

Another Gorbachev concession could be his willingness to eliminate intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Europe without linking it to a commitment to drop the Strategic Defence Initiative; only strategic weapons reductions are linked to the banning of Star Wars. Yet in the Iceland talks, Gorbachev linked his INF removals, as well as his willingness to accept partial limits on nuclear testing with a curb on SDI development.

His proposal to reduce strategic launchers by 50 per cent, with a limit of 6,000 warheads, includes another concession: American nuclear forces in Europe are no longer included in this category. (The Americans have always objected to labelling their medium-range aircraft based on land and on aircraft carriers as 'strategic'.) In Reykjavik, President Reagan went along with this limit on strategic warheads.

With his January 15 initiative Gorbachev also modified the Soviet Union's previous INF proposals at Geneva. The USSR had argued that Soviet intermediate-range forces in Europe should be reduced only as far as the level of French and British nuclear forces combined. Gorbachev has said that the USSR is now willing to see all Soviet and American medium-range forces completely removed. While this is happening, he is also willing to allow British and French nuclear weapons to remain in place, so long as neither country builds up its nuclear forces. He has dropped the old insistence that British and French nuclear missiles be counted as part of the total Euromissile arsenal in the negotiations.

One American objection to this part of the plan is that it does not cover the mobile SS-20s based in Asia. Those located on the Kamchatka peninsula can hit Alaska or Hawaii as well as US bases in Japan and South Korea. Furthermore these SS-20s could be transferred back to Europe in a crisis although, since Moscow says the infrastructures for these mobile missiles in Europe would have been destroyed with the missiles under their proposal, it would take some time to re-establish these weapons in Europe. At the Iceland summit, Gorbachev agreed to deal with the Asian objection by limiting Soviet deployment of SS-20s in Soviet Asia to 100 warheads, while the Americans could also keep 100 intermediate-range missile warheads, but only on the US mainland.

Another objection is that France and Britain now are engaged in modernizing their respective missile forces, equipping them with multiple warheads that are independently targetable, thus increasing their nuclear weapons stockpiles in the 1990s by a factor of four or five. Neither Britain nor France is likely to want to halt this process until the superpowers have actually cut back their strategic forces. Furthermore

Gorbachev calls upon the United States not to transfer any of its strategic or medium-range missiles to any other countries. The Americans object that this would prevent the transfer of the new Trident missiles to Britain or the shift of any Pershing and cruise missiles to other foreign locations. At Reykjavik, British and French missiles were left out of the agreements reached.

Beyond all these considerations is the general problem of defining what is allowable Star Wars "research." It may be just semantics, but the Russians have used both the terms "development" and "creation" when referring to the question of both sides renouncing the development, testing and deployment of what they call "space strike" weapons. In Article V of the original ABM the Russian term "create" is used in their text. Article V states that "each party undertakes not to develop, test, or deploy ABM systems or components which are sea-based, space-based, or mobile land-based." There is no clear definition of 'research' or even of 'components' in the treaty.

Within the United States this is a controversial issue. Gerard C. Smith, who was the chief US negotiator of the ABM treaty, insists that "it was not our intention that any type of technology for space-based ABM systems could be developed or tested under the treaty." Reagan administration officials, such as Kenneth Adelman, head of the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, disagree and argue that a search of all the negotiating papers shows that research, development and testing of Star Wars equipment is allowable under their interpretation of that treaty. At Reykjavik Gorbachev argued that any testing of space elements of anti-ballistic defence in space should be confined to the laboratory, implying that the ABM treaty ought to be amended more precisely.

If the basic aim of the Gorbachev initiative were to halt the SDI process in any way possible, this could be the major stumbling block to any real agreement on this disarmament proposal. This is especially true if the Soviets and the Americans cannot agree on what sorts of research would be permissible under the ABM treaty, or if they cannot agree to amend that treaty to allow certain kinds of research.

Finally, the whole Gorbachev plan faces the Western alliance itself with the question of whether it could carry on without nuclear weapons. The proposal for a new 'zero option' in Europe as put forward by Gorbachev has already raised some familiar West European fears. One is that the US would be decoupled from Western Europe, afraid to come to its defence with strategic nuclear weapons for fear of Soviet retaliation against the continental United States. A second concern is that Western European countries (excepting Britain and France in the first