ARMS CONTROL DIGEST

Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START)

"Major" progress towards a START Treaty was reported from the Baker-Shevardnadze "ministerial" meeting in Moscow, from 7 to 9 February. The two sides settled two of the three outstanding issues they had hoped to resolve: telemetry encryption, and non-deployed missiles. On the third issue, air-launched cruise missiles (ALCMs), the Soviets accepted the US proposal that bombers be counted as carrying an arbitrary number of missiles much lower than that which they are theoretically capable of carrying. Thus, US bombers would be counted as carrying ten ALCMs, and current Soviet bombers as eight, even though they are equipped for up to twenty and twelve, respectively. They would not be permitted to carry more than the latter numbers, however. Disagreement continued over the range at which ALCMs would be subject to START limits, with the Soviets continuing to argue for the 600 km definition from SALT II, while the US wanted it raised to 900–1,000 km (a drop from its previous proposal of 1,500 km).

The most promising advances toward an agreement in Moscow concerned strategic defences and sea-launched cruise missiles (SLCMs). Regarding the first, the Soviets dropped their insistence on an agreed statement permitting withdrawal from the START Treaty in the event of abrogation or withdrawal from the Anti-ballistic Missile Treaty, although they indicated that they would continue their own policy of linking the two. On SLCMs, the Soviets finally accepted the US preference for a simple declaration of planned deployments, while the US agreed to consider such a declaration as "politically binding." The two sides continued to disagree, however, on both the range above which missiles would be included (the US proposing 300 km, the Soviets 600), and the type of missiles (the US wanting it limited to nuclear missiles, the Soviets, to both nuclear and conventional types).

Finally, without committing itself to immediate follow-on negotiations, the US agreed to hear Soviet proposals for "START II" talks focussing on deeper cuts and stabilizing measures.

Hopes for a quick conclusion of the START Treaty were dimmed at the Baker-Shevardnadze ministerial in Washington, in early April. Although progress was made on some minor points, none of the major issues outstanding from Moscow were settled. Furthermore, according to American press reports, the Soviets "backtracked" on the issue of a purely declaratory approach to SLCM limits. An added complication was a new US proposal said to have been presented to Shevardnadze in Namibia, in March. This called for a ban on mobile land-based missiles with multiple warheads (MIRVs) as part of START I, and a ban on all MIRVed land-based missiles in START II. President Gorbachev reportedly ignored the former and objected to the latter on the grounds that it did not include submarine-launched ballistic missiles, in which the US has an advantage.

After the April meeting, with just one more ministerial planned before the Presidential summit, some US officials were reported as doubting that even an agreement in principle on START would be ready in time.

Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE)

In early February, President Gorbachev rejected President Bush's 31 January proposal for unequal levels of US and Soviet personnel on allied territory in Europe. Just a few days later, however, at the Open Skies meeting in Ottawa, the Soviets reversed themselves by accepting the original Bush proposal, and hence the principle of a larger number of US than Soviet troops on foreign soil in Europe. The proposal requires the Soviets to reduce their forces by 370,000 to 380,000 men, compared to just 80,000 for the US.

The West's assumption that the issue of personnel reductions had thereby been solved was belied, however, when Soviet chief negotiator Oleg Grinevsky on 22 February suggested additional alliance-wide ceilings of 700,000 to 750,000 in Central Europe. Western negotiators, who want personnel limitations restricted to US and Soviet forces, immediately rejected the idea and warned that it could wreck the agreement if it was put forward as a formal proposal by the East.

On another issue, NATO's revised proposal in early February lowered the ceiling on combat-capable aircraft to 4,700, as desired by the Warsaw Pact. NATO also agreed to exempt approximately 2,700 "primary" trainer aircraft, again in line with Pact wishes, and to set a separate ceiling of 500 on air-defence interceptors. However, the East continues to insist on exempting some 1,500 interceptors and 1,500 combat-capable trainers, as well as medium bombers and land-based naval aircraft. Western negotiators complain that the resulting "ceiling" would be over 2,000 higher than the number of aircraft now possessed by NATO.

At the Washington ministerial meeting in early April, Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze reportedly proposed equal ceilings of 500 US and Soviet combat aircraft based on allied territory, while postponing other aircraft-related issues to the next stage of the talks; this was rejected by the US. Other outstanding issues include ceilings for artillery and armoured combat vehicles, restrictions on helicopters, and definitions of armoured vehicles. Nevertheless, despite a widespread perception that the negotiations have stalled, both Eastern and Western delegates continue to believe that they can conclude an agreement before the end of the year.

Open Skies

The negotiations on an Open Skies Treaty began with high hopes in Ottawa in mid-February, as the foreign ministers of the twenty-three participating states (NATO and the Warsaw Pact) endorsed the concept of mutual aerial surveillance with "maximum possible openness and minimum restrictions." However, the talks soon bogged down in the details, as the USSR – isolated among its allies – insisted on a number of provisions which would restrict the "openness" of the regime. The Western states resisted Soviet proposals for a pooling of aircraft and sharing of the data, as well as the extension of overflights to overseas bases.

When the Ottawa meeting broke up on 27 February, little progress had been made on the detailed points of contention. While dropping their initial demand for a common fleet of aircraft, the Soviets had raised a new one that would allow only Soviet aircraft to overfly their territory. Other disagreements arose over the idea of restricted zones over various types of installations and populated areas, as proposed by Moscow; the type of sensors to be permitted aboard the aircraft, with the Soviets arguing for greater restrictiveness than the West; and the number of overflights to be permitted, with the Soviets proposing a lower figure.

Shortly after the talks resumed in Budapest on 23 April, both the Soviet and American chief delegates expressed pessimism about the prospects of reaching an agreement by the target date of 12 May. □

– RON PURVER