Statement on a NATO Proposal To Reduce Troops in Central Europe

December 5, 1985

Consistent with the Joint Statement issued by General Secretary Gorbachev and me at the conclusion of the Geneva meeting and with our efforts to promote a more constructive East-West relationship, we and our NATO allies are introducing in Vienna today a new proposal designed to break the long deadlock on conventional arms reductions in Europe.

Since the early 1970's, NATO has engaged the Warsaw Pact in discussions aimed at limiting the numbers of troops on both sides in central Europe. These discussions, known as the Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction Talks (MBFR), now constitute one of the longest continuously running arms control negotiations in history. The NATO allies have consistently tried to move these negotiations forward. In 1982 and 1984, the U.S. and the allies presented new proposals designed to achieve progress in the MBFR negotiations. Regrettably, both proposals were rejected by the Warsaw Pact. After extensive national reviews of these talks and their objectives, we and our allies have concluded that a significant and forthcoming new move could provide new impetus to the negotiations.

In an effort to move the negotiations forward, and taking into account expressed Eastern concerns, we have today tabled a new proposal for reductions with effective verification. The proposed package of verification measures is intended to verify the numbers of troops withdrawn as well as the numbers which will remain. Thus, in exchange for a comprehensive and effective package of verification measures, NATO Would be willing to accept the general framework of the February 1985 model proposed by the Soviet Union and its allies for a noncomprehensive agreement. We will no longer insist, as we have since the outset of negotiations, that the sides come to an agreement on Eastern troop levels before treaty signature. Nor will we continue to insist, for now, on a comprehensive approach whereby East and West must agree at the

outset on all the steps needed to reduce to parity.

In this context, the U.S. is now prepared to accept a reduction of 5,000 U.S. and 11,500 Soviet ground troops in the central European reduction area. These figures reflect the ratio between existing U.S. and Soviet troop levels in the area. As soon as these reductions are completed, NATO is prepared to accept a commitment by both alliances not to increase forces in central Europe. As verified by implementation of the verification measures, this no-increase commitment would last for 3 years.

The new Western proposal builds on key aspects of the Warsaw Pact's ideas of February 1985. These include a time-limited, noncomprehensive agreement; reductions without prior data agreement on Eastern forces; and a no-increase agreement. The main element which NATO has added is in the area of verification. Fair, effective, and reciprocal verification measures are essential so that both sides will be able to know whether the terms of the accord are being complied with. This is especially important if we are to accept a no-increase commitment on troops in the area without prior agreement on the level of those troops. The Soviets have contended that such prior agreement was unnecessary and that Western concerns could be satisfied through implementation of verification measures. This new Western proposal offers them an opportunity to pursue that approach. Agreement on all aspects of the proposed verification measures would, of course, have to be reached prior to the signature of a treaty.

We urge the Soviet Union and the other Warsaw Pact countries to consider carefully the details of our proposal. This NATO initiative can help fulfill the commitments made at the Geneva summit and produce real progress in Vienna which would reduce forces in central Europe.