

And alleged vulnerability to a Soviet nuclear attack is no less now than it was four years ago. But either way, the voters' mandate was plain.

Putting together a negotiating position

What are the choices open to President Reagan and what strategy has he adopted? There are several schools of thought in Washington on the basic stance the US should take, and these are reflected among the several advisers in the State Department, the Pentagon and the National Security Council, the three principal agencies concerned with the talks. For example, there have been those who said that the United States:

1) should not seek any agreement with the USSR or only one which offers a clear advantage to the US. Exponents of this position allegedly include some US officials who believe that past agreements have been damaging to US security. Failing an agreement which favored the US, they would prefer an all-out weapons race;

2) must first catch up to the USSR in nuclear armaments and then negotiate from a position of comparable strength. Proponents have included Secretary of Defence Casper Weinberger and some of his principal advisers, Under-Secretary Fred Ikle and Assistant Secretary Richard Perle (who, some might claim, belongs more appropriately in the first category). It is not always clear whether this group is convinced that the US is ready for serious negotiations. Alternatively, they may simply believe that the USSR is not ready for serious negotiations;

3) should negotiate now and try to break the arms impasse. This group apparently believes that past agreements, for all their inadequacies, enhanced security and restrained the Soviet forces at least as much as the US's. At least the opportunity should not be lost to test Soviet willingness now. Proponents of this view appear to enjoy the support of the President. They include Secretary of State Shultz, Assistant Secretary for European Affairs Richard Burt, National Security Council Adviser Robert MacFarlane and, by past performance, some senior military officers in the Pentagon. For those who are not quite convinced that the time has come to take the plunge or have been recruited reluctantly from group 2, it will be of some comfort to know that fully fledged negotiations will almost certainly take several years to complete and will give the US time in which to try to narrow the claimed gap in nuclear capability. This applies particularly to the sacred cow of Star Wars research;

4) The US should be prepared to make concessions in order to achieve agreement with the Soviets. It may be premature to ask whether there are any proponents of this view in the administration. In any case our analysis suggests that Mr. Reagan has moved into category 3 and might be prepared to consider 4 in certain circumstances, depending on the Soviet attitude and its willingness to consider realistic propositions.

What the US wants

Broadly speaking, the US objectives in these talks aim at stability, and, broken down into their component parts, might look something like this:

- 1) agreement to broadly equal numbers of warheads, missiles, throwweights, etc., for each side. This might have to include some sort of allowance for the British and French nuclear armories in the calculations of European-based forces;
- 2) a real cut in the present number of weapons;
- 3) some provisions for verification;
- 4) encouragement for both sides to put more of their missiles in submarines, since these are more or less invulnerable to attack because they are hidden under the sea;
- 5) specified limits on new developments and modernization;
- 6) no other freeze on deployment or development except as part of a negotiated settlement.

But seeking reconciliation with respect to these objectives is not the only obstacle with which the negotiations will have to contend. A serious complication has arisen concerning the US Strategic Defence Initiative (Star Wars), which could conceivably scuttle the talks or alternatively give them life. Star Wars has captured the attention of the press and clearly has a wide appeal to the imagination and the ability to arouse passions among both experts and non-experts on defence matters. It is clear that the Soviets are anxious to foster these reservations and to curtail or eliminate the program if at all possible — whether to protect their own lead in this field or out of fear the US might excel, is not known. The US, on the other hand, seems increasingly bent on maintaining the program for the purpose of determining what are the possibilities and costs associated with various options for missile defence based on earth or in space.

One might well ask whether the program is simply a negotiating ploy to grab the attention of the Soviets, provide negotiating leverage and test whether the Soviets can be persuaded to accept a smaller number of land-based missiles. However, indications from US spokesmen from the President on down are that research into the methods and technologies of missile defence is *not* negotiable and will not be abandoned as a negotiating chip, but that the later development of such systems — still some years away — might be negotiable in some respects. In fact American officials have acknowledged that the US hopes to use the Geneva talks to convince the Soviet Union that a space-based anti-nuclear shield is a better deterrent than existing nuclear weapons, and President Reagan has expressed willingness to share the results of this research, if productive, with the Soviets.

To what extent the Soviet spokesmen criticizing the project are simply posturing for effect might be debatable, since they are known to have a substantial program of their own in space-related research. The fact remains that, even as the Soviet and US negotiators were gathering for the start of talks on March 12, a number of editorialists were