

The reason for asking for negotiations on defensive systems (category 2) in the view of some US officials was that as both sides continued to improve the accuracy and destructive power of ballistic missiles, each would begin to fear the possible first strike capability of the other, and neither would have full trust in mutual deterrence. Even sharp cutbacks in powerful intercontinental-range missiles would not sufficiently reduce the threat to the remaining retaliatory forces. This could be done, it was argued, only by protecting them with defensive systems. Such systems could be phased in during the next five to ten years. In the meantime, Mr. Shultz was said to have asserted, the two sides would have a mutual interest in looking into a third category of systems by seeing whether *space-based defences* could be developed to protect members of the public, should deterrence fail.

One reason a lot of time had to be spent on these subjects was that the US position on defensive systems today is exactly 180 degrees from where it was in the early seventies when the Nixon administration, and the President himself, worked hard to convince Mr. Brezhnev and the Soviets to accept the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (part of SALT I) which limited each side to 100 ground-based defensive interceptors at one national site of its choice (for the Soviets, around Moscow; to date the US has not exercised its option to build such a system). The Americans, for the reason indicated above, would now like to consider an extension of this concept, but there is little evidence as yet that the Soviets are prepared to accept the argument either for additional missile defence systems of the type currently employed in the USSR, or for the pursuit of more exotic non-nuclear Star Wars defences. This lends credence to the view that further negotiations will be very demanding and progress will be slow.

To understand how the new set of talks came about, one has to go back at least to the US elections in November 1984. Immediately after election night (November 6) the President of the USSR wrote to Ronald Reagan to congratulate him on winning a second term as President of the United States, and further to propose a resumption of nuclear arms talks. Chernenko might have been motivated in part by some very positive words that had just been uttered by the victorious Reagan, as well as by the fact of his election triumph which confirmed that he would be around for another four years. Other feelers had been extended by the two leaders since shortly after Chernenko assumed power in February 1984, but none came nearly so close to sparking agreement on a formula for the resumption of talks. In the jubilation of election night 1984 when many subjects might have occupied Ronald Reagan's attention — and the Kremlin need not have been one of them — he told a crowd of supporters gathered in California to celebrate his unprecedented victory that the highest priorities of the second term of his administration would be first, nuclear arms control and second, tax reform. The same two priorities were repeated and reaffirmed in Reagan's Inaugural Address to Congress late in January 1985.

Controlled eagerness

Chernenko's congratulations were followed by other encouraging Soviet messages in quick succession. One from the Soviet leader read out at a Soviet Embassy recep-

tion in Washington, D.C., emphasized that the Soviet side was interested in serious business-like relations with the United States and wished to reach agreement "on a whole range of issues." Chernenko then gave an interview to NBC-TV in which he again expressed willingness to accept a broad agenda in arms control negotiations and pledged to work with President Reagan, provided the latter would make the reduction of nuclear weapons his top priority in US-Soviet relations. No other conditions were set relating, for example, to the removal of US nuclear weapons stationed in Western Europe.

After brief consideration, the US reacted favorably to these messages. "I think we are seeing results; we are seeing progress" said Secretary of State George Shultz on NBC-TV on November 16. "We agree with the goals that he [Chernenko] states." On November 22, only sixteen days after President Reagan's re-election, the United States and Soviet Union announced that Secretary of State Shultz and Foreign Minister Gromyko would meet in Geneva on January 7 and 8 to negotiate an agenda for talks on limiting nuclear arms. These talks were to be held without preconditions and "with the aim of achieving mutually acceptable accords on the entire complex of questions concerning nuclear and space weapons." Both the fact of the talks and their very broad mandate constituted a truly remarkable achievement, considering the conditions that the Soviets had stipulated for reentering the negotiations after walking out of two sets of Geneva talks late in 1983.

How did it come about that the Soviet and American leaders who had shown so much hostility toward one another in 1983, and largely ignored one another in the first half of 1984, could take such a significant step toward negotiations immediately after the American elections in November 1984? Are the superpowers and their leaders serious in seeking arms control or reduction? Are the Soviets concerned about the costs of building increasingly complex weapons systems?

Why negotiate? A Soviet view

One recalls that in 1983 the Kremlin had insisted that it could never again have dealings with Mr. Reagan. In November 1983 Soviet negotiators quit the talks on medium-range missiles, then on strategic missiles, charging that the deployment of new US missiles in Europe made further negotiations pointless. They insisted that nothing could happen until the new weapons were dismantled. But a year later, the Kremlin had come around. Military, economic and political factors apparently played a part in this about-face.

On the political side, Soviet leaders may have hoped that antiwar movements in Western Europe or the US Congress or electorate might have turned things around for them. They did not. The US allies stood firm. American voters gave their support to Reagan in historic proportions. After seeing the size of Reagan's election victory, Soviet leaders evidently saw no further advantage in sulking or waiting. They insisted, however, that they were not returning to the Geneva talks they had abandoned a year earlier but entering totally new negotiations.

Military factors likely counted even more than political considerations. Recall that by September 1984 Mr. Gromyko was ready to meet Mr. Reagan in the White House