

Russian proverb has a Catch 22

MOSCOW — Trading proverbs has become a staple of summitry and this one in Moscow is no exception. Two days ago, Mikhail Gorbachev responded to some new and not very inspired Reagan proverbs by saying that his favorite was still: Trust, but verify.

There's not much trust here in Moscow and verification remains one of the thorniest problems facing summit negotiators.

Teams of Soviet and U.S. arms negotiators are now trying to hammer out some agreement on how to accurately count each other's strategic weapons.

Big ICBM's are easy to spot. So, too, are bombers and the number of missile-armed subs is well known. The problem comes from cruise missiles, mobile missiles and chemical-biological weapons.

Both sides are deploying nuclear-armed cruise missiles on aircraft and submarines. The U.S. is also putting cruise missiles aboard its surface ships. Confusingly, both sides also have a growing range of conventional cruise missiles armed with high-explosive warheads. It's almost impossible to tell

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... in MOSCOW

whether cruise missiles are nuclear or conventional — in spite of Soviet claims that they can do so.

New Soviet road and rail mobile SS-24 and SS-25 strategic missiles also pose major problems of verification. Old strategic missiles are housed in deep silos, and, thus, easy to pinpoint. The mobile systems can be quickly moved or concealed in buildings, forests or in ordinary-looking railroad cars.

Yesterday, Soviet spokesmen publicly raised the issue of "public sector chemical weapons." Iraq and other Third World nations have used

industrial chemical plants to manufacture deadly nerve agents. Both sides appear inclined to junk their stores of chemical arms but the problem of verification to prevent cheating has not so far been solved. Still, a limited pact on reducing chemical weapons may emerge from the Moscow summit.

Finally, there is the even nastier question of biological arms. U.S. intelligence sources have long worried about reports the Soviets may have developed new nerve gasses that can penetrate all U.S. gas masks, and biological warfare agents that have been genetically altered so that their virulence is greatly increased and made immediate.

It's impossible to monitor every laboratory, or to tell which steel drums contain nerve agents and which hold pesticide.

As a result, if an agreement is to be reached on these key problems, trust may have to play an increasingly large role since verification may have reached its natural limits. Trust, on such life and death matters, can only come after a long period of correct or even friendly relations.