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NSC STAFF/IG Saturday Text as forwarded to Mr. McF.

Press Backgrounder
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THE SOVIET COUNTERPROPOSAL

-- On September 30, the Soviet NST Delegation in Geneva began formally presenting their counterproposal. Since some of the details of the Soviet counterproposal have already been made public by the Soviets, and information has appeared in inaccurate forms in the media, I thought it might be useful to give you as "background", not for attribution, an overview of what we know now about the Soviet counterproposal and our preliminary assessment of it. I stress "preliminary assessment" because our negotiations in Geneva will continue to probe for further details.

Terms of the Soviet Counterproposal

-- The basic elements of the counterproposal as presented by the USSR, are as follows:

-- A ban on development, including scientific research, testing and deployment of what the Soviets choose to call "space strike weapons", as a [condition] [precondition] for their proposed reductions in nuclear offensive arms.

-- 50 percent reductions in "nuclear delivery vehicles that can reach the territory of the other side".

-- For the USSR a 1,250 ceiling on strategic nuclear systems of the kinds covered by the SALT II Agreement.

-- For the US, a 1,680 ceiling under which would be included not only strategic-range systems, but also LRINF missiles, carrier-based aircraft, and so called "medium-range" aircraft based in Europe and Asia. All the US systems are described by the Soviets as "strategic" on the assumption that they can reach the Soviet Union.

-- The Soviets attributed the following to the US:

-- 2,215 ICBMs, SLBMs, and heavy bombers;

-- 209 LRINF missiles;

-- 560 carrier-based aircraft; and

-- 380 medium-range aircraft deployed in Europe and in Asia.

-- The proposal calls for reductions in "nuclear weapons" to equal levels of 6,000 on both sides; that is, 6,000 strategic weapons for the Soviets and 6,000 strategic and medium-range weapons combined for the US.

-- There would be freedom to mix within weapon and nuclear delivery vehicle aggregates, as long as no more than 60 percent of the total number of weapons are deployed on any one category of nuclear delivery vehicle.

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-- The Soviets have reaffirmed their earlier proposed ban on all long-range cruise missiles, including ALCMs, SLCMs and GLCMs. (e.g., over 600 km)

-- They would ban or strictly limit in unspecified ways new types of ICBMs, SLBMs and heavy bombers.

Additional Measures in Preparation for November Meeting

-- The Soviets also proposed additional measures that were described as practical steps aimed at early accomplishment of the overall agreement and contributing to preparations for the November Reagan-Gorbachev meeting. Basically, these are:

-- A freeze on all existing nuclear systems -- strategic, medium-range, and tactical -- at current quantitative levels and a limitation on their modernization;

-- A moratorium on deployment of US and Soviet medium-range missiles in Europe. Soviet negotiators also indicated that previous Soviet INF moratorium proposals remain valid;

-- The removal from "combat alert status" and dismantlement by an agreed date of some nuclear systems as a confidence building measure (they suggested 200 to 300 ICBMs);

-- A proposal that the sides not deploy any nuclear weapons to countries where such arms do not exist, not to increase stockpiles, and not to replace systems currently deployed in other countries with modernized systems; and

-- A mutual moratorium on nuclear testing. Soviet negotiators indicated that quote "further actions of the sides in this regard would take into account the actions of other nuclear states", unquote. We interpret this to mean that future Soviet adherence to a U.S./Soviet moratorium would depend in part on the testing practices of other nuclear states.

-- That summarizes the Soviet counterproposal as it has been thus far revealed. Let me now offer a few observations.

National Security Considerations

-- An assessment of the significance of the Soviet counterproposal must be viewed in the context of our national security objectives and our objectives with respect to the specific negotiations. Those objectives are well known, but worth underlining.

-- Overall, we seek radical reductions to equal levels in existing and planned offensive nuclear arms, and the stabilization of the relationship between offensive and defensive arms.

-- We intend to hold open the possibility of a more defense-reliant future, with greatly reduced levels of nuclear arms. And we want to provide a framework leading to the eventual elimination of all nuclear arms, both offensive and defensive.

-- Any agreements must be effectively verifiable, must enhance both US and Allied security, must not detract from nuclear and conventional deterrence, must improve strategic stability, must reduce the risk of war, and must be complied with.

-- Having made these key national security objectives clear, let me now also review our objectives for each of the specific negotiating fora.

-- In the START negotiations, our objective is significant reductions in strategic nuclear arsenals to equal and effectively verifiable levels. We place particular emphasis on reductions in the most destabilizing systems, especially MIRVed land-based ballistic missiles, their warheads and throw-weight.

-- Our existing proposal would require reductions to 5,000 strategic nuclear warheads. Significant reductions in the destructive capacity of strategic ballistic missile warheads must result in reducing the threat to our ICBM force and enhancing crisis stability.

-- In the INF negotiations, our goal remains the complete elimination of US and Soviet longer-range INF missiles, or, short of that, reductions to equal global levels of US and Soviet LRINF warheads. We also cannot accept diminution of NATO's conventional capabilities or insistence that we compensate the Soviets for UK or French nuclear forces.

-- In the Defense and Space negotiations, our goal, in the near term, is to reverse the erosion of the ABM Treaty caused by Soviet non-compliance activities and their massive build-up of strategic offensive forces, restore full Soviet compliance with the ABM and other agreements, and initiate a dialogue on the offense-defense relationship and a possible transition to a more defense-reliant posture.

-- For the longer term, we want to preserve the option of a transition to greater defense reliance, and to this end, we will continue SDI research in full compliance with existing treaty obligations.

Military Impact of Soviet Counterproposal

-- With a concrete Soviet counterproposal at long last on the negotiating table, our job now turns to close examination in an effort to see where there may be common ground which encourages us to move forward.

-- Our preliminary view of the overall Soviet counterproposal is that it is lopsided in the Soviets' favor and therefore [very] disappointing.

-- They continue to link US agreement to their proposal to a ban on development, including scientific research, testing and deployment of what the Soviets choose to call "space strike weapons" as a [condition] [precondition] for proposed reductions in nuclear offensive arms. As we have consistently maintained, [agreement][progress] in one area cannot be held hostage to [agreement][progress] in another.

-- In the START context, the Soviet counterproposal represents some familiar provisions as well as some new elements. It is, however, in the aggregate [blatantly] one-sided.

-- Although we don't have all the details, several observations can be made about the impact of the Soviet proposal in terms of its effect on deterrence, the strategic balance, and stability.

-- Let me illustrate a major imbalance in the Soviet proposal.

-- The Soviet Union has proposed a 50 percent cut in what it calls "nuclear delivery vehicles that can reach the territory of the other side."

-- The proposal calls for the US to have 1,680 such nuclear delivery vehicles and for the Soviet Union to have 1,250, an apparent advantage of 430 to the US.

-- However, the apparent advantage to the US of 430 is illusory. It is in fact the US, not the Soviet Union, that would actually be at a disadvantage in the Soviet proposal. Let me explain why.

-- The Soviet list of systems which can reach the other side's territory and which they consider strategic, counts as strategic systems 1,149 US longer-range INF missiles, land-based aircraft, and carrier-based aircraft, but does not count some 2,000 comparable Soviet systems and some 300 Backfire bombers.

-- Two examples illustrate the effect of the Soviet's unequal counting:

   -- For the US to have the same number of strategic nuclear delivery vehicles as the Soviets after the proposed 50 percent reductions, we would have to cut our own LRINF and medium-range systems to 430. This would be 60 percent below our present levels and only 20 percent of comparable Soviet levels.

   -- On the other hand, if, after the proposed reductions, the US were to retain its present numbers of LRINF and medium-range systems, the number of strategic nuclear delivery vehicles which the US could keep would be about one-half of the Soviet Union's 1,250.

-- We have seen the unequal impact of the Soviet count on nuclear delivery vehicles. There would be a similarly great disadvantage for the US in warhead numbers.

-- The inclusion of US LRINF missile warheads, and carrier-based and medium-range aircraft weapons, and exclusion of comparable Soviet weapons, under a common 6,000 weapon ceiling, would not only result in US inferiority in strategic ballistic missile warheads, but also virtually guarantee US inferiority as well in numbers of weapons on all strategic systems.

-- There is, however, an interesting new element in the Soviet proposal. For the first time the Soviets are proposing a 1,250 limit on its strategic nuclear delivery vehicles, approximately 50 percent below their current level. The proposed 6,000 limit on weapons is far lower than the 10,000-12,000 weapons they implied in their previous position they would seek to permit. The proposed 6,000 limit is about 40 percent below our estimate of the current Soviet level.

-- We are particularly disappointed, nevertheless, that the Soviet counterproposal fails to address the critical problem of stability and would probably actually decrease rather than enhance stability:

-- First, the combination of modernization constraints which would asymmetrically affect US forces and the lack of restrictions on Soviet heavy ICBMs guarantees that the Soviets would retain a great advantage in missile throw-weight. That advantage is now approximately 3-1.

-- Second, even though the proposed maximum of 60 percent of all weapons permitted in one component of the force would limit Soviet ICBM RVs to 3,600, the Soviets could keep a significant number of prompt, hard target-kill-capable warheads on heavy missiles such as the SS-18 and potential modernizations to the SS-18. Indeed, under the Soviet proposal they could retain all 308 SS-18 ICBMs. Thus Soviet attack capabilities would grow against a reduced number of US hardened facilities.

-- Third, the US heavy bomber force is penalized. First, bombs and SRAMs are counted along with missile RVs despite the fact that bombers have lower readiness rates than missiles. Also, massive Soviet air defenses make bomber penetration less certain than ballistic missile penetration.

-- Moreover, the proposed ban on long-range cruise missiles would terminate the U.S. ALCM program and thus degrade the retaliatory effectiveness of US heavy bombers in future years in the face of unconstrained Soviet air defenses. It would also terminate the U.S. SLCM program. In contrast, the Soviets would be free to retain their medium range ALCMs and SLCMs , which are capable of attacking targets in western Europe and some targets in the U.S.

-- Finally, movement toward more stabilizing forces requires flexibility in modernization. While the B-1 and MX could probably go forward because they have already been flight tested, the proposed ban on new types of offensive nuclear arms would probably prevent the deployment of D-5, the advanced technology bomber, and more survivable ICBMs, including the new small ICBM. New Soviet systems, including SS-X-24, SS-X-25 and SS-NX-23 could proceed since they have been flight-tested.

-- In sum, although the Soviet counterproposal for the first time envisages significant reductions in Soviet forces, there are major shortcomings, the adoption of which would unacceptably degrade US capabilities, decrease stability and undermine deterrence. In addition, the Soviets have proposed a number of other measures, described as "practical steps aimed at early accomplishment" which would be unacceptable to the US. We are continuing to probe the Soviets for details of their proposal.

LRINF

-- In the INF context:

-- While there are some ambiguities and inconsistencies in the Soviet counterproposal, it would have a dangerously destabilizing effect in Europe.

-- The Soviet counterproposal, along with Gorbachev's announcements in Paris, has a clear bottom line: that by prohibiting the US from providing a credible nuclear deterrent, the US can be denied a legitimate role in the defense of our allies. The counterproposal further attempts to diminish the US contribution even to Western Europe's conventional deterrent. Meanwhile, the Soviet threat to the Alliance -- both conventional and nuclear -- would be undiminished.

-- In addition, the counterproposal seeks to drive wedges between the US and our allies by excluding virtually all Soviet systems which threaten them in Europe and Asia while attempting to limit US systems designed to counter existing imbalances and to bolster allied security.

-- The Soviets seek to decouple European defense from our strategic deterrent. The US, however, will not be party to any agreement which would decouple US and allied security, which we see as indivisible. We note in this regard, the very fact that the Soviets are offering such a proposal further vindicates the long-standing Alliance strategy of firmness and solidarity in face of the growing Soviet threat and Soviet intransigence in arms control negotiations, including their walkout in 1983. That Alliance strategy has brought the Soviets back to the table and we must now remain firmly united in our pursuit of progress.

-- There are some [positive elements of Gorbachev's statements in Paris] [ambiguities in the Soviet counterproposal] which we [welcome and] intend to explore in Geneva:

-- Gorbachev acknowledged that at least some US LRINF missile systems will remain in Europe -- albeit on terms unacceptable to the U.S. This reflects the failure of their earlier effort to prevent NATO's response to SS-20 deployments, and vindicates NATO's unity behind the dual-track approach.

-- While in Paris, Gorbachev said that a Soviet-American agreement may be possible on medium-range systems--to use the Soviets' phrase--"without the direct link with the problem of space and strategic armaments." The US has always maintained that progress toward an INF agreement must not be held hostage to progress in the other Geneva fora.

-- Also while in Paris, Gorbachev acknowledged that the independent nuclear forces of France and the United Kingdom are not appropriate topics for the US-Soviet talks in Geneva. Of course, Paris and London will decide whether or not to enter negotiations with Moscow over their strategic nuclear capabilities, but it is clear that the US cannot and will not negotiate with the Soviets on that topic.

-- Mr. Gorbachev claimed that the Soviet SS-20s in the western USSR on "stand-by alert" have been reduced to 243 missile systems.

-- First, Mr. Gorbachev's use of the term "stand-by alert" in this context is ambiguous, and, in any case, it has never been a relevant criterion for accountability in an arms control agreement.

-- Second, Gorbachev admits that additional missile systems were deployed in the USSR after June 1984 and carefully avoids any claim that any SS-20 systems have been dismantled or are otherwise not available for use in times of crisis or war.

-- Third, we and our Allies agree that there is no relevance in any limited geographic breakdown of the SS-20 force, which has now grown to 441 launchers. (FYI: We do not publicly break them down geographically.)

-- The mobility and range of SS-20s allow those in the eastern USSR to move quickly into range of Western Europe. Therefore, the only valid measure of the SS-20 force and the threat it poses is the total global number of SS-20s. In that regard, neither Gorbachev's statements nor the Soviet counterproposal in Geneva would preclude additional Soviet deployments in Asia.

-- Moreover, I can state that energetic construction of new SS-20 bases in both the western and eastern portions of the USSR continued even after their so-called unilateral moratorium was declared by the Soviets in early April.

-- The US aircraft listed in the Soviet proposal are dual-capable and are essential to nuclear deterrence, as well as to a conventional defense of our allies in Europe and Asia. The Soviet proposal would constrain them while not constraining similar Soviet aircraft. This point is very clear, for example, with respect to US carrier-based aircraft, which are primarily non-nuclear systems with worldwide requirements.

-- The Soviet moratorium provision and the ban on GLCM would preclude full implementation of NATO's 1979 dual-track decision. The US Pershing II would be accountable as a strategic system and its deployments halted, thus perpetuating the substantial Soviet advantage in LRINF systems. The proposal is designed to destroy Alliance solidarity and undercut the concept of shared risks.

-- The Soviet plenary statements are ambiguous in regard to the status of INF talks and the impact of the proposal on Soviet INF systems. They maintain that "the Soviet approach envisages the deepest possible cuts in medium-range arms in Europe in strict accord with the principle of equality and equal security", and call for termination of "deployment in Europe of US and USSR medium-range missiles." The core of the proposal, however, clearly makes only US -- not Soviet -- medium-range systems accountable.

Defense and Space

-- In the Defense and Space negotiations:

-- The Soviets have proposed a ban on development, including scientific research, testing and deployment, of what the Soviets choose to call "space strike weapons", in which they include ASATs. The effect of the Soviet proposal would be to block the US strategic defense and ASAT programs but with no comparable effect on the Soviet programs.

-- First, the closed nature of Soviet society compared to that of the U.S., as well as verification difficulties, would make it [extraordinarily] difficult, if not impossible, for the US to detect Soviet cheating.

-- Furthermore, we know the Soviet Union is conducting its own extensive research and development in the area of strategic defense, including many of the same technologies under study in the SDI program. The Soviets decline to admit that they have such a program.

-- Also, the Soviets would be left with a monopoly in operational ASATs.

-- The Soviet proposal is in contradiction with General Secretary Gorbachev's statement that fundamental and laboratory research would be permitted. Moreover, the Soviets have been perfectly clear in Geneva that their tabled position is a ban on SDI research.

-- Furthermore, Soviet ABM activities go well beyond research and have in the case of the Krasnoyarsk radar violated the ABM Treaty. [Indeed, the aggregate of Soviet ABM-related activities suggests that they may be preparing for a nationwide ABM defense.] In contrast, the US SDI program is being conducted in full compliance with the ABM Treaty.

Nuclear Testing

-- With respect to the Soviet proposal for a nuclear testing moratorium, we have said before that such a moratorium is unacceptable under existing circumstances. A way must first be found to achieve effective verification capability and to fulfill our national security needs.

-- President Kennedy's words in 1962 when the Soviets broke the earlier (in that case joint) testing moratorium expressed this concern very eloquently: "We know enough about broken negotiations, secret preparations, and the advantages gained from a long test series never to offer again an uninspected moratorium. "

-- We remain concerned about Soviet violations of the LTBT and likely violation of the TTBT.

-- The President's recent invitation to Soviet experts to visit the US nuclear test site to measure the yield of a US nuclear test aims to set in motion a process that could increase confidence and cooperation between our nations regarding limitations on nuclear weapons testing.

-- We made clear when the Soviets announced their moratorium the reasons for continuing the US program of testing. US testing is required to ensure the continued effectiveness of our deterrent, and to ensure the reliability and safety of the US arsenal.

-- Furthermore, the Soviets accelerated their nuclear testing just prior to announcing their moratorium by concentrating a number of tests in a very short period. We believe the Soviets are in a position to resume testing at an accelerated schedule when the moratorium ends.

Conclusion

-- It is important to keep the Soviet counterproposal in proper perspective. We should not forget that it was the Soviets who walked out of the START and INF negotiations in 1983, which caused an interruption of more than a year in negotiations.

-- The US, in contrast, put on the negotiating table a series of far-reaching arms reduction proposals.

-- While we welcome the fact that the Soviets finally have put a specific proposal forward, the specifics of their counterproposal, as they have presented it, would have the effect of:

— Blocking our strategic defense program, while allowing theirs to proceed.

-- Halting US strategic modernization — a modernization in response to the Soviet buildup of the last decade, and locking in current Soviet advantages;

-- Probably lowering rather than enhancing strategic stability; and

-- Producing a clearly one-sided result in the nuclear force balance by including US systems that directly defend our allies while excluding Soviet systems that threaten them.

-- Thank you for your attention. I hope the material I have just provided is useful, and I urge that you regard it with these points in mind:

-- First, in his preparations for the November meeting, President Reagan is focusing on ways to add momentum to serious give-and-take with General Secretary Gorbachev. The President will not, however, ever agree to sacrifice our basic objectives.

-- Second, as our analysis continues we are endeavoring to obtain additional information from the Soviets about their counterproposal.

-- Last, we are realistic and realize that the complex issues which affect the basic security of both sides are not likely to be resolved in the short term. No one should expect that the November meeting between President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev will produce an arms control agreement. Nor is arms control its exclusive focus; we expect to address important regional and bilateral issues. But with hard work we can hope to define more clearly a new and potentially fruitful basis on which hard negotiations can proceed.