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NATIONAL SECURITY DECISION
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U.S. Approach to START Negotiations

The main threat to peace posed by nuclear weapons today is the growing instability of the nuclear balance. This is due to the increasing destructive potential and numbers of warheads delivered by the most inherently destabilizing Soviet systems, ballistic missiles, and especially ICBMs. The clear and primary focus of U.S. efforts should be to achieve a significant reduction in these systems, the number of warheads they carry, and their overall destructive potential.

At the same time, the U.S. will continue to require the essential contribution made by effective strategic nuclear forces to deter conflict and to meet our own legitimate security requirements. In addition, given the advantage in non-nuclear forces enjoyed by the Soviet Union and its allies, U.S. strategic nuclear forces will be required to fulfill our commitments to our Allies and friends.

The U.S. Goal in Negotiations

Therefore, the goal the United States sets for itself in strategic arms negotiations is to enhance deterrence and to achieve stability through significant reductions in the most destabilizing nuclear systems, ballistic missiles, and especially ICBMs, while maintaining an overall level of strategic nuclear capability sufficient to deter conflict, underwrite our national security, and meet our commitments to Allies and friends.

The U.S. Approach

To achieve this goal, the U.S. approach will emphasize the basic difference between slow-flying, clearly second-strike systems, and the more destabilizing ballistic missiles. The U.S. proposal will include significant reductions in the number of ballistic missiles, the number of warheads carried on these missiles, and their overall destructive potential. It will use both direct and indirect means to reduce, and then eliminate, the Soviet advantage in ballistic missile throw weight.

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At the same time, the U.S. will propose separate constraints on slow-flying systems. The differences in treatment of bombers and cruise missiles will provide us a means of maintaining sufficient nuclear force to meet U.S. security requirements, even while significantly reducing our ballistic missile capability. It should also encourage the Soviet Union to turn to less destabilizing systems to meet its deterrent requirements.

The United States will propose a phased approach to the START negotiations. During the first phase, as in the INF negotiations, we will focus on the most threatening systems, in this case ballistic missiles.

Elements of the U.S. position during Phase I will include:

-- Limit ballistic missile warheads to 5,000 for each side.

-- Limit ICBM warheads to one-half the overall warhead total.

-- Limit total deployed ballistic missiles to 850 for each side.

-- Establish an internal U.S. negotiating goal of ensuring a reduction of Soviet throw weight as a result of Phase I to below 2.5 Mkg, using indirect limits. Hold this goal as sensitive information on a strict need-to-know basis and not for public release.

-- Direct throw-weight limits will not be demanded of the Soviets during the first phase. However, we will clearly lay down the principle with the Soviets that we expect the limits on missiles and missile warheads to result, in effect, in a significant reduction in the total missile throw weight to either side as a result of Phase I. Building on this, we intend to negotiate direct limits on throw weight at equal and further reduced levels as a major portion of the second phase of negotiations.

-- Explain our intent to focus on ballistic systems during the first phase. Stress the basic difference between ballistic systems and slow-flying, clearly second-strike systems.

-- Agree to equal limits on bombers at roughly current levels with BACKFIRE included, but defer further reductions or discussion of constraints on slow-flying systems (i.e., bombers and cruise missiles) until the second phase.

-- Declare our intent to seek in the second phase: (1) direct reductions in throw weight to equal levels; (2) further reductions in missiles, and missile warhead levels if conditions permit; and reductions and other constraints on slow-flying systems.

-- Assure effective verification procedures for the above.

Elements of the U.S. position in Phase II, which should begin as soon as possible after completion of Phase I, include:

-- Direct limits and reductions to equal levels of ballistic missile throw weight below current U.S. levels.

-- Reductions to equal levels of bomber forces with a goal of 250 total bombers on each side.

-- Discussion of further reductions in missiles and missile warhead levels, security requirements permitting.

-- Discussion of other constraints on slow-flying systems.

Additional Study Required

The START Interdepartmental Group will prepare recommendations on interim restraint measures and other elements of the U.S. approach needed to complement the decisions reached on the basic proposal. These will be provided for NSC review not later than May 18, 1982.

Ronald Reagan