

Speech by Jimmy Carter (Washington, 18 June 1979)

Caption: On 18 June 1979, a few hours after having signed, in Vienna, the SALT II agreements on the limitation of strategic nuclear weapons, the US President, Jimmy Carter, describes to the US Congress the significance of this new disarmament agreement.

Source: Office of the Federal Register (Ed.). Jimmy Carter, January 1 to June 22, 1979. Volume I: 1979. Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1980. 1144 p. (Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States). p. 1087-1092.

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URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/speech_by_jimmy_carter_washington_18_june_1979-en-6ficed84-c4ee-42ba-a57b-41013c49a4a4.html

Last updated: 19/08/2025



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Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Members of the Congress of the United States of America, and my fellow citizens:

The truth of the nuclear age is that the United States and the Soviet Union must live in peace, or we may not live at all.

From the beginning of history, the fortunes of men and nations were made and unmade in unending cycles of war and peace. Combat was often the measure of human courage. Willingness to risk war was the mark of statecraft. My fellow Americans, that pattern of war must now be broken forever.

Between nations armed with thousands of thermonuclear weapons – each one capable of causing unimaginable destruction – there can be no more cycles of both war and peace. There can only be peace.

About 2 hours ago, I returned from 3 days of intensive talks with President Leonid Brezhnev of the Soviet Union. I come here tonight to meet with you in a spirit of patience, of hope, and of reason and responsibility.

Patience – because the way is long and hard, and the obstacles ahead are at least as great as those that have been overcome in the last 30 years of diligent and dedicated work.

Hope – because I'm thankful to be able to report to you tonight that real progress has been made.

Reason and responsibility – because both will be needed in full measure if the promise which has been awakened in Vienna is to be fulfilled and the way is to be opened for the next phase in the struggle for a safe and a sane Earth.

Nothing will more strongly affect the outcome of that struggle than the relationship between the two predominant military powers in the world, the United States of America and the Soviet Union.

The talks in Vienna were important in themselves. But their truest significance was as a part of a process – a process that, as you well know, began long before I became President.

This is the 10th time since the end of World War II when the leader of the United States and the leader of the Soviet Union have met at a summit conference. During these past 3 days, we've moved closer to a goal of stability and security in Soviet-American relationships.

That has been the purpose of American policy ever since the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union became a central fact in international relations more than a generation ago at the end of World War II.

With the support of the Congress of the United States and with the support of the people of this Nation, every President throughout this period has sought to reduce the most dangerous elements of the Soviet-American competition.

While the United States still had an absolute nuclear monopoly, President Truman sought to place control of the atomic bomb under international authority. President Eisenhower made the first efforts to control nuclear testing. President Kennedy negotiated with the Soviet Union prohibition against atmospheric testing of nuclear explosives. President Johnson broadened the area of negotiations for the first time to include atomic weapons themselves. President Nixon concluded the first strategic arms limitation agreement, SALT I. President Ford negotiated the Vladivostok accords. You can see that this is a vital and a continuing process.

Later this week I will deliver to the United States Senate the complete and signed text of the second strategic arms limitation agreement, SALT II.

This treaty is the product of 7 long years of tough, painstaking negotiation under the leadership of three different Presidents. When ratified, it will be a truly national achievement—an achievement of the Executive and of the Congress, an achievement of civilians and of our military leaders, of liberals and conservatives, of Democrats and Republicans.

Of course, SALT II will not end the competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. That competition is based on fundamentally different visions of human society and human destiny. As long as that basic difference persists, there will always be some degree of tension in the relationship between our two countries. The United States has no fear of this rivalry. But we want it to be peaceful.

In any age, such rivalry risks degeneration into war. But our age is unique, for the terrible power of nuclear weapons has created an incentive that never existed before for avoiding war. This tendency transcends even the very deep differences of politics and philosophy. In the age of the hydrogen bomb, there is no longer any meaningful distinction between global war and global suicide.

Our shared understanding of these realities has given the world an interval of peace – a kind of a strange peace – marked by tension, marked by danger, marked even sometimes by regional conflict, but a kind of peace nonetheless. In the 27 years before Hiroshima, the leading powers of the world were twice engulfed in total war. In the 34 years since Hiroshima, humanity has by no means been free of armed conflict. Yet, at least we have avoided a world war.

Yet this kind of twilight peace carries the ever-present danger of a catastrophic nuclear war, a war that in horror and destruction and massive death would dwarf all the combined wars of man's long and bloody history.

We must prevent such a war. We absolutely must prevent such a war.

To keep the peace, to prevent the war, we must have strong military forces, we must have strong alliances, we must have a strong national resolve – so strong that no potential adversary would dare be tempted to attack our country. We have that strength. And the strength of the United States is not diminishing; the strength of our great country is growing, and I thank God for it.

Yet, for these same reasons—in order to keep the peace—we must prevent an uncontrolled and pointless nuclear arms race that would damage the security of all countries, including our own, by exposing the world to an ever greater risk of war through instability and through tension and through uncertainty about the future. That's why the new strategic arms limitation treaty is so important.

SALT II will undoubtedly become the most exhaustively discussed and debated treaty of our time, perhaps of all times. The Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, the members of the joint Chiefs of Staff, the Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, and many others who hammered out this treaty will testify for it before the Senate, in detail and in public. As President of our country, I will explain it throughout our Nation to every American who will listen. This treaty will withstand the most severe scrutiny because it is so clearly in the interest of American security and of world peace.

SALT II is the most detailed, far-reaching, comprehensive treaty in the history of arms control. Its provisions are interwoven by the give-and-take of the long negotiating process. Neither side obtained everything it sought. But the package that did emerge is a carefully balanced whole, and it will make the world a safer place for both sides.

The restrictions on strategic nuclear weapons are complex, because these weapons represent the highest development of the complicated technical skills of two great nations. But the basic realities underlying this treaty and the thrust of the treaty itself are not so complex. When all is said and done, SALT II is a matter of common sense.

The SALT II treaty reduces the danger of nuclear war. For the first time, it places equal ceilings on the

strategic arsenals of both sides, ending a previous numerical imbalance in favor of the Soviet Union.

SALT II preserves our options to build the forces we need to maintain that strategic balance. The treaty enhances our own ability to monitor what the Soviet Union is doing. And it leads directly to the next step in more effectively controlling nuclear weapons.

Again, SALT II does not end the arms competition. But it does make that competition safer and more predictable, with clear rules and verifiable limits, where otherwise there would be no rules and there would be no limits.

It's in our interest because it slows down – it even reverses – the momentum of the Soviet arms buildup that has been of such great concern to all of us. Under this new treaty, the Soviet Union will be held to a third fewer strategic missile launchers and bombers by 1985 than they would have simply by continuing to build at their present rate.

With SALT II, the numbers of warheads on missiles, their throw-weight, and the qualitative development of new missiles will all be limited. The Soviet Union will have to destroy or dismantle some 250 strategic missile systems – systems such as nuclear submarines armed with relatively new missiles, built in the early 1970's, and aircraft will have to be destroyed by the Soviet Union carrying their largest multimegaton bomb. Once dismantled, under the provisions of SALT II, these systems cannot be replaced.

By contrast, no operational United States forces will have to be reduced.

For one Soviet missile alone—the SS-18 – the SALT II limits will mean that some 6,000 fewer Soviet nuclear warheads can be built and aimed at our country. SALT II limits severely for the first time the number of warheads that can be mounted on these very large missiles of the Soviet Union, cutting down their actual potential by 6,000.

With or without SALT II, we must modernize and strengthen our own strategic forces – and we are doing so – but SALT II will make this task easier, surer, and less expensive.

The agreement constrains none of the reasonable programs we've planned to improve our own defenses. Moreover, it helps us to respond more effectively to our most pressing strategic problem – the prospective vulnerability in the 1980's of our land-based silo missiles. The MX missile, which has been so highly publicized, is permitted under SALT II. Yet its verifiable mobile development system will enhance stability as it deprives an attacker of the confidence that a successful first strike could be launched against the United States ICBM's, or intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Without the SALT II limits, the Soviet Union could build so many warheads that any land-based system, fixed or mobile, could be jeopardized.

With SALT II, we can concentrate more effort on preserving the balance in our own conventional and NATO forces. Without the SALT II treaty, we would be forced to spend extra billions and billions of dollars each year in a dangerous, destabilizing, unnecessary nuclear arms race.

As I have said many times, SALT II is not based on trust. Compliance will be assured by our own Nation's means of verification, including extremely sophisticated satellites, powerful electronic systems, and a vast intelligence network. Were the Soviet Union to take enormous risk of trying to violate this treaty in any way that might affect the strategic balance, there is no doubt that we would discover it in time to respond fully and effectively.

It's the SALT II agreement itself which forbids concealment measures – many of them for the first time – forbids interference with our monitoring, and forbids the encryption or the encoding of crucial missile-test information. A violation of this part of the agreement – which we would quickly detect – would be just as serious as a violation of the limits on strategic weapons themselves.

Consider these prospects for a moment. Suppose the Soviet leaders build a thousand additional missiles, above and beyond the ones they have now, many new, advanced, and of a formidable design. This can happen only if the SALT II treaty is defeated.

Suppose the Soviet leaders wanted to double the number of warheads on all their existing missiles; suppose they wanted to triple the annual production rate of the Backfire bomber and greatly improve its characteristics in range and payload. These kinds of things can happen only if the SALT II treaty is defeated.

Suppose the Soviet Union leaders encrypt all data on their missile tests; suppose they conceal their nuclear launcher deployment rate and hide all their existing missile systems. Those things can happen only if the SALT II treaty is defeated.

SALT II is very important. But it's more than a single arms control agreement; it's part of a long, historical process of gradually reducing the danger of nuclear war – a process that we in this room must not undermine.

The SALT II treaty must be judged on its own merits. And on its own merits, it is a substantial gain for national security for us and the people whom we represent, and it's a gain for international stability. But it would be the height of irresponsibility to ignore other possible consequences of a failure to ratify this treaty.

These consequences would include greatly increased spending for strategic nuclear arms which we do not need: greater uncertainty about the strategic balance between ourselves and the Soviet Union; vastly increased danger of nuclear proliferation among other nations of the world who do not presently have nuclear explosives; increased political tension between the East and the West, with greater likelihood that other inevitable problems would escalate into serious super power confrontations.

Rejection would also be a damaging blow to the Western Alliance. All of our European and other allies, including especially those who are most directly and courageously facing Soviet power, all of them strongly support SALT II. If the Senate were to reject the treaty, America's leadership of this alliance would be compromised, and the alliance itself would be severely shaken.

In short, SALT II is not a favor we are doing for the Soviet Union. It's a deliberate, calculated move that we are making as a matter of self-interest for the United States – a move that happens to serve the goals of both security and survival, that strengthens both the military position of our own country and the cause of world peace.

And, of course, SALT II is the absolutely indispensable precondition for moving on to much deeper and more significant cuts under SALT III.

Although we will not begin negotiations on SALT III until SALT II goes into effect, I discussed other nuclear control issues with President Brezhnev, such as much deeper mutual reductions in nuclear weapon inventories, stricter limit on the production of nuclear warheads and launchers, enhanced survivability and stability of missile systems that are authorized under existing SALT agreement, prenotification about missile tests and mass use or exercises of strategic bombers, and limits and controls on types of missiles which are not presently covered under any SALT agreement.

Though SALT is the most important single part of the complex relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union, it is only a part. The U.S.-Soviet relationship covers a broad range of issues, some of which bear directly on our joint responsibility to reduce the possibility of war. President Brezhnev and I discussed these issues in Vienna this morning in a long private session with only the interpreters present.

I undertook all these discussions with a firm confidence in the strength of America. Militarily, our power is second to none. I'm determined that it will remain so. We will continue to have military power to deter any possible aggression, to maintain security of our country, and to permit the continuing search for peace and

for the control of arms from a position of strength. We must have that strength so that we will never be afraid to negotiate for peace.

Economically, despite serious problems of energy and inflation, we are by far the most productive nation on Earth. Along with our allies, our economic strength is three times greater than that of the Soviet Union and all its allies.

Diplomatically, we've strengthened our friendships with Western Europe and Japan, with China and India, with Israel and Egypt, and with the countries of the Third World. Our alliances are stronger because they are based not on force, but on common interests and often on common values.

Politically, our democratic system is an enormous advantage, not only to each of us as individuals who enjoy freedom but to all of us together because our Nation is stronger. Our support of human rights, backed by the concrete example of the American society, has aligned us with peoples all over the world who yearn for freedom.

These strengths are such that we need fear no other country. This confidence in our Nation helped me in Vienna as we discussed specific areas of potential, either direct or indirect, confrontation around the world, including places like southern Africa or the Middle East.

For instance, I made it clear to President Brezhnev that Cuban military activities in Africa, sponsored by or supported by the Soviet Union, and also the growing Cuban involvement in the problems of Central America and the Caribbean can only have a negative impact on U.S.-Soviet relations.

Our strength, our resolve, our determination, our willingness to protect our own interests, our willingness to discuss these problems with others are the best means by which we can resolve these differences and alleviate these tests successfully for our people.

Despite disagreements, our exchange in Vienna was useful, because it enabled us to clarify our positions directly to each other, face-to-face, and, thus, to reduce the chances of future miscalculations on both sides.

And, finally, I would like to say to you that President Brezhnev and I developed a better sense of each other as leaders and as men. The responsibility for many decisions involving the very future of the world rests on me as the leader of this great country, and it's vital that my judgments be based on as much firsthand knowledge and experience as possible.

In these conversations, I was careful to leave no doubt about either my desire for peace or my determination to defend the interests of the United States and of our allies. I believe that together we laid a foundation on which we can build a more stable relationship between our two countries.

We will seek to broaden the areas of cooperation, and we will compete where and when we must. We know how determined the Soviet leaders are to secure their interests, and we are equally determined to protect and to advance our own.

We look to the future – all of us Americans look to the future – with anticipation and with confidence, not only because of the vast material powers of our Nation but because of the power of our Nation's ideas and ideals and principles. The ultimate future of the human race lies not with tyranny, but with freedom; not with war, but with peace.

With that kind of vision to sustain us, we must now complete the work of ratifying this treaty, a major step in the limitation of nuclear weapons and a major step toward world peace. And then we may turn our energies not only to further progress along that path but also more urgently to our own domestic agenda in the knowledge that we have strengthened the security of a nation which we love and also strengthened peace for all the world.

Thank you very much.