

U.S. negotiated SDI with Soviets since '85

What follows is excerpted from the transcript of a White House pre-summit background briefing on arms control issues, on Dec. 2, 1987.

Q: Secretary Gorbachov, in his interview on Monday, indicated that he fully expects to make major headway on that when he comes here next week. How far do you expect to get? What is the benchmark, do you think, that might be achieved on any START negotiations during his visit?

Sr. Admin. Official: I wouldn't want to answer it on a basis of "expect to get." I could only say what we would hope to get is very far in resolving some of the important fundamental issues. [To other briefer] Do you want to make a comment on that?

Sr. Admin. Official: Well, I think the—one of the benefits of this summit and the INF agreement is that it clears the decks of INF, to get on with START, which is certainly of great importance. Having said that, there are a number of very big issues which divide us. In START alone we have the sublimits, and then a whole host of very difficult verification problems which I would say was—in order of magnitude, they're greater than INF.

Then there's also the linkage the Soviets have imposed. They, by their code words, have said that we must—quote—"strictly abide by the ABM Treaty." And when we asked them in Geneva what this meant at their level, the level we were talking about, they said, "You may not test systems and components in space." So their buzz words are still that they want to hamper or hinder an SDI—

Q: To follow up, do you—might you—might it be possible to achieve at least an agreement in principle on START? And also, as part of that question, would you—do you have any indication that Mr. Gorbachov will bring new proposals on ABM Treaty language?

Sr. Admin. Official: Let me comment on that . . . obviously the issues that [the other briefer] has pointed out to you are issues that we hope will be significantly narrowed during the time of the meeting of the two heads. I didn't want to answer the question as to what we expect, I can only tell you what we hope and what we will be working to achieve.

Now, with respect to the second part of your question, let me simply point out that we are interested in a treaty.

We are not interested in an agreement which will not end

in a treaty, because an agreement which will not end in a treaty will, let's say, be a declaration coming out of the summit period, does not bind them in any way, is not legally binding. We may therefore find ourselves in the situation where the Soviets, not being bound by a lawful instrument, would go ahead and do anything they wished to do in their national interest, whereas realistically we might find ourselves being unilaterally encumbered. As a result, a reasonable position by some members of Congress saying, "We're about to have it, next year or the year after; why spend money on this, that or the other thing?"

That kind of unilateral disadvantage is not in our interest. And that's why we're pushing for a treaty. And, as a practical matter, the Soviets have communicated to us a very clear intention to join us in that objective. And as you know, the Soviets have publicly suggested the forum for signing such a treaty might very well be the next time there is a summit, which they have suggested be in Moscow. . . .

Q: . . . The discussion over transition to defenses has focused recently on the idea of predictability, and the Soviets seem to have embraced that as well. In addition to the open labs concept and some exchange of data, what other notions are there from the U.S. side on increasing predictability?

Sr. Admin. Official: We have tried to get the attention of the Soviets to the following overall approach—and I just want to explain what we're talking about here. We have in effect said to them, look, we're living in a new world. It's a world of rapidly evolving technology. The SDI program is a reflection of that. Obviously the new technologies affect the force structures, not only our own, but yours. We know you're doing work in this area, because of these new technologies.

Now, one of the interesting things is an acknowledgment of that by Mr. Gorbachov the other night. We know, we've known that. We know you're doing work in this field, we're doing a lot of work in this field. From our point of view, we see a possibility, now we're doing research on it, which moves our force structure, and maybe all of our force structures from an offense-dominated force structure, to a transition to a defense-dominated force structure.

Shouldn't we be talking about this with one another? Shouldn't we be visiting one another's laboratories? Shouldn't we perhaps be present at tests that take place? But overall, shouldn't we be talking to one another and trying to figure out a way to adjust to the new technologies in a stable manner? That's been our approach to the problem.

Now predictability, in the meantime, makes sense while this is happening, because it's evolving—who knows what we'll learn next year, what will come up next year. So you want some predictability, and the President has suggested a notion of predictability by saying for a period of time—and we have said the period of Dec. 31, 1994—we want to have, for that period of time, we'll agree not to withdraw from the ABM Treaty. That remains static. But that has to be—and I

personally have said to these people, "Do you have better ideas for predictability? Do you have other ideas for confidence-building measures? Tell us what they are." We want to discuss them.

Q: Could I just follow on that briefly? You talk about staying within ABM, but that means describing what ABM means. Does the U.S. plan to offer any notion of what would be considered within ABM in terms of testing of SDI in the future?

Sr. Admin. Official: Let me say to you very clearly that from March of 1985—and the reason I'm asserting this is because I have read things to the contrary—from March of 1985, the American delegation in Geneva has been explaining its position on the ABM Treaty and asserting its position to the Soviets, and we have had discussions about it. We have pointed out how much of our position is very similar to the positions previously taken by the Soviets in their interpretation. We have a difference of opinion. I don't want to minimize this. But we are talking about it.

Q: Can you clear up all of these reports that there have actually been conversations with the Soviets about what kind of tests? . . .

Sr. Admin. Official: This—two years ago, some of the Rand Corporation people talked to the Soviet scientists, and there was some discussion amongst them as to how one might compose a list and characteristics of devices on that list, and that below that, those thresholds, one would be free to test, and above them the limitations of the ABM Treaty would apply. And I did talk to Velikhov and to Sagdeyev about those things that had been discussed prior to that time with the Rand Corporation. But there have been no subsequent discussions after those discussions some time ago. It is certainly true that we have talked to all the U.S. scientists. We've talked to the laboratories, the government laboratories, to Livermore, to Los Alamos, to all the government laboratories and the people in the Defense Department, trying to learn whatever we can from anybody who knows something about these issues.

Q: And do you have a conclusion as to—when the President says in all of his recent speeches that when we're ready we will deploy, do you have a timeframe in mind that makes sense technologically? When—what timeframe that would be?

Sr. Admin. Official: The timeframe that we've talked to the Soviets about is seven years. And we said that—or 1994—Dec. 31, 1994—and we said that we would not exercise our right of withdrawal from the ABM Treaty.

Q: Is that because that would be the earliest that it would be possible to deploy? Is there a connection between what is technically feasible and that seven year period, or is that—

Sr. Admin. Official: I don't believe that anybody believes that one can deploy earlier than that; that's correct.

Other Sr. Admin. Official: On the question of this difference of interpretation of the ABM Treaty, is the President

prepared to move in any way toward the Soviet position, which is that there should be some limits on testing? Or is the President sticking to his position at Reykjavik that there should be no restrictions on development, the only question of predictability would involve deployment?

Sr. Admin. Official: No, I think the position is that we do—the President does not propose that there be any amendment to the ABM Treaty from the provisions as they were negotiated in 1972. In other words, the treaty stands on its own bottom, and he doesn't propose that we amend that treaty.

Q: I'm not talking about amendment, I'm talking about an agreement on what is permissible under the treaty. There are different interpretations obviously as [the other administration briefer] referred to. Is the President willing to alter the interpretation that the U.S. has applied to this treaty concerning placing limits on the testing of SDI?

Sr. Admin. Official: I believe not. I think we're clear as to what the meaning of the treaty is in that sense. . . .

Q: Gentlemen, in his new book *Perestroika*, Gorbachov talks about SDI research not only in the laboratory, but also in what he calls "factories, institutes and test ranges." Is there anything new in that language? Is it meaningful? And does it leave any room for negotiations?

Sr. Admin. Official: Well, there is something new in that language compared to previous Soviet statements which have said it's okay to have research in the laboratory, limiting it to the laboratory. And the extent to which the book goes beyond that, it's obviously a new formulation. But I want to make very clear to you, unambiguously, there is no provision in the ABM Treaty, which, in any way, cuts back on any research, anyplace, anytime and I just want to make that clear. Any effort to cut back on research by limiting to one or one, two and three is, in itself, not consistent with the ABM Treaty. That has been our position. It is our position. I think it's an unequivocal position and it's a completely correct position and in my knowledge is not an issue of controversy in the United States. . . .

Q: In that second passage, you referred to "sitting down and discussing components that could be tested in space and components that could not be tested in space." Does that represent anything new?

Sr. Admin. Official: That refers to the same idea that was discussed by Velikhov and Sagdeev, a year and a half ago, as I remember it, and that idea was that when they would propose a list of devices and a list of characteristics of those devices, and if those devices have capabilities above those thresholds, then they cannot be tested in space. If they have capabilities below those thresholds, then they could under the Soviet proposal, be tested in space.

The main point about that, from my standpoint, was that even the Soviet position says that there are certain types of devices that can be tested in space for the purposes of ABM research. . . .