



ARMS CONTROL MAGIC... LESS IS MORE

BY DAVID COX

Like the protein-rich power breakfasts offered by fashionable hotels, the superpower arms talks offer a programme to shed fat, build muscle, and eat with pleasure all at the same time.

DESPITE THE PREDICTABLY slow pace of the superpower negotiations on strategic arms reductions (START), on the face of things President Reagan is ending his presidency with an arms control record of some standing. In the bag is the historic accord on intermediate range weapons – not only a fulfillment of the zero-zero option initially proposed by President Reagan in 1982, but a path-breaking agreement in terms of its provisions for on-site verification. And in the START negotiations, even a framework agreement, to be completed by his successor, will be considered a Reagan accomplishment since the ceilings now under consideration – 1,600 strategic delivery vehicles and 6,000 warheads – are very close to the kind of reductions which he called for at the beginning of his presidency. Image-wise, the President looks even better since the media and the public at large seem to accept as a certainty that the result of the treaty will be a fifty percent reduction in strategic nuclear weapons.

All this said, why then should the applause be muted? On the part of defence analysts, the reservations stem mainly from con-

cerns about the implications of the provisions for on-site verification in the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty, and the more fundamental, long-term question of just how much arms control, particularly in conventional forces in Europe, do we really want. In the case of at least some arms controllers, there is a tension between the desire to applaud the reductions because they are going in the right direction (downwards), and a growing awareness that the post-START nuclear forces will be all the better to fight with, and, in any case, a far cry from fifty percent reductions.

In this debate, the interested citizen should tread warily, and keep a suspicious mind. This is no time to relax with the thought that the great powers have at last cured their habit of nuclear profligacy; all phrases such as “fifty percent reductions” and “halving the nuclear arsenals” should be treated with polite skepticism. On the other hand, opportunities are at hand to achieve arms control measures of surpassing importance. Sustaining the momentum created by the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty while avoiding the creation of false expectations about

truly deep reductions in nuclear weapons is the first task that we should require of our government.

IN 1984 VICE-PRESIDENT GEORGE Bush presented a draft chemical weapons treaty to the Geneva Conference on Disarmament. It contained verification provisions so stringent that few believed they were meant to be taken seriously. On-site inspections, said Bush, should be “anytime, anywhere.” Up to that time, the Soviets had resisted any agreement for on-site inspection, so the prospect for agreement seemed remote.

At the beginning of the negotiations on intermediate-range forces, Caspar Weinberger took a similar position: the on-site inspector of the intermediate-range agreement, he argued, should be akin to the bank inspector – able to wander around, to look over shoulders, to poke in corners. But in the spring of 1987 the Soviets responded in a disconcerting way: they accepted the principle of intrusive inspection, and declared that, pursuant to an agreement, their factories would be open to US inspection. Of course, declared Soviet spokesman Yuli Vorontsov, the same would be true for the United States, and he helpfully suggested that the President might need to seek

Congressional legislation to permit Soviet inspectors into US weapons factories.

From that point, the US Administration, under the strong influence of the military Joint Chiefs of Staff, backed away from highly intrusive inspections, and settled instead for the important but carefully limited provisions in the Intermediate-range Treaty. Did the United States really want Soviet inspectors roaming freely through weapons factories and perhaps across military bases? The Pentagon quickly decided that the answer was a firm negative. While the US change of heart did not affect the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty, the intrusiveness of verification is now an issue in all other arms control negotiations.

For example, a chemical weapons treaty, which is within sight from a technical point of view, is being quietly shuffled off centre-stage while Washington reassesses its commitment to “anytime, anywhere” inspection of chemical factories and weapons facilities. In the approach to conventional force reductions, defence planners ask themselves just how willing they are to see Soviet inspectors crisscrossing Western Europe en route to NATO’s military installations. In START, the superpowers propose to eliminate warheads as well as missiles. This will require detailed verification provisions.

How much inspection is enough? The old question has taken on a new meaning as now both superpowers, committed to negotiate reductions, seek to balance their desire not to be subject to extensive inspection with their need to develop the precise procedures required to implement a START agreement.

From the viewpoint of the national security analyst, the abolition of a class of weapons in the Intermediate-range Treaty, combined with the prospective START agreement, has focussed attention on the ultimate objective that is sought in these across-the-board negotiations. For NATO the ultimate purpose of the intermediate-range agreement is not to denuclearize Western Europe – that purpose has been emphatically rejected by the lead-