

At the second summit meeting between the two leaders, in Reykjavik, Iceland, on 11-12 October 1986, the Soviet Union proposed to eliminate all nuclear weapons over a ten-year period. The United States proposed the elimination of all ballistic missiles within ten years. There was agreement that in the first five years each side would reduce to 6000 their strategic warheads and to 1600 their strategic launchers. The summit talks broke down, however, over the issue of strategic defence, which the Soviets linked to any possible accord on offensive arms.

Some limited progress on the strategic forces issue was made at the 7-10 December 1987 Washington Summit. At its close, the superpowers agreed on the following points: a 50 per cent reduction in strategic offensive arms; a 6000-warhead ceiling with no more than 1600 intercontinental and submarine-launched ballistic missiles (ICBMs and SLBMs) and bombers; a sub-ceiling of 4900 ICBM and SLBM warheads (permitting up to 1100 air-launched cruise missiles); a 50 per cent cut in the number of Soviet "heavy" ICBMs to 154, with ten warheads each; a ceiling on the aggregate throw-weight of ICBMs and SLBMs at 50 per cent of the current Soviet level; a separate ceiling (outside the 6000 warhead limit) on long-range, nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missiles (SLCMs); and certain methods of verification of an accord. In addition, the two sides agreed on the "counting rules" for determining how many warheads would be assumed to be carried by each type of ballistic missile.

Nevertheless, a number of critical issues remained in dispute, leaving many officials pessimistic over the possibility of the superpowers reaching an accord in 1988. These problems included:

- methods of verification for SLCMs, given the difficulty in differentiating between nuclear and conventionally armed missiles;