

Arms Agreement Breathes New Life into SCC

An obscure group, the Standing Consultative Commission, has settled a contentious treaty dispute, but many remain

Two months ago, the United States and the Soviet Union signed two little-known but important arms control agreements. One resolved U.S. concerns, dating back to 1973, that the Soviets are secretly practicing to use their air defense radars in a comprehensive shield against ballistic missiles. The other was drafted in hopes of preventing World War III from being ignited by a nuclear explosion caused by terrorists.

The reason that neither of these agreements has been widely publicized is that they were negotiated and signed by a group that deliberately seeks obscurity—a group of nine or so Russians and ten Americans that compose the Standing Consultative Commission (SCC). The group, established under the provisions of the SALT I treaty in 1972, serves as the sole existing forum for the resolution of U.S.-Soviet treaty compliance disputes. As such, it lies at the heart of a growing controversy over a long list of Soviet treaty infractions, such as construction of a new phased-array radar at Abalakova and testing of the SS25 intercontinental ballistic missile (*Science*, 22 March, p. 1442; 12 April, p. 155), as well as a variety of Soviet allegations about illegal U.S. radars and missile defense research.

Critics such as Richard Perle, an assistant secretary of defense, say that the overall negotiating record of the SCC is poor, and charge that it has long outlived its usefulness. But supporters, including a number of former SCC officials, insist that its capabilities have not been fully exploited by the Reagan Administration, and that in any event its effectiveness could be vastly improved by fine-tuning its operation.

Fueling the debate is a general sense that the United States will soon be at an arms control crossroads—a point at which an irrevocable decision could be made either to resolve the major compliance disputes or to abandon diplomacy and retaliate against Soviet infractions by formally abrogating major treaties. Many expected such a decision in June, when President Reagan was scheduled to resolve a long-running dispute among his appointees over continued U.S. adherence to the unratified SALT II treaty. But the decision was instead

postponed, and will be taken up either in December, the original SALT II expiration date, or in the spring, when the deployment of a new submarine could push the United States over the treaty's limits.

Informed public debate about the SCC is hampered by the fact that its detailed proceedings as well as the fruit of its negotiations are considered privileged information, available only to select officials in the executive branch, interested congressmen, and a handful of congress-

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sional aides with the appropriate security clearance. State Department officials explain that the purpose of this secrecy is to foster uninhibited debate during the twice-yearly SCC negotiating sessions, as well as to avert any reluctance by the participants to compromise for fear of public embarrassment.

Many supporters of the SCC say that in practice the veil of secrecy surrounding the panel's activities is often lifted, but in the context of a diplomatic stalemate rather than a successful resolution. Specifically, they note that the Reagan Administration has released three detailed reports listing Soviet treaty infractions that the SCC has failed to resolve (*Science*, 8 March, p. 1180). But the only official U.S. notice of the recent agreement on radars was given in a press release from Geneva, Switzerland, for example. "During this [SCC] session, the parties signed a Common Understanding intended to further enhance the viability of the ABM treaty," the relevant passage states in entirety.

No mention was made of the fact that a loophole in the treaty, which permitted the Soviets to operate certain air defense radars during missile tests from a site at Sary Shagan, has now been closed. (In the future, the radars may not be operated during missile tests unless potentially

hostile aircraft are clearly in the vicinity, and their operation must then be fully explained, according to the agreement.) The radar operation had figured prominently in the Administration's most recent report on Soviet treaty compliance, where it was cited as evidence "that the U.S.S.R. may be preparing an ABM defense of its national territory."

A second recent SCC agreement, involving potential nuclear terrorism, has also received little notice. Mentioned only briefly in the official press release, it actually calls for joint preparation of messages on nuclear terrorist acts that would be transmitted on the Hot Line in order to prevent potentially catastrophic U.S.-Soviet misunderstandings. It is classified "Secret," along with seven older SCC agreements on such esoteric matters as the dismantling of ballistic missiles and the use of shelters over missile silos.

Supporters of the SCC acknowledge that its performance has not been sterling in recent years, and that even more important disputes remain unresolved. But they blame the Administration for avoiding the forum and undermining its effectiveness. Former SALT negotiator Paul Warnke, for example, is critical of Reagan's past reluctance to make formal, detailed complaints at the SCC about a variety of apparent SALT II infractions as soon as they were detected. He also faults the frequent public criticism of Soviet activities. "It never pays to paint someone into a corner," he says. "Public comments tend to choke off resolutions."

Several high-level State and Defense Department officials, most of whom decline to be identified because of the formal pledge of SCC confidentiality, respond that SALT II issues were indeed raised quickly at the SCC, although they were not earnestly pursued at first because of the Reagan Administration's uncertain commitment to the treaty. They also note that the Administration sought a special SCC session to discuss the illegal Soviet radar at Abalakova as soon as it was detected by reconnaissance satellites in mid-1983, and the Soviets refused. But they also acknowledge that for awhile the Administration was primarily interested in raising such issues

outside the SCC—in direct demarches with senior Soviet officials—so as to avoid the forum's strictures on publicity.

Indeed, some officials still favor this policy. "In my judgment, the SCC has failed to produce results," says Perle. "It is hardly surprising. It is simply a forum where American technicians and Soviet technicians are able to talk to one another. Neither side in my judgment has significant authority to alter the practices of its national authorities, and because there exist no clear incentives to comply, I think it would be unreasonable to expect a forum like the SCC to produce compliance. . . . The assignment of these compliance issues to the SCC for years at a time has in my judgment conveyed to the Soviets the signal that we are not serious about resolving the issues." As evidence of the usefulness of waging a campaign against Soviet treaty violations in public, rather than through the SCC, Perle cites "the affirmative Soviet response" to U.S. complaints about chemical weapons attacks in southeast Asia.

SCC supporters, in contrast, argue that the panel's low rate of success in recent years could be improved if the Administration invested more authority in the U.S. delegation and more energy in the proceedings. Sidney Graybeal, a former U.S. commissioner of the SCC, and Michael Krepon, an expert on treaty compliance at the Carnegie Endowment, argue in a forthcoming issue of *International Security*, for example, that so-called "back channel" approaches by high-level officials outside the SCC undermine its effectiveness, divert those who have less time and technical expertise than the SCC staff, "and result in a hardening of positions, making ultimate resolution more difficult."

They are also critical of the fact that the SCC commissioner is "nominated by unanimous consent of many different bureaucracies . . . and has no single patron." As a result, according to various officials, the commissioner's instructions are sometimes changed in the middle of negotiations, as one part of the bureaucracy temporarily displaces another as

White House favorite. This happened to Richard Ellis, a lawyer and former commander in chief of the Strategic Air Command who serves as the present commissioner, during negotiations on the radar agreement, forcing him to withdraw a demand at one point that the Soviets had already accepted. Graybeal and Krepon recommend that a clear line of authority should be established between the principal SCC commissioner and the President's national security adviser, and that the commissioner's office "should be located with the national security council staff."

Finally, there is an "emerging consensus," as former SALT I legal adviser John Rhinelander puts it, that the fruits of SCC negotiations should be disclosed. "Clearly, the effectiveness of the panel depends on the process remaining secret," he says. "But we must obtain an agreement that the results be made public." Krepon and Graybeal agree. "Popular misconceptions about the role and record of the SCC as well as public concern over unresolved compliance problems have reached the point at which constructive factual reports would be useful." Since Congress has recently been demanding annual reports on Soviet transgressions, it should also be interested in open accounts of those issues that the SCC has resolved.

The major obstacle to such a reform will clearly be resistance by the Soviets. They routinely attack unauthorized U.S. disclosures about SCC proceedings as major treaty violations in and of themselves. "An approach devoid of elementary decency," is the way they described the first Administration compliance report. "This is impermissible and must be stopped." But Mark Lowenthal, a national defense specialist with the Congressional Research Service, suggests that "this is the price the Soviets have to pay for dealing with a democracy."

One Administration official, who is highly critical of Soviet noncompliance yet supportive of the SCC process, argues that no matter what reforms are made, "it is still a technical group, buffeted by politics, with insufficient clout to resolve issues like the radar at Abalakova. Its ability to resolve issues will always be limited in periods of real tension. In the end, it will only be as successful as the overall political relationship." The fact that few agreements have been reached at the SCC over the past 4 years is emblematic of how seriously U.S.-Soviet relations have deteriorated. But the fact that two were signed last month may be cause for hope.

—R. JEFFREY SMITH

Germany Axes Neutron Source

Paris. The West German government has turned down proposals from the Julich Nuclear Research Center for a major new pulsed neutron facility, the SNQ, that the laboratory had been hoping to build for completion in the mid-1990's.

According to officials in the German Ministry of Research and Technology in Bonn, the main reason for turning down the proposal was that the total cost of 2.9 billion DM (\$1 billion), which would have been shared by the federal and the state government, was considered too high for the scientific returns that could be expected.

Following the approval of the proton-electron collider HERA, now under construction in Hamburg, the SNQ had been placed at the top of the priority list for new research facilities in a report published 3 years ago by a blue-ribbon committee headed by Professor Klaus Pinkau, head of the Max Planck Institute for Plasma Physics. However, the Pinkau committee attached two conditions to its endorsement.

The first was the completion of a more detailed scientific and technical case for the SNQ. This was prepared by scientists at Julich and presented to German Research and Technology Minister Heinz Riesenhuber earlier this year by the head of the center, Wolf Hafele.

The second condition was that, due to the expected cost of the machine (almost twice that of the planned European Synchrotron Radiation Facility), international participation was essential. So far, however, no other country has said that it is prepared to help meet the costs, which government officials say are considerably higher than they had initially anticipated.

There are now hopes in Britain that the cancellation of the SNQ could persuade the German government to contribute toward the cost of the new Spallation Neutron Source that started operation at the Rutherford Appleton Laboratories at the end of last year (*Science*, 1 March, p. 1021). Because of cuts in Britain's science budget, the machine is currently only able to operate at 70 percent of its capacity, and in the past Britain has persistently been wooing West Germany—so far unsuccessfully—to help fill the gap.—DAVID DICKSON