Go for the Gold

President George Bush enters office with an historic START (Strategic Arms Reduction) treaty within his grasp. Whether he seize the opportunity to reverse the buildup in strategic nuclear arms depends on his willingness to establish priorities and face up to difficult decisions early in his term. The years since he left the Oval Office, and actions deferred now can be crowded out later by an expanding agenda.

The new administration’s negotiation of the START negotiations, previously scheduled for mid-February, could nevertheless serve a constructive purpose. In addition to allowing the new administration to get organized, a modified START might provide some breathing space to modify Reagan’s positions on strategic defense and the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty that have created the impasse on START. To reopen negotiations on the same basis would tend to lock the new administration into toxic, unchangeable positions. After a discreet interval, the United States can resume negotiations with a position that more realistically reflects the constraints of the budget, U.S. strategic interests, and the technical prospects for a Star Wars defense.

At the same time, National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft’s estimate that it might take a year to review START policy may foreshadow serious problems to come. The administration’s lack of enthusiasm for START shared by key members of the new Congress, when coupled with the high priority being given to chemical and conventional warfare agreements, suggests that the new administration may be tiring of the idea of START while pursuing less important, and less readily attainable, objectives.

A START agreement stands out as the number one arms control priority. The treaty is not only by far the most important item on the arms control agenda but also the major accomplishment closest to fruition. President Bush has inherited a nearly complete framework for a treaty that could be signed in a year or so. The signing of the START treaty would be hailed at home and abroad as the turning point in the nuclear arms race. Failure to reach an agreement would be seen as a major setback to arms control regardless of what other achievements might be achieved.

To make a START treaty possible, however, President Bush will have to take a leadership role to resolve differences in the forthcoming policy review. Opponents of START within the administration can be counted on to attack the emerging treaty. Some will insist that the treaty should not be negotiated until there is a firm domestic consensus on modernization of the land-based strategic triad; in fact, START would permit any modernization within existing limitations. A number of states, if allowed to reprogram billions of dollars, might convert the threat into the reality it is today. Still others will insist that the Soviet Union must accept the erosion and scheduled destruction of the ABM Treaty as the price of START; in fact, the ABM Treaty is critical to the acceptability of START from the point of view of the United States.

During his campaign, Bush himself introduced a note of doubt as to his priorities when he said, “I’m remembered for anything, it would be thus: a complete and total ban on chemical weapons... That’s my solemn mission.” While a worldwide ban on the production and stockpiling of CW could be an extension of the ban on the use of chemical weapons in the 1925 Geneva Protocol, it can be no stretch of the imagination be considered a substitute for a START agreement. Moreover, as a multilateral agreement with complex verification requirements, chemical weapons accord would take longer to achieve than a bilateral START agreement.

President Bush must move expeditiously to establish the priorities of his arms control agenda. In doing so, he should adopt the caution that President Reagan reportedly gave his advisers after the Washington summit “to go for the gold” by completing a START treaty for signature at the Moscow summit. The prize, which eluded Reagan because of his obsession with Star Wars, can be Bush’s if he decides to run the race.

Sunggeun M. Kae
ty, Jr.
President and executive director of the Arms Control Association and former deputy director of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency; Charles C. Fluer
teren, former U.S. ambassador to the U.N.; Conference on Disarmament and former chief of the International Relations Division of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency; Elisa
t Rowe, guest scholar at the Brookings Institution; and James Lernard, former U.S. ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, former deputy U.S. representative to the United Nations, and former special representative to the Middle East peace negotiations. The briefing was part of ACA’s Media Information Project, sponsored jointly with the Committee for National Security. A news item on the Paris Conference appears on page 27.

Sunggeun M. Kae
ty, Jr.
The just-concluded Paris Conference on chemical weapons has focused attention on the 1925 Geneva Protocol prohibiting the use of chemical weapons in warfare, and on the continuing efforts to develop a ban on the production and stockpiling of chemical warfare agents. The use of chemical weapons during the Iran-Iraq war and U.S. charges that Libya is constructing a chemical weapons project have highlighted the risks of chemical warfare, the proliferation of chemical weapons, and the importance of the ongoing negotiations toward a global chemical weapons ban, being conducted in Geneva under the auspices of the U.N. Conference on Disarmament (CD).

We have an excellent panel on this highly specialized field with us today. Ambassador Charles C. Fluer
teren will discuss the recent Paris Conference and the prospects for negotiations in Geneva. Elisa Harris will speak about chemical proliferation and the role that the U.S. and other countries should play in containing the proliferation of the chemical weapons programs and the programs for and significance of further agreements in this area.

Ambassador Charles C. Fler
teren: Those of us who are concerned experts in this field are somewhat like lizards who live under a rock most of the time, and when the rock is lifted, and the bright sunlight comes on us, we come out blinking. I participated in the negotiations in Geneva for some years, and during the last decade and a half there were maybe four or five times that we had any press attention at all.

Initially, chemical weapons were perceived to be principally a U.S.-Soviet problem. In fact, the bilateral negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union from 1979 to nearly the end of 1980, when the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan put an end to that phase. Most of the other countries sat back and waited for the United States and the Soviet Union to settle their problems, which were mainly based on the reluctance of the Soviets to permit verification measures to our liking.

Then we entered a period of multilateral discussions. A working
group formed in the U.N. Committee on Disarmament (now the Conference on Disarmament). We were discussing a protocol that was produced partly by the United States in 1983. Again, the Soviets showed reluctance to discuss the problems of verification.

Then there was the 1984 U.S. proposal with what was con
cidered to have a rather Draconian verification measure—that is, mandatory on-site inspection. After serious arguments over that issue, it was finally brought to a point where the discussions could move forward in 1987, when the Soviets accepted, in principle, the idea of mandatory on-site inspections.

At that point, countries began to realize that everybody had to

A major concern is what would happen if a country produced weapons in a facility that was not declared. It is possible that in the vast reaches of some of the countries we worry about, a clandestine facility could be constructed. To meet that problem, the United States proposed in 1984 that there be mandatory on-site inspection at the request of any state party or group of parties. The request

Chemical Arms Control After the Paris Conference

On January 13, 1989, two days after the adjournment of an international conference on chemical weapons (CW) held in Paris, the Arms Control Association sponsored a press briefing by a panel of chemical warfare and arms control specialists. An edited transcript of that briefing follows.

The briefing was part of ACA’s Media Information Project, sponsored jointly with the Committee for National Security. A news item on the Paris Conference appears on page 27.

Sunggeun M. Kae
ty, Jr.
President and executive director of the Arms Control Association and former deputy director of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency; Charles C. Fler
teren, former U.S. ambassador to the U.N.; Conference on Disarmament and former chief of the International Relations Division of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency; Elisa Harris, guest scholar at the Brookings Institution; and James Lernard, former U.S. ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, former deputy U.S. representative to the United Nations, and former special representative to the Middle East peace negotiations. The briefing was part of ACA’s Media Information Project, sponsored jointly with the Committee for National Security. A news item on the Paris Conference appears on page 27.
"There's a good deal of heavy, detail work to be done, but I think it can be done successfully, and a good treaty can emerge." —James Leonard

Korea, we're told, is seeking to possess chemical weapons. Finally, Ethiopia is another probable chemical weapon state.

Although some of these countries probably acquired their chemical weapons from other CW states, a majority of them are now, we're told by U.S. officials, in a position to produce their own chemical weapons independently. This production is often based on equipment and material that's provided by Western chemical companies. We've seen this in the reports both on Iraq and Libya. That's a basic outline of the nature of the problem that we face. With the proliferation of chemical weapons, the threat of proliferation..." —James Leonard

Amidst the larger powers is very difficult to imagine. Among the small countries, it is certainly conceivable that they could produce some. On the other hand, in most smaller countries, you don't have to look among a large number of chemical manufacturing installations, because they have very few. Therefore, any new activity would draw attention. If this treaty were in force, I believe the chances would be very small that one would develop a surreptitious chemical weapons capability.

Look for a moment at the current situation and imagine that the chemical weapons treaty, as envisaged in the Geneva negotiations, were in force. First of all, the United States and the Soviet Union would have divested themselves of all their chemical warfare capabilities, which would of course improve the moral authority of their strictures against other countries that are attempting to evade the restrictions. But more practically, there would be a place in the international trade of chemical weapons to which would apply to all countries party to the treaty. We would assume that the West Germans and our allies would not have sold their exports of critical materials would have been tightly controlled by the international authority which was set up under the treaty. With these factors in mind, it is understandable that the great deal stronger in dealing with the German connection to the Libyan chemical facility.

Elisa Harris: I'd like to address the problem of chemical weapons proliferation and its relationship to the Geneva negotiations. One of the dimensions of which you mentioned is that governments are extremely reluctant to talk about specifics. They don't generally tell us what they have, how they acquired the capability and what the nature of the capability is. Instead, governments often speak in terms of the number of chemical weapons states, but even these estimates are often contradictory. I would like to suggest that the West Germans and our allies would not have sold their exports of critical materials would have been tightly controlled by the international authority which was set up under the treaty. With these factors in mind, it is understandable that the great deal stronger in dealing with the German connection to the Libyan chemical facility.

Dr. Willard: We'd like to address the problem of chemical weapons proliferation and its relationship to the Geneva negotiations. One of the dimensions of which you mentioned is that governments are extremely reluctant to talk about specifics. They don't generally tell us what they have, how they acquired the capability and what the nature of the capability is. Instead, governments often speak in terms of the number of chemical weapons states, but even these estimates are often contradictory. I would like to suggest that the West Germans and our allies would not have sold their exports of critical materials would have been tightly controlled by the international authority which was set up under the treaty. With these factors in mind, it is understandable that the great deal stronger in dealing with the German connection to the Libyan chemical facility. —George Willard

If a treaty had been in force, it is far less likely that the German companies would have been able to supply Libya." —Charles Flouriere
The Nuclear and Space Talks: The Reagan Legacy and the Path Ahead

Paul H. Nitze

"START would provide us the rights necessary to deploy survivable ICBMs, and it would make the job easier by reducing the threat to such a force."

The Objectives of Arms Control

In a lecture at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in 1985, I addressed the topic of the objectives of arms control. The main points were as follows:

We and our allies have long based our security policy on deterrence—that is, the prevention of conflict by convincing a potential opponent that the risks and costs of aggression would far outweigh any possible gains he might hope to achieve.

In seeking to strengthen deterrence, we must remember that arms control is but one element of our security policy. Arms control complements the measures we must take unilaterally, such as maintaining the big strategic forces and forces necessary for an adequate deterrent; it is not a substitute or replacement for adequate defenses. Indeed, experience shows that, while arms control can play an important role in enhancing our security and producing a more stable strategic relationship, what we and our allies are able and willing to do for ourselves is more important.

This point becomes particularly important when one assesses the contributions the prospective START treaty would make to our security.

With these thoughts in mind, and based on the fundamental goal of maintaining and strengthening deterrence, one can pose several objectives for our arms control efforts.

First, we should seek to enhance stability; that is, we should work to reduce the incentives that a side might have to strike first in a crisis or to provoke a crisis that would lead to the use of force. To dissuade the Soviet Union from contemplating reckless action, our military forces as a whole should have the necessary characteristics of effectiveness, flexibility, diversity, and survivability against an attack focused directly on those forces.

Second, and related to the first objective, we should seek to assure parity or at least rough equivalence between the capabilities of the two sides. We could not be confident that U.S. and allied forces clearly inferior to those of the Soviet Union would provide an adequate deterrent to reckless action in a crisis. In seeking parity, we can enhance stability by reaching rough equivalence at substantially lower levels of arms. Of course, reductions per se are not necessarily good. If the remaining forces are more vulnerable to a first strike, stability is reduced, but properly structured reductions can indeed improve stability.

A third objective is to seek agreements that are reasonably precise and unambiguous, but the less ambiguity, the better. Fourth, we should have confidence in our ability to verify compliance with the agreements and in our ability to insist that our will to react to any violations in a way that will deny them the benefits they might hope to gain from such noncompliance.

And finally, our arms control policy must merit sustained support from Western publics and from Western legislative bodies; this is necessary not only to buttress our positions in the negotiations, but also to carry out the defense programs that must proceed in parallel with arms control.

As the Reagan administration comes to a close, we can look back on a period of unprecedented activity in the arms control field. This activity has covered a wide agenda, including nuclear testing, conventional stability talks, and a ban on chemical weapons. But the heart of the U.S.-Soviet arms control agenda has been the Geneva Nuclear and Space Talks. In that area, we and the Soviets have completed the INF [Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces] Treaty, have made significant progress toward conclusion of a Strategic Arms Reduction (START) treaty, and also have stretched out the framework for an agreement regulating defense and space activities.

Though much has been accomplished in the Nuclear and Space Talks, there is much yet to be done. Several difficult issues and many important details remain to be resolved in the START negotiations, and the sides disagree on the balance between arms [Limited] Defense and Space Talks. Even the INF problem will not be behind us until the treaty is successfully implemented. Thus, the incoming administration faces a full and challenging nuclear and space arms control agenda.

Let me review the Reagan record on the Nuclear and Space Talks, and then turn to the approach I recommend for the Bush administration.

Because arms control efforts can only be judged in the context of the force structures involved, I will outline my views on U.S. force modernization efforts as well.
What Next For Arms Control?

Building on the Achievement. With the ratification of the INF Treaty, the Reagan administration took a positive step for arms control. The strong bipartisan support for arms control rekindled during the ratification process has improved the prospects for an historic agreement on strategic arms reductions, despite emerging resistance in some quarters. The Bush administration will face a broad agenda of other important issues, including conventional forces in Europe, chemical weapons, nuclear test limitations, and nonproliferation.

Protecting the Antiballistic Missile Treaty. Amid these hopeful developments, the future of the ABM Treaty remains in doubt. President Bush has not yet revealed how he will handle the Strategic Defense Initiative, which continues to threaten the ABM Treaty and obstruct progress toward a START agreement.

Keeping the Arms Control Vigil. During the crucial transition months, it will be important for arms control supporters to keep a careful watch over developments. The Arms Control Association analyzes unfolding events in all areas of arms control, and disseminates this information through its press and public education programs.

YOU CAN HELP. As a member of ACA, you will receive Arms Control Today, the monthly journal that gives comprehensive coverage of developments in this vital field. And best of all, you can support ACA's work and play a more effective role in the current debate.

Join the Arms Control Association

Use the convenient mailer inside to renew your membership or to become a new member.