# Strategic Arms: Ambiguous Prospect for SALT Phase Two

President Nixon intends to sign a second agreement on strategic arms during his visit to Moscow early this summer, but so far there does not seem to be much to agree about. The Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) have reportedly gotten nowhere since they resumed in November 1972. And Henry Kissinger, having departed for Moscow last month expressing hopes of a "conceptual breakthrough," has returned apparently empty handed. (The empty hands, of course, may be a conjurer's artifice for letting Nixon be the one to produce the rabbit from the hat.)

Even if progress has been as minuscule as the Secretary of State proclaims, the snail's pace is not necessarily discouraging. If past form is a guide, each country likes to allow the other ample opportunity to make concessions, which is why the pieces tend to cascade into place right at the last moment. The issues to be resolved are intricate, and require almost as elaborate negotiations within one's own bureaucracy as with the other side.

Where does SALT stand now? The Moscow agreement signed by President Nixon in May 1972 consisted of a treaty confining antiballistic missile systems (ABM's) to two each, and an interim agreement, to run for 5 years, setting limits on the numbers of land and sea based missiles deployed by each side. Not spelled out in the treaties were the various informal understandings governing how the permissible numbers of missiles should be counted. The Soviets agreed not to build missiles larger than a certain size, and both parties consented not to build exotic ABM's, such as those based on lasers.

The urgency of signing a second arms accord in Moscow springs from the inherent instability of the first agreement. The dynamics of the 1972 agreement, roughly speaking, go as follows. A principal Soviet aim was to halt the American Safeguard ABM system while retaining their own ABM (which serves primarily to defend Moscow against a sneak Chinese attack). The Americans demanded that in exchange for a limit on ABM's the Soviets should accept a limit on the number of offensive missiles. The Soviet price for a missile standstill was that they should have a 3 to 2 advantage in missile numbers in order to compensate for the more advanced state of American technology, chiefly in MIRV's, the technique of stacking several, independently targeted warheads on a single missile.

The instability in the agreement is that as Soviet MIRV technology catches up, as it is fast doing, the U.S.S.R. will be able to convert its allowed quantitative advantage into an absolute advantage. Since this would provoke another massive action-reaction cycle of the arms race, both sides have an interest in discovering a formula for translating the interim agreement on offensive weapons into a more permanent limitation.

There have been few official clues as to the progress or subject matter of the second round of SALT talks that began in Geneva after the May 1972 accords. In a press conference on the eve of his departure for Moscow last month Secretary of State Kissinger described how all SALT negotiations went through three stages —exchange of information, agreement on goals, and hard negotiations. SALT phase two, he said, had progressed through the first stage to the "point where we should be making, or should be attempting, a conceptual breakthrough."

Events outside the talks have been rather more visible than those inside. The substantial boost for strategic weapons in next year's military budget is an obvious bargaining chip to be laid on the SALT negotiating table. Counterforce strategy, the idea bruited about in the last few months by Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger, is another way of signaling to the Russians that they would do better to reach an agreement giving "essential equivalence" now rather than later.

The clearest indication of what has been going on inside the talks comes from an account leaked to former Pentagon Papers editor Leslie H. Gelb. Writing in the *New York Times* last month Gelb says that the United States has offered two separate formulas, each designed to bring about the "essential equivalence" between the offensive weapons of the two countries. Formula one would set a total figure within which each side would have "freedom to mix" the proportion of land missiles, sea based missiles, and bombers in its forces. Under formula two, aimed at controlling just land based missiles, there would be a limit, not on MIRV's directly but on either the number or payload of MIRVable missiles.

Both formulas seek to allay the major fear of American planners—that Russian missiles could pose a threat to the Minuteman force. The first formula represents the concerns of those who believe that land based missiles are inherently vulnerable and that the deterrent should be moved out to sea. The second formula satisfies those who seek to avert the threat to Minuteman by restricting payloads rather than by controlling MIRV's.

At the stage now reached, both formulas have presumably failed to satisfy the Russians. During Kissinger's Moscow visit last month a Soviet official said that the two sides had reached agreement on several points and were "now talking about numbers." The Russians also proposed a plan to limit MIRV, but this too was apparently unacceptable. Presumably both sides now have to decide if and where there is room for compromise.

On Kissinger's word, the Moscow talks have been widely reported as unsuccessful. On the other hand, the talks were interrupted by a meeting of the Soviet Politburo, a body which would have to endorse any major advance in arms control. If Kissinger, a consummate master of using the press to advance his own ends, were trying to stage manage a surprise success for Nixon's forthcoming Moscow visit, the scene could not in fact be better prepared than it now is.

Kissinger's Moscow negotiations are part of what is now known to be the two tiered structure of the SALT talks. The two official delegations meeting in Geneva (or in Helsinki and Vienna during SALT phase one) constitute the "front channel" through which the two sides exchange information, probe positions, and otherwise keep the game in motion. The decisions that lead to major shifts in negotiation are made in the "back channel," which consists of direct deal-

ing between Kissinger and the Soviet ambassador in Washington, Anatoliy F. Dobrynin. Traffic in the back channel is tightly held, so much so that even the SALT delegates may not know what has been discussed.

The style and much of the substance of the SALT talks has been laid bare in a remarkably detailed study based on National Security Council memoranda and much other inside information.* The author, John Newhouse, has since been appointed counsel of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. As Newhouse tells it, the SALT talks were preceded on the American side by Kissinger's institution of new arrangements—including the Verification Panel—to prevent the various parts of the bureaucracy presenting only agreed positions of no harm to themselves. All interested agencies were made to assent to a range of options, the component parts of which Kissinger could shuffle around as the state of negotiations required.

The first phase of the SALT talks lasted for 30 months and required mountainous labor for each mouse produced. The first round, which began in November 1969, was spent mostly in exchanging information. There was not much movement until round two when, in what the White House concedes to have been an intellectual blunder, the Americans offered a proposal to limit ABM's to Moscow and Washington only. This was intended as a bait to get the Russians talking about limitations on MIRV's. To the Americans' surprise, the Russians snapped up the offer which, it turned out, meant an ABM for the Soviet Union only—Congress would not have voted one for Washington, D.C.—and the offer had to be reneged on.

Rounds three and four were gloomy for the American side: the Russians seemed to be stalling and just letting them talk. But some crucial milestones were passed. Kissinger made it clear through the back channel that the Russians would get no agreement on defensive weapons without a limit on offense as well. And the White House, once leery even of parity, conceded the principle of allowing the Russians a 3 to 2 advantage in missiles.

The tempo of the talks picked up a little in round five, which began 1 day before Kissinger's visit to Peking and the initiation of triangular politics. The Soviets proposed the "one plue one" deal on ABM's that was eventually accepted—each side may have one ABM round its capital and one elsewhere. In round six they agreed to a sublimit on their very large missiles like the SS-9. This was one of the top American priorities; failure to gain it might have cost Nixon the support of the military and maybe other parts of the government.

By April 1972, the time was ripe for Kissinger to visit Moscow and put the package in near final shape. He agreed with Communist Party leader Leonid I. Brezhnev for the Russians to have a 3 to 2 edge on sea based missiles in return for a freeze on the Soviets' very active submarine construction schedule. The White House got the Joint Chiefs of Staff to approve this deal in return for a speed-up of the Trident submarine program.

A large number of significant details remained to be disposed of during Nixon's visit to Moscow in May 1972. It was not until the last minute, after the Russians had made several crucial concessions, that it was clear there would be any treaty at all, says Newhouse.

The immense obstacles to reaching an agreement in SALT phase one were only overcome because the two sides had a strong common interest in doing so. The same interest still prevails, and there is no necessary reason, despite Watergate, why Nixon's next Moscow visit should not also produce a solid accord.—NICHOLAS WADE

* J. Newhouse, *Cold Dawn: The Story of SALT* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1973), $7.95.

# Virus Cancer Program: Review Panel Stands By Criticism

For quite a while, the National Cancer Institute's very expensive, very targeted Virus Cancer Program (VCP) has made a lot of people very mad. After a year-long review, a special committee of the National Cancer Advisory Board has now said officially what virus program critics have been saying privately. The VCP is an exclusive scientific club that has been able to make its own rules about how to spend the vast sums at its disposal, and these have not always been very good rules. The committee, headed by Norton Zinder of Rockefeller University, neither said nor implied that the program should be discontinued, in spite of the singularly negative tone of its report. What it did say was that the VCP must make some substantial changes in the way it does business.

First, the committee said, the VCP is too expensive. (It costs about $50 million to $60 million a year and consumes slightly more than 10 percent of the total NCI budget.) Second, the program must be opened up to the scientific community. At present, it is run by a handful of persons who have undue control over large amounts of money, which goes to only a limited number of laboratories. Furthermore, the individuals who award contracts are in a position to award them to each other, which somehow does not seem quite right. The committee called for new management practices and a good stiff measure of peer review by outside scientists.

The Zinder committee was appointed by the cancer board in March 1973 in response to growing criticism of the virus program (*Science*, 24 December 1971). Composed of basic scientists who, for the most part, are not part of the cancer virus community and who were known to have their doubts about contract research, the committee was predictably harsh on the virus program. Benno C. Schmidt, chairman of the President's Cancer Panel, which reports directly to the President, spoke with *Science* about the committee's bias. "One thing I've learned since I've been panel chairman," said Schmidt, who is an investment banker, "is that you can get any kind of advice from the scientific community that you want. If we had wanted to hear about all of the things that are right about the Virus Cancer