

Statement by Assistant to the President for Press Relations Fitzwater on the Soviet-United States Nuclear and Space Arms Negotiations

February 12, 1988

On Monday, February 15, the United States and the Soviet Union will resume step-by-step negotiations on nuclear testing with the opening of round two of these talks in Geneva. The nuclear testing talks represent a practical approach -- as the President has long advocated -- to nuclear testing limitations which are in our national security interest.

In undertaking these talks, the United States and the Soviet Union agreed, as a first step, to negotiate effective verification measures for two existing, but unratified nuclear testing treaties: the Threshold Test Ban Treaty (TTBT) and the Peaceful Nuclear Explosions Treaty (PNET). Once our verification concerns have been satisfied and the treaties ratified, we will propose that the United States and the Soviet Union immediately enter into negotiations on ways to implement a step-by-step program -- in association with a program to reduce and ultimately eliminate nuclear weapons -- of limiting and ultimately ending nuclear testing.

We are making progress toward our goal of effective verification of the TTBT and the PNET. During General Secretary Gorbachev's visit to Washington in December, the United States and the Soviet Union agreed to design and conduct joint verification experiments intended to facilitate agreement on effective verification of these two treaties. These joint experiments, which will take place at each other's nuclear test site, will provide opportunities to measure the yield of nuclear explosions using techniques proposed by each side. Through these experiments, we hope to provide the Soviet Union with all the information they should need to accept U.S. use of CORTEX -- the most accurate technique we have identified for verification of the TTBT and the PNET.

We and the Soviets also agreed to visit each other's nuclear test sites for the purpose of familiarizing ourselves with the conditions and operations at those test sites. These unprecedented visits, which build on an idea the President first proposed in September 1984, took place last month in a constructive and cooperative atmosphere.

With a better understanding of the practical problems associated with conducting these experiments, we now have the information needed to design the experiments. The two sides have agreed to begin this work immediately upon resumption of negotiations on Monday. We hope that the sides will continue to make expeditious progress in these talks.

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