

questions of Treaty interpretation and compliance. The United States Senate ratified the Treaty by a vote of 88 to 2.

During the 1970s both the United States and the Soviet Union continued research into ballistic missile defence. In 1975, the US dismantled the BMD system it had deployed at a missile base in Grand Forks, North Dakota.

The Soviet Union has kept its BMD deployment around Moscow. As the counterforce capability (the ability to accurately strike enemy missile silos) of ballistic missiles improved in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the question of defending against ballistic missiles surfaced again, since defence of missile silos would be easier to achieve than population defence. From the outset, therefore, the new Reagan Administration paid more attention to BMD than had previous administrations.

In March 1983, President Reagan announced that the United States would pursue the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) to provide a defence that would make nuclear weapons "impotent and obsolete". The ABM Treaty, therefore, entered a new and uncertain phase, since the final goal of a defensive shield, impenetrable by ballistic missiles, contradicts the very basis of the ABM Treaty. Although President Reagan initially stated that SDI was only a research programme and would be conducted within the limits of the ABM Treaty, the Administration has put forward and moved towards acceptance of a second "new" interpretation of the ABM Treaty which would allow the US to carry out tests and development of systems previously considered forbidden by the Treaty.

This new interpretation, also known as the "broad" interpretation, would allow the testing and development of ABM systems based on new physical principles and would only prohibit their actual deployment. The Reagan Administration has stated that it believes this broad interpretation is legally valid.