

## I.

### ARMS CONTROL ISSUES: CURRENT POSITIONS

#### 1. Recent Shifts in American and Soviet Positions

At the first working session of the conference, the opening speaker was Alton Frye, of the Council on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC. He suggested that, at this point in history, the two leaders of the world's superpowers, Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev, had an unprecedented opportunity to reverse the nuclear arms race. Mr. Frye cited a number of important shifts in the position of both superpowers which he believed warranted some degree of optimism for the Geneva negotiations.

President Reagan had campaigned in 1980 on the promise to restore the United States to a position of military superiority over the Soviet Union. In 1984, he reversed this position, acknowledging that neither side could gain a meaningful strategic edge. Furthermore, Frye argued, while the early negotiating proposals tabled by the Reagan Administration were patently non-negotiable, the Administration had moved toward greater flexibility, offering more realistic trade-offs.

The Soviet Union had itself undergone a number of changes in the recent past and these too were put forward by Mr. Frye as reasons for optimism. Gorbachev had emerged as a very capable leader, with a number of fresh initiatives to spur the arms control process. For example, the Soviet negotiators, moving from their original argument that SDI research was prohibited by the ABM Treaty, had recently acknowledged that this treaty did *not* ban SDI research. They had also stated that it was possible to define the boundaries of such research, admitting that some deployment of space-based surveillance might be acceptable, though certainly *not* testing of lasers or other beam weapons in space. The Soviet Union had also recognized openly the distinction between the arsenals of the superpowers and those of the "independent" nuclear powers: France, Britain, and China. Finally, the USSR had, for the first time, proposed its own formula for arms reductions.

The US and Soviet proposals were encouraging because genuine reductions in offensive forces might avert any destabilizing forays into strategic defence. It was important, however, that the complexities surrounding "third country" nuclear forces not be allowed to muddy the Soviet-American negotiations. The superpowers could not negotiate about the nuclear forces of other countries, but