

Statement by Principal Deputy Press Secretary Speakes on the Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction Negotiations

March 20, 1986

Today marked the close of the 38th round of the Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions [MBFR] negotiations in Vienna, where the United States and its NATO allies continued efforts to find common ground with the Warsaw Pact on the reduction of conventional forces in Central Europe. Unfortunately, the Soviet Union and its allies have not responded constructively to recent Western initiatives that had sought to make substantial progress in these negotiations.

Last December 5, NATO introduced a major new MBFR initiative designed to bring East and West closer together on a number of issues. Most significantly, while reaffirming the importance of effective verification, the NATO participants set aside their longstanding insistence that the sides come to an understanding on troop-level data in the area of reductions before an agreement is signed. This was a major concession to the East, which had often declared its readiness to move forward swiftly in the talks if only the so-called data barrier could be removed. Not only did the West decide to remove this barrier, it also adopted the East's own general approach-to negotiate a first-phase, time-limited agreement in which initial U.S. and U.S.S.R. reductions would be followed by a no-increase commitment in the area of reductions by all participating states. On these and a number of other

points, the U.S. and its allies made every effort to come to an early accord in Vienna.

At the beginning of the round, there was reason to be optimistic. General Secretary Gorbachev had noted that, following the December 5 West initiative, an outline for agreement in Vienna was emerging. At the same time, Mr. Gorbachev and many Soviet and East European spokesmen indicated that they shared with NATO an appreciation of the vital role of verification, including on-site inspection, in arms control. However, the Eastern participants have not reciprocated the West's move or given substance to the declarations of their leaders. Indeed, on February 20, the Warsaw Pact tabled a draft agreement which recycled old and unacceptable Eastern positions and which included an utterly inadequate verification regime.

NATO has made it clear to the Warsaw Pact that the East's actions during this negotiating round did not meet Western security requirements and that we await a response from the East as important as the step the West took in December. If the Soviet Union and its allies show the political will to match that of the West, then there is hope that the MBFR negotiations can result in an effective and fair agreement. The President has instructed the U.S. delegation to continue to work for such an outcome.