

'Salt II: the great illusion of disarmament' from Der Spiegel (11 June 1979)

Caption: On 11 June 1979, for German weekly publication Der Spiegel, the signature, on 18 June 1979 in Vienna, of the SALT II agreements on the limitation of strategic arms paradoxically leads the United States and the Soviet Union to continue the arms race.

Source: Der Spiegel. Das Deutsche Nachrichten-Magazin. Hrsg. AUGSTEIN, Rudolf ; Herausgeber ENGEL, Johannes K.; BÖHME, Erich. 11.06.1979, n° 24; 33. Jg. Hamburg: Spiegel Verlag Rudolf Augstein GmbH. "Salt II: Abrüstung - die große Lüge", p. 125-137.

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Salt II: the great illusion of disarmament

SPIEGEL report: Arming the superpowers by agreement

Jimmy Carter and Leonid Brezhnev want to sign the agreement of a lifetime in Vienna next week: the second Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (Salt II). Carter calls it a ‘contribution to peace’ — but, in fact, it is primarily a fresh incentive to a new round of the arms race.

Vienna Congress, 1979: the Heads of State of the two most powerful countries in the world, Leonid Brezhnev and Jimmy Carter, are spending four days in the same city: Brezhnev with his closest advisers and medical team; Carter, as ever, with a huge entourage, planeloads of media men, his wife Rosalynn and daughter Amy.

6 000 police officers are providing security for the VIP guests. The historical backdrop is the splendid and venerable Vienna Hofburg, former residence of the Habsburgs. The programme for the visit was still being frantically prepared late last week:

On Friday, the Carters will pay a courtesy call on Austrian President Rudolf Kirchschläger. In the evening, they will be attending the opening night of Mozart’s ‘Die Entführung aus dem Serail’.

Talks on Saturday at the American and, on Sunday, at the Soviet Embassy. While the talks are going on, Rosalynn and Amy Carter will be taking a boat trip on the Danube and visiting the Vienna treasure vaults. On Monday 18 June, we have the glittering finale:

In the Redoutensäle of the Hofburg which — as Max Reinhardt and Richard Strauss discovered back in the 1920s — are best suited to theatrical performances, Carter and Brezhnev are to sign a treaty that many, even now, consider a once-in-a-lifetime event: the second Treaty between the two superpowers on strategic arms limitation (Salt II).

This ‘contribution to peace’ (as Carter describes it) was negotiated at almost 300 meetings over some seven years — and the basic provisions have been ready for about a year.

Almost monthly since then, imminent final agreement has been announced, and summit dates and stages negotiated, until, finally, it became official on 9 May. ‘Thank God, we have finally made it’, groaned US Secretary of State Cyrus Vance after a final meeting with Russian Ambassador Anatoli Dobrynin, praising the agreement as a message of hope for Americans and for all people in the world.

The subject-matter is so complex, and there was such tough haggling over every comma, that, as late as last Wednesday, some sceptics doubted whether the 70-page document with its protocol and additional declarations would be ready in time for the Vienna Summit. The drafting experts from both sides were still sitting around the table in Geneva and still negotiating.

But a State Department spokesman reassured us that they were getting closer to an agreement every day. And, in the White House, preparations for Carter’s first meeting with his Soviet counterpart went ahead.

Provided Leonid Brezhnev is not bedridden, the Summit seems certain to go ahead. It also seems certain that the Soviet leader and Carter will thrill the world with a pact which, according to Carter, substantially reduces the probability of nuclear war.

Does this mean that, finally, after years of a race to acquire ever bigger, ever more unusual, ever more accurate and ever more destructive weapons, we are going to have disarmament? Are we taking a step back from the abyss of nuclear holocaust so dramatically portrayed in a US Congress study just a couple of weeks ago?

A treaty that legally binds both sides to disarm is unprecedented in the war-ridden history of the human race.

Also unprecedented is a German Chancellor's decision to go to the United States with the avowed intention of influencing the US national ratification process — Salt II has to be approved by at least 67 of the 100 US Senators.

When, last week, he received an honorary doctorate from Harvard University, Helmut Schmidt said of Salt II: 'This Treaty is a piece of world history. It is also a factor in world security and the security of my own country.' The Chancellor campaigned for Salt II on all three national television channels.

That enthusiasm was echoed elsewhere. Edward Kennedy paid tribute to Salt II as a historic achievement. Poland's *Trybuna Ludu* went so far as to celebrate the Treaty as the 'best news that the world has had in recent years.'

But do realists like Schmidt and Kennedy actually believe what they are so solemnly saying?

It is true that the Salt negotiators have drafted a document which lays down that both sides must disarm.

According to Salt II, the Soviets, for example, must dismantle some 250 intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), as they would otherwise be over the agreed limit. 'That is more than ten per cent', enthused America's long-standing chief Salt negotiator Paul C. Warnke in an interview with *Der Spiegel*, 'I believe that a single agreement really has made a difference.'

Salt II also sets maximum and intermediate limits that herald an end to the quantitative strategic arms race.

The Treaty even includes provisions that could mark the end of the qualitative arms race, albeit over time.

But the armaments monster is far from defeated, given the huge arsenals that both East and West have accumulated.

Over the last 20 years, the arms race has devoured more than \$2.6 million million — \$2 673 848 000 000 to be precise — with the result, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) calculates, that, back in 1976, the nuclear powers' arsenals contained nuclear weapons with an explosive capability totalling 50 000 megatonnes, 15 tonnes of TNT for each inhabitant of the planet.

Academics in the West have highlighted the madness of it all. According to US Soviet specialist Richard J. Barnet in his book 'The Giants — Russia and America', so long as the Soviet and US political leaders agree that nuclear war is unthinkable and that the only point of nuclear weapons is to provide a dire warning of Armageddon, there is no real reason to continue the arms race.

Harvard Professor Richard Garwin was blunter still. In his view, there are such strong forces, jealously guarding our freedoms in the areas of defence and the military, that it is simply impossible to work up the impetus to introduce effective arms control.

One statistic dramatically illustrates this: the budget of the American Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA) — significantly, the ACDA is linked not to the Pentagon but to the State Department — is exactly 1/10 000 of the Pentagon budget. In other words, for every dollar spent on disarmament, \$10 000 are spent on arms.

Although it is a good start, Salt II is going to make very little difference to that situation. The celebrated instrument for peace comes too late to stop the arms race — it is unlikely that any treaty can stop it now.

All the positive first steps are simply overshadowed by the reality of the massive statistics: Salt II does more than set limits, it establishes ceilings that give enough scope for a new variant on the arms race.

The two superpowers are allowing themselves 2 250 delivery systems for strategic weapons — and that alone suggests not disarming but arming. The United States has yet to reach that ceiling: it currently has

only 2 000 systems.

The number of warheads with which both may equip their strategic weapons has also been restricted — allowing the United States to increase its total from the current approximately 11 000 to some 20 000 by 1985 when Salt II expires. The Soviets can build up their stocks still further: from some 4 500 currently to a possible 20 000 as well.

The two contracting parties have imposed many restrictions on themselves in the Protocol to Salt II concerning the deployment but not the testing of new weapons systems. But the tests may be conducted as soon as the Protocol expires, at the end of 1981.

Jimmy Carter has also proposed increasing the US defence budget for this year by \$11 billion (that is 10 %); much of that will fund the most ambitious nuclear weapons programme for 20 years.

The Pentagon is demanding \$2 billion just to modernise the ‘triad’ — the US threefold deterrent comprising intercontinental missiles, underwater missiles and bombers. Though one component of the triad — the firmly established intercontinental missile — is increasingly vulnerable, the military and many Senators are insisting on giving it a new, more solid status.

The magic cure is called MX, the ‘experimental missile’, and could, in fact, mislead any enemy. The missiles are constantly moved on covered lorries from one silo to the next, so that — if dummies are left in the empty silos — not even the best-performing satellite can tell where the ICBM is actually positioned. As a result, an attack on America’s ICBMs would be more or less pointless because the enemy missiles cannot be properly programmed. According to gleeful Salt critic Eugene Rostow, formerly Lyndon Johnson’s security adviser, mobile ICBMs would fundamentally alter the nuclear balance.

The Pentagon would like to deploy 250 such missiles, and, as the White House announced last Friday, Jimmy Carter is prepared to pay that price for Senate approval. The cost? Between \$20 billion and \$30 billion.

And that is not all. Secretary of Defense Harold Brown was even more outspoken, declaring that, this year, America was going to equip its submarines with the new Trident C-4 missile and that cruise missiles would boost the effectiveness of the triad’s bomber component. America is improving the accuracy and explosive force of its Minuteman ICBMs.

\$50 billion — that is Washington’s conservative estimate of the cost of further armaments before Salt II expires.

Much of that expenditure is earmarked for weapons systems that are not covered by Salt, are subject to no financial limits and allow the imagination free range.

Over the past ten years, for example, the Pentagon has invested some \$1.4 billion — and the private sector at least four times that figure — in developing weapons that would basically invalidate Salt: a laser-guided anti-missile system against incoming missiles.

The system is not yet ready for mass production, but the first tests were successful. The laser beam is programmed from a mountain or an aircraft and locked on to the approaching missile, which then shatters in the atmosphere.

It goes without saying that the Soviets are working on a similar project. They are also working on the development of what are known as killer satellites with which they can destroy not only enemy spy satellites but, possibly, their missiles as well.

According to a senior White House official, Salt II does not signal the end of the arms race or the end of competition between the Soviet Union and the United States.

And no one could really have believed that anyway. As history shows us, disarmament was always a dream and the promise to disarm a great illusion.

Russia's Tsar Alexander I was the first in recent history to propose troop reductions when he suggested to British Foreign Secretary Lord Castlereagh, in a letter dated 21 March 1816, that they should simultaneously reduce forces of all kinds.

Some 80 years later, Tsar Nicholas II invited the Great Powers to the first Hague Conference, explaining:

To the extent that every power is acquiring more and more arms, armaments are increasingly failing to fulfil the purpose that the governments intended ... it seems apparent that, if this state of affairs continues, it is bound to result in the kind of chaos that we sought to avoid and the terror that made all men shudder.

But there was no disarmament. Nor was there any subsequent disarmament as a result of a multilateral agreement. The only examples of disarmament have been the two occasions when the vanquished were forced to disarm by the victors, after the First and Second World Wars.

The problem has not been any lack of good starts or intentions. In January 1918 — still during the First World War, therefore — US President Woodrow Wilson, for example, called for levels of national armaments to be reduced to the minimum compatible with internal security.

But, when the countries that formed the League of Nations met after the war was over, Japan secured the condition that the criterion for arms limitation should be not internal security but 'national security'. And the French insisted that any disarmament had to be dependent on a country's 'geographical situation' and 'special circumstances' — an elastic form of words that could be used to justify any level of armaments, nipping Wilson's ideal in the bud.

The same fate befell the attempt by Soviet Foreign Minister Maxim Litvinov when, in February 1932, as the first Soviet representative to attend the Disarmament Commission of the League of Nations, he proposed 'general and complete disarmament'.

At least the Washington Fleet Agreement of 1922 and the Anglo-German Fleet Agreement of 1935 seemed to bring effective naval disarmament and limit the maritime arms race.

But all that the signatories to the Washington Agreement did was to scrap their obsolete large warships. They made sure that the size of their fleet was confirmed and cheerfully carried on arming in areas the agreement did not cover, i.e. small combat vessels and submarines.

The London Agreement similarly fixed the fleet sizes of the two rivals, and, by setting astronomically high ceilings, gave the German navy a further incentive to establish an ambitious shipbuilding programme, i.e. to increase its level of armaments.

After the Second World War, the United Nations tried to revive the concept of disarmament but was similarly luckless and unsuccessful. In the mid-1950s, it sometimes looked as though progress was within reach, but, in August 1953, all hopes and dreams were temporarily shattered — not by a Soviet 'niet' but by an American 'no'. US delegate Harold Stassen expressed reservations about all existing arrangements on behalf of the Eisenhower Administration: it was the time of the Cold War, and the Americans did not trust the Soviets.

As the Americans, and above all their gruff Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, saw it, whatever the Americans did, the Soviets tried to catch up, often lagging very far behind but determined to challenge the United States for world domination.

It was not until events like the Vietnam War revealed the limitations of US power and the Soviets, despite Vietnam, advocated their policy of peaceful coexistence that serious discussions resumed between the two superpowers.

One of the main reasons why the Soviets were prepared to conclude a treaty was obvious: the effort to keep up with the Americans cost billions — billions needed to meet Soviet citizens' consumer requirements.

Moscow and Washington concluded a total of 14 agreements, none of which was broken — including the Outer Space Treaty, the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, the Seabed Arms Control Treaty and, finally, Salt I.

The signature of Salt I, on 26 May 1972 in Moscow, was marked with the same pathetic celebrations as Salt II now. US President Nixon declared — and repeated this almost daily in the 1972 presidential election campaign — that never before were two adversaries, divided by contrasting ideologies and political rivalries, in a position to limit the weapons on which their survival depended.

Impressed that so much progress had been made, the US Senate approved the Treaty — by the same margin of 88 to two as what is known as the 1964 Tonkin resolution, the cornerstone for US intervention in Vietnam.

And, just as in 1964, the vote in the Senate brought the US military machine into full swing. Salt I saw the beginning of one of the most expensive phases in the arms race between the two giants.

The Treaty set ceilings on strategic weapons that neither side was even close to when it was concluded. And that was, patently, what the signatory powers, at least the Americans, intended.

On his return from signing the Treaty in Moscow, Richard Nixon declared that no power on earth was now stronger than the United States of America and that nothing else would ever be acceptable to Americans.

And, just a week after the Treaty had been signed, his Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird laid before Congress a range of Salt-related amendments to the strategic programme.

According to Laird, the US needed new ('Trident') submarines and new long-range underwater missiles, new bomber bases and a new supersonic bomber ('B-1'), improved warheads, improved intelligence systems, etc., etc., etc.

The Defence Secretary and his military got largely what they wanted — and a great deal more. Carter's chief negotiator at the Salt II negotiations, Paul C. Warnke, acknowledged that the US had added a number of new weapons to its arsenal on a daily basis since Salt I came into force.

The increase in the number of delivery systems was comparatively modest — from 1 710 to 2 058. In contrast, the number of warheads almost doubled — from 6 000 at that time to almost 11 000 now. The Pentagon calculated that just 300 would be enough to kill 100 million people in the Soviet Union.

The armouries of the two rivals are now so well-equipped that the Americans have 34 strategic weapons available to them to destroy any large Soviet city and the Russians as many as 26 to destroy any large city in the US.

At the same time, existing stocks have been improved. American missile technicians, for instance, adjusted the computer-controlled target programs of 550 Minuteman III missiles and were able to increase targeting accuracy from within 360 to within some 200 metres — a sixfold increase in explosive force at target. The aim is to improve accuracy to within 15 metres by 1980.

It is true that Jimmy Carter (who wants to see all nuclear weapons banned) cancelled one of the military's

pet projects, the B-1 supersonic bomber, that Nixon and Ford had promised them.

But even without the superbomber, there has been no shortage of miracle weapons developed in the wake of Salt I.

In April, the almost 19 000 tonne submarine 'Ohio' was launched in the US State of Connecticut, the first in a class of 12 state-of-the-art vessels.

They are more powerful, bigger and more expensive (each costs around \$1.5 billion) than anything that has moved around below the surface before. They reach underwater speeds of up to 80 kilometres an hour and can remain submerged for up to three months without surfacing.

The submarines are each equipped with 24 Trident C-4 missiles, each of which can carry up to 24 nuclear warheads two and half times the power of the Hiroshima bomb. Each vessel could, therefore, turn as many as 576 towns into radioactive rubble.

An even more significant breakthrough in the arms sector is the development of a projectile that, according to US Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, the Soviets should fear more than the US might fear any weapons they develop: the cruise missile, a modern version of the old German V-1.

The cruise missile is jet-propelled, only 4.40 metres long and weighs in at a good 900 kg. It can be fired from aircraft, ships above and below water and from land. It flies at a target height of only 40 metres — too low for Soviet radar and air defences to pick up and take counter measures. And it is accurate to within 30 metres.

The Western military has also praised, as a decisive breakthrough in weapons technology, the development of a new nuclear bomb, what is known as the neutron bomb. Two years ago, its construction and deployment caused profound disagreement between the Americans and the Europeans and between Jimmy Carter and Helmut Schmidt in particular.

Instead of producing a powerful shock wave and substantial radioactive fallout, this third generation nuclear weapon produces relatively high radiation of 'fast neutrons' that easily penetrates armoured vehicles or walls. In short: the neutron bomb kills people but spares buildings.

The Soviets' first response to the technological challenge posed by the new US weapons was — as usual — to try to go bigger and better.

They looked for ways of eliminating the American intercontinental missiles in their silos and developed the SS-12 and SS-19 heavy ICBMs. Each of these supermissiles carries warheads with an explosive force of between 2 and 25 megatonnes — on average, ten times as much as all of the 1.4 million tonnes of explosives that fell on Germany during the Second World War.

At the same time, they developed a special way of priming their ICBMs: gas is used to propel the missiles from the silos, and the sensitive propulsion unit is ignited only outside the silo. The advantage is that the undamaged silos can be reloaded after only a few hours.

The Soviets also pumped billions into non-strategic weapons. They manufactured a supersonic bomber, dubbed the 'Backfire' bomber by Nato, built and deployed accurate medium-range missiles (the SS-20 and SS-21), thereby gaining a significant lead in the 'grey area' of nuclear weapons not covered by Salt. The Soviets are also still out in front in the field of conventional weapons.

The limited impact of Salt I on restricting armaments is also apparent from the constantly rising defence budgets in East and West. The Soviet defence budget shot up from \$84.4 billion in 1972 to \$133 billion in 1977. During the same period, the Pentagon's budget rose from \$77.6 to \$104 billion.

Shortly after Salt I was signed, CIA Deputy Director Herbert Scoville Jr remarked that disarmament negotiations were plainly the best pretext for fuelling up rather than curbing the arms race.

This was particularly evident when — in November 1974 — Gerald Ford and Leonid Brezhnev agreed in Vladivostok on the ceilings for a new, second Salt Treaty: 2 400 delivery systems for each side without qualifications, far more than either possessed at the time. On returning from the summit, Ford declared that it was America's duty to develop its strategic forces up to the agreed limits.

The arms race was proceeding merrily apace — that was the lament of Harvard scientist George B. Kistiakowsky. He had been Head of Explosives in the Los Alamos US atomic research facility in 1944 and was later President Eisenhower's special adviser on science and technology. As far as he was concerned, the Vladivostok agreement could be interpreted only as protecting the arms race from any interference by the disarmament lobby for the next ten years. And he warned that arms races usually ended in war.

Ford and Brezhnev had, in fact, gone too far. The new ceilings were unpalatable even to the US Congress. In early 1975, in its Resolution No 20, Congress expressed its firm conviction that the Treaty had to result in further arms limitation and reductions on both sides.

Not only peace researchers but also a number of Senators on whom Jimmy Carter has to rely if the Treaty is to be ratified doubt whether Salt II meets that challenge.

Three Senators — George McGovern, Mark Hatfield and William Proxmire — openly threatened that they would reject any Salt proposal that did not fundamentally limit the arms race.

But there is still sharper and more menacing criticism from those who still cannot come to terms with the fact that the days of America's clear nuclear superiority are finally over and that nuclear parity has long been established. For the periodical *New Republic*, to acknowledge that the Soviets have achieved nuclear parity goes against the grain for Americans and is almost intolerable for the hawks.

On that issue, serious scientists and strategists have long agreed that even the wealthy United States cannot recover its previous position. According to Marshall Shulman, Soviet expert in the State Department, neither the Soviets nor the Americans can hope to secure a substantial military advantage, even if they double existing arsenals.

And yet in the United States Salt II is opposed by 166 organisations. They may not represent the majority of Americans — to date, a majority has been in favour of a Salt Treaty in all the opinion polls — but they are a vocal and financially powerful minority.

Their most prominent spokesman is former Secretary of Defense Paul H. Nitze who considers it a given that Salt II will help the Soviet Union achieve a dangerous nuclear predominance.

The reason: at some point in the first half of the 1980s, the Soviets will be in a position to destroy at first strike the bulk of US intercontinental missiles in their silos.

But Nitze and his supporters fail to point out that the Americans can very probably avoid that threat by introducing mobile ICBMs, their MX missiles for instance, whose deployment — but not testing — is prohibited only until the Salt Protocol expires at the end of 1981.

The deciding factor in whether the Senate approves or rejects the Treaty will probably be the debate on what is referred to as the verifiability of Salt II.

The hawks claim that America is no longer able to verify whether the Soviets have genuinely complied with the Treaty — particularly since the loss of its two listening posts in Iran. And they are not about to trust the Soviets without further ado.

Carter, in contrast, claims that he would never sign a treaty and present it to Congress or the American people unless it could be properly verified from the day on which it entered into force.

And ‘properly’ means that, should the Soviet Union really circumvent the Treaty, the introduction of new weapons, for instance, would always require a number of tests. Even if a couple of tests escaped American notice, the third at least would be picked up by the close-knit surveillance system.

Moreover, the Treaty contains a wealth of detailed provisions designed to make verification easier. Launch pads, for example, from which missiles with multiple warheads (‘MIRVs’) *could* be fired are also counted as such — and therefore covered by the Salt ceilings — regardless of whether they are actually equipped with a MIRV or with a single missile carrying only one warhead.

Helmut Schmidt, Salt’s PR man, has also intervened in the debate. Challenged by sceptical US Senators about the problem of verification, the Chancellor retorted that the matter had been exaggerated. They should not be fainthearted. He himself had had the kind of doubts about the West that others felt in relation to the Russians.

Until a few weeks ago, conservative Salt opponents more or less had the stage to themselves, and used it, without even knowing the exact terms of the Treaty, to preach their Cold War ideology to the people. But now that the Salt negotiations have been brought to a conclusion, the Treaty’s advocates have also ventured into the open.

David Linebaugh, for example, a senior official from the US Disarmament Agency, demonstrated in the *Los Angeles Times* that it was not the Soviets but the Americans who were the clear winners of the Salt II round.

According to Linebaugh, Salt II is a prohibitive Treaty for the Russians, because:

- they have to reduce their delivery systems by 250;
- they may not deploy their already tested mobile intercontinental missile, the SS-16, and may not increase the number of warheads on their existing missiles;
- they were unable to secure agreement that all weapons able to reach the other side’s territory should be classified as strategic weapons (America’s tactical nuclear weapons deployed in Europe, for example).

According to Linebaugh, Salt II restricts the Soviet Union, but, for the United States, it is a permissive Treaty because:

- the US may continue modernising all three components of its strategic triad, including the air-launched cruise missiles, which the Soviets wanted completely banned;
- it may deploy its sea- and air-launched cruise missiles and its MX-system as soon as the Salt Protocol has expired;
- the US is not subject to any restrictions in relation to the tactical nuclear weapons deployed in Europe.

According to Linebaugh, the Kremlin hawks are hardly delighted at that. Fortunately, they have, to date, been in the minority; but he warned the Senate that this could change if America’s hawks played into their hands with still more demands.

Finally, Jimmy Carter has used what can hardly be described as an original argument in favour of the Treaty. After the mere prospect of Salt II was used to sway many a Senator to vote for Salt I when it was under debate, Carter has enticed them with Salt III. According to the President, Salt II is a step in the right direction; it will lead to the even better Salt III.

Until then, carry on arming.