomic Scientists in November 1960 by President Kennedy:

"As I look at the future, I am convinced that the United States must lead the way in a world-wide effort to bring military weapons under effective international control."

"... We must mobilize first-rate talents and ample research and development resources to develop and put forward detailed proposals for arms control."

"... We should also be aware that the spread of nuclear weapons to additional powers is recognised as a danger by Moscow."

The Minister believes that the policy indicated in these quotations is capable of leading mankind away from war and towards prosperity and stable peace. It is clear, however, that there are considerable difficulties in the way of securing general support for such a policy. There is a vital difference between the aim of 'bringing military weapons under effective international control' and the aim of 'general and complete disarmament under effective control'. The latter aim has for the last two years been the declared official policy of the United States and the Soviet Union and proclaimed by both as not only desirable but immediately practicable - if only the other side would agree.

It seems to the Minister that the time has come for a new approach to the problem of disarmament which has been so long discussed at talks and conferences with little results. Rather than giving verbal support to disarmament policies impossible of achievement, responsible leaders should impress on the public that they face living in an age in which the Great Powers possess nuclear weapons and are not likely to relinquish them.

The Minister is convinced that no nuclear power would in fact trust its opponent to destroy all its nuclear weapons under any system of inspection and control within our power to devise; and that no honest nuclear power would sign an agreement to destroy or surrender all or a significant proportion of its nuclear weapons unless there existed in full and effective operation a world authority, in which it had learned to trust, and which had the military capability of dealing with a nuclear "cheat". The evolution of such an authority may take many generations.

These truths need to be brought home to the public - sooner rather than later - and should also constitute the frame of reference within which the detailed study of arms control problems, and policy planning, should be carried on.

The problem to be put to researchers for solution is therefore not how to control and inspect 'general and complete disarmament in the foreseeable future, but how best now to tackle the problem of building up a system of world security that will give every nation at least the same protection as its weapons now give it.

It goes without saying that no one not possessing the vast resources of information and skills, and not burdened by the vast responsibilities of a great power, can attempt to define in any detail along what lines work on armaments control may proceed. The Minister, nevertheless, suggests two lines of attack on this problem which seem to him more promising than disarmament by categories of weapons and forces across the whole world. These are what might be termed the limited geographical areas of law approach and the preventive approach.

The general principles of the geographical approach might be stated as follows:-

The growth of international law and disarmament can best be sought as a gradual process and the aim should be to secure a gradual area by area limitation of arms and the application of the rule of law. A beginning can most easily be made with

non-nuclear states which are not so sensitive on issues of inspection and control as nuclear states are. Ultimately it may be hoped to persuade nuclear powers gradually to surrender their nuclear weapons, or a proportion of them to a world authority. But it would be foolish to expect them to do so until they have learned to trust that authority by seeing it enforce law and international security successfully for a period of years.

An area of law may be defined as a limited geographical zone in which a group of nations agree to limit arms to police level, to settle their differences peacefully and to keep out all foreign forces on condition that the great powers would support the United Nations in the inspection and control necessary to ensure that the agreement was being kept. Such areas would not only be prototypes or working models of the disarmed world of law which it is hoped ultimately to achieve, but they would also act as fire-breaks in a world threatened with total destruction and as carpets of peace between the great powers now occupying or threatening to infiltrate into sensitive areas.

There are many such areas where a beginning might be tried:-

(1) Central Europe, including all Germany, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Rumania and Bulgaria.

(2) The Middle East, Israel and Arab States.

(3) West Africa south of the Sahara.

(4) Laos, Cambodia and other contiguous States.

In none of these areas are permanent advantages to be gained by either side from building up offensive or defensive forces that would outweigh the disadvantage of mounting tension due to the presence of foreign troops and arming of Governments or revolutionaries in the countries concerned.

What may be called the preventive approach refers to the formula, which Ireland and other countries have urged in the United Nations, of the restriction of nuclear weapons. At its last session the General Assembly carried by 68 votes to none with 26 abstentions an Irish Resolution co-sponsored by Ghana, Japan, Mexico and Morocco, which-in summary-urged the present nuclear nations not to transfer control of these weapons, or information regarding them, to non-nuclear nations and urged non-nuclear nations not to manufacture or acquire these weapons, and urged them also to permit inspection of their territory to ensure that these undertakings were being carried out.

The Minister feels that nothing could be so effective to prevent the further spread of nuclear weapons as a declaration by the nuclear powers, possibly led by the United States, that they are prepared to respond to the above Resolution by declaring their readiness 'to make every effort to achieve permanent agreement on the prevention of the wider dissemination of nuclear weapons' and further 'as a temporary and voluntary measure pending its negotiation of such a permanent agreement, to refrain from relinquishing control of such weapons to any nation not possessing them and from transmitting to it information necessary for their manufacture. The Minister believes that if such a declaration were made, it would at least help to prevent the situation getting worse while ways of improving it can be sought.

Tension would be further relieved if each nuclear power made a further declaration that it is prepared at once to enter into negotiation for an agreement, under international inspection, to cut off production of nuclear weapons as soon as (1) all the other nuclear states declare their readiness to embark upon such negotiations and (2) the non-nuclear powers declare their willingness, 'on a temporary and voluntary basis, to refrain from manufacturing nuclear weapons and from otherwise attempting to acquire them'.

The Minister has brought and is bringing the above ideas to the attention of responsible statesmen through United Nations channels and in other ways. When suitable opportunities occur Heads of Missions should advance the Minister's views and report any useful reactions.