ARMS CONTROL DIGEST

ABM Treaty

The long-awaited third Review Conference of the US-Soviet Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty of 1972 took place in Geneva from 24 to 31 August. It was preceded by a sharp debate within the US administration over whether or not to charge the USSR with a "material breach" of the Treaty because of the construction of a large radar complex near the central Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk. The US government (as well as most private arms control experts) have long contended that the radar, because it is not situated on the periphery of the USSR nor facing outward, violates a key provision of the Treaty meant to prevent early-warning radars from being used in a nationwide ballistic missile defence. The USSR continues to insist that the radar is for space-tracking, not covered by the ABM Treaty. Nevertheless, in response to US concerns, in October 1987 it imposed a moratorium on further construction of the radar, which US intelligence sources estimate is still three or four years from completion. These sources also belittle the radar's military significance, given its vulnerability to attack.

Declaring the radar to be a "material breach" of the Treaty would lay the groundwork for US abrogation of the agreement, as desired by many advocates of the US Strategic Defense Initiative. The US State Department and Joint Chiefs of Staff were reported to be resisting such a move, partly on the grounds that the USSR would be in a better position than the US to build, relatively quickly, a nationwide defence.

While the debate was going on in Washington, on 19 July the USSR announced its willingness to "dismantle the equipment of the Krasnoyarsk radar in a verifiable way that would leave no doubts on the part of the United States," conditional on agreement "to abide by the ABM Treaty, as signed in 1972." The Soviets had previously offered to dismantle the radar, but only if the US did likewise with two of its new radars in Greenland and Britain, which the Soviets (backed by some arms control experts) charge are themselves violations of the Treaty. Disagreement over the interpretation of the ABM Treaty has been one of the chief stumbling blocks to a new strategic arms reduction (START) agreement. The US State Department welcomed the new Soviet proposal as a "positive step," but continued to insist on the radar's dismantling "without delay and without conditions." The US debate over the "material breach" issue was temporarily resolved on 8 August, when the White House announced that the decision would be deferred until after the Review Conference.

Unlike the previous two review conferences (in 1977 and 1982), the meeting at the end of August failed to produce a joint communiqué reaffirming the Treaty's aims and purposes. The US delegation afterwards stated that it had made clear to the Soviets that the US would not sign a START agreement if the radar were not dismantled. The Soviet delegation, in turn, threatened to withdraw from the START talks if the US abrogated the ABM Treaty. It revealed that, at the meeting, the USSR had proposed such measures as advance notification of the building of new radars, agreement on ways to distinguish missile defence radars from other kinds, and mutual inspection of disputed radars. Later, it was reported that the Soviets had suggested the possibility of joint manning of the Krasnoyarsk radar, but that this had been rejected by the US for fear that its personnel could be expelled in a crisis. The Soviets were also reported to have informally suggested replacing the radar's large, sophisticated transmitter with a less-capable, mechanically-steered dish (also rejected by the US as insufficient).

On 16 September, in a speech in Krasnoyarsk, Soviet leader Gorbachev publicly offered to turn the radar into a "centre of international cooperation for peaceful uses of outer space," under the control of a proposed World Space Organization. This offer was apparently unconditional, although Gorbachev, referring to the disputed US radars in Greenland and Britain, stated that "We expect Washington to take corresponding steps in reply to our new initiative." US officials reportedly said the proposal would be acceptable to the US if it involved dismantling the radar or converting it into a new type, but not if it amounted simply to "legitimizing" its completion and operation.

On 6 October, it was reported that Soviet officials had called for technical experts from the two sides to review the details of a Soviet plan to dismantle or modify the radar. The US was said to have agreed in principle to such a meeting.

At the end of October, the Soviet government announced that the radar would indeed be turned into a civilian-run space research centre and that the USSR expected the US to take similar measures with its UK and Greenland sites. At the time *Peace&Security* went to press there had been no reaction from the United States.

Nuclear Test Limitations

The Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963 prohibits nuclear testing in the atmosphere, outer space, or underwater. On 4 August, its 25th anniversary, five countries at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva began an effort to transform the Treaty into a comprehensive test ban by submitting to Britain, the US, and the USSR (its "depositary governments") an amendment to prohibit underground testing as well. If the proposed amendment gains the support of a third of the Treaty's parties – as appears certain, since one hundred countries approved the idea at last year's UN General Assembly – this will force the depositary governments to convene a conference of all parties next year to consider the amendment. However, actual amendment of the Treaty requires support from a majority of its parties, including all three depositary governments. Of the latter, both the US and UK continue to oppose a comprehensive test ban at this time. Advocates of the amending conference are hoping that it will at least put pressure on them to change their position.

As agreed in their on-going Nuclear Test Talks in Geneva, the US and USSR this summer conducted a Joint Verification Experiment (JVE) at each other's underground nuclear test sites – at the US site in Nevada on 17 August, and at the Soviet site near Semipalatinsk on 14 September. For the first time ever, scientists, technicians, and observers from each side participated in an actual underground nuclear test by the other, by monitoring the explosions through a combination of seismic and hydrodynamic means (the former favoured by the USSR, the latter by the US).

Initial results from the Nevada test were controversial, with some geologists insisting that it proved seismic methods to be at least as good as hydrodynamic, and others disagreeing. The USSR has long