

Text obtained from the permanent archives at www.state.gov

Treaty Between The United States of America and The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on The Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems

In the Treaty on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems the United States and the Soviet Union agree that each may have only two ABM deployment areas,¹ so restricted and so located that they cannot provide a nationwide ABM defense or become the basis for developing one. Each country thus leaves unchallenged the penetration capability of the others retaliatory missile forces.

The Treaty permits each side to have one limited ABM system to protect its capital and another to protect an ICBM launch area. The two sites defended must be at least 1,300 kilometers apart, to prevent the creation of any effective regional defense zone or the beginnings of a nationwide system.

Precise quantitative and qualitative limits are imposed on the ABM systems that may be deployed. At each site there may be no more than 100 interceptor missiles and 100 launchers. Agreement on the number and characteristics of radars to be permitted had required extensive and complex technical negotiations, and the provisions governing these important components of ABM systems are spelled out in very specific detail in the Treaty and further clarified in the "Agreed Statements" accompanying it.

Both Parties agreed to limit qualitative improvement of their ABM technology, e.g., not to develop, test, or deploy ABM launchers capable of launching more than one interceptor missile at a time or modify existing launchers to give them this capability, and systems for rapid reload of launchers are similarly barred. These provisions, the Agreed Statements clarify, also ban interceptor missiles with more than one independently guided warhead.

There had been some concern over the possibility that surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) intended for defense against aircraft might be improved, along with their supporting radars, to the point where they could effectively be used against ICBMs and SLBMs, and the Treaty prohibits this. While further deployment of radars intended to give early warning of strategic ballistic missile attack is not prohibited, such radars must be located along the territorial boundaries of each country and oriented outward, so that they do not contribute to an effective ABM defense of points in the interior.

Further, to decrease the pressures of technological change and its unsettling impact on the strategic balance, both sides agree to prohibit development, testing, or deployment of sea-based, air-based, or space-based ABM systems and their components, along with mobile land-based ABM systems. Should future technology bring forth new ABM systems "based on other physical principles" than those employed in current systems, it was agreed that limiting such systems would be discussed, in accordance with the Treaty provisions for consultation and amendment.

The Treaty also provides for a U.S.-Soviet Standing Consultative Commission to promote its objectives and implementation. The commission was established during the first negotiating session of SALT II, by a Memorandum of Understanding dated December 21, 1972. Since then both the United States and the Soviet Union have raised a number of questions in the Commission relating to each sides compliance with the SALT I agreements. In each case raised by the United States, the Soviet activity in question has either ceased or additional information has allayed U.S. concern.

Article XIV of the Treaty calls for review of the Treaty five years after its entry into force, and at five-year intervals thereafter. The first such review was conducted by the Standing Consultative Commission at its special session in the fall of 1977. At this session, the United States and the Soviet Union agreed that the Treaty had operated effectively during its first five years, that it had continued to serve national security interests, and that it did not need to be amended at that time.

The most recent Treaty review was completed in October 1993. Following that review, numerous sessions of the Standing Consultative Commission have been held to work out Treaty succession -- to "multilateralize" the Treaty -- as a result of the break-up of the Soviet Union and to negotiate a demarcation between ABM and non-ABM systems.

¹ Subsequently reduced to one area (See section on ABM Protocol)