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Report by Shri S. Sinha, Director (EARC) – Ministry of External Affairs, 'Brief Analysis of the propagandist statements on disarmament and nuclear-free zone made by the Peoples Republic of China'

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Summary:

The Peoples Republic of China supports disarmament and a nuclear-free zone in the Asian and Pacific Regions strictly for tactical reasons

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Prepared by Shri S. Sinha, Director (EARC) – Ministry of External Affairs – Copies circulated by J.C Ajmani, Deputy Secretary (DIS) 1/1/64

Brief Analysis of the propagandist statements on disarmament and nuclear-free zone made by the Peoples Republic of China

From time to time the Peoples Republic of China found it necessary to give a modicum of propagandist support to disarmament and to a nuclear-free zone in the Asian and Pacific Regions strictly for tactical reasons. There of these tactical reasons may be cited: a) To serve the general purpose “of exposing and combating the imperialists’ arms expansion and war preparations.” To this end, PRC used slogans for general disarmament and the establishment of nuclear-free zones to compel the imperialists under the weight of international opinion to cut back on their armaments programme; b) to prevent the USA “from building nuclear rocket bases in the Far East, particularly in Japan and South Korea,” the purpose being to reduce the risks of nuclear retaliation on PRC as long as PRC had not built up its own independent nuclear capability and also to keep up pressure for the withdrawal of American power from the Pacific; c) To support and assuage Asian sentiments on such issues as disarmament and peace zones.

2. But the tactical manoeuvres were designed to promote rather than hamper PRC’s basic policy of developing independent nuclear arsenal. To this end a secret agreement reached with the Soviet Union on 15th October 1957 for Soviet technical support in laying a foundation for PRC’s nuclear capability. As with Peking’s other policies a zig-zag course was publicly taken to meet the obstacles that stood in the way of its main policy goal in this regard.

3. The earliest (that is, 1958) press statements in PRC suggest that while PRC was still at a rudimentary stage in nuclear development, it was necessary to counter-act, by policy maneuvers, the prospects of USA establishing nuclear bases in the Pacific zone, and more particularly in Japan and South Korea. Thus on 10th February 1958, Premier Chou En-Lai endorsed the consensus of the Afro-Asian Solidarity Conference that “Asia and Africa should be a peace zone in which no foreign country should deploy nuclear and rocket weapons.” In March 1958, reacting to the SEATO Council meeting, the Chinese press stressed the “establishment of an atom-free zone in Asia as the only way of preventing the US from establishing a rocket base in the Far East.” On 10th May, 1958, at an interview with West German correspondents, Chen Yi supported suspension of atomic tests, world-wide disarmament and the Rapacki Plan. Among Chen Yi’s reasons was the “serious possibility that Japan might be equipped with nuclear weapons.” Again on 19th April, 1959, Chou En-Lai condemned the introduction of nuclear and rocket weapons in South Korea by the USA and declared himself in favor of “an area free of atomic weapons...throughout the whole of East Asia and the Pacific region.” Thus for the first time, Chou extended his “peace zone” to East Asia signifying that he wished US power to withdraw from Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Okinawa, South-East Asia and the US testing grounds in the Pacific. An important feature of these calls for a peace zone was that PRC made no promise to disarm or renounce developing atomic weapons in China. By August 1960 PRC stretched the nuclear-weapons free one further to cover “the Asian and Pacific regions including the United States.”

4. On 6th June 1960, PRC issued a statement supporting comprehensive disarmament proposals put forward by the Soviet Union on 2nd June 1960. The motivating factors were elucidated in CCP’s letter of 14th June, 1963.

“We have always maintained that, in order to expose and combat the imperialists’ arms expansion and war preparations, it is necessary to put forward the proposal for general disarmament. Furthermore, it is possible to compel imperialism to accept some kind of agreement on disarmament, through the combined struggle of the socialist countries and the people of the whole world.

If one regards general and complete disarmament as the fundamental road to world peace, spread the illusion that imperialism will automatically lay down its arms and tries to liquidate the revolutionary struggles of the oppressed peoples and nations on the pretext of disarmament, then this is deliberately to deceive the people of the world and help the imperialists in their policies of aggression and war.”

5. Although PRC gave tactical support to proposals for a nuclear-free zone in the Asian and Pacific regions, this was not given wide publicity in China lest it compromised PRC’s basic decision to become an independent nuclear power. The Sino-Soviet agreement on technical help to develop PRC’s nuclear capability broke down in 1959 on three grounds:

- a. The Soviet-US parleys for an agreement on stopping nuclear proliferation put a curb on the Soviet Union’s “technical assistance” to PRC for the development of nuclear military power.
- b. PRC already had the nuclear support of the socialist camp; and
- c. Any premature attempt to develop a nuclear capability in PRC would be a heavy burden on the latter’s backward economy.

6. According to PRC, on June 20, 1959, the Soviet Government “unilaterally tore up the Sino-Soviet agreement on new technology for national defense signed in October 1957, and refused to provide China with a sample of an atomic bomb and technical data regarding its manufacture.” Thus when the Soviet Union was considering the draft treaty on partial nuclear test ban, PRC, in a series of memoranda, made it clear that the Soviet Government “must not infringe on PRC’s sovereign rights and act for China in assuming the obligations to refrain from manufacturing nuclear weapons.” It was made unmistakably clear that any treaty between the United States and the Soviet Union which “aimed at depriving the Chinese people of their right to make atomic weapons” would not be tolerated. The main arguments which PRC advanced against the Moscow Treaty of 5 August 1963 were:

- a. That the nuclear powers had set up a monopoly
- b. That in the name of nuclear proliferation they had sought to “manacle” China from making her own bombs,
- c. That socialist countries cannot depend upon the nuclear power of one socialist state

“The Soviet Statement that all the socialist countries are dependent on the nuclear power of the Soviet Union for their survival strikes an out and chauvinistic note” (PRC official spokesman, 15 August 1963)

7. Indubitably, one of the main causes of the Sino-Soviet rift is the failure of the Soviet Union to install an independent nuclear capability in PRC. A spate of statements, since the Moscow Agreement of 5 August, made it clear that PRC far from being restrained by the Agreement, would develop its own nuclear capability regardless of the cost. As a sop to Asian pride, it was claimed that PRC’s bomb would be the “first’ people’s bomb” and also the “first bomb ever to be produced by Asia.”

8. Having staked out its national right, PRC developed a broad propagandist attack (PRC’s statement on 31 July 1963 on the Moscow Treaty, by advocating “complete, thorough, total and resolute destruction of all nuclear weapons through the adoption of the following measures:

- a. dismantle all military bases including nuclear bases on foreign soil and withdraw all nuclear weapons and their means of delivery
- b. Establish nuclear-free zones in the Asian and Pacific regions including the US, Soviet Union, China and Japan, and nuclear-free zones in Central Europe, Africa, and Latin America
- c. Prohibit export and import of nuclear weapons and technical data;
- d. Stop all nuclear tests including underground tests

9. The ultra-radical measures were adopted not only to attack the limited nature of the Moscow Agreement (which PRC desperately sought to forestall) but to create a popular justification, in the absence of a comprehensive agreement, for the development of PRC's nuclear military power. Moscow duly pointed out that PRC's insistent demand for an independent nuclear arsenal in spite of its having the protection of "the entire might of the socialist camp" exposed PRC's private ambitions which exceeded the interests of socialism and the national liberation movement. Identifying these camouflaged ambitions, CPSU observed, that they were "special vanguardist national and racial objectives."

10. That PRC's statement of 31st July 1963 was a tactical maneuver to defeat the Partial Test-Ban Agreement was further revealed by the statement which Chen Yi made on 28 October 1963 to some Japanese journalists. He argued that apart from the requirements of defense, PRC wanted nuclear weapons because "they are a mark of a first-class power. The carrying out of nuclear tests is necessary for China's prestige as a first-class nation."