

Niles concluded that, while US negotiators still had some reservations about certain aspects of the proposals, there had been significant progress in the Soviet position and there was therefore reason to be optimistic.

4. Discussion and questions from the floor

Build-down

In his presentation, Alton Frye discussed "build-down". He said that the build-down concept had been advanced in the US Congress as a replacement for the "Freeze" proposal, which, in its present form at least, was considered by most representatives to be non-negotiable. There was much more congressional support for the build-down proposal, Frye said, than for the freeze initiative, and it was this support which had contributed to the positive shift in Reagan's arms control policies. Mr. Frye supported build-down, arguing that modernization would continue as long as both superpowers maintained their right to upgrade their nuclear arsenals. Under the build-down regime the very process of modernization would result in fewer and fewer weapons and the restraints imposed by build-down could contribute to stability.

Furthermore, there had been a "progression" in the Soviet response. Frye quoted a Soviet spokesman, Georgi Korniyenko, who stated in Geneva that "anything negative" the Soviet Union had said about build-down "related only to the original formulation." Apparently, the USSR was now ready to discuss the possibility of a build-down initiative.

Closely associated with the argument for build-down had been the support for the small-scale, single-warhead missile, dubbed "Midgetman", which, Frye was quick to point out, need not be mobile. If the two superpowers did reduce their counterforce capability to 3 or 4,000 warheads with "hard-target kill capability", the level sought by the USSR, then a fixed-site, silo-basing scheme for Midgetman would be feasible; this, said Frye, would avoid the verification problems associated with mobile launchers.

Denis Healey and William Epstein objected to Frye's sanguine attitude toward build-down and Midgetman. The Freeze was still politically viable and technically verifiable, and continued to attract a great deal of public support in both North America and Europe.

Mr. Epstein predicted that build-down would be distorted and exploited as an excuse to retire old, obsolete weapons and to deploy