

Radio Address to the Nation Following the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Summit Meeting in Brussels, Belgium

March 5, 1988

My fellow Americans:

As many of you know, I recently returned from Brussels, Belgium, where I met with the leaders of the North Atlantic alliance. I'm glad to say that the Western alliance remains a strong and unified guardian of the free world, ready to meet the many challenges before us.

In all of my meetings with allied leaders there was a unity of purpose and resolve that I found heartening and uplifting. That strength and unity have never been more sorely tested or better proven than in the events leading up to, and making possible, the recent signing of our historic treaty with the Soviet Union to eliminate an entire class of U.S. and Soviet nuclear weapons. Let me, if I may, review those events, because they provide a lesson that was much on my mind this week in Brussels, a valuable lesson about the only effective way to deal with the Soviet Union: from a position of strength.

INF refers to intermediate-range nuclear forces. They only became an issue in the seventies and early eighties when the Soviets began targeting their new SS-20 missiles against every major city in Western Europe and our friends in Asia, as well. The free nations had no comparable weapon to counter this new threat. So, NATO agreed on what we called a dual-track policy. We would negotiate with the Soviets to get them to remove their missiles or to reduce them to the lowest possible equal level, and we would also deploy our own forces to counter their new threat.

Well, the Soviets tried every play in the book to keep NATO from deploying these weapons. They stalled; they threatened. Finally, they walked out of the negotiations in Geneva when we did begin deploying. The political pressure brought to bear on Western Europe was immense. Many said our allies couldn't take it and they'd cave in. Demonstrations erupted in many of the capital cities in Europe, and the demonstrators' line was very similar to the Soviets No NATO deployments. In the United States, the so-called nuclear freeze movement gained strength. Well, if those demonstrators had gotten their way, there would be no INF treaty. There would be no agreement with the Soviet Union to reduce, for the first time in history, nuclear armaments. The Soviet SS-20's would still be in place, threatening the populations of Western Europe and Asia. The lesson learned: One must always negotiate with the Soviets from a position of strength.

At this NATO meeting, we talked with our allies about ways to apply this lesson. After the removal of the Soviet intermediate-range missile threat, our highest priorities are: first, to negotiate a 50-percent reduction in strategic arms; second, to address the fact that the Warsaw Pact conventional forces, arrayed offensively along the Iron Curtain, far outnumber NATO's; and third, to address the problems created by the continued Soviet maintenance of the world's largest chemical weapons arsenal.

That's why continued modernization of NATO forces, nuclear and conventional, is essential. Most of you have heard of SDI—our Strategic Defense Initiative that may one day make ballistic missiles obsolete. At the same time, we must continue to pursue NATO's conventional defense initiative to develop high-tech conventional weapons that may be an important part of the answer to the Soviets' aggressive strategy on the European continent.

These issues were on our agenda in Brussels. We resolved there to press for large, asymmetrical reductions to Warsaw Pact conventional forces, for example, tanks and artillery. General Secretary Gorbachev talks at home about perestroika—that's Russian for restructuring. Well, it's time for some restructuring in the Warsaw Pact. It's time for the abandonment of the Soviet offensive strategy on the continent.

We must never forget that arms reduction is not enough. Armaments are only the symptom, not the cause, of a much deeper division between free societies and the unfree. That division is at its heart a moral division. Perhaps it is best symbolized by the Berlin Wall and the horrible barrier that cuts down the center of Europe, dividing nations, peoples, families. The question must be asked: When can we ever hope to achieve a real and lasting peace with a regime that is so fearful of its own people that it must imprison them behind barbed wire? That's why, when I visited the Berlin Wall last year, I issued a challenge to Mr. Gorbachev: If you really want glasnost, if you really want openness, tear down that wall!

So, let me conclude by saying, I found this week in Brussels what the Atlantic alliance has demonstrated now for 40 years: that a peace built on strength can and will endure. And I am convinced, after our meeting, that the alliance of free nations has never been stronger.

Until next week, thanks for listening, and God bless you.

Note: The President spoke at 12:06 p.m. from the Oval Office at the White House.

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