

SECTION I - ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT

1. THE ABM TREATY

Background

The SALT I Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty and the Interim Agreement on Strategic Offensive Arms were signed by Soviet General-Secretary Brezhnev and US President Nixon on 26 May 1972. The SALT negotiations began in November 1969. Since they were unable to reach final agreement on strategic offensive arms limits, the parties agreed to make the ABM Treaty separate and of unlimited duration, while signing an interim agreement on offensive arms limitations.

Both the Soviet Union and the United States undertook Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) programmes during the 1960s. In the United States, the BMD issue sparked a prolonged public debate. The advisability of developing BMD centred on two main concerns: the ease with which the defences could be overcome by large numbers of cheaper offensive missiles, and the possibility that BMD deployments might destabilize deterrence based on the concept of mutual assured destruction. This concept, which had become the basis of nuclear deterrence, assumes the impossibility of an adequate defence against nuclear weapons.

The ABM Treaty prohibits both sides from deploying a nation-wide BMD and limits each to two ABM deployment areas (this was amended to one area on 3 July 1974). The Treaty also puts restraints on radars and interceptor missiles and prohibits the development, testing or deployment of sea, air, space or mobile land-based ABM systems and their components. Extensive verification measures are provided for in the Treaty, which also established the Standing Consultative Committee to deal with questions of Treaty interpretation and compliance. The United States Senate ratified the Treaty by a vote of 88 to 2.

During the 1970s both the United States and the Soviet Union continued