

**The US and the USSR are entering a new round of arms control negotiations. But the nuclear build-up continues unabated.**

# JAW-JAW WAR-WAR

Paul Rogers

FOR TWO DAYS in early January, Schultz and Gromyko met in Geneva to discuss the resumption of negotiations on nuclear arms control, broken off over a year previously. At the end of the meeting, to wide media attention and even wider acclaim, the talks were announced to have been a success. Comprehensive negotiations would commence in Geneva this month and would cover strategic weapons, the intermediate nuclear forces in Europe, and even space-based weapons. The aim would be to achieve not just arms control but actual disarmament - substantial cut-backs in existing arsenals.

## Image and reality

An image was therefore given of an easing of the strained relations between the US and the USSR and a bringing under control of the nuclear arms race. It is ironic in the extreme that the reality was somewhat different - January 1985 represented one of the most notable months in the acceleration of the nuclear arms race for more than a decade.

Just four days after the end of the Geneva talks, on 12 January, the sixth Ohio-class missile submarine in the United States Navy's Trident fleet was launched at Groton, Connecticut. Later this year it is scheduled to enter service carrying 24 Trident missiles, each with 8 H-bomb warheads, exceeding by ten the number of multiple-warhead missiles allowed to the United States under the increasingly defunct SALT II agreement.

Also in January, at the Blytheville Air Base in Arkansas, the USAF's fifth squadron of B52 bombers equipped with air-launched cruise missiles entered service. With each of the sixteen bombers carrying twelve of these missiles, this single event added 192 H-bombs to the US strategic

inventory, equivalent to Britain's entire Polaris fleet.

Meanwhile, over in Europe, it was confirmed, also in January, that the US Army had completed deploying more than half of the entire force of Pershing 2 missiles scheduled to be based in West Germany.

While this immense expansion of US nuclear forces was in progress, a similar phenomenon was under way in the Soviet Union. A self-imposed moratorium on the construction of SS-20 bases, dating from early 1983, had been quietly dropped, and a full-scale programme of new base construction was under way. The first of the new series went operational a month before the Geneva talks, and while the talks were actually in progress it was being indicated that ten further bases were now under construction. At least 450 SS-20s

## the nuclear arms race proceeding serenely onwards

will have been deployed by the time the programme ends some time next year. With their multiple warheads they will double the arsenal of intermediate range missile warheads available to the Soviet Union compared with ten years ago.

At the strategic level, too, the Soviet Union was pressing ahead. A new ICBM, the SS-25 was starting to be deployed, another ICBM and a supersonic long-range bomber were being tested and at least three cruise missiles were being developed.

There is a tremendous irony in the

juxtaposition of these processes. We are told, repeatedly and from many different quarters, that East-West relations are improving, that the US and the USSR are at least talking, and that we can, metaphorically at least, rest easy in our beds. Yet if we peel away the very modest secrecy which covers the actuality of the nuclear arms race, we find that it is business as usual, very brisk business indeed, with the nuclear arms race proceeding serenely onwards, apparently oblivious to any supposed improvements in superpower relations.

## The context

In relation to arms control, nuclear weapons are grouped into three categories. The smallest are the tactical weapons, including artillery, torpedoes, mines, depth charges and short range missiles. Apart from attempts to negotiate nuclear-free zones, there are no negotiations which deal with these weapons.

Then there are the intermediate range weapons such as cruise missiles and the SS-20, which cannot travel over intercontinental distances and also tend to be concentrated in certain areas of the world, notably Europe. They were the subject of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) talks in Geneva in the early 1980s.

Finally, there are the really long range or strategic nuclear weapons such as the Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) and giant long range bombers. These strategic weapons were the subject of the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) talks in the 1960s and 1970s, and the more recent Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) negotiations in Geneva in 1981 and 1983.

In most areas of nuclear weapons developments, the United States has led the

way. This has been true of the atom bomb, the hydrogen bomb, the development of multiple warheads on single missiles, and of long range jet bombers. On rare occasions, the Soviet Union has led, as with the first test of an ICBM, but the United States is typically five years ahead of the Soviet Union in most areas of technology.

A consequence of this has been for the Soviet Union to try and make up what it lacks in accuracy and reliability by the use of large, if more crude weapons. This feature in turn enables the hawks within the United States to press for even more attention to technical superiority. There has never yet been a time when the Soviet Union has been able to match the US strategic arsenals in either numbers of warheads or accuracy of missiles.

#### Past lessons and future expectations

If we examine the results of 20 years' experience in arms control negotiations, we find that the whole process has yet to result in the dismantling of a single missile or aircraft, save for a handful of obsolete

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systems already due for the scrap heap. The SALT II negotiations are perhaps the best example.

From 1972 to 1979, negotiators attempted to agree on ceilings for different categories of strategic warheads, but this was at precisely the time when the practice was being developed of putting many warheads on each missile. The MIRVing (Multiple Independently-targetable Re-entry Vehicles) was transforming the arsenals of first the United States and then the Soviet Union. As a result, over the seven years of the SALT II negotiations, the United States increased its warhead total from 5700 to 9000 and the Soviet Union its total from 2100 to 5000!

This is not to say that the SALT diplomats themselves were necessarily acting in bad faith. Many were people of goodwill, skilled negotiators who, in an era of relative detente, even had support in their home countries. It is possible to see the process as a race, not between one superpower and the other, but rather between two entirely unequal competitors, the armourers and the negotiators. While the latter might make some progress down the 'track', the former are moving at least twice as fast, rendering the efforts of the

negotiators meaningless.

In practice, though, far from being meaningless, the very process of negotiations can be positively dangerous. The fact that such a process is under way gives this false sense of security in which an appearance of progress is maintained, a most useful function for governments faced with persistent peace movements.

#### The recent talks

It is reasonable to describe the process of the SALT II talks of the 1970s as involving some degree of goodwill, but the circumstances were very different from those of the more recent rounds of talks in the early 1980s. There were two sets of discussions in Geneva between 1981 and 1983 - the INF talks concerned with the so-called Euromissiles such as the Pershing II and SS-20, and the START talks involving longer range strategic weapons.

These talks, unlike SALT, were characterised by relatively little good will, by a propensity for bargaining positions to be announced in the full knowledge that they would be unacceptable to the other side, but could be of propaganda value for domestic consumption.

The best single example of this approach was the so-called 'zero option' from the United States. This required the Soviet Union to withdraw all its SS-4, SS-5 and SS-20 missiles, in return for which the United States would cancel the deployment of cruise and Pershing II missiles in Western Europe.

The zero option was superficially attractive and was a widely used instrument of propaganda in Western Europe - after all, the image of a Europe free of all missiles was attractive enough. But the zero option neglected several key facts. Most importantly, it excluded any reference to British and French missiles, operating out of Europe and aimed at Soviet territory. These would remain, even after the dismantling of all the Soviet systems. Furthermore, at least 400 Poseidon missile warheads of the US Navy had, for many years been allocated to NATO for targeting on Eastern Europe, specifically as a counter to the Soviet missiles. These, too, were excluded from the zero option.

The zero option proposal was subsequently modified, and prospects for some sort of agreement looked reasonably bright in early 1983. Even so, the proposals briefly under consideration at the time of the famous informal 'walk in the woods' by the two chief negotiators, involved some deployment of US missiles. In other words, even if the negotiations had suc-

ceeded, there would have been new missiles deployed in Europe *by mutual agreement*. Once again, the armourers would out-run arms control.

In the event, the talks collapsed in November 1983 and, during and since the talks, the nuclear arms race has proceeded unabated. The momentum of the nuclear arms race is unchallenged and possibly unchallengeable by conventional political institutions.

#### Prospects for the new talks

For a few brief years, in the early part of the Carter presidency, there was a pause in the expansion of US nuclear arsenals. Improvements were being made to existing systems, and new weapons were under development, but the immense acceleration of the early 1970s decreased to almost nothing.

At the start of this period, around 1975, the US had a greater than 2:1 superiority over the Soviet Union in nuclear targeting ability, and in the late 1970s it was the turn of the Soviets to attempt to catch up. In this they failed, for the end of the decade saw a transformation of the funding for US nuclear programmes giving an immense new momentum to the arms race.

This was largely achieved through the activities of remarkably well endowed pressure groups and within two years of the Reagan administration entering office the new weapons were coming off the assembly lines. Even now, three years



later, there is no sign of the process slowing down. The Fiscal Year 1986 Defence Budget request is for a 5.9% increase in real terms, with a massive 20% increase, again in real terms, for weapons research and development, much of it devoted to financing the expanding space weapons programme.

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In the latter part of this decade, several thousand new strategic nuclear warheads will enter service, with fewer than 90 obsolete warheads being withdrawn. They



will include the first deployments of the highly accurate Trident D5 missile, a counter-silo missile of considerable first-strike potential.

In the past few months, the Soviet response to this has become clear. It appeared in the early 1980s that the Soviet Union was not expanding its nuclear arsenals at the pace which might have been expected. The evidence now suggests that considerable funding may have been diverted from production to development, with the result that a whole range of new weapons is nearing completion.

Even US government spokesmen agree that the new Geneva arms control talks will go on for several years, so we are faced with a familiar story - negotiations in one water-tight compartment and a continuing nuclear arms race in another.

**Signs in the wind**

In this context is there, therefore, any room for optimism? In the run up to any series of talks it is the practice for the sides to indicate their general frame of mind. It is fair to say that in terms of general policy statements the prospects look quite good. Soviet and American foreign policy officials have spoken in optimistic terms of the outlook for realistic progress in Geneva.

Once again though, as the start of the talks draws near, there are signs of quite different realities. At the beginning of February, the United States Department of Defence started a new offensive on the theme of supposed Soviet violations of existing agreements and treaties. The Soviets responded with counter charges.

Even more ominously, the United States announced on 12 February that it would continue with full-scale research into space-based weapons even if substantial progress was made in negotiations on controlling or even limiting numbers of nuclear missiles. The crucial problem here is that there is simply no clear dividing line between research and deployment. A weapons system can be developed right up to the point where it is deployable. At that time, a single decision and a few months of production turns it into a reality. There can be little doubt that the Soviet Union will adopt a similar policy. Thus the prospects for the control of the new generations of space-based weapons reduce almost to zero.

Hidden behind the rhetoric of optimism put forward by some US spokespeople, typically in the State Department rather than the Pentagon, is one final harsh reality. There exists within the American

defence environment, a school of thought which regards arms control negotiations as fundamentally dangerous. These people regard US strategic superiority as the only acceptable position, with arms control being highly objectionable in that it is conceived in terms of a balance of forces.

Underpinning this outlook is the belief that the United States is engaged in an economic war of attrition with the Soviet Union, and that Soviet determination to keep up with US nuclear programmes will ultimately lead to the collapse of the Soviet system.

This outlook is probably a minority one, even within the strategic studies field, but those who hold it are precisely the people who hold sway within the Reagan administration. In any realistic analysis it is therefore quite unreasonable, if not fundamentally naive to expect any hard progress to be made at Geneva.

It becomes essential to make this apparent to as wide a constituency as possible. Furthermore, it becomes even more essential to concentrate analytical tools on understanding the momentum of the nuclear arms race, the national and international forces which fuel it, and the process by which it might be brought under control.



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