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# NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT: THE GORBACHEV INITIATIVE

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The Iceland summit between Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and US President Ronald Reagan was the most dramatic confirmation of the Russian concern about where the nuclear arms race and the American strategic defence initiative are leading. The linking of the concessions proposed by Gorbachev at the Reykjavik meeting to his insistence on curbing the SDI program caused President Reagan to reject them. However Gorbachev's considerable concessions did suggest that the Soviet leader was serious when he proposed his wide-ranging nuclear disarmament scheme in January 1986.

This Icelandic meeting, proposed by Gorbachev, was billed as a preliminary session to clear the way and spell out the agenda for a major summit meeting in Washington as agreed at the initial Geneva summit in 1985. But Gorbachev went beyond this to make a series of proposals on a range of arms control issues. And these in turn elicited some new counterproposals by President Reagan, all of which foundered in the end over the Star Wars issue.

The two leaders did verbally agree on banning all intermediate range missiles in Europe, while allowing 100 INF missiles to be deployed by the Americans in the United States and 100 Soviet missiles of this type to be kept in Soviet Asia. They also agreed on certain steps towards verification and on freezing short-range missiles in Europe. They agreed to limit each side's strategic nuclear warheads to 6,000 and their nuclear launchers to 1,600. Finally they agreed to the US plan to start a phased accord on nuclear testing, beginning with verification of existing treaties and working towards a comprehensive test ban treaty. But there were differences over the interpretation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty of 1972. In Reagan's view the Gorbachev proposal to confine research on post 1972 developments to the laboratory for 10 years would have killed SDI.

However, all these proposals are said by both sides still to be on the negotiating table and it now will be up to the negotiators at Geneva to see whether any of them can be agreed upon and the Soviet-American summit process continued.

## PREVIOUS CALLS FOR DISARMAMENT

In January of 1986 when Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev presented his plan for general and complete nuclear disarmament there was a certain amount of skepticism in Western circles. The Soviet Union, it was said, has had a penchant for dramatic, wide-ranging disarmament plans that are designed to impress the public, but which, according to these critics, are neither practical nor realizable.

In the pre-atomic era, the Soviet Union was first off the mark with a proposal for "general and complete disarmament" made by Deputy Commissar for Foreign Affairs Maxim Litvinov in 1927 to the League of Nations preparatory disarmament commission. It was followed the next year by a draft convention, but the Western powers shelved it.

When the United Nations was formed at the beginning of the nuclear age and dedicated to peace and security, the Americans with their Baruch Plan produced the first nuclear disarmament proposal. The Soviet Union quickly followed suit on 19 June 1946 when Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko presented the Soviet's contrary grand design for destroying all nuclear stocks, halting production and curbing future violations. However, the atmosphere of fear and mistrust, as each side rushed to develop their atomic weapons, precluded any agreement.

It was not until 10 May 1955 that the Soviets made what the West considered its first "serious" proposal

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