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SALT and a 'Pseudo-Crisis'

We should not permit political myopia to obscure our wider vision of U.S. national interests in the field of central strategic nuclear systems—which is what the SALT II treaty is all about. The stakes—establishment of limitations on strategic nuclear weapons—are higher and far more vital to our national security than is the peripheral issue of 2,000 to 3,000 Soviet troops in Cuba.

As Senate committees near the completion of their consideration of the treaty, we find ourselves focusing not on this issue of momentous significance to our national security and our leadership in the world, but rather on a matter unrelated to, and far less significant than, the treaty.

There has been a regrettable tendency to lose sight of the larger issue in an atmosphere of near-hysteria over the question of Soviet troops in Cuba. Let me state unequivocally that I am not sympathetic to the presence of Soviet troops in Cuba. But we should not lose all sense of perspective. We need to take a step back, examine the matter in a broader context and recognize how much is involved here and what is actually at stake.

First, we should study the treaty itself, and the hearings conducted by the Senate Foreign Relations, Armed Services and Intelligence committees. Those hearings have been very thorough and valuable. I have read through the transcripts of all the hearings. I believe that a careful reading may lead others to conclude that the treaty can be a modest but important step forward, a positive contribution to our national security. I have not yet reached a final judgment of my own position on the treaty. I want to complete my review of the recent report of the Senate Intelligence Committee on the important issue of verification before reaching that judgment.

By August, the treaty had emerged from the Foreign Relations and Armed Services hearings in relatively good shape, and prospects for Senate approval looked good—with the addition of certain reservations and understandings to the Resolution of Ratification. The hearings dealt not only with the specific elements of the treaty, but also served the useful purpose of focusing attention on the overall growing military and strategic imbalance. The big question was not whether the treaty would be approved, but what steps should be taken, and how much funding should be provided, to proceed with the necessary modernization of our strategic and conventional forces.

But shortly before the Senate reconvened in September, the Cuban issue emerged. I have served in Congress since 1952, and in my 27 years in Washington I have witnessed a few periods of genuine crisis. It has been my belief from the beginning that the current Cuban episode is not anything near crisis proportions. From the outset, I emphasized that we needed to establish, as best we could, exactly what the situation was. It made no sense for the administration to state that "the status quo is unacceptable" until we knew more precisely what the "status quo" was.

There were some who rushed forward with statements that the Soviets were "testing" us, as though this were some grave new threat with far-reaching ramifications. In fact, however, all intelligence reports thus far indicate that the Soviet troops in question probably have been in Cuba for years; indeed, they may well be a residue of the 20,000 or so Soviets who were there at the time of the 1962 missile crisis.

So this is not a "test" or "challenge" to the United States. But there were some—and the administration is not blameless in this regard—who contributed to such a perception before looking at the realities of the situation, and thus was created this "pseudo-crisis" in which we became all too deeply immersed.

As a result, the treaty suddenly became subjugated to a far less important issue—not an "artificial" issue, as Andrei Gromyko claims, but not one meriting a crisis atmosphere. Certainly, the Cuban question should not overshadow the SALT II treaty—a treaty that represents the work of nearly seven years of negotiations by three administrations, Republican and Democratic. If the Senate, after careful judgment, rejects the treaty on its merits, that is one thing; but if the treaty dies either because of delay, or an unwarranted connection to the presence of a relatively small number of Soviet troops in Cuba, that is quite another thing.

Neither of these two reasons for the treaty's death would reflect well on the Senate or on the country. To effect the treaty's demise through either of these means would send uncertain signals to our allies in Europe and to the nations in the world. For the treaty to die from a sudden seizure of trembling delirium brought on by the discovery of a handful of Soviet troops in Cuba—an island on which U.S. forces are also stationed—would ill serve the image of the United States as a powerful and mature nation. Undue delay, in itself, would also lead, I feel certain, to the further entanglement of SALT in politics, particularly with next year's campaign season being only a short time ahead, and would lead to its execution on the gallows of political posturing and partisan rhetoric by candidates in both parties.

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So the Senate should proceed, in a deliberate and rational way, to make its judgment. The committees have conducted their hearings in a most responsible fashion. Proponents and opponents have been heard in the committees, and there is ample time for a full-scale Senate debate later this year.

When the Senate makes that judgment, it should come down to a simple question—a question not simply answered, but still a simple question: is *this treaty* in the best interests of the United States? This should be the benchmark by which the Senate measures its decision. Let us not cloud the environment with a totally unrelated issue—one that is clearly not a threat to U.S. security. If the treaty is *not* in our own interests, it ought to be rejected. Conversely, if it is in our country's interests, then the treaty should be approved, with any appropriate reservations and understandings.

Now, it could be correctly pointed out that the United States should long ago have devised a strategy to deal with Soviet adventurism around the world. Clearly, Moscow has developed and deployed—in some cases in conjunction with Cubans—military capabilities well beyond the legitimate needs of its own territorial security. The already overdue need to develop a viable and effective strategy of dealing with Soviet adventurism, however, will not be achieved by holding the treaty hostage. After all, no one in his right mind would suggest that the treaty be ratified as a favor to the Soviet Union.

To those who advocate that Senate debate on the treaty be put off until late into next year or thereafter, the question should be addressed: what happens to our national security in the meantime? The SALT process would be stopped dead in its tracks, and the prospects for achieving significant reductions in nuclear armaments in the future, and for limiting the proliferation of nuclear weapons, would become increasingly dim. In the meantime, the Soviets, having already built considerable momentum, would be free to go ahead with the development, deployment and expansion of systems that would otherwise be prohibited under SALT II.

For example, there would be no constraint on Soviet development of the SS16 mobile intercontinental missile, which is banned under the

treaty. The Soviets could proceed with no limit on fractionation—putting more than 10 warheads on an SS18 missile, for example. Under the treaty, the Soviets would be limited to 10 warheads per SS18, whereas the missile has the capacity of carrying up to 20—even 30—warheads, and this would greatly expand their offensive capacity. Moreover, instead of being limited to the production of 30 Backfire bombers per year, the Soviets could greatly increase their production rate. Further, there would be no restriction on telemetry encryption or other concealment practices, thus making our verification of Soviet missile testing, development and deployment much more difficult. Additionally, instead of being restricted to a single new-type missile, as provided in the treaty, the Soviets would be free to deploy as many new types as they choose—and they have the capability, the technology and the momentum to develop several new missiles in the near future.

Also, whereas the treaty establishes a limit of 2,250 strategic launcher systems and heavy bombers by Jan. 1, 1982, the Soviets could have 3,000 such systems by 1985. Sub-limits, likewise, would not exist and, instead of being held to 820 MIRVed land-based ICBMs, the Soviets could deploy from 1,100 to 1,300. In other words, without the treaty all caps are gone and all bets are off.

With or without SALT II, we are going to have to proceed with the strengthening of our strategic and conventional forces, as well as theater nuclear forces in Europe. But without SALT II, we face a much less predictable strategic situation and the need for much greater military spending than would be necessary with the treaty. Much of the money that is needed for building up our conventional forces would be siphoned away to match the Soviets in an uncontrolled strategic nuclear armaments race.

We must retain a sense of reason and perspective. We have to be aware of the consequences of delaying the treaty inordinately. A matter of this significance must not become a political football. The Senate deserves the opportunity to vote on the treaty. The country deserves to have the treaty judged on its merits.

The truth is that any lengthy delay in Senate consideration of SALT II effectively kills the treaty. I believe it should be debated in the Senate and stand or fall on the basis of its value to U.S. national security, and not on the basis of an issue not relevant to the treaty.

As one who voted against the 1963 Test Ban Treaty, who has voted for increased defense spending, who has sharply criticized the Soviets for adventurism and suppression of dissidents, I am constrained to say that holding the treaty hostage to 2,000–3,000 Soviet troops in Cuba—apparently long existent, but only recently identified—would be much like throwing an antique chair, brought over on the Mayflower, at a mouse that suddenly appears on the drawing room floor: the chair is reduced to splinters, but the mouse escapes untouched. In other words, we can end up with the treaty down the drain, while the Soviet troops—long in Cuba—remain there.

Let us return to a steady course and bring our best judgment to bear, in a realistic way, on the problems that confront our national security interests.