



ISRAEL MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

374 Address to the General Assembly by Prime Minister Shamir- 8 June 1988

8 Jun 1988

► VOLUME 9-10: 1984-1988

374. Address to the General Assembly by Prime Minister Shamir, 8 June 1988.

Addressing the special session of the General Assembly on disarmament, Mr. Shamir recalled Israel's long record in seeking regional and global disarmament. He reminded his audience that Israel has been calling for a nuclear-free-zone in the Middle East for the past decade and for mutual reductions in arms. He appealed for the banning of chemical weapons in the Middle East and suggested that this issue be discussed directly by Israel and the Arab states. As the only country in the Middle East, whose existence was threatened, Israel was still determined to pursue arms limitations in the region. In the course of his meetings in New York, Mr. Shamir met with Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze. They reached an agreement that an Israeli consular mission will soon leave for Moscow. Text of the UN address follows:

I congratulate you on your election as president of this special and important assembly of the United Nations. It is my ardent hope that under your balanced leadership the assembly will have meaningful and constructive deliberations, and will arrive at positive conclusions that will offer a better future not only for the people of the region in which we live, but for all mankind.

I have the privilege of representing a people with a very long history, whose ancient moral code has been adopted by the entire civilized world. Peace, according to this code, is the highest of human ideals. War is a terrible curse that we must do our utmost to remove from the face of the earth.

No one is more aware of the horrors of war than the Jewish People. We have experienced virtually all the sufferings, ravages, brutalities and atrocities that human imagination can invent. Even after regaining independence and sovereignty in our ancient homeland, we have had to fight five wars in defense of our existence and security. There is not a man, woman or child in Israel who does not know the tragic meaning of war.

That is why we all pray that the deliberations at this session be fruitful and productive. We pray for the success of any effort at disarmament that will reduce tensions and diminish the likelihood of war.

Today, there are at least 25 major and minor armed conflicts in the

world in areas of tension and danger. One of these is the Middle East, a complex and strife-torn region in which the Arab-Israeli conflict is but one of many difficult and tragic problems.

In our case, the core of the problem is the consistent refusal of the Arab states - with the exception of Egypt - to accept the existence of Israel in any boundaries. The moment this refusal is replaced by a willingness to recognize our legitimacy and our permanence, peace between us and our neighbors will have a chance. But, we do not propose to sit idly until that day. As the only country in the Middle East whose very existence is continually threatened, we have a vital interest in reaching agreements that will curtail the arms race and reduce the threat of armed conflict. We must hope that one agreement will beget another, until we completely remove the threat of war and achieve full political accommodation.

The agreements concluded between the U.S. and the USSR, and the further reductions now being negotiated between them, should serve as our example. These agreements are, of course, important in themselves, but they are even more important as testimony to a political will to resolve conflicts through negotiations, and to renounce the use of arms. Israel has taken two initiatives in the same direction.

As early as 1980, we proposed at the General Assembly of the U.N. the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, based on free and direct negotiations between the states of the region. We did so in addition to our repeated declaration that Israel would not be the first country to introduce nuclear weapons into the Middle East. Such zones have been established in Latin America by direct negotiations between the countries of the region. And, lately, the states of the South Pacific reached a similar agreement in the same manner. The mode of negotiating these agreements and the mutual reassurances built into them, are vital components in establishing and maintaining such nuclear-weapon-free-zones. This was expressly stressed by the U.N. Commission, headed by the late prime minister of Sweden, Dr. Palme.

We made this proposal because we assumed that the process of reaching these agreements and their successful conclusion would in effect serve to reduce not only the risk of nuclear war, but the more real and immediate danger in the region - the prospect of conventional war.

Many have urged us to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty. But we have seen that this treaty has, in no way, prevented wars between its signatories. It is our view that if establishing and maintaining a nuclear-weapon-free zone can make conventional wars less likely, then its benefits will far outweigh anything that can be gained from a non-proliferation treaty.

We have repeatedly invited the Arab states to negotiate the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone, but they have rejected the idea. They have refused to sit down with us. They have refused to negotiate with us. They have refused to adopt the procedures of Latin America and the South Pacific. And they have refused to adopt the recommendations of the Palme Commission on the manner of creating such a zone in the Middle East.

We do not understand this blanket refusal. It reflects a consistent attitude of rejection of any kind of dealings with Israel, even on matters of vital concern to the security and future of the peoples of our region. Nevertheless, our offer stands. It is testimony to our faith

that common sense, logic, and the yearning for peace by the peoples of the Middle East will, in time, induce the Arab governments to come to terms with Israel's existence.

From this rostrum, I would like to address an appeal to the leaders of the Arab states in the Middle East. We are entering an era of greater openness and understanding between former rivals; of accommodation between the great powers, and of unprecedented steps in nuclear disarmament. Let us join this wave of goodwill and seek together a new path that will lead us away from past hostilities and belligerence, and from barren and futile options that are imported from outside. Let us meet and reason together, let us listen to each other directly, let us negotiate even in the present rough seas and not relent until we reach the shores of mutual accommodation, understanding and peace.

We did not let the rejection of our proposal deter us from taking yet another initiative at the U.N. In 1986 we proposed to negotiate a reduction of forces in the Middle East. We know that the burden of the arms race is devastating to the economies of all the countries in the region. And it is getting worse.

What the countries in our region are spending for the purchase of arms is alarming and tragic. Iraq, Iran, Syria, Libya and Saudi Arabia are among the biggest arms importers in the world. Each of them buys more arms than Israel. Syria alone has four times as many war planes as Belgium or Hungary, ten times as many tanks as Belgium, and four times as many tanks as Hungary. I mention these two countries because their populations are about the size of Syria's and they are members of military alliances.

The weight of arms is not only expressed in quantity, but also in quality and destructiveness. We have long been troubled by the supply to some Arab regimes of ground-to-ground missiles of varying ranges, and by reports on the development of such missiles by their own defense industries. As recently as the beginning of August 1987, Iraq announces the development and testing of a missile with a range of 615 km. And missiles have been employed by both Iraq and Iran in the devastating Gulf war. Lately, we have also learned of the supply of intermediate-range missiles by China to Saudi Arabia. We never forget that Arab states not bordering on Israel have sent their forces to participate in the wars against us. Neither can we ignore the fact that both Iraq and Iran proclaim that their ultimate aim is to "liberate" the Holy Land and Jerusalem from us.

The arms race is dangerous and costly to us all. Acquisition of arms by one side will only precipitate efforts by the other to acquire more arms. Have we not realized that this cycle is endless; that its price is exorbitantly high that it will provide no answer to the malaise of our region; that the security of all states in the region can be assured at much lower levels of armaments?

Let us - even as we search for a political settlement - pursue any initiative that can stop and reverse the arms race. It will benefit all the states in the region. It will bring the day of peace closer.

The Government of Israel maintains the deep conviction that the use of chemical weapons is a most odious method of destruction of human life. We are greatly troubled by the introduction of these means of calamity into the Middle East and the world's indifference to the brutal usage of chemical weapons in causing thousands of innocent victims. The presence and use of chemical weapons

constitute a real threat to the peace of our region and to the peace of the entire world. All enlightened peoples should be alarmed by the arbitrary use of these weapons.

Our awareness in Israel of the dangers posed by chemical weapons to humanity, as well as our deep concern regarding the proliferation of chemical weapons, led my government to take steps directed at limiting this proliferation. These steps involve strict legal control over the export of any material which may be used in the production of such weapons.

Deriving from Israel's deep concern for the peace and safety of our region and that of the world generally, we have the following proposal. We believe that it is essential for the nations of our region to establish a chemical-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, on the basis of arrangements to be freely arrived at among all the states of the region. In this manner we may safeguard the mutual security of our peoples, as well as the security of the entire region, and thus make a major contribution to the cause of world peace.

Lastly, I must decry and protest the employment and production of poison gas in our region. By its own admission, Iraq has used this vicious means of indiscriminate killing in its war with Iran. It is a gross and blatant violation of the Geneva Protocol to which Iraq is a signatory. The use of poison gas in the Iran-Iraq war has also been established by the secretary general of the U.N., albeit without identifying the culprit. Syria, too, has built facilities for the production of poison gas, and its leaders have brazenly threatened to use it against Israel.

It is inconceivable that the international community should react to this contemptuous defiance of international agreements with indifference and helplessness. It must, rapidly and resolutely, conclude the protracted negotiations on a convention that will remove chemical weapons from the arsenals of nations, and devise a mechanism of inspection that will assure universal compliance.

Most nations - unlike Israel - are happily not directly confronted by implacable enemies, nor by a threat to their very existence. But, in our shrinking globe security is indivisible. A conflagration in one corner can quickly engulf the world. A nuclear-weapon-free zone and the end of the arms race in the Middle East, and the universal banning of chemical weapons, are urgently needed not only for the sake of the people in our region, but for the sake of all mankind.

It was a Hebrew prophet who, 2,700 years ago, articulated the vision of disarmament and peace. His words, "and they shall beat their swords into plowshares," inscribed outside this building, have represented the ultimate ideal of mankind from time immemorial. His vision was the goal of the United Nations at its inception. Let us hope that this session of the United Nations General Assembly will be true to this noble and lofty goal, and help bring us closer to its realization.