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THE SALT II CRISIS:

AN OPPORTUNITY TO LIMIT THE DANGERS

by

GEORGE M. SEIGNIOUS II

We are in the final rough passage of a journey beginning over seven years ago when the US and Soviet Governments undertook the second series of Strategic Arms Limitation Talks. After extended, painstaking negotiations, the SALT II treaty was signed on 18 June 1979 at the Vienna Summit Conference by Presidents Jimmy Carter and Leonid Brezhnev. The treaty was transmitted to the US Senate where extensive hearings began in July in three committees—Foreign Relations, Armed Services, and Intelligence. SALT II is now before the full US Senate for debate, with a final vote on ratification of the treaty expected shortly. A two-thirds majority, or 67 of the 100 Senators, must vote to approve the agreement or SALT will be rejected.

The Chinese have separate symbols for the words “opportunity” and “danger.” When these two symbols are combined, they represent the word “crisis.” Whether we are fully alert to the fact, the US, during this struggle between pro-SALT and anti-SALT forces, is passing through a period of crisis. As we approach the SALT II turning-point, we must determine whether we will take the path of opportunity afforded by this treaty or walk the path of rejection that would increase the danger to US security in the 1980’s.

No more important decision than the ratification of SALT II will be made by this Congress. Indeed, the second Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty is possibly the most important treaty to be submitted to the US Senate since the creation of the North Atlantic alliance over a quarter century ago. The outcome of the Senate vote will influence the dimensions of the Soviet strategic threat

to the US in the 1980’s. The vote can partially determine the level of information we are able to gather on future Soviet strategic programs. And the Senate decision can also largely determine whether the US-Soviet strategic nuclear weapons race accelerates or is brought under increasing control.

I. US Strategic Modernization and SALT II

It is interesting to note that much of the debate surrounding the SALT II treaty has not been about the specific limitations of the agreement itself, but about the appropriate level of US defense expenditures. This is not altogether inappropriate because our national security in the nuclear age rests on two bulwarks—maintaining viable deterrent forces and negotiating equitable and verifiable arms control agreements. For three reasons, the United States and the Soviet Union must jointly agree to limit strategic offensive arms:

- To promote strategic and crisis stability, thereby reducing the risk of war.
- To limit the burden of armaments upon our national energies and resources.
- To help avoid a world populated with many more nuclear-weapons states.

Overall, the SALT debate so far has had a constructive effect. Rather than causing a letdown in US defense efforts, the debate has catalyzed a new consensus behind stronger US defense programs as well as a consensus that further negotiations should put greater quantitative and qualitative limits on nuclear weapons programs in each country.

During the SALT II debate, however, two

myths have emerged about the treaty and our strategic forces. The first is that we are standing still on defense; the second is that SALT will tie our hands. Both of these propositions are false.

Our strategic military capabilities are increasing, and SALT will allow us to proceed with all of the force options we have decided are necessary for our security:

- We have improved the accuracy and explosive yield of our existing Minuteman III land-based missiles. SALT II will not prevent similar improvements in the future.

- We have begun to fit some of our existing Poseidon nuclear submarines with the longer-range Trident I missile, which will enable these submarines to patrol and hide in vastly increased ocean areas, and still be within range of their Soviet targets. They will be even more difficult to detect. This program will be completed in 1982. SALT II does not restrict it in any way.

- We have launched the first of our Trident nuclear missile submarines, each of which can hit about 200 Soviet targets. By the end of SALT II, we plan to have seven of these submarines. SALT II does not hinder this in any way.

- We are developing and testing air-launched cruise missiles for placement aboard approximately 150 of our heavy bombers. We plan to start installing these air-launched cruise missiles in 1981. By late 1985, we expect to have nearly 1500 cruise missiles deployed. These cruise missiles are highly accurate and can be launched far outside of Soviet air defenses. One could be fired from a B-52 over the Atlantic and land within a few hundred yards of a command post near Leningrad, carrying a nuclear punch over 10 times that which destroyed Hiroshima. SALT II does not hinder this at all.

- We have approved advanced development of the MX missile and a verifiable "horizontal dash, closed loop" mode for deploying this mobile ICBM. Deployment of the MX in this basing mode will greatly complicate Soviet targeting problems. SALT II explicitly permits the US to develop and deploy one new type of ICBM. The mobile MX, our choice, will

improve the survivability of the land-based leg of the strategic triad and help offset the Soviet countersilo capability represented by the SS-18 and SS-19. Indeed, the SALT II limits on strategic launchers and MIRVed launchers, together with the fractionation limit, will increase the margin of safety to the MX force by limiting the number of warheads the Soviets can target on our ICBMs and still have forces left for other strategic tasks.

- We are developing and testing long-range ground- and sea-launched cruise missiles. Deployment is prohibited by SALT II until after 1981, but these missiles would not be ready for deployment before this date anyway. SALT II does not ban the transfer of cruise missile and other sophisticated technology to NATO, nor will it hinder cooperation with our allies to modernize nuclear and conventional forces in Europe.

Given the scope and momentum of US strategic weapons modernization programs, it is valid to question SALT critics and ask them what it is that they would like the US to do to modernize our bomber, submarine, and missile forces that we are prevented from doing under the treaty terms. The United States has not been and will not be standing still; under SALT II, we will maintain strategic forces second to none in the 1980's.

II. SALT Caps the Soviet Strategic Threat

Without the SALT limits, we would likely face a Soviet strategic nuclear threat both quantitatively and qualitatively more formidable than the threat as limited by the treaty.

It is precisely because the US is concerned about an unrestricted Soviet strategic buildup that we wish to place SALT restrictions on the Soviets. Indeed, the more one is concerned about the formidable Soviet threat under SALT, the more one should seek to avoid an even greater threat, one unlimited by SALT.

The most difficult task that faces a strategist is to find some means to control the forces of one's opponent. In an arms race, the US can build more, but so can the Soviets.

No matter how many weapons the US builds, we cannot—in the absence of arms control agreements like SALT II—stop the Soviet Union from building right along with us. With nuclear weapons—against which there is no adequate defense—the result of such a race is not more security for one, but greater insecurity for all.

It is instructive to examine the dimensions of the Soviet strategic threat between now and the mid-1980's—as limited by the SALT II treaty—compared to the greater threat without any treaty.

Under the SALT II treaty package:

- The Soviet SS-16 ICBM is banned.
- The Soviets will have 750 fewer launchers than we project they could have by the end of 1985 (2250 versus about 3000).
- The Soviets will have about 600 fewer launchers of MIRVed missiles than we project they could have by the end of 1985 (1200 versus about 1800).
- There will be 3000 to 10,000 fewer Soviet strategic warheads deployed than we project they could have by the end of 1985 (10,000 versus 13,000 to 20,000).
- There is a cap on the number of Soviet heavy missiles.
- Soviet SS-18 heavy missiles will carry only 10 warheads each and not the 30 that are technically feasible.
- There is a production limit on Backfire bombers (per presidential letter, Brezhnev to Carter, considered by US as binding).

None of these benefits would exist in the absence of the treaty.

III. SALT Improves US Defense Planning and Knowledge of Soviet Forces

Under this treaty we will be able to plan our defense programs more effectively because we will be able to assess with greater accuracy and confidence the size and shape of the Soviet strategic threat. The treaty requires the Soviets to fit their forces into a well-defined matrix of numerical limits, sublimits, and qualitative restrictions. With the treaty in place—and rigorously monitored—we will be more certain about the dimensions and composition of the Soviet strategic forces.

Of course, the US would monitor the strategic forces of the Soviet Union even if there were no SALT agreement. It is essential for us to have good, solid intelligence on Soviet strategic forces, totally apart from any arms control agreement, and we have been gathering such intelligence for many years. In fact, only a portion of the total intelligence we collect on Soviet strategic forces is related to SALT provisions.

There are specific provisions in SALT II, proposed by us and accepted by the Soviets, that make the job of monitoring Soviet forces easier than it would be without SALT.

- Under SALT II, the Soviets will not be allowed to interfere with the intelligence systems we use to verify SALT.
- Under SALT II, deliberate concealment, including encryption of telemetry, which impedes verification of compliance is banned. This ban applies not only to construction and deployment of systems limited by SALT but also to testing of those systems, because some provisions are verified by observation of testing. Without this ban,

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the Soviets could use any and all means of concealment.

- Under SALT II, the production, testing, and deployment of the Soviet SS-16 ICBM, and its unique components, are banned for the treaty period. This ban precludes difficulties that would have arisen in distinguishing it from a Soviet shorter-range missile that is not limited by the treaty. The SS-16, it should be stressed, is the only ICBM that has been tested from a mobile launcher.

- Under SALT II, neither side is allowed to conceal the association of a missile with its launcher. Without this provision, it would be much more difficult for us to assess which missile goes with each type of launcher.

These are just some of the SALT II verification provisions. Without them, it could be much more difficult to collect needed intelligence on Soviet strategic programs. Without the bans on deliberate concealment and interference, we could find it much harder to determine how many strategic missiles and bombers they are deploying, and what their military capabilities and characteristics are.

Thus, it is not surprising that the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence unanimously concluded that:

Overall the Committee finds that the SALT II Treaty enhances the ability of the United States to monitor those components of Soviet strategic weapons forces which are subject to the limitations of the Treaty.

No leader, military or civilian, wants to plan with less rather than more information about an adversary. In SALT we have used verification to good advantage—for our own security, for strategic stability, and to help turn uncertainty into confidence.

IV. SALT II and the Arms Competition

There can be little doubt that rejection of the SALT II treaty would lead to a further escalation of the arms race. The alternative to SALT II could well be an open-ended, all-out strategic weapons competition with no limits. Rejection of the treaty:

- Would cost tens of billions of dollars more and result in thousands of additional strategic nuclear weapons on both sides with no improvement in US national security.

- Would almost certainly throw other efforts to limit the arms race, such as the talks on anti-satellite weapons, into a prolonged deep freeze.

- Would be likely to increase the risk of nuclear weapons proliferation.

These arms limitation efforts—with SALT as the capstone—are part of a conscious effort to control our destiny, to determine our future in a world of growing danger and challenge. We can give up our diplomatic efforts and rely solely on our military deterrent forces and *hope* that nuclear war never happens. Or, we can take appropriate military *and* diplomatic steps to limit that risk. I believe that any prudent American—interested in the security of this nation—would choose this latter path.

V. Critics of SALT

While critics of SALT have raised many specific objections to the treaty, *it is unclear how their concerns could be better answered by rejection of SALT II as it now stands.*

- Yes, it would be preferable to reduce the number of Soviet heavy missiles, but rejection of SALT II would remove all limits on numbers of heavy missile launchers or on warheads per missile. Rejection would allow us to build heavies, but there is no military reason to do so and no US military leader has advocated that we do so.

- Yes, it would be preferable to have Backfire bombers counted in the aggregate launcher totals, but if SALT II is rejected there would be no restrictions at all on Backfires. Moreover, reopening this issue could lead to Soviet counter demands to include in SALT II the FB-111s now operating under our Strategic Air Command and to include the hundreds of fighter-bombers in Europe that are capable of a nuclear weapons attack on the Soviet Union, but which are not counted against the SALT II treaty limits.

There are many questions about the SALT II treaty raised by critics who believe it does

not go far enough to limit the Soviet threat or who believe it does not go far enough to limit the strategic arms race. But the SALT II treaty should be considered on its own merits—not compared to an ideal treaty. Anyone could draw up a treaty that confers more advantages to one side or the other. But it requires compromise to reach mutual agreement, and it took seven years of hard bargaining to reach this particular one. We did not compromise on any issue vital to our security.

Indeed, rejection or renegotiation of SALT II would not mean a “better” treaty. Major amendments to this treaty that would confer further unilateral advantages to the US, provisions that we have not been able to win in seven years of negotiations, would almost certainly cause the Soviets to present their own demands for additional advantages for themselves. The result would be new and protracted negotiations in which the Soviets would reopen issues previously resolved in favor of the US.

Contrary to what some critics allege, the US did not make all the concessions in SALT II. It is the *Soviets*, not we, who are dismantling 10 percent of their operational strategic launchers under the terms of the treaty. It is the *Soviets* who have agreed to limits on their theater bomber, the Backfire. It is a *Soviet* ICBM, the SS-16, that is banned by the treaty, while no operational US system is banned. It is the *Soviets* who agreed to count some of their single-warhead ICBMs as MIRVed systems to facilitate verification of SALT II.

On the other hand, against Soviet wishes, the strategic nuclear forces of two US allies, the United Kingdom and France, are not limited by the treaty although they clearly can be targeted on the Soviet Union. Nor did the Soviets succeed in efforts to ban the MX missile; nor to ban the deployment of ballistic missile submarines and aircraft carriers in the Mediterranean; nor to limit the number of Trident submarines; nor to ban all cruise missiles with a range over 600 kilometers, or, alternatively, to require each cruise missile to be counted separately. The American negotiators did very well in the SALT II

negotiations, and the outcome, I believe, was clearly to the American advantage.

VI. The Choice: Danger or Opportunity

The US has a choice before it now—to accept or reject this agreement. The possible consequences of rejection are themselves a persuasive case for acceptance. Rather than focusing on the critics’ question about whether the US Government should have accepted only half a loaf in SALT II, perhaps a more reasonable question is whether we can afford to settle for nothing at all.

The decisive questions about the worth of SALT II to our national security are these:

- Without SALT II, will we be better able to control the Soviet buildup?
- Without SALT II, with its specific limitations and verification provisions, will we know more about Soviet strategic programs?
- Without SALT II, forced to spend larger sums on a nuclear arms race, will we be better able to meet the Soviet challenge to NATO, or to improve our conventional forces?
- Without SALT II, forced to concentrate our attention and resources on a nuclear arms race, will our response to the Soviet challenges in Africa, Asia, and elsewhere be more effective?
- Without SALT II, while squandering our resources on an arms race that need not be, will we be better able to meet all the needs of this nation, at home and abroad?
- And finally, will we lower the risks of nuclear war by rejecting SALT II?

The answer to each of the six questions above is No. Ultimately, the entire matter reduces to a single question: Will the US be better off with this treaty or without it? There is no more fundamental question before us all today. The answer could determine the future, the security of this generation, and the legacy we leave for generations yet to come.

It is clear to this soldier that the combination of firm diplomacy, as represented by SALT II, and sound military programs, as represented by our present and planned forces, gives us far more security than either a diplomacy unbacked by strength or arms building unsupported by diplomacy.