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THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

BACKGROUND BRIEFING
BY
SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL
ON
THE GENEVA MEETING

October 8, 1985

The Briefing Room

2:35 P.M. EDT

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: This is the third in a series of briefings that -- hope to give weekly on the run-up to the Geneva meeting.

Today's is designed to illuminate an important issue that will surely be on the agenda, and that is the military balance between the United States and the Soviet Union.

A central item on the agenda will surely be how to preserve a stable military balance and to make it more stable through arms control in the coming months and years.

Recently, the Soviet Union has made a counter-proposal to the U.S. proposal in Geneva. There has been a certain amount of commentary from the Soviet side on certain aspects of its position, while the full position has not been elaborated publicly, nor will we today.

The partial statements and references to isolated components of the Soviet position by the Soviet Union have engendered a certain amount of speculation and questioning, which is understandable.

The consequence of this being done in a piecemeal fashion, however, has been that it has led to a considerable amount of misinformation, and, I think, uninformed conjecture about their proposal. Therefore, I thought it might be useful to get together today on background in order to make clear the kinds of questions that ought to be asked if we are going to be able to digest, absorb and consider the significance of it and how we can make some progress in Geneva.

Let me put this in perspective. The President finds that the very fact that the Soviet Union has made a counter-proposal is a promising development. It shows that his strategy has worked, that firmness and allied solidarity, which has been demonstrated over the past five years, have paid off.

The Soviets have now expressed interest, in addition, in what we both believe must be the highest priority task at hand to start moving now toward deep, stabilizing and verifiable reductions in offensive nuclear warheads. And that's good. It is a very good development. And we intend, for our part, to spend all of the time that is needed with them behind closed doors in Geneva to try to make real progress, and the sooner the better.

Our negotiators have tabled sound U.S. proposals. For example, we have, for a long time, proposed a reduction of about half

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in land and sea-based ballistic missiles and a cut of about one-third in the warheads on those missiles. Moreover, our negotiators have an unprecedented amount of flexibility in the specific means to use to reach our goal of deep, stable, verifiable reductions.

If the Soviets will now show the flexibility required on their side and are prepared to engage in real give-and-take, this could be the beginning of a successful process. It is too early to make predictions. There are a number of very penetrating questions that have to be asked about the Soviet counter-proposal before we can really make any judgments. And, in sum, the questions would be as follows --

First, would the Soviet counter-proposal strengthen or decrease the first-strike capability which the Soviets have been building? Now, this is a capability which we do not have, nor do we want it, and which, if it were achieved, would seriously undermine the strategic balance on which deterrence and peace have rested. We are concerned the Soviet first-strike capability would be strengthened and strengthened substantially under their counter-proposal.

Second, would the counter-proposal result in equitable balance between the parties? Our preliminary analysis indicates that the Soviet counter-proposal is highly unequal. It would ensure that the Soviet major advantages in the numbers of nuclear weapons, nuclear delivery vehicles and ballistic missile throw weight.

Third, what would be the effect of the Soviet counter-proposal on the capability on both sides to modernize? We are concerned here that the counter-proposal, as now shaped, would prevent key areas of needed U.S. modernization while it would allow the considerable Soviet buildup and modernization, which began about ten years ago, to be carried through to completion with new systems.

Fourth, what would be the effect on the security of our allies, which we consider, of course, indivisible from our own security? Our concern here is that in several major respects the counter-proposal and what has been said by the Soviets publicly in Paris as well seems designed to fulfill the long-standing Soviet goal of totally removing United States nuclear deterrent from the protection of our friends and allies in Europe and Asia while not inhibiting the Soviet forces which threaten those allies.

Fifth, is the Soviet counter-proposal verifiable? Our preliminary analysis indicates that key elements would not be verifiable. This question is particularly important in view of the record of Soviet non-compliance with existing arms control agreements.

Finally, have the Soviets dropped their insistence that progress and reducing offensive arsenals must be linked to stopping United States strategic defense research program. Regrettably such inappropriate linkage may still be the case. Such a Soviet precondition presents a serious obstacle to progress in Geneva, and must be dropped. The need for offensive reductions is self-evident, and we believe that there are ample incentives on both sides for trading offense for offense.

By the same token, there is a clear need for defensive research and testing, which both the United States and the Soviet Union are pursuing.

Now let me explain in just a few moments some of the fundamentals that have led us to these preliminary conclusions, and I'll be glad to take your questions after that.

At bottom, the basis on which offensive deterrence has rested has been a balance of offensive strategic nuclear forces. Now those forces are deployed in three modes. There are land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles. On the United States side this totals 1,030 systems. Those contain approximately 2,130 warheads.

Secondly, in the sea-based leg the United States, on its submarines -- let's see -- 37 submarines, approximately 600 tubes, comprising 5,370 warheads.

And finally, on the bomber leg the United States has 263 bombers, and these forces basically are arrayed and designed to deter the corresponding Soviet land-based, sea-based, and air-based systems. On the Soviet side, in ICBMs, we currently count 1,393 Soviet land-based ICBMs.

Q Repeat that, please.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Thirteen hundred ninety eight -- and we will give you copies of these charts -- on which are deployed some 6,400 nuclear warheads.

Secondly, in the Soviet submarine force, they currently possess 62 submarines, 954 launch tubes, and a total of about 2,500 nuclear warheads.

Finally, on the Soviet side, there are approximately 430 heavy bombers.

In the aggregate this totals up for the United States an aggregate total of delivery vehicles -- land, sea, and air -- of 1,393 delivery vehicles -- launchers, aircraft. For the Soviet side,

corresponding number 2,832.

United States warhead total from the three legs of a triad -- excuse me -- ballistic missile warheads, approximately 7,500, compared to Soviet ICBM and SLBM warheads of about 8,900.

Finally, the throw-weight totals are about 4.4 million pounds on our side and about 11.9 million pounds on the Soviet side.

Now, let's think for a moment about what has been stated by the Soviet Union publicly about their latest proposal.

Bearing in mind that it is these three central systems which are designed to deter each other, the Soviet Union has said that it is proposing a cut of 50 percent in the number of delivery vehicles, that is, missiles, aircraft. And that this would leave the United States entitled to 1,680 of these delivery vehicles.

Now, how do they reach that number? The Soviet Union states that in addition to counting ICBMs and SLBMs and bombers, that the United States ought to include in its total of nuclear systems about 1,049 additional systems which are forward deployed in aircraft carriers, aircraft that we have forward based in Europe and Asia, as well as the INF systems, missile systems, requested by the NATO allies for deployment in Europe.

Now, if one adds to the United States' ICBM, SLBM and bomber count, these 1,149 systems, you get something over 3,300 total systems, which the Soviet says -- Soviet Union says if cut by 50 percent would leave us entitled to 1,680. This is a very important point. One can see that we have two extreme choices that one can imagine. If, for example, we are left with an entitlement to 1,680 -- that is the Soviet stated outcome -- we could take all of the forward deployed systems on aircraft carriers, our INF missile systems in Europe, forward-deployed aircraft and that 1,049 would consume that amount of our total entitlement of 1,680, leaving us entitled to a grand total of 531 to be disposed between ICBMs, SLBMs and bombers.

In short, we could, if we remain faithful to our commitments in Europe, be required, under this proposal, to have no more than 530-odd systems, as compared to our current delivery vehicle count of 1,893. So it's about -- well, it's far more than a 50 percent cut of truly strategic systems.

Now, the correlary point to that is, if we were to go in that direction, the number of aim points, the hard targets which the Soviet Union would have to go after, would also be very greatly reduced. If we had no more than 531 strategic systems, we would probably choose to distribute those between bombers, submarine-based missiles and land-based missiles, but, surely, fewer in each category, perhaps as few as 300 or so ICBMs.

Now, I take you back to my original question about whether this proposal strengthens or weakens the first-strike capability of the Soviet Union. Now, if today the Soviet Union must consider that it faces 1,000 ICBMs in the United States and it builds forces to assure that it has warheads of its own, 6,400, with which to attack those 1,000 U.S. systems, then one can see that the warhead-target ratio is about 6 to 1.

Now, there are other hard targets in the United States and most analytical experts here would count or credit the Soviet Union with having something at least on the order of a 3 to 1 warhead-target ratio today. But how might that change?

Well, as I've said, if the United States continues to support its allies and is limited to no more than 300 ICBMs, then this number goes down from 1,000 to 300.

Now, true enough, the Soviet Union says that it, too, would cut the number of its warheads and that, conceivably, this 6,400 number of ICBM warheads would go down to 3,600. But, even there, if one considers a 3,600 residual ICBM warhead count, arrayed against somewhere between 300 to 500 systems in the United States, the warhead-target ratio has improved to their advantage very, very substantially.

Q Did you mean --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Excuse me, Bob?

Q You said 3,600 --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Okay. Good point. Bob says, "Why 3,600?" I went too fast.

Q Well --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The Soviet Union has said that the outcome in terms of warheads ought to be about 6,000 warheads on both sides. And they say that as many as 60 percent of those -- on their side and ours -- could be in any one leg of the triad. Now, if they chose, as has been their practice, to keep the bulk of their warheads on land-based missiles, then 60 percent of 6,000 would give you 3,600. Now, that 3,600 then would be in a position to attack whatever remaining U.S. hard targets existed -- 300 to 500. But under any circumstance, even conservative estimates, their ability to use many warheads per target would improve dramatically.

Now, I postulated this excursion on the notion that we kept all of our aircraft on aircraft carriers, our INF systems and our forward-based aircraft, because we have alliances. If we chose to withdraw our support to those alliances, which we surely could not do, but theoretically, if we were to do so, then the United States would have to decide how to array its 16,080 entitlement between land, sea and air -- and we could do so -- at the expense of separating ourselves from our alliances in Europe and elsewhere. This is something we surely couldn't do.

I think it's useful also to note that in saying that the United States should include its forward-based systems in Europe and Asia, its INF systems, it also asserts that they should not, and that the Soviet SS-20s, corresponding aircraft and, roughly, 2,000 -- 2,000 Soviet systems ought not be counted. And so, when they derived these outcomes in terms of strategic delivery vehicles, the Soviet Union takes 50 percent of something, but sets aside first 2,000 systems and doesn't decrease those one iota.

To provide just a kind of a sense of history of the Soviet buildup, this chart points out that for a long time, the United States number of land-based missiles has remained very constant. It's right now at 1,036, on which we have 2,100-odd warheads.

The Soviet Union, commencing about ten years ago, began to expand very sharply the number of warheads on their systems. And you see that take-off point here where the number of Soviet RVs, as they moved their systems, went dramatically up -- and these are just ICBMs -- not submarines and anything else -- the total now of on the order of 6,400 warheads.

Q RVs?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: That's a re-entry -- that's a bomb. (Laughter.)

Q Thank you.

Q That's like you, dear.

Q That's a technical term. People in the arms control group use it. It's a very technical term.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Turning to the INF issue for a moment, intermediate-range nuclear forces consist of missiles -- and specifically, the Soviet Union's SS-20 which has three warheads. The Soviet Union right now has 441 of those operational. And times three, or 13,023 warheads.

The charts, which some of you may not be able to see, or graphs, depict in this bar graph the balance between we and they over time since '77. The Soviets had these in '77, these in 1980, compared to zero here, these in '82, '84, and '85, with current U.S. levels of Pershings and GLCMs in Europe at this level.

The map to the left shows the reach of Soviet SS-20s which encompasses all of Europe, Middle East, all of Asia, part of

Alaska.

Breaking down the INF balance a little bit more discreetly, you see when you look at the missiles, themselves -- the SS-20 launcher versus our P-2s and GLCMs -- this balance -- when you look at the warheads on those missiles, this balance here -- or imbalance, I should say -- when you look at shorter range INF systems, you find that the Soviet Union maintains still a very substantial advantage over the NATO corresponding systems. When you look at artillery systems and very short-range systems, again, a significant advantage. And, finally, when you look at the aircraft numbers on both sides, there, too, a very substantial imbalance.

Bear in mind that in no case would any of the red bars count in any of these reductions, although all of the U.S. and NATO systems -- or U.S. systems -- would.

Let me turn for a moment to a comparison to our own arms control proposals and how these existing force balances or imbalances would be affected. You can see that when we talk about ballistic missiles, for example, the United States position is that these ought to be reduced to a level of about 850. The current total of our SLBMs and ICBMs is up at about 1,630. In short, that's about a 50 percent cut that we have proposed. The Soviet Union would have to cut from its force of 2,352 down to that level.

When you look at warheads, right now the ballistic missile count on their side -- ballistic missile warhead count -- is 8,900 compared to our 7,500. We propose equality at a level of 5,000 on both sides.

Finally, in bombers, we propose a reduction to a level on both sides of 400. The current existing balance, or imbalance in throw weight is depicted on the far side here.

The last chart I'd like to mention -- and then I'll take your questions -- concerns the strategic defense programs of the Soviet Union. This is something which is worth studying. I won't go over it in detail, but it shows, I think, two things -- that the Soviet Union has had a diversity of programs under very serious research going back more than 20 years. Depending upon the kind of system you talk about -- the conventional ground-to-air systems, which have been the most advanced and are, in fact, deployed, to the more exotic research on lasers, particle beams, directed energy, kinetic energy, and so forth -- these programs are not novel to the Soviet Union. They've had a very serious effort for a long time.

And the second point is that they have operational systems -- the operational being indicated in the darkest colors. Whether one talks about ASAT systems or in components of ABM systems -- radars, missiles, launchers -- the Soviet Union has had very solid strategic defense programs for a long, long time, both operational and research.

Now, I'll close by simply saying it is a proposal. It's a place to start. And the President believes that the time has come to engage seriously in Geneva, to bargain seriously, based upon reasonable criteria such as that neither side should have a first-strike capability; that we should focus our efforts upon reductions in the most destabilizing systems, those that can strike most promptly -- ballistic missiles; that we should seek to reduce ballistic missile warheads and destructive potential; that we should do this in a way which is -- reflects equality at the end of the day; that it should be so as to induce stability by not creating correspondence that doesn't exist between bomber systems and ballistic missile systems and that it must be verifiable.

The President's committed to bargaining for as long as it takes to achieve these goals and, in the process, hopes to induce a serious dialogue on the relationship between offense and defense.

We're prepared now to discuss this relationship and how, over time, we could move away from, heretofore, exclusive reliance upon offense and towards greater reliance upon defense.

I'll be glad to take your questions.

Barry?

Q One of the half a dozen points you made you made very briefly and you said that the Soviet proposal would prevent modernization in key areas of the United States. You didn't elaborate. Do you mean the pressure of numbers to meet their ceilings or do you mean in a more specific way? In other words, could you explain where and what coming programs that are vital would be impacted by the Soviet proposal? Elaborate, if you will, please, a little bit.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, based upon public pronouncements from the Soviet side, it is unclear what is intended by their call for a ban on new types of systems. But that is the point. If one bans new-type systems, but theirs are not called new and ours are, then such things as the Trident D-5 missile, the Midgetman, advanced technology bomber could not be developed.

On the other hand, if the Soviet Union so defines what is new as to say that the SS-24 and 25 are not new, then these truly new systems could be deployed. That's the point.

Q They haven't said yet, I take it, where the break point is between the new system and an old system. A certain stage of development? You don't know yet.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: We don't know yet.

Q Why is it --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Bob?

Q Can you say that the -- did you say that the Soviets have proposed a 50 percent cut in delivery systems and in warheads? You went back and forth.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, they have said it specifically in delivery vehicles and have stated that that would yield a U.S. entitlement to 1,680 delivery vehicles, which encompassed not only ICBMs, SLBMs, strategic bombers, but also forward-based systems in Europe, Asia, aircraft carriers.

Q Did they give -- sorry.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: And on warheads, they have said that a corresponding reduction up to yield 6,000 nuclear charges on both sides. Now, they didn't say from whence they were starting, but they ended up with a benchmark endpoint of 6,000 nuclear charges. And, of course, nuclear charges don't encompass the same things that RVs do. That's different.

That's worth mentioning, I think. When you stop and think about the fact that our forces are not symmetrical at all and that we face quite a different problem

vis-a-vis the Soviets than they do here, nuclear charges becomes a significant issue specifically. In the Soviet Union there are conventional ground to air anti-aircraft missiles -- air defense missiles they're called. Now, these are not counted as strategic anti-ballistic missile systems; they are designed to deal with bombers -- aircraft.

Well, there are about 13,000 of these in the Soviet Union and if you're a bomber pilot coming from the United States, you've got a big problem over there. They do not. The United States has no corresponding air defense system. We have chosen deliberately not to. As a consequence, what the Soviets bring over here in a putative attack can all go to striking in the United States hard targets, not air defense systems. They don't need to carry anything to do that. No so for the United States, which has to deal with getting through those 13,000 air defense launchers and you've got to carry something with you to do that. The Soviets say that those ought to be counted and come out of the residual 6,000 weapons to which we would be entitled. That's not fair.

Sam?

Q Why is it important where our delivery systems originate? You talk about under their proposal we would have to make a choice of either leaving our advance systems there or bringing them back. Why is it not more important what number of warheads from whatever sector we can bring to bear on an enemy target? And secondly, if our defense of Europe rests ultimately on the belief that we will put our own population at risk for Europe, why is it important that that defense originate in a missile silo in Stuttgart rather than in Omaha?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, I think the latter part of your question is at the heart of the Soviet strategy. How can the United States best assure confidence in Europe of our preparedness to defend them under attack? We have for 40 years maintained with strong allied support that that is best done through deploying U.S. forces in country --

Q The trip wire.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: -- not only to contribute to a better conventional balance or maintain one, but to have our nuclear forces deployed there as an earnest -- as a visible linkage to the United States strategic forces. That has worked and the fact that it has worked has powerful logic for carrying it on.

The Soviet Union faces surely, as we do, the need to deter attack by the United States. It has chosen to threaten Europe and the United States, at the request of our European allies, has responded with a corresponding deterrent, albeit much lesser scale. And when you look at our maximum INF deployment of missiles -- it would only be 572 -- the Russians already have 1,323. So the presence of those forces serves not only a real military deterrent value, but as a clear evidence of the linkage to the United States strategic arsenal.

The point you make about the extent to which the Soviet Union feels threatened by those systems as surely as they do by systems here masks that the scale of those deployments is really quite small and is dwarfed by enormous forces in the thousands and orders of magnitude greater on the Soviet side. So it is important as a linkage. In military terms, the lopsided Soviet advantage facing those modest forces is clear out of proportion.

Bernie?

Q Is there any area that was laid down by the Soviets recently that you see the most room for negotiation?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, I think that there are elements that hold some promise of enabling us to make progress. Again, I think the place to discuss that's really in Geneva. But I think they're implied in what I've said here and that is when they say that having over 2,000 delivery vehicles today and then they're prepared to go down to 1,250, well, if through negotiation they will maintain that and be willing to reduce in that measure, that would be worthwhile if we can get the categorization of what counts on our side squared away. Similarly, unconstrained, without an agreement we estimate that they could go to 13,000 or more strategic nuclear warheads. Well, if, in fact, this statement of a willingness to agree to 6,000 on their side is real and enduring, that could be positive if those on our side allowed to deter were of a corresponding capability.

Helen?

Q If they're so far ahead -- 10 years as you would put it, almost -- why do they want to negotiate and why are you negotiating now in public? Are you afraid of their bribe now and laying it all before the public that they have really succeeded in reaching people?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: First of all, I don't think that the President feels strongly that we mustn't negotiate in public. I think, honestly, the points that I have rebutted today have been points that have been made public by the Soviet Union. We believe the time has come to get to the table in Geneva and talk about the more esoteric parts of their proposal, to listen to it, examine it seriously, and try to make some progress. So it ought not be a matter of exchanging headlines.

At the same time, there is a responsibility of any government, and I have to say, no postwar government in this country has spent enough time in trying to provide the fundamentals of knowledge for the American

people to understand what is the concept of deterrence, on what is it based. And that's a responsibility, I think, we have.

Q Okay. If they're so far ahead, why are they negotiating?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Good point. Your speculation is probably as good as mine. I think, truly, that they see for 15 years the United States did not build a land-based missile or a submarine-based missile. For 20 years, we didn't build a new bomber, so why should they negotiate? We had nothing new on the blocks. But they can see now that after five years we've sustained appropriations for modernization of each leg of the triad, and that by the end of this decade, the substantial advantages they enjoy will have eroded quite a lot. So they would like to put limits on the U.S. systems. And, I think, the place to do that is at the negotiating table, as far as they're concerned.

Don.

Q On Sunday, on the television program in connection with the Soviet offer and the Strategic Defense Initiative, you stated that it was your view that testing and development of ABM systems which are in the category of other physical principles, is permitted by the ABM Treaty. Is that the position of the administration now? Is that its fixed position?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes.

Q And, if it is, how do you justify or explain how that position was reached when the person who negotiated the treaty, Ambassador Smith, says that was not the understanding when it was done and when the administration itself, in its arms control impact statements for several years -- the last one last year -- seems to say the opposite?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I think, first of all, the Soviet Union has never accepted such an interpretation that foreclosed what I have said, research testing development of systems based upon other physical principles. They have never tolerated that.

Now, it is true that there have been unilateral statements periodically that have stated, under the circumstances at the time, that we should seek to limit those systems and that the ABM Treaty ought to encompass that. Never have the Soviets bought that. And the conditions today are substantially different from conditions at the time that speculation was offered, different in their sense of these many, many Soviet programs that have, in some cases, matured rather dramatically.

Rick.

Q But the Soviet programs -- where you show deployments, are all those deployments on land? Are any of them in the air? Land-based mobile or space-based? Or are they all land-fixed based?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, the -- in the category of those deployed right now, these are land-based systems. In the case of the ASAT system, it is a system that is launched into orbit and goes into orbit and maneuvers to attack its target, so it is a space system, a space attack system, by their definition.

Q But it comes from a deployment -- do I understand? It comes from a deployment which is one of those authorized under the ABM Treaty. Is that right?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: If your point is do we challenge the authority of the Soviet Union to do their ASAT system,

we don't.

Q No. The question I'm trying to get to is whether or not the research, testing, development and deployment that they have done on the systems you're showing fits within the land-based allowance of the ABM Treaty, and whether or not they're raising the question with us that we are headed in air-based, mobile land-based or space-based does not fit within the Treaty.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Two points. It isn't clear that the Soviet assertion is that our research is in the space-based, mobile, sea-based or land-based area. Nor is it clear -- and you'd have to ask them -- how they defend the substantial research program that they pursue right now. Because, when you examine what they're doing in lasers, directed energy, kinetic energy and so forth, doing those things on ground is the natural precursor of -- some day -- space-based systems. And so it is a little bit of a non sequitur to conclude that because they are land-based today that they are designed that they are designed to be ultimately land-based systems. They wouldn't be, in all cases.

Q What do they say when you raise that question?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, we're still raising it. And I think only now are we going to begin to get into a serious discourse on it, and then I wouldn't treat it publicly.

Q Quick question about --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Right here in the back, please.

Q -- raised the question of a problem of verifiability, but didn't explain what is the problem posed with the verifiability?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The traditional problems of verifiability encompass the ability of national technical means to know of developments in Soviet missile programs.

Now, encryption of that means of -- or of our means of collection is one problem. The new generation of systems also promises to introduce a whole new family of problems. And that is, if you have mobile systems driving around without any designated deployment areas or any really clear way to get a handle on how many there are and where they are, that's an enormous verification problem.

I think I've gone over this once before, but just briefly, you know, in broad terms, up until now, we've been able to count submarines and bound the problem. You know how many there are. You don't know where they are, but you know how many, so you can build that many more. You can count ICBM silos. You can count bombers. But when they have a mobile system that drives around -- especially a Merved mobile system -- then you can't find it. You can't count it. And you don't have any way of doing that. So that's a problem. That answer your question?

Q Well, in other words, this proposal does not contain anything towards raising the problem -- enumerated in the past, in other words?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No.

Q No? They make no means of answering our traditional complaints?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No. But, to be fair, they may. Thus far, it's still a problem.

Andrea.

Q When you said that the President -- one of the President's goals is to induce a discussion with the Soviets at Geneva about the offense-defense relationship. Isn't implicit in that kind of discussion some setting of limits down the road on defense, if there corresponding reductions in offense?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: There is implicit in that an acceptance --

our desire for an acceptance on how defensive systems can be integrated into the fore-structure on both sides, yes. And there is implicit a correlation between the scale of offense and defense. If you don't have very much offense, you would need less defense.

Q So, that -- isn't there some incentive -- without talking about bargaining chip and limits and the other sort of semantic words that we've been stuck on -- isn't there an incentive built into your bargaining position for the Soviets to reduce offense, if you in turn agree to some limits down the road on defense?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: There is, I would think, an interest in reducing on their side and of establishing a stable process of introducing defensive systems and the expectation that the defense could be lessened to the extent that the offense were lessened, yes.

Lou?

Q I'm not sure I understood your answer to Rick's question. Are you -- do you maintain that the Soviets have stretched the ABM Treaty in terms of their space defense and that we're, therefore -- it's all right for us to do it or are you saying that their system -- all those things you've shown up there on the charts and talked about are permitted by the ABM Treaty -- the Soviets --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Two points: There have been a lot of things that the Soviet Union has done that we do not believe is allowed by the ABM Treaty. That's not quite what Rick was talking about. But let me make that point, that the Krasnoyarsk Radar we see as a violation.

A number of other steps that relate to whether or not there is a rapid reload capability for the ABM system around Moscow, whether some of those components have become transportable, whether some systems designed for air defense have been tested in a ballistic missile mode -- in short, all of these raise the appearance of Soviet exploration of possibility of wide-area defense, which is against the ABM Treaty. You cannot do that. And --

Separately, however, the family of programs that have thus far been conducted in the way of research neither on our side in the several new technologies, nor on their side are inhibited by the ABM Treaty.

Steve?

Q Is it possible, sir, that the Soviet Union may have a valid point in trying to count our tactical weapons in Europe as, in fact, strategic weapons -- or against a strategic total, based on the simple fact that our Pershings and GLCMs can hit the Western Soviet Union and theirs cannot hit the United States? I mean, from their point of view it doesn't matter if it's tactical or strategic, they both can reach them.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, when you talk about the character of those systems -- aircraft on aircraft carriers carrying lower yield weapons, the GLCMs which take a long, long time, which carry lower yield weapons -- these are, for example, not relevant crisis-management systems.

There is no question but that the central threat to the Soviet Union, which they seek to deter, is comprised in the U.S. ballistic missile force because it is those systems which reach there quickly and with greatest devastation and accuracy. The positing of the forward base systems as somehow significant in a military sense is not reasonable in any strategic context. In the context of theater defense, they surely are, and they are essential. And it is no less essential that the Europeans be allowed to defend against

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what is an immense Soviet threat of SS-20s.

So, for them to say that it is all right for them to threaten Europe, but it is not all right for Europe to defend itself is just not reasonable. I mean, how else would Europe do it?

Q Well, France and Britain, for one thing. But the President has said continually that we cannot bargain about British and French weapons, and they have said the same thing, but France said it last week. We're talking about the United States and the Soviet Union in Geneva and our weapons in Europe. Certainly, a Pershing II can threaten Moscow as readily as an ICBM in Wyoming. Now, from their point of view, what's the difference? In fact, it would get there sooner, would it not?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, the probabilities or the significance of the contribution of Pershing II weapons in a strategic exchange between the United States and the Soviet Union is not of strategic consequence. It is a contribution at the margin in that sense. It could be, on the other hand, the means of limiting the rate of escalation of conflict.

Q What sort of exchange would it be important in then? How could -- you have never advocated that there can be a limited nuclear war in Europe that I know.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, indeed. We don't envision that there ever could be.

Q Because that undercuts our entire basis of defending Europe.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: That's my very point. The idea that the Soviet Union is legitimately concerned about a partial or limited attack by Pershing weapons is just not credible. The strategic exchange which is inherent in nuclear conflict is not significantly altered by the Pershing IIs.

Q If that exchange ever occurs, they want somehow to neutralize those Pershings, don't they, because that would make a contribution to their destruction?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: They have thought quite a lot about that and have 1,323 to 100 and some odd imbalance to do that very thing.

Q Sir?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Lesley?

Q I see Ed looking at his watch, and I'd like to ask if you can tell us what you know -- can update us on the situation in the Middle East?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, I should have said at the beginning. I won't take questions on that today.

Q Do we know if --

Q Quick question on bombers: You ballooned their total nicely by including Backfire. Is that debate all over? Is there no give? Is it sort of like SDI? It is a locked American position that the Backfire is a strategic bomber -- because it certainly wasn't the U.S. position some years ago?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, the reality is established by the hardware. It's not a matter of interpretation

really. The Backfire bomber can fly from the Soviet Union to the United States unrefueled and drop bombs.

Q Well, we can talk about the Pershing all over again. But the agreement that was reached in '79 -- positioning, production, etc. -- have they lived up to the terms of the '79 side agreement?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The Soviet Backfire force as -- constitutes then, as it does now, a strategic threat to the United States and -- not to mention possible changes since that time in the way of refueling possibilities and forward deployment possibilities. And so it remains a problem.

Q Can I follow up on one earlier question on forward based systems and INF? From a horse-trading standpoint, doesn't it make good sense in the -- with the Soviet proposal to trade an F-4 for an SS-18? If they are willing to trade one for one, wouldn't it make good horse-trading sense, from our point of view, to trade a strategically insignificant weapon for one that is strategically significant on their side?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The need to associate corresponding forces is born of their capabilities -- what they can do just explosively as well as how quickly they can do it. The United States has said that there are areas where our advantages, such in bombers, can be negotiated versus areas of their advantages, such as in ballistic missiles. But there is not a direct one-for-one correlation between these things and you have to negotiate what that correlation would be. But we've said we're willing now to talk about tradeoffs.

Q -- one point, you do deal with aggregates and if an F-4 is going to count in the aggregate and the SS-18 is going to count in the aggregate, to some extent they are a tradeoff, are they not?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, you have to give them a coefficient -- I mean, not literally. But, there are different values that apply to these just because of what some can do and cannot do and I'd be glad to pursue it with you, but you can't mix the golf balls with the bowling balls. They really are different.

Q Can we ask a question about numbers? Can you --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: David?

Q Can you tell us, if you strip away the imbalance that you cited here in terms of INF and so on strictly as a matter of their proposal for the 50 percent reduction and 3,600 sub limit, does that interest us if they somehow stripped away the imbalances you discussed?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, David, I think the headline would be misleading to give you an affirmative on that. Reductions, and their apparent commitment to them, is a very appealing part of their proposal. Reductions in corresponding systems is what we're after to a position of equality that is verifiable. So, we see the possibility that some of the things in their proposal could lead to progress, yes.

Q Two questions about numbers. One, can you fill in the air launch cruise missile totals on both sides. And number two: in our case, I gather you're counting what we have deployed. In their case, are you using SALT accountable figures, that is, assuming the maximum number of warheads on each deployable missile. And is there an imbalance -- where they're figuring our SALT accountable numbers and we are not when they're looking at our systems?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, no. Nobody ever pretended that SALT accountable systems encompass carrier based aircraft or --

Q No, I'm not talking about that part. I'm just talking about the strategic arsenals.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, we get to the threshold of classified dope here both on our bomber loading and on their corresponding systems loading and I'm afraid I just can't treat it publicly --

Q Have you seen any evidence that they've taken some of the SS-20's off the alert status as Gorbachev indicated to get down to the -- what -- figures?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No. Our assessment of the currently operational SS-24's has not changed.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END

3:30 P.M. EDT