

Materials on Negotiating the SALT II Treaty 1977-1979

CITATIONS:

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SYNOPSIS

Negotiating the SALT II Treaty 1977-1979

The SALT II Treaty was designed to limit offensive weapons in both the U.S. and Soviet arsenals. The Treaty's main goal was to rectify the perceived SALT I inequalities by limiting the quality and quantity of Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs), Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs), and heavy bombers. By rectifying these inequalities both sides believed that they could assure crisis stability by decreasing either side's incentive to strike first. The SALT II process began in 1973 after the signing and ratification of the SALT I treaty.

In November 1974, President Ford and General Secretary Brezhnev met in Vladivostok and signed interim agreements for further SALT II negotiations. The chief feature of the accords was the recognition by both sides that neither could or should have strategic superiority. In later years, factions in both countries would claim that the other country was violating this agreement.

During the period 1977-1979, the Carter administration focused on decreasing and verifying Soviet throw-weight (the hardware and armaments carried in a missile's warheads). The Carter administration, however, could not get the SALT II Treaty ratified because some members of Congress felt that the Treaty legitimately allowed the Soviets to build larger and more multi-MIRVed (see below) ICBMs. Congress stalled ratification of SALT II by adding amendments designed to limit the number, throw weight, and accuracy of Soviet missiles. The Soviets refused some amendments outright, or agreed to accept others if they could, in turn, include amendments of their own.

The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in the latter part of December 1979. In response to this act, President Carter withdrew the SALT II Treaty from the Senate in early January of 1980. The following was one of the major issues addressed during the SALT II negotiations between 1977 and 1979:

MIRV Counting and Verification

The first SALT II talks during the Carter Administration took place in Geneva, Switzerland in March of 1977. The Treaty was not signed because neither side could resolve the issue of Multiple Independently Targetable Reentry Vehicle (MIRV) verification. Reentry Vehicles are warheads. A missile may carry many of these vehicles, which can be aimed at different targets. The Soviets felt that Article V of the SALT I treaty (the "nonconcealment" clause) had sufficiently addressed the issue of MIRV verification. The United States, however, felt that this clause was insufficient and that more definitive "counting rules" for all missiles--MIRVed or unMIRVed--placed in MIRV silos were needed. If such a mixture did exist, then the United States felt that all missiles in these silos should count as MIRVs. The Soviets balked at stipulating these new "counting rules" in SALT II. The United States' position was undermined when it deployed MIRVed

Minuteman IIIs and unMIRVed Minuteman IIs together in disguised silos in Malmstrom, Montana.

CHRONOLOGY

Negotiating the SALT II Treaty

1977-1979

Prelude

1973

Secretary of Defense, James Schlesinger, urges Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, to approach the Soviets for SALT II negotiations. Schlesinger suggests that Kissinger ask the Soviets to decrease their missiles' throw weight as they modernize their forces.

1974

The Watergate scandal ends the possibility of a SALT II breakthrough at the Moscow Summit.

Secretary of State Kissinger convinces President Gerald Ford to base SALT II talks on "equal aggregates of launchers" instead of throw weight.

November President Ford and General Secretary, Leonid Brezhnev, lead a US-USSR summit in Vladivostok, where they discuss arms control

1976

Kissinger cannot resolve the SALT II Treaty because Treaty opponents like Fred Ikle believed that SALT II allowed the Soviets to keep too many weapons.

1977

March President Carter approves the Comprehensive Proposal, which Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance carries to Moscow. The proposal's key features included: A promise by the United States to stop production of the MX missile if the Soviets cut their SS-18 heavy missile force in half. The Soviets rejected the offer.

The Carter Administration proposes a return to the original SALT II emphasis on obtaining limits and reductions to throw-weight and MIRVs.

Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko holds a press conference in which he rejects the proposal and charges the United States with destroying the Vladivostok agreements.

September Gromyko criticizes the U.S. for developing new weapons.

1978

February In a Pravda editorial the Soviets protest the U.S. policy of emphasizing the short-term nature of SALT II concessions and the future development of weapons that would offset Soviet gains through SALT.

April Cyrus Vance visits Moscow to assure the Soviets that the U.S. will abide by SALT II. The meeting produces a favorable impression on Party Secretary Leonid Brezhnev.

September Brezhnev emphasizes the obstacles standing in the way of SALT in order to speed up the Treaty's acceptance.

President Carter stresses that the USSR and the USA are close to a SALT agreement.

October Vance and Soviet leaders meet but do not resolve the Treaty.

**December-
January** USSR refuses to sign the Treaty after Vance's trip to China hints that U.S.-Chinese relations are normalizing.

1979

June Carter and Brezhnev sign the SALT II treaty at the US-Soviet summit in Geneva.

December The Soviet Union invades Afghanistan.

1980

January Carter withdraws the SALT II Treaty from Senate ratification procedures.

FURTHER READING

Negotiating the SALT II Treaty 1977-79

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