

FRANCE

Freeze on nuclear weapons

Comment published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs following the proposal made by the USSR on 21 June for a "freeze" on nuclear weapons.

In response to the proposal for a freeze on nuclear weapons made by the USSR on 21 June, France reminded Moscow that it had already reacted negatively to a similar proposal discussed at the last session of the United Nations General Assembly.

The note transmitted to the Soviet authorities in particular stressed the reasons why such a freeze would not constitute an effective contribution to the effort to secure a reduction in nuclear arsenals, beginning with those of the USSR and the United States.

First, such a freeze would have the effect of maintaining, for a period not necessarily determined in advance, the present imbalances.

This would mean conferring upon any State which had carried out a large-scale arms build-up a lasting advantage at the expense of States which had shown moderation.

The States whose security was thereby affected would find themselves prevented from proceeding to the necessary restoration of a balance.

The resulting situation could hardly be considered an encouragement to negotiations towards verifiable and substantial arms reductions between the two most heavily armed nuclear-weapon powers.

Secondly, an undifferentiated and global freeze, as proposed in the above-mentioned memorandum, would be largely unverifiable.

In the view of France, many aspects of such a freeze would not be susceptible of verification by national technical means alone, while others would require very complicated and therefore necessarily lengthy preliminary negotiations with a view to determining what methods, including on-site inspection and international observation, would be the most appropriate. One important aspect of the problem would be that of equality of access to the means of verification.

These necessary discussions on verification would be no less lengthy and complicated than the negotiations concerning the same aspect within the framework of efforts to secure an arms reduction.

Thirdly, in making the participation of the other nuclear-weapon powers the condition for the observance by itself of the freeze it proposes, the USSR appears to be trying to exonerate itself from the special responsibilities which, for it as for the United States, arise from the fact of the present level of its nuclear weapons.

France, which hopes that the negotiations now under way will reach a successful conclusion, does not see how the freeze proposed to the other nuclear-weapon powers, the size of whose forces bears no relation to the size of the forces of the two powers at present engaged in the START negotiations, could contribute to the progress of those negotiations.

Furthermore, the various moratoria which have been proposed in the past have never resulted in significant and verifiable arms reductions (in one specific case, it was the USSR itself which took the initiative of ending the moratorium in question).

France is sincerely anxious for dialogue and peace.

It believes that the latter, as history has amply demonstrated, necessitates a balance of forces in Europe as in the rest of the world, and that that balance should be ensured at the lowest possible level.

It is for this reason that the French Government supports the efforts undertaken, beginning with those of the two most heavily armed States, towards the attainment, through negotiations, of such a balance both in conventional weapons and in nuclear weapons. It earnestly hopes that they will succeed.