

## CONCLUSIONS

The Gorbachev initiative of January 15, despite its obvious propaganda value, its semi-political aims, and its utopian goal, faces us with the moral problem of whether we should try to negotiate, not just arms control, but some measure of disarmament, especially in the overburdened area of nuclear weaponry.

It is no panacea, but the plan does suggest new opportunities, if the West has the political will and patience to attempt to develop them, and if the Soviet Union, when it gets down to further negotiations, provides concrete proposals that match the Gorbachev vision.

The Soviet leader's ambitious disarmament programme is the most detailed of the Russian schemes to provide specific steps towards the reduction of nuclear arms. Gorbachev told the Soviet 27th Party Congress, in a lengthy and thoughtful discussion, that the Soviet Union intends "to work perseveringly" for the realization of this initiative, "regarding it as the central direction of our foreign policy for the coming years."

Aside from those in the Western alliance who are skeptical about the Gorbachev plan, there are skeptics in the Soviet hierarchy and in its military forces. Gorbachev, on whom so many Russians are pinning their hopes for economic change in the Soviet Union, must persuade these other elements in his society that constructive proposals for arms reductions can be productive and not weaken his country's security.

To do that, the Soviet leader requires a positive response from the other side, reflecting a Western willingness to test the sincerity of this new approach. Otherwise his call for "new thinking about the nuclear era" will be dismissed by the familiar Soviet hardliners as being based on "dangerous illusions" about the United States. They will point to the failure of this bold initiative as proof of the lack of desire on the part of the United States for any kind of control over its nuclear forces.

Seweryn Bialer argues that the genuine Soviet interest in a comprehensive strategic weapons agreement is "only secondarily dictated by domestic economic considerations. Far more significant are Soviet security concerns. These include the widening American lead in sophisticated technology, the accelerating American nuclear arms programme, and the tension and danger inherent in a new arms race." Especially there is the fear of the unknown, of what lies ahead with the grandiose Strategic Defence Initiative. "If such awesome security considerations are more important than economic considerations in the minds of new leaders," he concludes, "together they afford the United States the firmest

foundation for potentially successful negotiations with the Soviet Union on strategic arms control."

If so, and the Icelandic summit would seem to confirm this, now would still appear to be a unique opportunity for the United States and the West to work at serious arms control negotiations, to debate thoroughly the necessity for SDI development, and to make, perhaps, some real steps towards disarmament.

## NOTES

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Published by the Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security. Additional copies are available from the Institute: 307 Gilmour Street, Ottawa, Ontario, K2P 0P7.

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