

Remarks to Reporters on Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force Reductions

March 3, 1987

Working closely with our friends and allies in Europe and Asia, the United States has pursued -- ever since my initial proposal of November 1981 -- deep, equitable, and verifiable reductions of land-based U.S. and Soviet longer range INF missiles, with the objective of their complete global elimination. Most recently we've been preparing a detailed treaty text to implement these agreed objectives and to follow the specific formula on which Mr. Gorbachev and I agreed at our meeting in Iceland last October. This calls for reductions to an interim global ceiling of 100 warheads on U.S. and Soviet longer range INF missiles, with none in Europe, along with constraints on shorter range INF missiles and provisions for effective verification. I remain firmly committed to these objectives.

Having long sought progress in this area, therefore, I welcome the statement by Soviet General Secretary Gorbachev on Saturday that the Soviet Union will no longer insist on linking agreement on reductions in INF to agreements in other negotiations. This removes a serious obstacle to progress toward INF reductions and is consistent with the understanding which Mr. Gorbachev and I reached at our 1985 Geneva summit meeting: that we would indeed seek a separate agreement in this important area. I want to congratulate our allies for their firmness on this issue. Obviously, our strength of purpose has led to progress. To seize this new opportunity, I have instructed our negotiators to begin the presentation of our draft INF treaty text in Geneva tomorrow. I hope that the Soviet Union will then proceed with us to serious discussion of the details which are essential to translate areas of agreement in principle into a concrete agreement. And I want to stress that of the important issues which remain to be resolved none is more important than verification. Because we're committed to genuine and lasting arms reductions and to ensuring full compliance, we will continue to insist that any agreement must be effectively verifiable.

To explore further the implications of these latest developments, I have also asked our senior negotiators in Geneva -- Ambassadors Max Kampelman, Mike Glitman, and Ron Lehman -- to return to Washington to meet with me later this week. Following these discussions in Washington, I will send a team back to Geneva to

take up once again the detailed negotiations for an INF reductions agreement. We'll continue, at the same time, our very close consultations on INF issues with our friends and allies in Europe and Asia. It was, after all, allied firmness and unity in carrying out NATO's 1979 decision which helped to bring the Soviet Union back to the negotiating table and led to this opportunity to achieve a reductions agreement to the mutual benefit of both East and West. And as we proceed, it is well to remember that nothing is more important to the cause of peace than the credibility of our commitment to NATO and our other allies and to the vitality of these alliances of free nations.

Note: The President spoke to reporters at 3:30 p.m. in the Briefing Room at the White House.