

December 5, 1961

**Report from Seán Ronan to Con Cremin (Dublin),
'Irish Resolution on Preventing the Spread of
Nuclear Weapons' (Confidential), New York
[Excerpt]**

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Summary:

Aiken drafted in additional personnel to the Irish Mission to the UN in the run-in to the XVIth UN Session. Seán Ronan, the head of the political and information divisions at headquarters in Dublin, was sent as a delegate to the First Committee of the UN, involving him intensely in Aiken's non-dissemination efforts. His insider account reveals some of the dynamics and calculations at play in the building, as Ireland managed a balancing act of engineering consensus between East and West. In large part, the Irish Mission crafted the resolution's language to skirt the issue of alliance nuclear sharing in a bid to manufacture unanimity. The Irish had pondered co-sponsoring a Swedish draft resolution but anticipated that it would face resistance from NATO comparable to earlier iterations of the Irish resolution. Similarly, Ireland neglected to mention a proposed new disarmament committee in the draft resolution - there was no guarantee that it would form and report expeditiously. Finally, by drawing on the instrument of acclamation, the Irish sidestepped French objections and gained universal approval for Resolution 1665 (1961), wrapping the resolution in universal legitimacy.

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[...]

It will be recalled that, before coming to New York for the General Assembly Session, we had elaborated a draft resolution which called on the nuclear Powers 'to use their best endeavours to conclude an international agreement containing provisions under which the said Powers would undertake not to give nuclear weapons to non-nuclear States and provisions under which non-nuclear states would undertake not to accept or to make nuclear weapons and also to undertake to facilitate the measure of inspection and control required to insure that each of them was fulfilling its undertakings'. Copies of the draft were handed to the United States, British, French, Canadian and Japanese representatives in Dublin so that their Governments might be aware of our intentions. Copies were also given to the Polish and U.S.S.R. delegations through our Permanent Mission at New York. On arrival in New York, I opened discussions with the above-mentioned and other delegations, notably the Dutch and Italians, and kept the Department informed and sought instructions on suggestions made in my reports of 30 September, 28 October, 8 and 11 November and in various cables. It was apparent that, having taken the views of all these delegations into account, our draft resolution, as circulated as a First Committee document on 17 November, commanded wide if not unanimous support. Only the French delegation indicated that, while admiring our initiative, they would not be able to support the draft resolution. On 29 November, we circulated the final text, copies of which are attached, which contained in the first operative paragraph the addition of the words 'and from transmitting the information necessary for their manufacture' to States not possessing such weapons, etc. This idea was contained in last year's resolution, and it was felt best to retain it. The second preambular paragraph was taken verbatim from last year's resolution and, in deference to the Soviet Union, the mention of inspection and control was shifted from the first operative paragraph to the second preambular paragraph.

We considered inserting a new operative paragraph in our draft resolution referring the question to the proposed new disarmament committee, to be established following discussions between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. on the composition of such a committee, or to the U.N. Disarmament Commission, which consists of the entire U.N. membership. After discussions with other delegations, it was felt better, in present circumstances, to omit such a clause and rather to suggest in our speech in the Committee that the proposed international agreement be drafted by a Committee of experts nominated by the nuclear States.

This year's resolution was much stronger than last year's, as it called for the conclusion of an international agreement whereas, in last year's, nuclear and non-nuclear Powers were called upon to take action to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons as a temporary and voluntary measure pending the negotiation of a permanent agreement. Our chances of obtaining a stronger agreement this year with the support of the nuclear Powers was enhanced by the fact that both the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. had included in their Disarmament Declarations (Documents A/4891 and A/4892) mention of the possibility of steps being taken on this question prior to the conclusion of an agreement on general and complete disarmament.

Of relevance to our item was a Swedish draft resolution (Doc. A/C.1/L.297), co-sponsored by Austria, Cambodia, Ceylon, Ethiopia, Libya, Sudan, Sweden and Tunisia, which asked the Secretary-General to make an inquiry into the conditions under which countries possessing nuclear weapons might be willing to enter into specific undertakings 'to refrain from manufacturing or otherwise acquiring such weapons and to refuse to receive in the future nuclear weapons on their territories on behalf of any other country'. We were approached to co-sponsor the draft but indicated that, while we would support it, we would not be in a position to co-sponsor, as we felt that, in present circumstances, we could not ask non-nuclear Powers to refuse the assistance of nuclear armed allies whom they might wish to have stationed in their territories. The draft resolution proved unpopular with many delegations, as they felt it sought to shift the emphasis entirely to non-nuclear states receiving nuclear weapons on their territories on behalf of any other country and thus to prejudice existing defensive arrangements. As the U.S. pointed out, the conditions creating the need for defensive arrangements would have to be removed before such arrangements could be terminated. The resolution was adopted in the First

Committee by 57 votes in favour to 12 against with 32 abstentions. Belgium, France, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Nicaragua, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, U.K. and U.S. voted against, and most Latin American and Brazzaville Powers abstained as well as Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Philippines. Those voting in favor included Canada, Denmark, Malaya, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Mexico, Nigeria and Norway. On 4 December the resolution was adopted in plenary by 58 votes to 10 with 23 abstentions.

In introducing our draft resolution, the Minister indicated that his basic objective was to prevent the danger of nuclear war from becoming greater during the period of time needed to evolve and strengthen a generally accepted system of world security based on international law and law enforcement. He noted that the nuclear Powers had abided by the spirit of previous resolutions and had not transferred control of nuclear weapons to non-nuclear states, even though under pressure from their non-nuclear allies. The Minister referred to the mention of the danger of the spread of nuclear weapons in the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. Disarmament Declarations, and he appealed to the nuclear Powers to begin at once in the manner they thought most appropriate to negotiate the agreement called for in the Irish resolution. He suggested that one way to approach the matter was to set up a small committee of experts from the nuclear powers to draft an agreement. After signature by the nuclear Powers, the agreement should be submitted for the approval of the United Nations and the accession of the non-nuclear Powers.

The U.S. indicated that they would support the Irish proposal. The Foreign Minister of the Ukraine spoke for the Soviet bloc and commended the Irish initiative. While he did support the draft, he did not find it completely satisfactory, as it did not mention the question of the transfer of nuclear weapons to the territories of other countries. He felt there was no difference between the transference of such weapons and failure to refrain from relinquishing control of these weapons. He then launched into an attack on Western Germany as a 'hot bed of aggression' which retained the greatest possible stocks of nuclear weapons and whose forces were being trained in their use. He stated that West German monopolies were trying to develop their own nuclear weapons and that the Bonn government had rejected the Rapacki Plan, which called for agreement not to manufacture nuclear weapons. The U.S., in exercise of their right of reply, indicated that the NATO allies had arrangements for stockpiling atomic weapons in order to secure their security. These weapons were for deterrent purposes only, and, as regards U.S. policy towards Germany, he referred to President Kennedy's interview with the editor of Izvestia on 28 November, in which the President outlined U.S. policy towards Germany particularly in the nuclear field.

Dr. Belaunde of Peru, former President of the General Assembly, welcomed the stronger draft resolution which called for an international agreement rather than a voluntary declaration and which recognised the fundamental question of control.

The United Kingdom, in supporting the draft resolution, indicated that, if the U.S. Baruch plan of 1946 had been accepted, the problem now before the Committee might have been solved. One result of the Irish proposal, in their view, would be that the nuclear Powers would have a greater obligation to reach agreement on general and complete disarmament. Canada, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Iraq, Poland and India also spoke in favour of the draft resolution. In explaining their vote on the Swedish resolution referred to above, the Italian delegation indicated that they preferred the Irish approach to the problem and would support the Irish draft resolution. The representative of Iraq in his statement accused Israel, with the assistance of France, of building a nuclear reactor that could be used to manufacture nuclear weapons. He was convinced that the reactor was in Israel for 'further aggressive designs'. In reply, the representative of Israel referred the Committee to a previous statement of his in which he said that Israel's nuclear research was designed only for peaceful purposes. His Government accepted the stated objectives of all Governments with regard to their nuclear activity unless it had proof that those objectives were not as stated.

Poland attacked France, NATO, and West Germany in their statement. While efforts were being made to limit the nuclear club, France had joined that club and now intended to become a thermonuclear power. It was evident that there was to be a further dissemination of nuclear weapons within NATO, and the demand by West

Germany for nuclear weapons could lead to a 'chain reaction' as other countries might feel threatened and therefore obliged to extend their military potential. The efforts of West Germany to get nuclear weapons was a matter of great concern to Poland, and the nuclear arming of West Germany might deal a fatal blow to efforts to achieve agreement on complete and general disarmament.

The most critical and perhaps condescending statement was made by the Indian representative, who stated that in 1956 Mr. Krishna Menon had brought the problem of the wider dissemination of nuclear weapons to the attention to the Disarmament Commission. He would support the Irish draft resolution, although it did not go far enough. He thought that the resolution might mean a separate agreement but he had heard that such an agreement could come about only as part of general and complete disarmament. In that case, the effect of the resolution would be very slight, and some nations might produce nuclear weapons during the long interval which it would take to conclude a general disarmament agreement. He thought it would be better to speak in the agreement of provisions under which nuclear states would undertake to refrain from 'transfer of control' of nuclear weapons instead of 'relinquishing control' as in the text. Voting for the resolution would not imply that India accepted in principle the continuing manufacture of nuclear weapons by the existing nuclear powers.

In replying to the debate, the Minister expressed the hope that the shortness of the debate and the unanimity of views expressed would be reflected in the negotiations between the nuclear Powers. The problem before the Committee became more acute every year due to pressure on the nuclear Powers to give nuclear weapons to their allies and pressure on the non-nuclear Powers to acquire these weapons because of fear that their opponents might produce or acquire them. He was glad that these pressures had so far been resisted. It was much easier to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons than to prevail on those possessing them to give them up. There seemed to be agreement between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. on this question and he was firmly convinced that the agreement could be reached. Argentina, Chile and El Salvador then explained their votes and warmly welcomed the draft resolution as an affirmative step towards solving the problem. They praised the patient wisdom of the Minister in presenting this item and also the technical precision and 'masterly' drafting of the resolution. El Salvador suggested that the words 'or acquiring them' be added to the last preambular paragraph so that it would be in harmony with the first operative paragraph which contained such a reference. The Minister said that he would like to accept this suggestion but, as the text had been shown to a number of delegations before submission, he felt it better to leave the draft as it was.

The position was then reached when the Committee was ready to proceed to a vote. As a result of previous conversations with the French delegation, it was clear that they would be unable to support the draft resolution; otherwise, it seemed likely to attract unanimous support. In an effort to achieve complete unanimous support, we suggested to the French delegation that, if the draft resolution were adopted by acclamation, it might make their position easier. With some reluctance, the French delegation agreed to this course. If, however, the matter came to a vote, they indicated that they would be obliged to abstain. Dr. Belaunde of Peru agreed to suggest that the draft be declared approved unanimously without a vote. There was no objection to this proposal and the Chairman then declared the Irish draft resolution adopted by acclamation. The resolution was similarly adopted by the General Assembly on Monday 4 December.

The next step towards the conclusion of the international agreement called for in the resolution will be consideration of the matter at whatever disarmament forum may be established as a result of talks at present proceeding between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. governments. The major Powers themselves would prefer if the question were considered by such negotiating body in the context of the disarmament principles announced by these States, rather than by the United Nations Disarmament Commission, which they consider to be an extraneous body in the disarmament field.

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