

# COMMENTARY AND CORRESPONDENCE

## The Irrelevance of SALT II

*To the Editor:*

I cannot agree with the outgoing Carter Administration's assertion, that SALT II unilaterally restricts the U.S.S.R., while placing no constraints upon the United States. There are no real restrictions upon either side, because both countries are free to pursue all of their currently planned weapon systems without interference. The Soviets have simply agreed to dismantle obsolete systems that were already going to be replaced. They also agreed to place limitations on the number of MIRVs per missile that will not even be technologically feasible until after the expiration of SALT II in 1985. The freeze on the number of Soviet heavy SS-18s will not matter, if they are planning to develop a mobile "light" ICBM as permitted by SALT II. Secretary of Defense Brown has previously admitted, in his Senate testimony, that SALT II would not impede the U.S. nuclear weapons program to any extent. Therefore, SALT II is not an arms control measure.

SALT II has accelerated the pace of the nuclear arms race. The price of obtaining the approval of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on this measure was the MX missile. The MX system will have a destabilizing impact because it possesses a first-strike capability against Soviet ICBMs. The Soviets have about 75% of their strategic forces in ICBMs, while U.S. strategic forces are more evenly distributed among ICBMs, SLBMs, and SAC bombers. Because of this imbalance, the MX system will create an ICBM vulnerability problem for the Soviets that is relatively more serious than the one we will be facing. The Soviets will be forced to respond with a mobile ICBM system of their own to counter our MX threat.

The MX "racetrack" or "dragstrip" basing mode is absurd. It is founded upon the dubious assumption that the Soviets will reciprocate with a similar MX of their own in order to permit verification. This assumes a Soviet interest and commitment to "adequate verification," and a willingness to commit a vast expenditure of funds to an economically inefficient system. My guess is that the Soviets will develop a cost-efficient, land-based, mobile ICBM system that will not be verifiable — on trucks or railroad cars, for example. If so, then the dragstrip MX will prove to be an economic, strategic and environmental folly. Moreover, despite the Pentagon's argument, I believe the Soviets can MIRV their missiles more cheaply than we can build additional dragstrips. It

should be noted that MX shelters are not hardened, so they can be taken out with a single warhead. Therefore, our ICBM vulnerability will not be solved by a land-based system. The Garwin-Drell proposal of basing the missiles in off-shore diesel powered submarines would appear to be cheaper, more apt to survive a first strike, and therefore more stabilizing for the purpose of mutual deterrence. The MX should be put under the ocean, not on the land. The reason why the Air Force is opposing this solution to the problem is that it does not want to lose this mission to the Navy.

It was the United States which opposed the inclusion of MIRVs in SALT I because we had a technological lead in the area and we wanted to exploit our advantage. It was predictable that the Soviets would work furiously to catch up. The problem was further compounded by the Joint Chiefs' decision to forego the development of heavy ICBMs because MIRV technology and present light ICBMs were thought to be sufficient to accomplish our strategic objective: mutual assured destruction. So, to a great extent we have only ourselves to blame for the projected vulnerability of our ICBMs to a Soviet first strike by heavy SS-18s with 30-40 MIRVs each.

The value of SALT II lies not in the limitations it contains, but in the negotiating process itself. No treaty negotiation process can keep pace with the rapid rate at which technologies develop. By the time a treaty is concluded and ratified, the technology has moved into a new generation with higher levels of destructiveness which rendered the treaty obsolete. Nevertheless, the SALT process serves the function of regulating the progression of technological stages in the arms race. SALT makes the arms race more understandable, predictable and less irrational to both sides. It allows them to signal their intentions to each other before acting upon them. However, the SALT process cannot stop the arms race unless it can simultaneously stop the technology race and this seems to be impossible.

Therefore, what the new Administration should do is forget about the ratification of SALT II, since it has already served its purpose, and move immediately into negotiating SALT III, or even SALT IV. Just as SALT I left open the MIRV problem, SALT II does not discuss the mobile ICBM, cruise missiles, theater nuclear forces, anti-satellite warfare, or high-energy weapons. We are now in the post SALT II stage of the arms race; we must negotiate on these systems immediately, before they get completely out of control.

FRANCIS A. BOYLE  
*Professor of Law*  
*University of Illinois*  
*Champaign-Urbana*

*The Fletcher Forum* welcomes commentary and letters from its readers on international issues and problems as well as the opinions which appear in these pages.