

## Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

### Soviets still demand SDI for START

The enormous distance separating the two sides in the negotiations for a treaty to reduce strategic nuclear weapons (START) was made clear during a background briefing at the State Department April 18 prior to Secretary of State George Shultz's latest junket to Moscow to meet with his Soviet counterpart, Eduard Shevardnadze.

Based on information provided in this briefing, if a treaty does come together in time for the superpower summit in Moscow May 29-June 2, it will be an unspeakable disaster.

The fact that the White House officially still holds out "hope" for a treaty to be ready in time for the summit is downright frightening. According to the administration official, there has been essentially no progress on the most important component of the treaty since the Reykjavik summit of October 1986.

This component does not have to do with offensive weapons, but with defensive ones—namely, the future of the Strategic Defense Initiative.

The Soviets have not changed their Reykjavik position on demanding a link between reducing offensive weapons and blocking U.S. development and deployment of the SDI, despite all administration propaganda to the contrary in the meantime.

All attempts by the Reagan White House to create the impression that progress has been made on this front have proven to be totally false—most notably, the effort to draw such an interpretation from the joint statement issued by Reagan and Gorbachov at the end of their summit in December.

Then, top-level administration officials were adamant in insisting to the press that the reference in the joint statement to permitting "testing [of SDI systems] as required" meant that unfettered SDI development would be permitted during a period of non-withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty. U.S. officials gloated that the statement meant the Soviets had at last conceded the U.S. right to go ahead with its program.

However, the Soviets rejected this interpretation of the phrase, "testing as required," insisting their position had not changed one iota from that taken by Gorbachov at Reykjavik, when he demanded that the SDI "be confined to the four walls of a laboratory."

So, when it finally became clear that the two sides had entirely different readings of the phrase, "testing as required," the United States was forced to admit that more effort would be required to clarify what this meant. The next step was the Shultz-Shevardnadze meeting in Washington in March. The U.S. negotiating team again came away from the talks glowing with the report of a breakthrough in the resolution of this problem. "We have now achieved a framework for hammering out exactly what will be permitted in the area of ballistic missile defense," Shultz told the press.

He said that the two sides agreed to draft a document, with all their areas of disagreement bracketed, and begin the negotiating process of removing the brackets—resolving the areas of disagreement—one at a time.

In an exclusive interview with this reporter, a top U.S. negotiator said the step was, in reality, "sideways, at best, not forward," and many in Washington were worried that Paul Nitze had slipped through his plan for subtly negotiating away the SDI through this mechanism. But now, with Shultz

heading to Moscow for his final meeting with Shevardnadze before the next summit, the senior administration official was forced to concede that the two sides are at "square one" on the defense and space issue.

Pressed by this reporter, she told the assembled press that there are 1,200 bracketed areas in four documents that, taken together, comprise the START treaty. The documents include: 1) the treaty itself, 2) a protocol for inspection procedures, 3) a protocol for conversion and elimination of systems, and 4) a memorandum of understanding that includes data on all the relevant systems covered under the treaty.

After she outlined the continuing disagreements between the two sides contained in these four documents, I asked, "What about the draft document on ballistic missile defense that you said in March you wanted to be ready for signing at the same time as the START treaty?"

"Oh, yes, you are right," she said, pretending she just happened to forget the single biggest sticking point in the entire negotiation. "That is the fifth document."

"Well, I'm afraid there isn't even an agreement to draft such a document now," she said, indicating that whatever progress supposedly occurred in March had vanished. "The idea was to build on the language of the Washington joint statement, to deal with that very important ambiguity in that statement," she added. "It is very important to clarify it before we move ahead with any START treaty."

So, in the final analysis, all the differences over mobile versus air-launched and submarine-launched systems, etc., in the START talks are irrelevant to the question of when a treaty will be ready, unless the administration is ready to suddenly kick the SDI out the window.