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SALT II: TOWARD A BALANCE OF TERROR

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It has been seven months since President Carter sent the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty to the Senate. This treaty -- the world's best hope to put the brakes on a suicidal U.S.-Soviet stockpiling of nuclear arms -- remains unratified.

Prospects for Senate ratification actually have grown dimmer. In early December, Senate Majority Leader Robert Byrd pronounced the treaty dead for 1979. Some understand this to mean that it's unlikely to be revived anytime soon.

The leading architect of SALT II, Henry Kissinger, deserves a good share of the credit for undermining this treaty. When Kissinger was Secretary of State, SALT II was the bright centerpiece of detente and stability between the superpowers. Now this same treaty is being assailed by Kissinger as "risky." Approval should not come, he counsels from on high, unless America pumps up military spending substantially.

What has changed? No more than this: a White House administration. The man who served two Republican presidents as Secretary of State now finds it politically possible to distance himself from a treaty that a Democratic administration inherited and embraced.

This is the same figure who said there was no place for partisan politics in foreign policy when he ran foreign policy.

Let's examine this exercise in "double think" which would have use believe we've got to spend more on weapons to get fewer weapons. (Remember when we were told we had to destroy Vietnam villages in order to "save" them?)

The United States and the Soviet Union confront each other today from positions of rough parity in their capacity to destroy each other, not once, but several times over.

To insist that SALT II is acceptable only if defense spending is increased in real dollars by 3 percent, by 5 percent or by some other increment may be "macho," but it's also madness. What's more, none of these swash-buckling advocates seem able to say what the money is supposed to buy!

No advocate of federal aid to education, or dependent children or the unemployed would ever dream of asking Congress for a dime on this basis -- without being able to say exactly where and how the money should be spent and being prepared to defend it vigorously.

Americans are being told that "Proposition 13" fever doesn't apply to generals and admirals. We're told that our military capability can never be too strong. At a time when the public is demanding tighter accountability and more restraint in government spending programs, taxpayers are being asked to disregard the fact that military spending is the least productive kind of government spending.

Worse, the linkage of SALT II to an increase in the defense budget runs the risk of nudging public opinion toward the erroneous conclusion that America is weak. In fact it is not.

A single U.S. Navy Poseidon submarine with its 16 multiple warhead missiles represents more explosive force that was used in all of Europe and Japan in World War II.

One Poseidon submarine has the power to devastate every city in the Soviet Union with a population over 150,000.

The United States has 31 Poseidon submarines, plus 10 other submarines armed with Polaris missiles, plus more than 1,000 land-based ICBMs, plus 420 intercontinental bombers.

Frankly, depending upon what kind of weapons are counted and the size and number of warheads they carry, the United States, under SALT II, would be ahead in some areas and the Soviets in others. But our strategic forces would be roughly in balance in terms of overall destructive capability.

It is because of this "equivalency" that SALT II deserves ratification. Does anyone honestly believe that it is any more politically possible for Kremlin leaders to consign themselves to military inferiority than it would be for the President of the United States?

To insist on a treaty that abandons the idea of "equivalency" and insists on massive U.S. superiority is to ask Russia to give its personal blessing to a rival power holding it over the barrel forever. The Soviets can't do that any more than we can. To insist on this stance is to doom the treaty -- any treaty -- and unleash a madcap arms race with no holds barred.

SALT II deserves ratification because it is a hope for peace. It does not signal America's retreat; it marks our progress on the long road toward a saner and safer world -- a world in which the risk of mutual nuclear destruction is curbed.

SALT II will not reduce the cloud of terror from overhead, but it's our only hope of containing it.

To work, SALT II must rely on mutual deterrence -- a shared risk-taking by the United States and the Soviet Union. To some, acceptance of this idea is tantamount to surrender. To me, it is an act of national maturity. It reflects the sober realization that world stability will only result when the United States and the Soviet Union find a means to end competition through a suicidal arms race.

History is now judging the United States Senate. It's time to let our Senators know that Oregonians are judging them, too. The people of Oregon want and deserve a voice raised for nuclear sanity, for SALT II.

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