

**Remarks on Signing the
Intermediate-Range
Nuclear Forces Treaty
December 8, 1987**



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The President. Thank you all very much. Welcome to the White House. This ceremony and the treaty we're signing today are both excellent examples of the rewards of patience. It was over 6 years ago, November 18, 1981, that I first proposed what would come to be called the zero option. It was a simple proposal -- one might say, disarmingly simple. [Laughter] Unlike treaties in the past, it didn't simply codify the status quo or a new arms buildup; it didn't simply talk of controlling an arms race.

For the first time in history, the language of "arms control" was replaced by "arms reduction" -- in this case, the complete elimination of an entire class of U.S. and Soviet nuclear missiles. Of course, this required a dramatic shift in thinking, and it took conventional wisdom some time to catch up. Reaction, to say the least, was mixed. To some the zero option was impossibly visionary and unrealistic; to others merely a propaganda ploy. Well, with patience, determination, and commitment, we've made this impossible vision a reality.

General Secretary Gorbachev, I'm sure you're familiar with Ivan Krylov's famous tale about the swan, the crawfish, and the pike. It seems that once upon a time these three were trying to move a wagonload together. They hitched and harnessed themselves to the wagon. It wasn't very heavy, but no matter how hard they worked, the wagon just wouldn't move. You see, the swan was flying upward; the crawfish kept crawling backward; the pike kept making for the water. The end result was that they got nowhere, and the wagon is still there to this day. Well, strong and fundamental moral differences continue to exist between our nations. But today, on this vital issue, at least, we've seen what can be accomplished when we pull together.

The numbers alone demonstrate the value of this agreement. On the Soviet side, over 1,500 deployed warheads will be removed, and all ground-launched intermediate-range missiles, including the SS - 20's, will be destroyed. On our side, our entire complement of Pershing II and ground-launched cruise missiles, with some 400 deployed warheads, will all be destroyed. Additional backup missiles on both sides will also be destroyed.

But the importance of this treaty transcends numbers. We have listened to the wisdom in an old Russian maxim. And I'm sure you're familiar with it, Mr. General Secretary, though my pronunciation may give you difficulty. The maxim is: *Dovorey no provorey* -- trust, but verify.

The General Secretary. You repeat that at every meeting. [Laughter]

The President. I like it. [Laughter]

This agreement contains the most stringent verification regime in history, including provisions for inspection teams actually residing in each other's territory and several other forms of onsite inspection, as well. This treaty protects the interests of America's friends and allies. It also embodies another important principle: the need for glasnost, a greater openness in military programs and forces.

We can only hope that this historymaking agreement will not be an end in itself but the beginning of a working relationship that will enable us to tackle the other urgent issues before us: strategic offensive nuclear weapons, the balance of conventional forces in Europe, the destructive and tragic regional conflicts that beset so many parts of our globe, and respect for the human and natural rights God has granted to all men.

To all here who have worked so hard to make this vision a reality: Thank you, and congratulations -- above all to Ambassadors Glitman and Obukhov. To quote another Russian proverb -- as you can see, I'm becoming quite an expert -- [laughter] -- in Russian proverbs: "The harvest comes more from sweat than from the dew."

So, I'm going to propose to General Secretary Gorbachev that we issue one last instruction to you: Get some well-deserved rest. [Laughter]

The General Secretary. We're not going to do that. [Laughter]

The President. Well, now, Mr. General Secretary, would you like to say a few words before we sign the treaty?

The General Secretary. Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, comrades, succeeding generations will hand down their verdict on the importance of the event which we are about to witness. But I will venture to say that what we are going to do, the signing of the first-ever agreement eliminating nuclear weapons, has a universal significance for mankind, both from the standpoint of world politics and from the standpoint of humanism.

For everyone, and above all, for our two great powers, the treaty whose text is on this table offers a big chance at last to get onto the road leading away from the threat of catastrophe. It is our duty to take full advantage of that chance and move together toward a nuclear-free world, which holds out for our children and grandchildren and for their children and grandchildren the promise of a fulfilling and happy life without fear and without a senseless waste of resources on weapons of destruction.

We can be proud of planting this sapling, which may one day grow into a mighty tree of peace. But it is probably still too early to bestow laurels upon each other. As the great American poet and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson said: "The reward of a thing well done is to have done it."

So, let us reward ourselves by getting down to business. We have covered a 7-year-long road, replete with intense work and debate. One last step towards this table, and the treaty will be signed.

May December 8, 1987, become a date that will be inscribed in the history books, a date that will mark the watershed separating the era of a mounting risk of nuclear war from the era of a demilitarization of human life.

Note: The President spoke at 1:45 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to Ambassador Maynard W. Glitman, U.S. Negotiator on Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces, and Ambassador Aleksey Obukhov, Deputy Head of the Soviet Nuclear and Space Arms delegation. Following their remarks, the President and the General Secretary signed the treaty and the accompanying protocols.