

The Senate's Arms Control Sub-committee will soon begin hearings on the Vladivostok agreement. One would hope that this will remove the secrecy in which its negotiating history has been shrouded up to now, and reveal to the American public the essential facts surrounding its conclusion which have been known for some time to key U.S. officials and their Soviet counterparts.

The summit's aide memoire, which has already been changed in some particulars to respond to domestic critics -- and which is said by the Secretary of State not to reflect what was actually agreed upon in another important respect -- still remains unavailable to the press or public. The history of secret side agreements in SALT I suggests that the full circumstances surrounding the Vladivostok agreement should receive the most careful Congressional examination, with testimony under oath from the negotiating participants.

In the process, the steady erosion of the U.S. negotiating position throughout SALT II should be clearly elucidated. The reasons for this erosion have been cogently laid out by Paul Nitze in his recent Foreign Policy article on the SALT negotiating process. Principal among them has been the failure to coordinate positions on the U.S. side, or to bring to bear the full range of available U.S. negotiating leverage.

An accurate recording of the negotiating history is particularly important since Vladivostok has been misleadingly

portrayed by certain U.S. officials as the result of substantial unilateral concessions by the Soviet Union. The fact is that the U.S. successively yielded on a number of principles in order to produce the Vladivostok result. Key among these was the position that there should be equality in strategic offensive power, attained either by an equal missile throw-weight limit, or by a disparity in MIRVed missile numbers to compensate for the gross advantages in Soviet missile size. Ironically, the Soviets had accepted the latter proposition almost a year ago, in the context of negotiations relating to the extension of the Interim Agreement. The principle is even more relevant to the longer-term agreement negotiated at Vladivostok. Throw-weight remains the dominant controllable parameter of the two sides' offensive forces -- a self-evident proposition which was strenuously argued by Dr. Kissinger throughout SALT II until the fall of 1974, when the Soviets reversed their position of six months earlier and made clear that they regarded retention of their grossly superior throw-weight as an essential condition of any SALT II agreement. As a corollary the Soviets insisted upon equal numbers of MIRVed missiles. We accepted both these Soviet positions in October, paving the way for the Vladivostok agreement the following month.

The most widely heralded Soviet "concession", relating to so-called U.S. forward based systems (FBS), represented the abandonment of an argument that was never seriously advanced by the Soviets (except on those periodic occasions when the

U.S. Secretary of State publicly supported the Soviet FBS position). U.S. analyses, presented to the Soviets in Geneva and at the summit, had conclusively shown that the advantage in FBS lay with the USSR, and that if any side were entitled to compensation it was the U.S.

A further issue which should be carefully probed by the Senate relates to reductions. The Secretary of State has already acknowledged that we could probably have achieved agreement at a lower MIRV figure than 1320. The obvious question remains why we failed to do so. The aggregate total of 2400 delivery systems is excessive as well, and runs counter to the earlier recommendation of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defense that both sides should be limited to a total of 2000 delivery systems. Far from putting a cap on strategic forces, the agreed figures of 1320 and 2400 set new floors to which both sides will now feel pressed to build. The assertions of the agreement's negotiator that its terms require reductions from current Soviet capabilities do not bear close examination. Nor do the assertions that U.S. intelligence supports the proposition that the agreement constrains the Soviets to force levels lower than those they intended to attain during the agreement's period.

The agreement's effect on U.S. defense capability can be particularly damaging. On the strategic side, it is likely to exert pressures for the diversion of money from important qualitative improvements into the expansion of missile numbers.

But, even more significantly, the agreement will create imperatives for increased strategic force spending -- reversing the downward trend of the past decade, and diverting already marginal funds from essential general purpose force modernization. The likely result will be to accelerate the shift in the global military balance to Soviet advantage, constraining our foreign policy options in an increasingly dangerous and unstable world, and enhancing the Soviets' perceptions of opportunities for the expansion of their own power and influence.

Finally, there are very serious verification problems associated with the type of agreement that has been negotiated. Assurances of anonymous "senior officials" that the problems are manageable lack credibility among informed specialists. Indications that the Soviets are currently violating key provisions of the SALT I agreements argue for extreme caution in the structuring of new agreements which will run through the mid-eighties. Recent evidence suggests that the scope of questionable Soviet activity is expanding. The whole subject requires thorough airing by the appropriate Congressional committees before we enter into an agreement whose enforceability is even more questionable than those which are already suspected of Soviet evasion.

In sum, the Vladivostok agreement does nothing to solve the U.S. problem of massive Soviet throw-weight advantage. On the other hand, it essentially resolves the Soviet problem of U.S. qualitative advantage by setting an equal ceiling on the

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two sides' MIRVed forces. Given massive Soviet superiority in missile size, this equal ceiling creates the potential for significant Soviet strategic advantage. Such advantage would destabilize the strategic balance, and place the U.S. at a serious psychological disadvantage in future dealings with the USSR.

Further, the agreement stresses our defense budgets at a time when key conventional programs are already seriously underfunded. And finally, it contemplates limitations which may be essentially unverifiable at a time when we have serious grounds to believe that the Soviets may be failing to comply with the agreements negotiated at SALT I.

The regrettable but inevitable conclusion to which the informed observer is driven is that we should have done much better. A fully informed press and public are likely to insist that we do better; and therein lies the principal significance of the hearings which will shortly begin before the Senate's Arms Control Sub-committee.