Svetlana Savranskaya / Thomas Blanton

The Nuclear Abolition Package of 1986 and the Soviet Road to INF

1. Introduction

The Soviet road to the INF Treaty started many years before the historic Reagan–Gorbachev meeting in Washington, at the exact date and time determined by Nancy Reagan's astrologer. To understand how this ground-breaking treaty became possible, we need to look back to the mid-1970s' thinking about nuclear war in both the Soviet Union and the United States, and also to the story of SS-20 deployment, to subsequent Soviet attempts to negotiate mutual reductions in the late 1970s, and to the negotiating stalemate starting in 1983 and lasting till Gorbachev came to power in the Soviet Union. The story of INF is the story of nuclear learning and the building of trust. Thirty years after the signing of the INF Treaty, it looks as though both learning and trust have been lost in U. S.–Russian relations.

Mikhail Gorbachev's proposal for global nuclear abolition, made in January 1986, ranks as a landmark in the process that led to the historic 1987 Treaty to eliminate intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF).[1] At the most obvious level, the first stage of the proposal included eliminating INF in Europe along with 50 per cent of both sides' strategic forces. At a deeper level, the abolition package represented the first public airing of a sea-change in Soviet military thinking about fighting a nuclear war—a major shift that would give Gorbachev the necessary foundation for his radical arms control proposals to go forward.

Remarkably, the authors of the proposal were not Gorbachev's "new thinkers." Rather, the abolition package originated with the Soviet General Staff, specifically Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev, working with a small group of General Staff experts including General Nikolai Chervov, and with input from senior diplomat Georgy Kornienko.[2] Yet Gorbachev would ultimately go much further than Akhromeyev ever intended, both on conventional arms cuts and on sacrificing some of the Soviet military's most advanced systems, especially the Oka missile

1 For an overview and key primary sources from the time, see Svetlana Savranskaya and Thomas Blanton, Gorbachev's Nuclear Initiative of January 1986 and the Road to Reykjavik, National Security Archive, Electronic Briefing Book No. 563, October 12, 2016, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/nuclear-vault-russia-programs/2016-10-12/gorbachevs-nuclear-initiative-january-1986.

2 See the joint memoir by Sergey Fyodorovich Akhromeyev and Georgy M. Kornienko, Glazamy marshala y diplomata, Moscow 1992, Chapter 3.

(SS-23). INF was all that the Soviets were able to salvage from the nuclear abolition proposal after they had failed to receive any positive response from the Reagan Administration on the abolition package. New evidence suggests that President Reagan and Secretary of State George Shultz did in fact take it seriously but encountered staunch resistance from the U. S. government and its NATO Allies.[3]

For the Soviets, the INF Treaty was a big leap. They were entering into a hugely unequal agreement that was nevertheless seen as being in the Soviet national interest. This Treaty—which shook Soviet traditional military thinking, negotiating style, and several deep concepts of how international relations worked—was a logical result of the "new thinking" that had originated even before Gorbachev announced it publicly.

2. Changes in Soviet Military Thinking About War in Europe

Soviet nuclear thinking, at least among the senior military, had already changed dramatically before Gorbachev came to power in March 1985. We now know this from Soviet military journals and internal doctrinal studies;[4] from declassified Warsaw Pact files from across Central Europe;[5] from extensive interviews with high-level Soviet military planners by U. S. defense contractors (the BDM firm) working for the Office of Net Assessment at the Pentagon at the end of the Cold War;[6] from the series of "critical oral history" conferences looking at the collapse of détente during the Carter-Brezhnev period, which included senior Soviet veterans;[7] and from a remarkable oral history roundtable in 2006 focused on military planning.[8] Still missing, of course, is any access to the Soviet General Staff archives, a major gap for which the relatively full openness of Warsaw Pact files in former member countries only partially compensates.

3 See the Reagan Presidential Library documents published in: Savranskaya and Blanton, Gorbachev's Nuclear Initiative of January 1986.

4 See Joan Bird and John Bird (eds.), CIA Analysis of the Warsaw Pact Forces: The Importance of Clandestine Reporting, Central Intelligence Agency, Historical Collections Division, Langley, VA 2012.

5 Vojtech Mastny and Malcolm Byrne (eds.), A Cardboard Castle? An Inside History of the Warsaw Pact, 1955–1991, Budapest/New York 2005.

6 See William Burr and Svetlana Savranskaya, Previously Classified Interviews with Former Soviet Officials Reveal U. S. Strategic Intelligence Failure Over Decades, National Security Archive, Electronic Briefing Book No. 285, September 11, 2009, analyzing and publishing the BDM study, Soviet Intentions 1965–1985, Volumes 1 and 2, 1995, declassified in 2009, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb285/index.htm.

7 For the documents and transcript from each of these seminal conferences, see the National Security Archive, Carter-Brezhnev Project page, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/carterbrezhnev/.

8 Jan Hoffenaar and Christopher Findlay (eds.), Military Planning for European Theatre Conflict During the Cold War: An Oral History Roundtable, Stockholm, April 24–25, 2006, Zurich 2007.

Yet the main outlines of the story are clear, illuminating several key themes on the road to the INF Treaty. First, of course, was the interactivity between Soviet planning and U.S. and NATO planning, so that the Soviet decision to deploy the SS-20s, for example, occurred during extensive Western discussions about the necessity of modernizing nuclear forces, including the prospect of bringing in the neutron bomb.[9] Next was the power of the military–industrial complex in driving decisions without real consideration of the political consequences. The Deputy Head of the Military–Industrial Sector of the Central Committee apparatus, Vitaly Kataev (who would certainly know from his lengthy tenure in the Soviet Central Committee's Defense Industry Department), told the BDM interviewers that the SS-20 decision was made not at the political level, but by a troika of Central Committee Secretaries for Defense and the military-industrial complex with the Defense Minister alone. There was no expert input, but lots of push from the missile design bureaus and factories.[10] During this period, which started in 1976, the Soviet Defense Minister was not a combat commander, but a military industry manager. This was Dmitry Ustinov. On promotion to Minister he was quickly given the rank of General in April 1976, and was a Marshal by July, ultimately achieving the all-time record for Orders of Lenin—eleven of them. The Deputy Head of the General Staff, General Makhmut Gareev, commented, that that was when the armed forces had "been taken over by the enemy."[11]

Yet as early as the mid-1970s, Soviet General Staff war planners had come to the realization that a nuclear war in Europe would negate the Soviet/Warsaw Pact's advantages in conventional forces over NATO, and indeed make impossible any conventional war fighting along the lines of long-standing Pact plans, such as Czechoslovak forces reaching Dijon, France, in nine days.[12]

According to Colonel Vitaly Tsygichko,[13] key studies by the General Staff think-tank in 1968 and 1972 identified what David Rosenberg would later term the "smoking radiating ruin" problem—the absolutely inhospitable environment for conventional advance or counterattack in the context of an already radioactive battlefield in central Europe.[14] Conventional Soviet and Warsaw Pact doctrine had insisted on advances of 150 kilometers per day, but the studies showed that

9 Kristina Spohr, Germany and the Politics of the Neutron Bomb, 1975–1979, in: Diplomacy and Statecraft 21 (2010), pp. 259–285.

10 Kataev interview, BDM study, Soviet Intentions 1965–1985, Vol. 2, p. 98.

11 Gareev interview, BDM study, Soviet Intentions 1965–1985, Vol. 2, p. 75.

12 On the impact of the NATO Double-Track Decision on Warsaw Pact Strategic planning, see Oliver Bange, SS-20 and Pershing II: Weapon Systems and the Dynamization of East-West Relations, in: Christoph Becker-Schaum, Philipp Gassert, Martin Klimke, Wilfried Mausbach, and Marianne Zepp (eds.), The Nuclear Crisis. The Arms Race, Cold War Anxiety, and the German Peace Movement of the 1980s, New York/Oxford 2016, pp. 70–86.

13 Tsygichko, quoted in: Hoffenaar and Findlay (eds.), Military Planning for European Theatre Conflict, pp. 65–68.

14 See David Alan Rosenberg, 'A Smoking Radiating Ruin at the End of Two Hours': Documents on American Plans for Nuclear War with the Soviet Union, 1954–1955, International Security 6/3 (Winter 1981/1982), pp. 3–38.

in a nuclear battlefield, not even 50 kilometers was possible, and even then most of the soldiers would have died from radiation poisoning.[15]

Simultaneously, Soviet planners re-thought their requirements for tactical air support, basing this on analysis of Israeli operations in 1967 and 1973, and U.S. movements in Vietnam. They reached the conclusion that the conventional balance in Europe was maybe not so much in their favor, considering NATO's tactical air resources and likely use of tactical nuclear weapons. One CIA compilation based on clandestine reporting (including some from key Warsaw Pact assets like Colonel Ryszard Kuklinski in Poland who passed top secret Warsaw Pact documents to the U.S. throughout the 1970s) describes "intellectual ferment" in the 1970s and, even among the Soviet air operations planners, there was "a certain sense of desperation" despite major investments by 1980–81 in tactical air weaponry.[16]

As the former Soviet and Warsaw Pact officials participating in the 2006 Stockholm discussion on military planning described it, this new military understanding of the impossibility of winning a nuclear war was not allowed to surface as stated Soviet policy, given the primacy of Communist Party doctrine about winning any conflict with imperialism/capitalism. Formal military scenarios were therefore required to posit "victory" rather than state the more likely reality. The new military realizations did, however, develop in parallel with initiatives like Leonid Brezhnev's famous Tula speech in January 1977, which was intended as an olive branch for incoming U.S. President Jimmy Carter, but was largely ignored by a U.S. foreign policy elite preoccupied by internal debates ("Team B versus Team A") over Soviet intentions.[17] As Raymond Garthoff later commented, the U.S. was in real need of a Team C that might entertain the possibility of future Soviet collapse.[18]

The collapse of détente under Carter in 1979 and the rising sense of U.S.–Soviet crisis through to the end of 1983 restricted the new Soviet military analysis against nuclear war fighting to the confines of the General Staff planners, until

15 See the comments on the war plans as "science fiction" by Tadeusz Pioro, formerly of the Polish General Staff, in: Hoffenaar and Findlay (eds.), Military Planning for European Theatre Conflict, pp. 77 f. and 91 f., referring to a Polish plan of 1970 and the Czechoslovak plan of 1964; and the agreement by former Soviet general Aleksandr Liakhovskii, who served in the Main Operational Department of the General Staff, pp. 93 f.

16 Bird and Bird (eds.), CIA Analysis of the Warsaw Pact Forces, p. 35.

17 See the discussion of the Tula speech, in: Anna Melyakova and Svetlana Savranskaya (eds.), Anatoly S. Chernyaev Diary, 1977, National Security Archive, Electronic Briefing Book No. 594, May 25, 2017, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2017-05-25/anatoly-s-chernyaev-diary-1977. Team B, a group of conservatives appointed by CIA director George H.W. Bush in 1976 to question CIA assumptions, argued that the standard CIA analysis (Team A) of rough strategic parity between the U.S. and the USSR was wrong, and that the Soviets sought and were achieving nuclear superiority.

18 See the discussion in Raymond Garthoff, A Journey Through the Cold War: A Memoir of Containment and Coexistence, Washington, D.C. 2001, pp. 325–337, the Team C reference is on p. 333.

the coming of Gorbachev in March 1985. Up to that point, the extraordinary incapacity of Soviet leadership, in a highly centralized system, from the decrepit Brezhnev to the sick Andropov to the dying Chernenko, meant only increased paranoia and inertia.

Again, interaction with U.S. planning had a significant impact. For example, in August 1980, there was front page U.S. coverage of leaks of a new Presidential Directive (PD-59) exposing Carter's White House planning for flexible nuclear war options, in place of what National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski derogatorily called "the spasm plan" of the SIOP (the Single Integrated Operational Plan).[19] Brzezinski persuaded Carter that having only a spasm plan actually increased the risk of nuclear war—in stark contrast, say, to President Eisenhower in the 1950s, who concluded the opposite, that having limited strike options encouraged their use and risked escalation.[20]

The front pages certainly caught Soviet attention. The long-time General Staff war planner Colonel General Adrian Danilevich, for example, told the BDM interviewers in 1992 that "you confused us terribly" with the discussion of limited nuclear strike options which would have "asymmetrical consequences," since the theater would obviously be limited to Europe or the European territory of the Soviet Union.[21] Also confused was the U.S. Secretary of State, Edmund Muskie, who found out about PD-59 from the newspapers. His top aide on Soviet matters, Marshall Shulman, warned that the reported emphasis on leadership and C3I (command, control, communications and intelligence) targets could "only increase Soviet perceptions of vulnerability" and introduce "further instability in the strategic balance."[22]

The Pentagon official who commissioned the BDM interviews, Andy Marshall, had a different view. The Director of the Pentagon's Office of Net Assessment—nicknamed "Yoda" after the wise and often inscrutable movie character in *Star Wars*—believed that PD-59 was a justified reaction to the Defense Intelligence Agency findings that the Soviets had built so many bunkers for leadership that they must be planning nuclear war fighting. So "the objective was to clarify and personalize somewhat the danger of warfare and nuclear use to Soviet decision makers."[23]

19 See Michael Getler, Carter Directive Modifies Strategy for a Nuclear War, in: Washington Post, August 6, 1980, p. A1.

20 See William Burr, Jimmy Carter's Controversial Nuclear Targeting Directive PD-59 Declassified, National Security Archive, Electronic Briefing Book No. 390, September 14, 2012, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb390/.

21 Danilevich interview, BDM study, Soviet Intentions 1965–1985, Vol. 2, pp. 37, 40.

22 See Document 17, Shulman to Muskie, September 2, 1980, in: William Burr, Jimmy Carter's Controversial Nuclear Targeting Directive PD-59 Declassified, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb390/.

23 Marshall interview, BDM study, Soviet Intentions 1965–1985, Vol. 2, pp. 118f.

3. Gorbachev and Nuclear Learning

A new stage in U.S.–Soviet arms control negotiations started with Gorbachev's selection as General Secretary in Moscow. Though not a radical reformer from the start, Gorbachev was committed to stopping the arms race, which he saw as both dangerous for humankind and devastating for the Soviet economy. Although this view was widely shared within the more progressive military and political leadership, the traditional Soviet thinking and negotiating style focused on numerical equality in armaments, especially where reductions were concerned. The Reagan Administration did not help either. As the longtime Soviet Ambassador to the U.S., Anatoly Dobrynin, pointed out in his memoirs, "Reagan's belligerence backfired:" it was producing results that were "just the opposite of the one intended by Washington."[24] Rather than come up with any new proposals, the Soviet side had dug in for a long confrontation, and denounced U.S. militarism. In this situation, Gorbachev needed a breakthrough to get out of the vicious cycle.

His own background and his open-minded approach to entrenched problems and learning helped Gorbachev leap from total stalemate in arms control negotiations, symbolized by the Soviet walkout from the Geneva talks in the fall of 1983, to his eventual agreement to a Treaty with highly asymmetrical cuts. Gorbachev and his supporters came to see the INF Treaty as being in the interest of the Soviet Union and as a first step toward universal nuclear disarmament. Gorbachev had very little prior experience with arms control but, as Janice Gross Stein showed in her early research, he "learned in part from those in the Soviet Union who had been thinking about security for a long time, in part from the meetings with senior officials abroad, and in part through the trial-and-error experimentation that he and his colleagues initiated. […] Over time, learning from others and from behavior became self-reinforcing and self-amplifying."[25] The Soviet leader elevated his close allies like Alexander Yakovlev, Eduard Shevardnadze, and Anatoly Chernyaev to key positions in the Soviet Party apparatus. Essentially, he used the power of the office of General Secretary to enable their ideas to come to the fore and to change policy.[26]

Gorbachev also learned by interacting with foreign leaders, whom he eventually came to perceive as his main interlocutors on arms control and most foreign policy issues. Importantly, starting from the meeting in Geneva, he also came to understand, that Reagan did not merely represent the interests of the

24 Anatoly Dobrynin, In Confidence. Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents (1962–1986), New York 1995, p. 545.

25 Janice Gross Stein, Political Learning by Doing: Gorbachev as Uncommitted Thinker and Motivated Learner, in: International Organization 42/2 (Spring 1994), p. 180.

26 See the discussion on the power of appointments and the power of ideas in the groundbreaking early book by British political scientist Archie Brown, The Gorbachev Factor, Oxford 1996, and in Robert English, Russia and the Idea of the West, New York 2000.

military–industrial complex, but that he represented his electorate and the real interests of U.S. citizens—and that he was also constrained by them. The most important understanding, however, was the meeting of two minds, each believing that nuclear weapons could be completely eliminated, which took place between the two leaders in Geneva and then, especially, Reykjavik

4. Gorbachev's Nuclear Initiative of January 1986

According to first-hand accounts by the top officials who developed the proposal, the history of the Soviet abolition program dates back to the spring of 1985. Soon after Gorbachev came to power in March of that year, the Chief of General Staff, Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev, first revealed to Deputy Foreign Minister Georgy Kornienko that he and the head of the Legal and Treaty Department of General Staff, General Nikolai Chervov, along with military experts from the General Staff, were secretly preparing a detailed program of total elimination of nuclear weapons. Kornienko supported the idea, and Akhromeyev ordered selected military experts to study the issues and prepare a draft. This was basically ready by mid-summer 1985. Very few people knew about the program until the end of that year, however. Although the program was ready, its authors were looking for an occasion to present it to the top leadership when it would have most chance of being accepted by the Soviet leaders, and might be received favorably by the United States. Soviet arms control expert General Viktor Starodubov writes in his memoir that the planners felt the time was right to present it to Gorbachev after his meeting with Reagan in Geneva.[27]

Akhromeyev first reported the plan to Minister of Defense Sergey Sokolov at the end of December 1985, and Kornienko took the draft to Foreign Minister Shevardnadze.[28] General Chervov was instructed to take the program to Gorbachev, who was vacationing in Crimea. The military's hunch proved right. After discovering that Reagan was an abolitionist in Geneva, Gorbachev was enthusiastic about making a bold proposal, and the fact that the program was ready made it all the more practical. He approved it and presented it to the Politburo in early January 1986. Not everybody was enthusiastic about the program. Interestingly, the "new thinkers" around Gorbachev, including Chernyaev, later came to distrust it, because it originated from the General Staff and was embraced by "old thinkers" like Kornienko. But at the time, Chernyaev was very impressed with Gorbachev's public statement. On January 18, 1986, he wrote in his diary: "Gorbachev's statement. It seems he [has] really decided to end the arms race at all costs. He is going for that very 'risk,' in which he has boldly recognized the absence of risk,

27 Viktor Starodubov, Ot razoruzheniya k kapitulyatsii (From Disarmament to Capitulation), Moscow 2007, pp. 261 f. See also Akhromeyev and Kornienko, Glazamy marshala y diplomata, Chapter 3.

28 Ibid.

because no one will attack us even if we disarm totally. And in order to revive the country and set it on a steady track, it is necessary to free it from the burden of the arms race, which is depleting more than just economics."[29] But later, in his memoirs, Chernyaev was skeptical about the proposal and thought it was mainly propaganda by the military. So was it just propaganda, or was it the first serious step toward universal disarmament?

Rather transparently, the Akhromeyev proposal meant to retain Soviet conventional superiority and get rid of the West's European nuclear weapons—particularly the Pershing II deployed in late 1983, which, to the Soviets, looked like the ultimate decapitation weapon. American specialists, including Ambassador Jack Matlock and CIA analyst Douglas MacEachin, deprecated this possibility, basing their calculations on lower assessments of range and accuracy, but they were never believed by the Soviets, including Gorbachev, who, in one Summit preparatory session, described the Pershing IIs as "a gun pressed to our temple."[30] Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin remarked in his memoirs that "it would not be honest to deny that Gorbachev's proclamation carried elements of propaganda." Nevertheless, the strategic thinking was exactly what Gorbachev had in mind: bringing the Cold War to an end.[31]

According to Gorbachev's spokesman and biographer, Andrei Grachev, the drafters of the program envisioned it in terms somewhat similar to those of the U.S. drafters of Reagan's "zero option" INF solution of 1981. They thought that the chances of the U.S. side accepting abolition were close to zero, but that making the proposal would provide strong negotiating grounds as well as propaganda points for their own side. General Starodubov later claimed that Akhromeyev's reasoning was that "if by any chance the Americans accepted the idea, the Soviet side would be able to make full use of its advantage in conventional weapons."[32] Gorbachev, however, saw the program differently. For him, it was an opportunity to advance the U.S.–Soviet arms control discussion that had stalled after Geneva with a bold, radical stroke. He thought it would be acceptable to Reagan because of his strongly expressed belief in a nuclear-free world. Also, according to Grachev, by accepting an initiative drafted by Akhromeyev and Kornienko, Gorbachev, was able to "trap" his own military into supporting very deep cuts in armaments across the board.[33]

29 The Diary of Anatoly Chernyaev 1986. National Security Archive, Electronic Briefing Book No. 220, May 25, 2007, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB220/Chernyaev_1986.pdf, pp. 6 f.

30 See Svetlana Savranskaya and Thomas Blanton (eds.), The Last Superpower Summits. Gorbachev, Reagan, and Bush. Conversations that Ended the Cold War, Budapest/New York 2016, p. 163.

31 Dobrynin, In Confidence, p. 597.

32 Starodubov, Ot razoruzheniya k kapitulyatsii, pp. 261–262. See also Akhromeyev and Kornienko, Glazamy marshala y diplomata, Chapter 3.

33 Andrei Grachev, Gorbachev's Gamble. Soviet Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War, Cambridge 2008, p. 69.

The program envisioned three stages. The first stage was a 50 per cent reduction of strategic nuclear weapons (to be achieved over 5 to 8 years) and an agreement to eliminate all medium-range nuclear weapons in Europe. In the second stage, starting in 1990, Britain, France and China would join the process by freezing their arsenals, and all nuclear powers would eliminate their tactical weapons and ban nuclear testing. In the third stage, "starting in 1995, liquidation of all still remaining nuclear weapons [would be] completed."[34] Other important elements of the Soviet program were a ban on space weapons, strict adherence to the ABM Treaty, and a comprehensive nuclear testing ban.

Because of the lack of immediate response, Gorbachev always believed that his program was never taken seriously in the West, and had simply been dismissed as propaganda. For example, on April 4, 1986, he complained to a visiting delegation of U. S. congressmen that "the United States decided to hide behind the opinions of its Allies—West European countries and Japan, otherwise, it would be hard for them to justify their negative position […]. We are often accused of making propaganda proposals. Well, if it is propaganda, then why not catch Gorbachev at his word, why not test his intentions by accepting our proposal?"[35]

However, the highest level declassified U. S. documents show that Reagan took the abolition proposal very seriously (as few others in the U. S. government did) and that he forced through an extensive policy process including multiple consultations with Allies (who, except for Helmut Kohl, almost unanimously opposed any such abolition). On January 15, 1986, after a long meeting with Secretary of State George Shultz and National Security Adviser John Poindexter, Reagan wrote in his diary: "we'd be hard put to explain how we could turn it down." On February 3, after a senior National Security Planning Group meeting, Reagan wrote, "Some wanted to tag it as publicity stunt. I said no. Let's say we share their overall goals & now want to work out the details. If it is a publicity stunt it will be revealed by them."[36]

Shultz told the State Department's senior group for arms control on January 17, 1986:

> I know that many of you and others around here oppose the objective of eliminating nuclear weapons. You have tried your ideas out in front of the president from the outset, and I have pointed out the dangers too. The president of the United States doesn't agree with you, and he has said so on several very public occasions both before and since the last election. He thinks it's a hell of a good idea. And it's a political hot button. We need to work on what a world without nuclear weapons would mean to us and what additional steps would have to accompany such a dramatic change. The president has wanted all along to get rid of nuclear weapons. The British, French, Dutch, Belgians, and all of you

34 Gorbachev Letter to Reagan, January 14, 1986, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=3131897-Document-01-General-Secretary-Mikhail-Gorbachev.

35 See Savranskaya and Blanton, Gorbachev's Nuclear Initiative of January 1986, Doc. 22.

36 Douglas Brinkley (ed.), The Reagan Diaries, Vol. II: November 1985–January 1989, New York 2009, pp. 562, 568.

in the Washington arms control community are trying to talk him out of it. The idea can potentially be a plus for us: the Soviet Union is a superpower only because it is a nuclear and ballistic missile superpower.[37]

In the end, the Reagan Administration did not dismiss the abolition proposal as propaganda, but did come to the conclusion that it was not ready for a program of such a scope. The opposition of the Allies and what senior negotiator Paul Nitze called the "free-for-all" battle between Shultz's State Department and Caspar Weinberger's Pentagon ultimately deterred Reagan from expressing his fulsome support, and left Gorbachev fuming that Washington had dissed him. Reagan's letter to Gorbachev of February 22, 1986 engaged only with the INF issue and left the rest out.[38] That became a pattern. At least as of spring 1986, the two ships had passed in the night, even though, at the highest level, both actually shared a commitment to getting rid of nuclear weapons. The astute Congressman Dante Fascell, long-time Chair of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, provided a coda for this dynamic when he met with Gorbachev in Moscow in April 1986, before the Iran–Contra scandal plunged the Reagan Administration into total dysfunction that fall. Fascell said of the nuclear abolition proposal: "The reality is such that the United States is not ready, for some reason—either political or military, I don't know—they are not capable to make the big leap, which you are calling for, at this time."[39]

Although the Soviet side was dissatisfied with the U.S. response, frequent meetings and interactions pushed both sides to work harder on negotiating positions and think about deep disarmament for the next Summit. In fact, active Soviet diplomacy and the American effort to use the opportunities offered by Gorbachev resulted in a comprehensive review of the entirety of the U.S. arms control policy and long-term nuclear strategy in preparation, a process which continued throughout the spring and summer of 1986. Meanwhile, the Reagan Administration actively engaged the Soviets in all negotiating formats. As a result, the Soviets accepted the U.S. "zero option" on INF, agreed to radical verification measures, and started internal discussions on dramatic reductions in conventional weapons. Gorbachev's January 1986 initiative and the U.S. response laid the first paver on the road to the most dramatic summit in U.S.–Soviet history, the one at Reykjavik in October 1986, which, despite its failure, prepared the ground for the INF Treaty signed in 1987.

37 George P. Shultz, Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State. New York 1993, p. 701. See also M. Charles Hill Papers, Ronald Reagan Library, RAC Box 3, Spiral Notebook (01/06/86–01/23/86).

38 For Reagan's letter see Savranskaya and Blanton, Gorbachev's Nuclear Initiative of January 1986, Doc. 18.

39 See ibid., Doc. 22.

5. De-linking as a Political Initiative

At Reykjavik, the Soviet side agreed to leave the British and French nuclear weapons out of the equation, and accepted the idea of cuts or even a complete elimination of medium-range ballistic missiles in the Asian portion of the USSR. This significant and unanticipated change in their position in effect meant a complete acceptance of the original U.S. proposal for a "zero option." However, the Ministry of Defense—represented by Akhromeyev—had agreed to that solution at Reykjavik only as part of a compromise that firmly linked the intermediate-range weapons with strategic and space issues, including adherence to the ABM Treaty and limits on SDI, all to be negotiated as one package.[40] The U.S. side rejected such linkage, and argued for negotiating INF as a separate agreement. Therefore, to make progress towards their top priority—a comprehensive START treaty that would cut strategic arms in half across the strategic triad while Reagan was still President—Gorbachev and his aides realized they would have to revisit the package deal and focus on just those parts, such as INF, where agreement was more likely.

Aiding this realization, by early 1987 there was a significant change in the perception of SDI on the part of Gorbachev and his close associates. Fear of SDI as a potential first strike weapon from space, which Gorbachev had tried to explain to Reagan over and over again at Geneva and Reykjavik, had by now faded. Part of this change was due to the influence of progressive Soviet scientists, like the academicians Evgeny Velikhov and Roald Sagdeev, who did not believe in the technological feasibility of the SDI concept. Perhaps even more important was that the perception of threat from the United States was giving way to a new sense of trust and productive cooperation, emerging from the experience of the two previous Summits. This new understanding promised important payoffs in the future.

In January 1987, Gorbachev pushed on two fronts at once to advance *Perestroika*. Domestically, the January Central Committee Plenum concentrated on political reform and democratization and scheduled a CPSU conference to address those issues for the summer of 1988. In foreign policy, to preserve and strengthen the momentum of Reykjavik, Gorbachev convened an international forum which had the title "For a Nuclear-Free World, for the Survival of Humanity." This forum focused on the threat of nuclear weapons and the need for deep reductions as a step towards their complete elimination. Academician Andrei Sakharov, recently released from exile, was permitted to speak at the forum.

40 Sovetsko-Amerikanskaya vstrecha na vysshem urovne, Reikjavik, 11–12 Oktyabrya 1986 goda (Transcript of the Soviet-American Summit. Reykjavik, October 11–12, 1986. Meeting of the working group of experts on military issues), Information about the position of the Defense Ministry provided by Colonel-General Chervov in an interview, Moscow, June 15, 1996.

Along with many other participants, he called for swift progress on arms control, even if this meant negotiating on INF separately.[41] Sakharov also met privately with two U.S. scientists and talked about the need to untie the strategic arms control package and to stop allowing SDI to be the major stumbling block in the negotiations. Gorbachev had called on his Politburo members to "stop being afraid of SDI" as early as March 1986, but it took him almost a year to follow his own advice. Untying the arms control package was a very sensitive political issue, since it amounted to a unilateral concession, and it took a great deal of internal discussion and an impassioned memorandum from Yakovlev, on February 25, 1987, for Gorbachev to make the decision.[42]

Ironically, the argument that persuaded Gorbachev alluded mainly to the U.S. domestic political agenda. Yakovlev argued that considering the strength of the right wing in the Republican Party and the upcoming Presidential elections, if Gorbachev was counting on signing a major strategic arms control treaty while Reagan was still in power, he had to sign a separate INF accord as soon as possible. On February 26, 1987, the Politburo ratified the decision to untie the package as a means to jumpstart negotiations, and to invite George Shultz to Moscow in April. Gorbachev made the formal announcement on February 28.[43] It was received with concern among the Soviet military, who viewed it as caving in to Reagan's demands, but nobody, at first, wanted to openly oppose the General Secretary.[44]

At this point, preparations for a successful INF Summit became the foreign policy priority of the Soviet leadership. Just as in the period before Reykjavik, Gorbachev understood that he had to take serious steps to accommodate U.S. interests, perhaps even invoking the hated word "concessions." The test of seriousness would come during the visit by Shultz in April 1987. In preparation, in late March the Soviets announced new radical proposals on verification, basically introducing the principle of "anytime anywhere," which went well beyond what the U.S. side was proposing or willing to accept at the time. April brought with it even more rethinking Shultz's trip were Margaret Thatcher's visit to Moscow and Gorbachev's visit to Prague. During Thatcher's stay, the British Prime Minister accused the Soviet leader of exporting Communism to third world countries and explained to him how the Soviet military posture in Europe, combined with

41 Frances FitzGerald, Way Out There In the Blue. Reagan, Star Wars and the End of the Cold War, New York 2000, p. 409–411, goes so far as to credit Sakharov's speech at the forum with "breaking the spell" of the tied package, but the internal Gorbachev documents point to other key players in the ultimate decision.

42 Alexander Yakovlev memorandum to Gorbachev, February 25, 1987 in: Savranskaya and Blanton (eds.), Last Superpower Summits, pp. 269–277.

43 For this decision see Elizabeth C. Charles, Gorbachev and the Decision to Decouple the Arms Control Package: How the Breakdown of the Reykjavik Summit Led to the Elimination of the Euromissiles, in: Leopoldo Nuti, Frédéric Bozo, Marie Pierre Rey, and Bernd Rother (eds.), The Euromissile Crisis and the End of the Cold War, Washington, D.C./Stanford, CA 2015, pp. 66–84.

44 Savranskaya Interview with General-Colonel Anatoly Gribkov, Moscow, November 13, 1996.

memories of 1956 and 1968, conveyed a sense of threat to Europeans.[45] Gorbachev was moved by her explanation and mentioned it repeatedly in Politburo discussions of Soviet and the Warsaw Pact military doctrine. The Prague visit in April 10, 1987 helped Gorbachev realize that soon he would have to confront major changes in Eastern Europe and the issue of Soviet troops stationed there. In a way these two visits helped him approach negotiations with Shultz in a more decisive and even radical mode.

6. Concessions and the Soviet Military

The most controversial development in the entire INF negotiations was the Soviet decision to consider the SS-23/Oka tactical missile with a tested range of 400 km (well under the 500 km stipulated by the INF Treaty) as an item that should nonetheless be covered by the Treaty. The inclusion of Oka stirred up a major controversy between Gorbachev and Shevardnadze on one side and the Soviet military on the other, and by the fall of 1987 had led to the first real break between the political and the military leadership. Gorbachev and Shevardnadze acted against the strong opposition of the military, including that of Defense Minister Marshal Sokolov and of Akhromeyev, who was Gorbachev's major supporter in the military and the author of many disarmament initiatives himself.

During his talk with Shultz on April 13, Shevardnadze agreed in principle on the inclusion of the shorter-range missiles in the systems counted under the INF Treaty. This Soviet concession was confirmed by Gorbachev during his meeting with the Secretary of State the following day. Gorbachev was under pressure from Shultz, who insisted that if the Soviet Union did not count the SS-23 as having a range of more than 500 kilometers, then the United States would have to deploy similar systems in Europe.[46] Throughout the meeting Gorbachev repeatedly accused the American side of forcing the Soviet side to make more concessions and not treating the Soviet Union as a great power, to which Shultz made his famous response: "I'm weeping for you."[47]

It was only possible to make the concession on Oka by sidestepping the military and by isolating them from the decision-making. According to Akhromeyev and Kornienko, Gorbachev and Shevardnadze intentionally did not invite the Marshal, who would normally be present at all the meetings at which INF issues were discussed, as a top Soviet arms control negotiator. He was invited to the

45 Gorbachev-Thatcher Memorandum of Conversation, March 30, 1987, in: Svetlana Savranskaya and Tom Blanton (eds.), The Thatcher-Gorbachev Conversations, National Security Archive, Electronic Briefing Book No. 422, April 12, 2013, Doc. 1, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB422/docs/Doc%201%201987-03-30%20Gorbachev-Thatcher%20memcon.pdf.

46 Memorandum of Conversation between M. S. Gorbachev and G. Shultz, April 14, 1987, in: Savranskaya and Blanton, (eds.), Last Superpower Summits, pp. 278–284.

47 Shultz, Turmoil and Triumph, p. 894.

meeting immediately *after* the concession was made, and the talk turned to the unresolved issues of START. The Marshal was not informed of the Oka decision, but in the next day's press coverage it appeared as if he was present during the entire meeting and therefore must have approved the inclusion of the SS-23.[48]

This, in fact, is exactly the impression Shevardnadze later gave in his memoirs, responding to criticism of his "concessionary position" on INF, and on the Oka missile in particular:

Why don't the deputies from the Soyuz Group for example, ask not just me, as they are so zealously doing, but Marshal S. F. Akhromeyev, a man I respect, about the reasons for dismantling the Oka Missile Compound? He sat next to the General Secretary during the negotiations about this class of weapons. Surely a Marshal would know much better than I, who gave their consent to this and why, as he would also know that without the consent of the Minister of Defense and the Chief of the General Staff such a decision would not have been made.[49]

Transcripts of the meetings of Shevardnadze with Shultz on April 13, and of Gorbachev with Shultz on April 14, show that Akhromeyev did not participate in, or even attend the discussion about shorter-range missiles. Only Gorbachev, Shevardnadze, and Dobrynin were present at the first part of the meeting. After Akhromeyev arrived at the Kremlin to participate in the meeting on April 14, not a single word was said about the shorter-range systems, and the discussion moved on to strategic offensive weapons. In fact, the final position agreed to by the political leadership was not coordinated with either the Defense Minister or the Chief of General Staff, precisely because they were on record as strongly opposing it.

As time went on, opposition to including Oka in the Treaty grew stronger, and the idea of making such a concession to the United States was regarded by some as treason. It was a highly technological new weapon, which had only recently been deployed and was both a source of pride to the military and could be a strong bargaining chip for diplomats. Marshal Sokolov openly criticized the decision in the Central Committee building, calling it a "state crime" and comparing it to Khrushchev's "destruction of the navy and the aviation."[50] At that point, events intervened in a bizarre way, when a West German amateur pilot named Mathias Rust flew a single-engine Cessna across hundreds of miles of Soviet airspace, landing in the middle of downtown Moscow (close enough to taxi over to Red Square). This inexplicable breach of Soviet air defenses gave Gorbachev an opening to remove members of the top military brass who opposed new thinking and were especially against the new INF Treaty. Sokolov was replaced by the more loyal and less ambitious Dmitry Yazov at the end of May 1987.

48 Akhromeev and Kornienko, Glazami Marshala i Diplomata, pp. 131–133. More detailed information on the inner politics of the SS-23 concession was given to Savranskaya by Georgy Kornienko, Interviews, Moscow, June 13, and June 28, 1996.

49 Eduard Shevardnadze, The Future Belongs to Freedom, New York 1991, pp. 96 f.

50 Quoted in Grachev, Gorbachev's Gamble, p. 96.

Even though he made the decision to include shorter-range weapons in April, Gorbachev announced it to the Politburo only on July 9, after the decision by Kohl that the German Pershing IA missiles would be eliminated. In his statement Gorbachev presented it as a major step toward "clearing Europe from nuclear weapons" and called for adding a "third zero"—eliminating *all* tactical nuclear weapons in Europe.[51] The Soviet Union issued a formal announcement of a global double zero platform—going beyond the initial Reagan initiative of 1981. Intermediate-range and shorter-range missiles would be eliminated both in Europe and in Asia. Thereby, a whole class of nuclear weapons would be destroyed for the first time in nuclear history—and under conditions of the strictest verification.

According to Akhromeyev, Shevardnazde's disregard of the position of the Defense Ministry on Oka resulted in the "first serious crack" between the Defense Ministry and Foreign Minister Shevardnadze. All attempts by the military to return to the issue of shorter-range missiles in the summer and fall 1987 were sidelined by threats of party disciplinary measures. This is how Akhromeyev describes it his memoirs:

> Efforts by the military to return to the issue of Oka before the treaty was signed were immediately thwarted using all means, including threats of applying party disciplinary measures to servicemen who participated in the negotiations and who criticized this misstep at party meetings. It finally ended by the military simply having to retreat literally a week before the Washington summit, where the INF Treaty was going to be signed, and only then our internal decision about including the missile SS-23 in that Treaty.[52]

According to advisers close to Akhromeyev, the political leadership eventually forced the military leadership to accept the position that Gorbachev had agreed to with Shultz. They did so only after six months of pressure, and some never signed the agreement.[53] The Soviet Union would now have to destroy 239 SS-23/Oka missiles completely—a blow against the military's prestige. On top of this, Oka was expensive to destroy.

Although the story of Oka is quite often told in Russian military and political memoirs, documents that have become available recently put the narrative in a somewhat different light. Oka was tested only for the range of 400 km, but the developers of the system and a small circle of top military knew very well that it could fly farther than that. On October 16, 1987, on the eve of Shultz's trip to Moscow to finalize the draft Treaty and to set the dates for the Summit, the Five—the Soviet main decision-making body on military–industrial and arms control issues—gathered for its regular meeting, chaired by Lev Zaikov. The entire agenda was devoted to INF issues. Item 2 on the agenda read, "About

51 Notes of a CC CPSU Politburo Session, July 9, 1987, translated and published in Savranskaya and Blanton (eds.), Last Superpower Summits, p. 289.

52 Grachev, Gorbachev's Gamble, p. 133.

53 Savranskaya Interview with Georgy Kornienko, May 18, 1996.

expediency of presenting the American side with factual [information about] the range of the Oka missile," and item 3 read, "About providing the delegation data on our INF and shorter-range missiles (RMD [*rakety men'shey dal'nosti*]) for inclusion in the Memorandum." The presenter of both items was Akhromeyev. The reference information attached to the agenda (which is in the Vitaly Kataev papers collection at the Hoover Institution) shows that the "factual" capability of Oka was up to 600 km, with modification Oka-U. The drafters suggested that the Soviet side should not inform the U.S. side about the actual range, and insisted that Oka be classified as having a 400 km range (as tested). Since the concession had already been made, the Soviet side should propose to expand the parameters of the treaty to include all systems with the range 400–1,000 in the shorter-range category.[54] If the U.S. side agreed to it, the new range would cover the Lance-2 missile and would remove the issue of upgrades to those missiles, which indeed became a problem for the Soviets in the spring of 1989.

Reverberations about the way the INF Treaty was negotiated and the lack of consultation between the military and the political leadership continued throughout the fall and even after the signing of the Treaty. On December 29, the Party organization of the Legal and Treaty Department of the General Staff held a meeting, which allowed participants to air their hurt feelings and concerns about the process of negotiation and the concessions made in the INF Treaty. Although the report, signed by Zaikov, Chebrikov, Shevardnadze, Yazov and Dobrynin, is overall positive in tone, it mentions problems of communication between ministries, significant concessions given by the Soviet side, and the fact that Akhromeyev talked with members of the Legal and Treaty Department about the issues raised at the meeting.[55]

7. Conclusion—The Most Important Treaty

Gorbachev and Reagan never achieved their dream of universal nuclear disarmament. They were unable to sign the START Treaty while Reagan was in office. Though many of their dreams did not materialize, the INF Treaty stands as a towering achievement—a breakthrough in scope and an agreement bringing in an unprecedented model of verification.

Under the Treaty, the Soviet Union destroyed 889 of its intermediate-range missiles and 957 shorter-range missiles, while the U.S. destroyed 677 and 169 respectively. From the point of view of Gorbachev's supporters in the military, those the U.S. agreed to scrap were the missiles with a very short flight time to targets in the Soviet Union, which made them the most dangerous in starting off

54 Plan rassmotreniya voprosov na soveschanii u tov. Zaikova L.N. October 16, 1987, Kataev Papers Collection, Hoover Institution, Box 13, Folder 29.

55 Memorandum to Gorbachev, M.S. from Zaikov, Chebrikov, Shevardnadze, Yazov and Dobrynin, February 17, 1988, Kataev Papers Collection, Box 13, folder 28.

possible escalation to a general nuclear war. These weapons were perceived as the most threatening, and that was why the Soviet military supported the Treaty, even though there was significant opposition among them to the inclusion of shorter-range weapons.

The Treaty included remarkably extensive and intrusive verification inspection and monitoring arrangements, based on the "any time and place" proposal of March 1987, which, to the Americans' surprise, was accepted by the Soviets; and the documents show that the Soviets were willing to go even beyond the American position in the depth of the verification regime. The new Soviet position on verification not only removed the hurdle that seemed insurmountable, but according to the then U. S. Ambassador to the USSR, Jack Matlock, it became a symbol of the new trust developing in U. S.–Soviet relations, which made the Treaty and further progress on arms control possible.

To understand why the Soviet leadership agreed to such unequal cuts and such uncharacteristic transparency, we have to be aware of what the Soviets saw in this Treaty—a first step on the road to a nuclear-free world and also a first step to a Soviet-American partnership to end the Cold War and fundamentally change the international system itself.