

News Digest By The Associated Press

Soviets offer to rid Europe of medium-range nuclear missiles

MOSCOW — State-run Soviet news media Sunday hailed Mikhail S. Gorbachev's offer to rid Europe of superpower medium-range nuclear missiles as a "historic chance" which the United States could not legitimately pass up.

"There is the possibility in a short time to free our common European home from a significant share of the nuclear burden," Soviet journalist Tomas Kolesnichenko said on the television program "International Panorama."

Broadcast media and the Tass news agency also highlighted statements from foreign leaders backing the new Soviet proposal.

The media reaction, similar to previous campaigns to marshal support for Kremlin positions, was clearly designed to put pressure on the United States to respond quickly to the Soviet offer.

Gorbachev announced Saturday that the Soviets were willing to negotiate a separate accord with the United States on medium-range missiles in Europe. The Kremlin had previously linked such an agreement to a demand that the United States limit testing on its

Strategic Defense Initiative, or "Star Wars."

Speculation arose that the new Soviet position is linked to Gorbachev's campaign for economic and social reforms in the Soviet Union and the need to trim defense spending so allocations can be increased for other uses.

The new Soviet position seemed sure

to win support in Western Europe, where opposition to nuclear weapons is widespread.

Gorbachev has met with officials from several NATO countries in recent months to discuss European security, the latest being Italian Foreign Minister Giulio Andreotti on Friday.

The governments of West Germany,

Denmark and Belgium on Sunday welcomed the Soviet offer. Britain, France, the Netherlands and Italy said they needed more time to study it.

In Geneva, U.S. officials said they believed the Soviets made the new offer in hopes it would increase Western European opposition to the so-called "broad interpretation" of the 1972 anti-

ballistic missile treaty.

This interpretation would allow expanded testing of Star Wars, a space-based missile defense system. The dispute over testing of space weapons caused the breakdown of the Iceland superpower summit in October.

Kolesnichenko told Soviet TV viewers Russia's decision to seek a separate accord on European missiles would nullify the U.S. claim that no agreement was possible because Moscow insisted on linking medium-range missiles and space weapons.

"Now (that) this basis does not exist, it is extremely important that this historic chance not be missed," he said.

White House spokesman Albert R. Brashear said Sunday "we look at it as a generally positive" position, but "we still want to see" details.

"We are in consultation with our allies, and essentially we have completed the process of drafting (a U.S. proposal)" to be presented at the Soviet-U.S. arms talks in the future, he said.

Western Europe welcomes Gorbachev's offer; NATO official calls plan a 'step forward'

LONDON — Western Europeans on Sunday welcomed the surprise Soviet offer of a separate deal to eliminate medium-range nuclear missiles in Europe, saying it was the long-awaited breakthrough to an agreement.

Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher of West Germany said it removed "the main obstacle" to an accord. NATO Secretary-General Lord Carrington called the offer "a substantial step forward."

The Danish Foreign Ministry said it was "a good and positive signal" and

Belgian Foreign Minister Leo Tindemans said his reaction was to "rejoice."

The governments of Britain, France, the Netherlands and Italy were among those which refrained from any quick assessment, saying they wanted time to study the Soviet offer.

Soviet and U.S. arms control negotiators in Geneva scheduled a special session Monday to discuss Gorbachev's appeal that an accord on medium-range missiles be reached "without delay."

Genscher said the Soviet leadership recognized that the issue of medium-

range missiles could not be linked to East-West disputes over President Reagan's Star Wars program.

"By separating medium-range missiles from other disarmament issues, Gorbachev has removed the main obstacle to an agreement on reducing and destroying all Soviet and American medium-range missiles," he said.

"It is reasonable to hope that a breakthrough on the question of medium-range missiles will have a positive effect on negotiations over other (disarmament) issues," Genscher said.

In Brief

Ford: Reagan will survive Iran-Contra scandal

LINCOLN — Former President Gerald Ford says he's confident the Reagan administration will survive the Iran-Contra scandal, but it's reduced the presidential prospects of Vice President George Bush.

"It's not the major crisis in this century," Ford told reporters Saturday. However, he said, "there's no doubt that (Bush's candidacy) has suffered to some extent so far."

Ford commended President Reagan for appointing Howard Baker to succeed Donald Regan as chief of staff, calling the appointment an important move toward restoring good relations between the White House and Congress.

Reagan will take a second positive step this week when he is scheduled to deliver a speech responding to the Tower commission report, Ford said.

Ford, a Nebraska native, was in Lincoln to accept an award from a foundation that promotes tourism in the state.

Ski lift accident kills five, injures dozens

TARBES, France — A damaged chairlift pitched dozens of skiers onto rocks and snow far below Sunday, killing five of them and badly injuring 25 of the Pyrenees resort of Luz-Ardiden, officials said.

Some victims reportedly fell from heights of up to 130 feet. Local news media gave conflicting reports, saying the lift cable snapped, that it jumped off a pulley, or that a support pylon may have collapsed. The cause of the accident has not been determined.

The chairlift, on the resort's upper slopes at an altitude of nearly 10,000 feet, was new and opened just two weeks ago.

The resort is high in the Pyrenees mountains running along the border between France and Spain. Luz-Ardiden is about 20 miles south of the pilgrimage town of Lourdes.

Elderly man shoots, kills three; commits suicide

LOS ANGELES — A man who had accused his wife of setting up a \$7,000 burglary grabbed a revolver after an argument and fatally shot two neighbors and his stepdaughter before killing himself, police and neighbors said.

Ed Smith, 83, had been arguing with his 80-year-old wife, Ann, in their home for hours Saturday before he armed himself and began shooting, said Detective Steve Morgan.

"During the course of the dispute, she decided to move out and called relatives to help," said Lt. Charles Massey. The shooting began after Mrs. Smith left the couple's small, white clapboard house, and walked to the rear of a neighbor's home.


Smith fired 10 to 12 times, police said. He fired at and missed his wife, shot his stepdaughter, 45-year-old Linda Downard, and then seemed to fire at random targets, fatally wounding a 91-year-old neighbor and another woman.

When he realized police were coming, Smith shot himself in the chest. He was pronounced dead at the scene, Morgan said.

Downard died Saturday afternoon in surgery in California Medical Center, said a nursing supervisor.

Neighbor Cleotis Pouncy, 68, died Saturday evening in surgery in County-USC Medical Center of a wound to the torso, authorities said.

Rachel Taylor, 91, was found on her porch with keys in her hand. She apparently was opening the door to her home when she was killed, said neighbor Margaret Alexander.



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