

The Soviet Union at the Bargaining Table - Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force Negotiations

The Soviet Union was sharply critical of the NATO decision to deploy new intermediate-range nuclear missiles in response to its introduction of the SS-20 missiles, and said initially it would not take part in negotiations unless the decision was cancelled. Nevertheless, the Soviet Union subsequently agreed to preliminary discussions on Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force arms control in Geneva in the autumn of 1980. Formal negotiations began in November 1981.

Last December, the General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, Yuri V. Andropov, made public a proposal concerning intermediate-range nuclear weapons. He said that the Soviet Union was prepared to consider retaining in Europe only as many intermediate-range missiles as were maintained by Britain and France, which together are reported to have currently a total of 162 missiles. To reach that number the Soviet Union would have to remove an older generation of missiles, the SS-4s and SS-5s, as well as make some reduction in the number of SS-20s deployed in Europe.

Mr. Andropov's proposals were welcome in one respect; they represent Soviet recognition that NATO governments have a legitimate concern about the number of SS-20s aimed at their European member states, and that a reduction is necessary. This in itself is progress.