

'strategic forces' to include intermediate-range US missiles and aircraft was perhaps the most important, and is dealt with in the following section. The ban on SDI research and development is also addressed later. Strictly in terms of strategic weapons as this term was defined in the SALT agreements,\* the ban on modernization and on long-range cruise missiles had little appeal to the US, since it discriminated against current US force deployments and deployment plans for the MX missile. But, despite these serious difficulties, the core Soviet proposal on strategic weapon reductions marked a significant step toward the previous US proposal for deep reductions in strategic warheads and launchers.

The US response at the end of October 1985 was also made public, and subsequently confirmed by Paul Nitze, special adviser to the President and Secretary of State. The main elements in the American proposal were the following:

- a ballistic missile **warhead** ceiling (including those on land and submarine-based launchers) of 4,500
- a ballistic missile **launcher** ceiling (land and sea based) of 1,250, but with indications that the ceiling could be raised to 1,450
- a warhead sub-ceiling of 3,000 on ICBMs
- a throw-weight limit on strategic ballistic missiles, the effect of which is that neither side could exceed more than 50% of existing Soviet throw-weight
- a ban on mobile missiles
- a limit of 350 on heavy bombers which, on the Soviet side, apparently includes the Backfire, an airplane previously defined as medium-range, but which was claimed by the US to have a strategic (i.e. intercontinental) capability\*\*
- a separate limit of 1,500 on air-launched cruise missiles (ALCMs), with no limit on other nuclear armaments (gravity bombs and short-range attack missiles) carried by bombers
- a limit of 120 on the number of bombers allowed to carry ALCMs.

In regard to strategic weapons, therefore, the American proposal again reflected the US concern with Soviet land-based ICBMs. The determination to

\* The SALT negotiators defined 'strategic' as weapons with a range exceeding 5,500 kilometres.

\*\*On 16 June 1979, at the time of the signing of the SALT II Agreement, President Brezhnev gave President Carter a written statement noting that the Backfire is a medium-range bomber. "[The Soviet Union] does not intend to give this airplane the capability of operating at intercontinental distances." In effect, this precluded deployment at certain Soviet bases which might otherwise permit an intercontinental radius of action.

limit throw-weight (the combined weight of the warhead and guidance systems that the booster rocket is able to thrust into a given trajectory) indicated the US belief that the large throw-weight and increasing accuracy of the SS-18 endangered US land-based Minuteman missile forces. At the same time, the US position had changed somewhat from the earlier START position, since the sub-ceiling on land-based ICBM warheads was increased from 2,500 under START to 3,000. In effect, the gap between the US and Soviet proposals on land-based ICBMs, the single most contentious element in the negotiations on central strategic forces, was narrowed to a difference of 600 warheads between the 3,000 proposed by the US and the 3,600 by the USSR. On the surface, this appeared negotiable.

Secretary Gorbachev's dramatic proposals of 15 January 1986 did not affect the respective positions on strategic warheads. However, in his sweeping programme for disarmament, Gorbachev made explicit a shift which had already been signalled by Soviet officials, namely, the willingness to remove the INF negotiations from the discussions on strategic weapons. With this step, the complex Soviet package of October 1985 was disaggregated, leaving a negotiation on central strategic weapons which addressed the same systems and counted strategic forces in the manner which had become familiar through the SALT and START negotiations.

Despite these offers, which made more feasible an agreement on deep reductions in strategic forces, there appeared to be little movement in the subsequent rounds of the Geneva talks on central strategic systems. The major obstacle was clearly the linkage to SDI. Nonetheless, in mid-1986 both sides further modified their positions on central strategic systems. In June the Soviet Union offered an 'interim' option to be put in place before the deeper cuts previously proposed, but not to replace them. In comparison with the October proposal, and remembering that by January the Soviets had abandoned their proposal to count INF as strategic weapons, the main changes were as follows:

- a limit of 1,600 on strategic launchers including bombers, thus approximating the previous US proposal (1,250 missile launchers and 350 bombers)
- an increase in the number of 'nuclear charges' (essentially including gravity bombs as well as warheads) from 6,000 to 8,000
- an increase from 3,600 to 4,800 in the sub-ceiling of warheads deployed on any single leg of the triad as a consequence of the increase in total warheads to 8,000 (but thereby maintaining the ratio at 60%)
- the inclusion of submarine-launched cruise missiles in the 8,000 total, accompanied by a ban on surface ship SLCMs (presumably because the difficulties of verifying ship-borne SLCMs made a total ban more