

Statement by Deputy Press Secretary Roussel on the Soviet Nuclear Test Ban Proposal

March 29, 1986

The President has taken note of General Secretary Gorbachev's speech on Soviet television today. The United States has repeatedly made it clear that the practical step now needed in the area of nuclear testing limitations is to enhance mutual confidence in the ability of the two sides to verify existing agreements, in particular the unratified Threshold Test Ban Treaty and the Peaceful Nuclear Explosions Treaty. The President has made a series of concrete proposals to the Soviet Union in this regard, most recently on March 14. In this initiative the President invited Mr. Gorbachev to send Soviet experts to the United States to examine our new CORRTEX verification system and to observe a U.S. nuclear test in mid-April at our Nevada test site. The President made it clear that if this meeting leads to an agreement on verification -- incorporating CORRTEX -- which meets our concerns, he is prepared to move forward toward ratification of these two treaties. This proposal is still valid, and we expect the Soviet Union to respond to it seriously, as we have responded to all Soviet proposals.

As far as a nuclear testing moratorium is concerned, the U.S. position has not changed. From the time that the Soviets announced their moratorium last year, we made clear why a moratorium is not in the security interests of the United States, our friends, and allies. The United States has learned through experience that moratoria cannot be counted on to lead to the enhanced security desired. While the total elimination of nuclear weapons remains an ultimate goal, nuclear weapons remain needed to deter aggression and secure the peace. As long as this is the case, a moderate level of nuclear testing is needed to ensure the continued reliability, safety, and effectiveness of our nuclear deterrent.

Regarding a meeting between the President and General Secretary Gorbachev, the two agreed at Geneva ``to meet again in the nearest future," and the General Secretary accepted the President's invitation to come to the United States in 1986. In December the President indicated to the General Secretary which dates would be most convenient for this meeting. No reply has yet been received regarding this suggestion. Nevertheless, the President is confident that the General Secretary takes his agreement seriously and that he will respond in due course.

In the President's view, meetings at the highest level should deal with the entire range of important issues between our two countries. Nuclear testing is one of them, but only one; and it is an issue which is directly related to others such as the need -- which we see as the highest priority -- to reduce the levels of existing nuclear arms and to establish effective verification procedures. If the Soviet Union desires to make serious progress on the question of nuclear testing limitation, it should accept the President's longstanding proposal that we have our experts meet, and should respond positively to the President's most recent offer.

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1986/32986b.htm>