

The Soviet Union has stated that it believes the narrow interpretation to be the only valid interpretation of the Treaty. Indeed, until 1985 this was the only interpretation held by the United States. The Soviets have stood by this position at the Defence and Space Talks, insisting that the testing of ABM systems and components must be restricted by the traditional interpretation. The general approach of the United States at the Defence and Space Talks consists of discussing the effects of the relationship between offence- and defence-based systems on the strategic balance, negotiating a smooth transition from an offense-dominated to a defence-dominated military structure, and resolving concerns over possible Soviet violations of the ABM Treaty.

At the Washington Summit in December 1987, both sides agreed to establish a non-withdrawal period of some (as yet undetermined) length for the ABM Treaty. Currently the United States is suggesting six years, while the Soviet Union has put forward a ten-year proposal.

On 15 January 1988, at the ninth round of the NST talks, the Soviets tabled a draft protocol to the proposed Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) Treaty. During the 10 year non-withdrawal period suggested in the proposal, testing of ABM systems and components would be restricted by the narrow interpretation of the ABM Treaty. The Soviets have consistently held that agreement on SDI and the ABM Treaty must be reached before a START agreement is possible.

The United States rejected the Soviet-proposed Protocol, arguing that a START Treaty should not be tied to restrictions on SDI. On January 22, the United States presented a draft treaty on ballistic missile defence (BMD). The draft was intended to provide a basis for a transition to a defence-oriented military structure by allowing for development, testing, and deployment of advanced missile defences.