

An attempt at control

and to set in motion the contacts that culminated in the November 22 announcement of forthcoming talks to start in January 1985. Thus it is apparent that a few weeks at least in advance of the US elections the Soviets were preparing to negotiate with the Reagan administration. Why this haste to get together with an unconfirmed and allegedly hostile President following the unproductive and broken talks of 1983? Two explanations seem possible. Either the Kremlin wanted specifically to help Mr. Reagan's re-election efforts by allowing him to be portrayed as the candidate who could sit down and talk peace with the Soviets, thereby undercutting anything that Mr. Mondale could say in this area; or the Soviets were already convinced that they wanted to talk about arms control with the next President and, believing they knew who he would be, thought they might as well get started early.

My own conclusion is that Soviet leaders had decided by the summer of 1984 that they would return to the negotiating table on the best terms available. If, as now appears likely, they actually took such a decision, it is tempting to conclude that they may have some very real concerns to deal with. The principal Soviet preoccupation which is usually identified at this point is their worry about the revival of US military strength over the preceding four years.

Soviet worries

The Kremlin undoubtedly has its own set of pressures to contend with. Observers believe, for example, that anxiety over an arms race in outer space has troubled the Soviets for some time since Mr. Reagan's Star Wars speech in March 1983. A clear expression of this anxiety was Moscow's proposal on space weapons talks in June 1984, reflecting concern about a new competition in which the American lead in electronic technology could prove insurmountable.

Still other Soviet military-related concerns may exist including: the need to move a greater part of their mainly land-based missile force out to sea in submarines because the coming American D-5 warhead would make the Soviet's land-based missiles at least theoretically vulnerable to a US first strike; the technological mobilization of American industry generally in support of the defence program; the ability of NATO weapons systems to detect and attack Soviet reinforcements in East Germany and Poland long before they were engaged; the superiority of US targetting and delivery systems, which applied also to the Pershing-2 and ground-launched Cruise missiles now being installed in Western Europe. The continued deployment of these missiles (the ultimate total will be 572) represented a political defeat for Moscow which some analysts believe helped push the Kremlin toward negotiations.

But of all these concerns, the prime Soviet objective reiterated again and again by President Chernenko before his death in March 1985, and by Secretary Gorbachev since, was to forestall President Reagan's Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI or "Star Wars"), a research and development program designed to explore all possibilities for the destruction of ballistic missiles in flight. These might include both ground-based and space-based weapons systems, nuclear and conventional means, and probably some not-so-conventional non-nuclear ones. As the program is

still in its infancy, its scope is unlimited and its focus very broad. Whether the Congress will fund the program is still uncertain. Should the administration go full speed to grasp SDI, the consequent financial burden on the Soviet Union might be intolerable. Vast sums of money would have to be added to those already spent for nuclear and conventional forces — including the "pacification" of Afghanistan — in order to prevent the Americans from moving rapidly out in front. As one observer put it, "a trillion dollars arms race that the Soviets fear they could not win!" Since the Americans have already spent a trillion dollars on nuclear armaments, it is apparently not too much to consider that this amount could be doubled in the next two or three decades.

At this point military and economic factors begin to overlap. The cost of development of new systems has become prohibitive, while the risk of the Soviet's losing weapons superiority to the Americans — of slipping back to an apparently vulnerable and inferior position such as they have not experienced since the first postwar decade — appears intolerable. At this point also I believe that a case can be made that the Soviets do want a negotiation — at least, that is, one which serves to protect their position by reining in the United States effort.

Why negotiate? The US position

In the United States, Americans clearly voted in November for a serious effort in nuclear arms reduction. This is most evident in Mr. Reagan's more respectful tone toward the Kremlin in the months leading up to the election, culminating in his invitation to Mr. Gromyko in September 1984 which acknowledged that the voters wanted something more than the hostility and diplomatic confusion of the preceding three years. As the *New York Times* put it, "The first Reagan term proved how easy it is to stage arms control negotiations that run no risk of reaching agreement."

Leading up to his meeting with the Soviet Foreign Minister, Mr. Reagan went beyond electioneering. He had until then virtually conceded a reluctance to negotiate out of fear that Congress might not pass his big military budgets. But by September he was ready to make arms control his first priority. He sounded even more eager for it than Mr. Mondale and even reaffirmed the commitment *after* the votes were counted.

The resumption of negotiations was hailed in the United States as a major diplomatic coup for the Reagan administration, even though some early enthusiasm had been tempered by the reality of nuclear complexity and the likelihood of a lengthy and difficult negotiation. The administration also expected to gain more tangible benefits: not only greater public approval for its foreign policy as a whole, but, paradoxically, voting support in Congress to relieve pressure on its defence spending, especially on weaponry directly tied to arms control sensitivities. The government also gained international credit for reviving the dormant talks.

The administration's mandate is undeniable even if the first three Reagan years are seen as a success — a shrewd campaign to soften up the Soviet leaders, to show them how expensive and dangerous an unrestrained arms race would be. As it turned out, the burden was also great for the US economy, adding enormously to the public debt.