

New nuclear cuts likely 47 nations pledge to help republics

Administration considering cuts in warhead count

WASHINGTON — New nuclear weapons cuts under study by the Bush administration seem designed to entice republics of the former Soviet Union to eliminate their most powerful nuclear missiles, analysts said Thursday.

Sources said President Bush was considering reducing or eliminating long-range nuclear missiles with more than one warhead, a move that would include cuts in the submarine-based nuclear warheads that most concern the Russians.

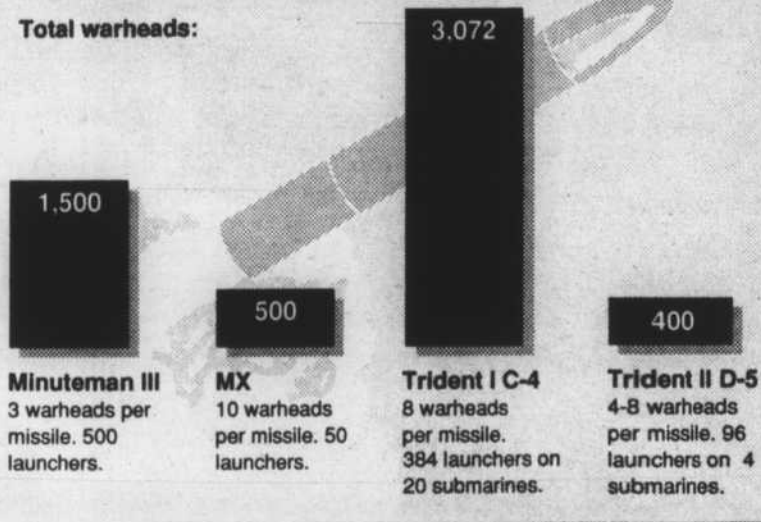
Up to now the United States has refused to consider cuts in the Trident submarine force, which is the most modern and survivable part of the U.S. strategic nuclear force.

Asked about published reports that Bush was considering new cuts in the strategic arsenal, Pentagon spokesman Bob Hall declined comment beyond saying, "We're looking at all of our programs, including strategic programs, in the context of changes in the world" and the prospect of continually shrinking defense budgets.

Cuts in the Trident nuclear force would be as much a bow to the reality of a breakdown in the U.S. nuclear production system as a willingness to give up firepower. Because of safety problems in the system, no new warheads are being built for the Trident II missile, and the Pentagon confirmed last month that it was considering

Arms reduction

Land and submarine-based nuclear weapons that could be affected by the President's proposed cuts.



dropping plans for future production. A reciprocal action to the cuts said to be under consideration might be the scrapping of the SS-18 heavy missiles and the SS-24 mobile missiles by Russia and the three other republics with strategic nuclear weapons on their soil, said Jack Mendelsohn, a former U.S. strategic arms negotiator and currently deputy director of the private Arms Control Association.

Both the SS-18 and SS-24 carry 10 warheads per missile.

The U.S. plan could result in scrapping up to about 20 percent of the

long-range nuclear arsenal that would be left under the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or START, which has not yet been ratified by the Senate.

Bush proposed a ban on land-based multiple warhead missiles last Sept. 27, but he did not suggest cuts below the levels set by START. He also excluded the Trident submarine force.

Mendelsohn said he believed the administration may be considering arming the Trident II missiles with six warheads each rather than the maximum possible eight. That would reduce the planned Trident II deployment by 480 warheads.

WASHINGTON — Forty-seven nations large and small agreed Thursday on a massive "global effort" to rescue millions of hungry people in the former Soviet Union with humanitarian shipments of food and medicine.

The United States will airlift supplies to the 12 former republics with 54 sorties beginning Feb. 10. The food aboard will include 38.4 million pounds left over from the Persian Gulf war, enough for 16 million meals. A million doses of Desert Storm antibiotics will be carried by the C-5 and C-141 cargo planes, as well.

The airlift will "vividly show the peoples of the former Soviet Union that those who once prepared for war with them now have the courage and conviction to use their militaries to wage a new peace," Secretary of State James A. Baker III said.

The NATO alliance will undertake complementary deliveries. "Nothing could better symbolize the end of the Cold War," NATO Secretary-General Manfred Woerner said.

Baker said several countries had offered contributions in the closed sessions after President Bush pledged an additional \$645 million at the opening Wednesday.

He said Saudi Arabia would release \$1.5 billion it had held up. Japan pledged \$50 million in grants to purchase medicine and U.S.

officials said South Korea had offered \$800 million and Thailand \$450 million in low-interest loans. Argentina offered to take in 100,000 refugees.

"Countries are responding in large measure in proportion to their ability," Baker said. The United States has pledged more than \$5 billion, mostly in farm credits while the 12-nation European Community, led by Germany, has contributed billions of dollars more in credit, loans and grants.

The conference came up with outlines on how to assist the republics in the areas of food, shelter, energy, medicine and economic reform. Franz Andriessen, the vice president of the European Community, told reporters: "Plans must now be followed by actions and results."

Some polls have indicated that Americans feel the United States is already giving the ex-Soviets too much aid.

This sentiment could be a problem for Bush in his drive for reelection, especially in light of the recession at home, a senior U.S. official said.

"He's going to say nothing can be more important for the security of the United States than to see reform (in the former Soviet Union) succeed," the official said. "We have something going that is very good for the United States."

Democrats ready to negotiate on extending unemployment

WASHINGTON — Congressional Democrats offered Thursday to negotiate an extension of jobless benefits with President Bush to avoid an election-year replay of last year's partisan war over the issue.

The Democrats' accommodating words came a day after the White House said that Bush would support extra coverage for people who have used up their unemployment benefits.

House Democrats have introduced legislation providing 13 extra weeks of coverage, beyond the 20- or 13-week extension approved last fall after a four-month dispute. The White House has provided no details of what it wants.

Some 600,000 people will exhaust their extended benefits in the latter half of February

with others following each week and no apparent end to layoffs in sight. Jobless people personally pleaded for extended benefits during a Thursday House Ways and Means subcommittee hearing.

The White House and Democratic comments offered no guarantee of agreement. Democrats said they wanted to have a bill on Bush's desk by mid-February, with or without a compromise.

With the president slipping in public opinion polls and the recession biting hard in many congressional districts, there was intense pressure on both sides to strike a speedy deal and avoid angering voters just months before the election.

New government statistics provided fresh evidence of the recession's sting. The Labor Department said the number of Americans filing new claims for unemployment benefits jumped 46,000 during the week ending Jan. 11, to 447,000 workers.

The claims number is highly volatile, and in fact the four-week moving average of 434,000 new claimants was down from 465,000 for the previous week. Both numbers indicated the economic slump was continuing.

Word of the Democrats' willingness to talk came as the House Ways and Means Committee's human resources subcommittee considered a \$4.5 billion Democratic measure to extend the benefits. The subcommittee plans to

vote on the bill next week.

The bill's two sponsors - Ways and Means Chairman Dan Rostenkowski, D-Ill., and subcommittee Chairman Thomas Downey, D-N.Y. - both said the measure should be paid for if possible.

"I'd like to pay for as much of this bill as we can," Rostenkowski said. He added later, "We'd be happy to negotiate."

Rostenkowski said the program could be paid for, in part, with \$3.7 billion in extra money he said the White House's Office of Management and Budget expects the government to raise over the next four years. OMB Director Richard Darman would not comment.

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Arms ban put on Somalia

UNITED NATIONS — The U.N. Security Council on Thursday imposed an arms embargo against combatants in Somalia's civil war and urged all warring factions to agree to an immediate cease-fire.

The 15-member council unanimously adopted the resolution that calls for the embargo on the Horn of Africa nation and asks Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the secretary-general, to ready a massive program of humanitarian

assistance. An estimated 20,000 people, mostly civilians, have been killed or wounded since November in the power struggle between tribal warlords vying for power since longtime President Mohamed Siad Barre fled the country last January.

The resolution strongly urges all parties to immediately agree to a cease-fire. It also calls on them to ensure the safety of aid workers.

Nuclear weapons producer had 127 accidents since 1943

YAKIMA, Wash. — There have been 127 significant accidents involving nuclear weapons production at the Hanford nuclear reservation since 1943, according to a report obtained Thursday by The Associated Press.

Fourteen of the accidents were in the most serious category, and the last major accident occurred in 1980, the U.S. Department of Energy report said.

While the DOE says the report contains no new public revelations, it is the first comprehensive look at the scattered accident history of the former plutonium production site.

"None of the incidents reviewed resulted in a worker fatality," the report said. "Hanford's overall plant safety record has been exemplary."

Hanford, located near Richland in south-central Washington state, used nine reactors and huge processing facilities to make much of the plutonium for the nation's nuclear weapons.

Most of the accidents involved facilities that are no longer in use, the report said.

The report said only eight of the accidents, and none classified among the most serious, have occurred since 1980.