

APR 24 1989

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A REVIEW OF THE GENEVA NEGOTIATIONS 1987-1988

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INTRODUCTION

During the period under review in this paper — from mid-1987 to September 1988 — the United States and the Soviet Union pursued sustained negotiations on nuclear arms control. These negotiations began in Geneva in March 1985 as the Nuclear and Space Talks (NST). The two sides agreed to divide the talks into three negotiations: intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF); the strategic arms reduction talks (START); and the defence and space talks, which the Soviets refer to as the 'space weapons' talks.

In December 1987 the two sides signed a treaty to abolish medium-range missiles, and by May they had come temptingly close to an agreement on START. They were considerably further from an agreement to control the deployment of space weapons and reach a common understanding of the restraints imposed by the ABM Treaty, although the disagreement did not appear to be as great an obstacle as was once thought.

In sum, as the two sides resume negotiations in 1989, the central question will be whether the negotiators can sustain the momentum generated by the successful negotiation of the INF Treaty, and the agreed framework for a START Treaty. This paper identifies the points of agreement and disagreement in the three negotiating areas, beginning with the events leading to the successful conclusion of the INF Treaty, and raises some of the concerns expressed by arms controllers about the issues omitted from the negotiation.*

* Readers may wish to consult CIIPS Background Paper No. 13 for a review of the 1986-87 negotiations. It should be noted that the review does not attempt to cover the multilateral Conference on Disarmament, nor the debate about conventional arms negotiations which has been stimulated by the signing of the INF Treaty.

THE INF NEGOTIATIONS

By the spring of 1987 there appeared to be a realistic prospect of an INF agreement based on the formula which had emerged from the Reykjavik summit in October 1986. In this formulation, the Soviet SS-20s, the focus of NATO concern since their deployment ten years earlier, would be eliminated in exchange for the elimination of the US ground-launched cruise missiles (GLCMs) and Pershing IIs then being deployed in Europe. However, both sides would be allowed to keep 100 warheads and their associated launchers: in the Soviet case, this residual force was to be kept in Soviet Asia, and therefore out of range of the European NATO countries, while the US warheads were to be kept in the continental United States.

This formula was criticized in particular by the leading NATO European countries, who argued that the agreement would leave the Soviets with a decisive advantage in the European theatre in shorter-range nuclear missiles, with ranges between 500 and 1,000 kilometres. To a lesser extent, US critics noted that the warheads based in the United States would have little military value, while the Soviet warheads in Soviet Asia could hold at risk US military forces in the Pacific.

In Prague on 10 April, Gorbachev went some considerable way to resolving the first of these issues by proposing immediate talks on issues arising from the deployment of shorter-range INF. He also accepted the US definition of these weapons as those having a range of between 500 and 1,000 kilometres, thus effectively defining three categories of nuclear forces: the long-range INF (the SS-20, the SS-4, the GLCMs and the Pershing IIs) with ranges between 1,000 and 5,500 kilometres, the shorter-range INF (the SS-12, SS-22 and SS-23) with