

# Institute for Defense & Disarmament Studies

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## The Prospects for Arms Control and Disarmament: A View from Moscow

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In December 1981 I spent ten days in Moscow talking to arms control experts, on a trip sponsored by the American Friends Service Committee (Philadelphia) and the USSR-USA Friendship Society (Moscow).

I discussed many topics that bear on disarmament, including:  
Nuclear Arms:

- \*The future of the nuclear arms race; the prospects for strategic and theater nuclear arms limitation; and the US campaign for a bilateral, US-Soviet nuclear-weapon freeze;

### Conventional Arms:

- \*Soviet conflicts with other socialist countries, including those of Eastern Europe, China, and Afghanistan;

- \*The Madrid talks on Security and Cooperation in Europe;

- \*Soviet views on a just settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict; and

- \*A proposal for a non-intervention regime, which would ban direct military intervention by the USA, USSR, and other countries of the 'northern hemisphere' in conflicts in developing countries.

During the course of the visit, in a total of 30 separate meetings, I met with leading individuals from the following organizations:

### GOVERNMENT:

Foreign Ministry, Department of International Organizations

### PRESS:

Izvestia

APN (Novosti Press Agency)

## TASS

## ACADEMY OF SCIENCES:

Institute for World Economics and International Relations (IMEMO):  
 International Relations Department  
 International Organizations Department

## Institute for USA and Canada Studies:

Scientific Secretary  
 Disarmament and Military Policy Department  
 Foreign Policy Department  
 Domestic Policy Department  
 Domestic Economic Department  
 Ideology Department

## Institute for the Economics of the World Socialist System:

International Relations Department

## Institute for State and Law:

International Law Section

## Institute of Oriental Studies:

International Research Department

## NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS:

Soviet Peace Fund  
 Soviet Peace Committee  
 Disarmament Commission, Soviet Peace Committee  
 Soviet Committee for European Security & Cooperation  
 Union of Soviet Friendship Societies  
 Board of the USSR-USA Society

Because the talks were small and informal, I had the opportunity to hear a wide range of personal views. The remainder of this article attempts to summarize the most important and most commonly-expressed views.

## VIEWS ON NUCLEAR ARMS CONTROL

I found a uniform resignation about the prospects for nuclear arms control in the 1980s. This was based on many points:

1. The Reagan Administration's rejection of SALT II and of nuclear arms control generally.
2. The Carter/Brown (Presidential Directive 59) and Reagan/Weinberger explicit support of doctrines of limited nuclear warfare.
3. The associated planned procurement of nuclear-weapon systems suitable for pre-emptive, counterforce attacks, for space warfare, and



for maintaining command, control and communications during extended nuclear exchanges.

4. The planned production of long-range, ground- and sea-launched cruise missiles, which the SALT II protocol had precluded until the end of 1981, with the goal of providing time to negotiate a permanent ban.

5. The planned deployment of Pershing II ballistic missiles in West Germany, within 10 minutes' range of targets in the USSR.

Scholars at both IMEMO and the USA Institute, the two main arms control research centers, expressed surprise that the US government has openly endorsed the idea of trying to fight and win nuclear wars. They argued that this explicit, official blessing would cultivate a mentality of accepting nuclear war and therefore make it more likely.

Several experts said that the introduction of long-range cruise missiles would make arms control agreements much more difficult, by making satellite verification of agreements impossible. Referring to both cruise missile production and the lack of a strategic arms control agreement, one high official said "Time is running out". Another analyst commented that the stationing of the Pershing II in West Germany, within a few minutes' range of Soviet command and control centers, would oblige the USSR to place its nuclear missiles in an "automated" response status. "What other alternative will we have?" he questioned. I found this remark, made by a responsible, influential analyst, the single most frightening one on the entire visit.

As I had been led to believe from talks with US and Soviet officials in the USA, it seems that the USSR (like the USA) will continue to abide by the terms of the SALT II treaty, except that it will not reduce the total number of strategic bombers and missiles from the present 2500 to 2400 (as would be required within six months of ratification) or 2250 (as required in the treaty by the end of 1981). In other words, the Soviets will adhere to the SALT II sublimits on MIRVed ICBMs, MIRVed ICBMs plus SLBMs, and large ICBMs.

The Soviets seemed to expect the initiation of new strategic arms talks (the 'START' strategic arms reduction talks) to be delayed, as has since been confirmed by the Reagan administration. They expressed no views on what might be accomplished by the START talks, appearing to believe that, whenever it begins, the new round of strategic talks would not lead to a new agreement any time soon.

There was more optimism about the Geneva talks, then just beginning, on Intermediate-range (Europe-based) Nuclear Forces. In virtually every meeting, I was asked about the prospects for these talks from the US point of view. When I said that Reagan's zero option and Brezhnev's position (outlined in a Der Spiegel interview) seemed far apart, Soviet experts referred to the zero option as a

proposal for "bilateral negotiation of unilateral disarmament". Pointing to the several offers made to freeze Soviet SS-20 deployments in exchange for a US agreement (a) not to deploy the planned new US ground-launched cruise and Pershing II missiles and (b) to negotiate reductions in existing theater nuclear weapons, one expert commented: if the West had accepted Brezhnev's first offer to halt SS-20 deployments and reduce the older missiles, there would be no more than 100 SS-20s deployed. (Today there are about 250, of which 175 are oriented toward Europe.)

I commented that the Soviet position set out in *Der Spiegel*, comparing US tactical aircraft with Soviet missiles, was not likely to be persuasive to US and West European public opinion. In response, I was told that the Soviet position in Geneva had taken some time to work out and would not be changed quickly. The only ready alternative suggested by Soviet experts was their offer of a true "zero option"—the dismantling of all nuclear weapons in Europe.

#### RESPONSE TO THE FREEZE PROPOSAL

Almost everywhere, there was a positive response to the proposal of the US campaign for a bilateral nuclear-weapon freeze, to end US and Soviet testing, production and deployment of nuclear warheads, missiles and other delivery systems. Soviet experts pointed out that, in the past, the USSR has supported various versions of such a freeze: a cut-off in production of fissionable material; a freeze on production of nuclear warheads; a halt to the introduction of new missiles; and, in 1981, a freeze on production of medium-range missiles and strategic submarine systems. More generally, they said, the Soviet Union would like to see an end to the nuclear arms race and has made plain its readiness to hold negotiations on this topic.

When I pressed for more specific reactions and possible reservations, I found skepticism that the freeze idea could become a major force in US politics, much less an official US position, in the period of a conservative Republican administration. I observed that many US citizens, for their part, doubt that the USSR would accept a freeze; and that for this reason, it would be useful for a suitable Soviet non-governmental organization, such as the Soviet Peace Committee, to circulate freeze petitions among Soviet citizens. They responded that 180 million Soviet signatures for disarmament had been gathered just three years ago; and that the Soviet government had supported a successful motion by Bulgaria in the UN General Assembly calling for a world disarmament petition campaign. They indicated that a petition calling specifically for a freeze might be circulated, if the US campaign continued to gather momentum and widespread media attention.

Four possible reservations to the freeze proposal were raised by a couple of individuals. The most important that, since the idea of stopping all nuclear-weapon production was too ambitious to be implemented quickly, it should be supplemented by a near-term goal of



stopping the introduction of destabilizing new technology. I responded that this was a primary objective of the freeze; that what was "new" changed each year and was therefore difficult to define except by a blanket ban; and that the public would support a total ban more readily than a partial one.

Two analysts observed that, if US and Soviet production of nuclear weapons were banned, the USSR would have to take into account continued production elsewhere, particularly in China. In response to this, I commented that the production of a few hundred nuclear weapons in China could hardly rationalize the production of 20,000 or so each in the USA and USSR.

A third potential objection concerned the possible requirement for on-site inspection of Soviet warhead-production facilities. I remarked that if the nuclear arms race were completely stopped, the Soviets should have nothing to conceal in regard to its production processes and facilities. It was argued that on-site inspection might reveal militarily-useful information about the design and technology of existing Soviet warheads; but it was also observed that the USSR has recently made some concessions in the area of inspection of civilian nuclear facilities.

The final possible objection concerned the implications of a freeze for the future of existing nuclear arsenals. A high official observed that, if a freeze were instituted, then eventually the existing arsenals would become obsolete. Thus, he said, in order for a freeze to be acceptable, future retirements of existing weapons would have to be studied and found acceptable.

When I asked whether the Soviet program to replace more vulnerable submarines carrying medium-range missiles with less vulnerable subs carrying long-range missiles would have to be completed before they would consider a freeze, they responded that this would not be necessary, since the USSR has a sufficient number of invulnerable missiles for the purpose of deterrence.