

Gerald Ford Takes His Stand On SALT

I wish to share some of my thoughts regarding the SALT II treaty and America's defense policies. They constitute my first effort at comprehensive public comment on these subjects since leaving the White House in January 1977. I've been there. The responsibilities are awesome. I have weighed these words very carefully.

I have studied the treaty and its accompanying documents in detail. I have been thoroughly briefed by the administration and by those on the other side. I have carefully followed the ongoing debate in the Senate committees. And I am deeply troubled.

Frankly, I am troubled less by the questions in the treaty itself—although there are serious questions—than I am by the air of unreality that seems to accompany some of the debate.

Strategic arms control is of great importance to the United States. I supported the SALT talks in Congress, encouraged them as vice president and pursued them personally as president. We need the SALT process and a good SALT agreement. But neither the SALT talks nor any SALT treaty is an end in itself. It is not the key to all wisdom. It is not a magic answer. Ratification will not bring utopia; rejection will not bring Armageddon.

Just as SALT should never be considered in isolation from the rest of U.S.-Soviet relations, neither should SALT have a higher priority than our national defense program. We must be certain of our strength before we can safely consider SALT limits on it. Let's make certain we get the horse before the cart. It would be catastrophic to reverse the two.

Anyone who recommends a context for the national debate surely should follow his own advice. So, before looking at the particulars of the treaty, let's look at the status of our defense program. Let's try to answer the question: can America be certain of her strength today and during the next decade?

That examination requires a brief history of the evolution of U.S. military strategy in the nuclear age, starting with the initial concept in the '50s—"massive retaliation."

The "massive retaliation" doctrine was based on one simple fact: the United States possessed overwhelming strategic superiority. With it, theoretically, we could presumptively deter and surely control any military conflict with the Soviet Union through the threat of escalation to a point where the United States was absolutely dominant.

Massive retaliation was a logical response to the frustrations of the early '50s:

—In Korea we had achieved our initial objectives, but many people felt that we had become "bogged down" in a situation in which the Communist forces enjoyed a relative advantage.

—In Europe we had set NATO force goals which, even if they had been met, would have constituted a severe economic drain.

Even though the United States still enjoyed substantial superiority in its ability to project conventional forces to distant areas of conflict, massive retaliation made good military sense. Put simply, it was a strategy to deter "limited" conflict such as Korea by threatening to respond at a level where both sides knew we would prevail.

The principal problem of "massive retaliation" was its lack of political credibility. A nuclear attack on the Soviet Union seemed so disproportionate a response, and therefore so unlikely a response, to a Soviet provocation at a minor level of conflict that the doctrine of "massive retaliation" could not be counted on to deter local aggression.

So next came steps to add credibility to deterrence by adding flexibility to our military arsenal. While retaining absolute dominance in strategic weapons, we deployed tactical nuclear weapons with the NATO forces. And then in the early '60s, we moved to further improve the credibility of the United States and NATO military strategy by "filling in," with conventional military capability, the lower steps of the escalation ladder of military conflict.

We had moved from the concept of massive retaliation to the concept of "flexible response" under which deterrence of Soviet aggression would rest, not just on the capacity to devastate the Russian heartland, but to respond to Soviet aggression at any level of conflict. At the conventional level, U.S. forces were to be adequate to deal with modest military incursions and to make obvious the inevitability of a U.S. military response to aggression. They were to be sufficient to force a "pause" in the conflict in which the Soviets would contemplate seriously the consequences of continuing hostilities. Should the U.S.S.R. nevertheless persist in its aggression, the United States could then escalate the conflict to the level of tactical nuclear warfare and, if nec-

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Since the United States was unmistakably dominant at both these levels, the Soviet Union was clearly deterred from attack in the NATO area.

As we made these moves toward a flexible response doctrine, the famed "missile gap" occurred. Suddenly, and for the first time, we thought that our absolute dominance in strategic nuclear weapons was imperiled by the apparent intention of the U.S.S.R. to produce ICBMs en masse. Because both our defense and deterrence ultimately rested on that dominance in strategic weapons, we moved quickly to modernize and diversify our strategic force—to make it less vulnerable to the massive Soviet missile force we were told was their plan. The strategic posture we have today—the Triad and even the specific weapons systems, the ICBMs, strategic ballistic missile submarines, and bombers—was largely developed at that time.

The "missile gap" fears were based not on what the Soviets were actually doing, but on what we thought they were capable of doing. Our response to the perceived threat ironically proved far more helpful to American security than our reaction to the actual Soviet program once we discovered it in the mid-'60s. They were not building missiles at the rate we had feared and so we assumed they desired only a modest strategic capability and, unfortunately, we relaxed. Our Minuteman ICBM program was halted well short of the numbers recommended by our military leaders. The notion of targeting their strategic arsenal was rejected in favor of a concept of targeting Soviet cities under a doctrine of "assured destruction" designed to encourage the U.S.S.R. to do the same because it would require only a small Soviet strategic force to achieve.

All in all, it was a formula bound to produce complacency. You start off with total and absolute superiority; then you get scared that the other side is going to catch up and surpass you, so you diversify and modernize; then you realize the other side wasn't doing anywhere near as much as you thought; and so, psychologically, you believe that the overall result is continued assured superiority. The complacency that followed the awareness that there was no real missile gap was the beginning of our problems today.

A separate but related factor which influenced the policy process was the Vietnam War. Aside from the psychological trauma of Vietnam and its impact on U.S. foreign policy, the conflict had a dramatic negative effect on the several force structure decisions which had been made in the early '60s. The war naturally resulted in very high defense budgets, very little of which was devoted to R & D or force modernization, aside from Vietnam-related items. This natural emphasis was underscored by the desire of the administration in the earlier years of the conflict to conduct the war in a manner calculated to have the least visible and disruptive domestic impact. The result was that during a period when Soviet force development was barreling forward, long-range strategic programs in this country were inadequately funded.

the war on force development and modernization continued even after U.S. involvement had ended. This occurred as a result of the unfulfilled expectation that the end of the war would permit a "peace dividend," releasing large sums of money for domestic budget needs. The pressures which this produced on the defense budget in general and new strategic programs in particular were extreme. The result was that the defense budget continued to decline as a proportion of the national budget and of the gross national product. These difficulties reinforced both the tendency toward a relaxation of military standards and a propensity to avoid analysis of the evolving strategic balance and the unpleasant choices it might reveal.

We got back on track in the mid-'70s. The B1 bomber program was fully funded. The decision was made to go forward with the MX missile. The Trident submarine program was pushed forward. Priority was given to our other strategic programs. And a major shipbuilding program was designed and budgeted. Unfortunately, since the election of 1976, the defense budgets have actually been proportionately reduced and the weapons programs begun in earlier administrations have been halted or slowed down.

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union has never stopped building. It was thought they would be satisfied with a modest "assured destruction" capacity targeted at our cities. They weren't. Then it was rationalized and assumed that psychologically they needed to keep building until they felt they had achieved strategic force equality and that then they would stop. They didn't. Today's perilous picture is where we stand.

At virtually every level of military competition, the United States is either already inferior to the Soviet Union or the balance is shifting steadily against us. We are inferior and falling farther behind in conventional force capability. Our ability to project military power over long distances is still superior to that of the Soviets, but they are rapidly closing the gap. Our dominant position on the seas is vanishing. Our Navy is no longer a two-ocean powerhouse and the Soviets continue to build a blue-water, power-projecting fleet. In NATO, the increasing Soviet advantage in conventional force capability is no longer balanced by our current or proposed theater nuclear weapons.

And, most critical of all for our national military policy is the strategic nuclear superiority on which we have relied since World War II to rectify any force disparities at lower levels. The strategic balance is clearly shifting against us, especially as we look forward to a period of great vulnerability for our entire ICBM force in the early 1980s.

The question we started with was: can America be certain of her strength today and during the next decade? My answer, frankly, is no.

It is an ominous picture. What should we do about it? The essential first step is to recognize that our military policy is increasingly out of touch with reality. Strategic superiority and escalation dominance are no longer available to cover our conventional military shortfalls, which are growing. This is the fact of our present situation, a fact we have been all too unwilling to face openly.

There is, unfortunately, no easy, painless, inexpensive way. Since we can no longer dominate the escalation ladder, we must have forces able to deal adequately with aggression at every level of conflict. In addition, we need to modify our strategic employment doctrine. No president should be forced to choose between the massive destruction of the Soviet Union or surrender. That is an intolerable burden. It is an intolerable choice.

Broader options obviously demand a larger defense program. Our senior military leaders can better set out the program details and precise dollar amounts essential to our needs, although certain steps are obvious:

- We need an MX missile.
- We need a new strategic bomber.
- We need to accelerate the Trident program as rapidly as our facilities will permit.
- We need an air defense at least sufficient to prevent the Backfire bomber from counting on a free-ride attack on the United States.
- We need to modernize and enhance our strategic airlift capabilities, to enable us to project our military power adequately wherever it may be needed.
- We need additional funds to improve command and control, for readiness training and for conventional force modernization.

-And we need assured funding for research and development into the future.

This list is not all-inclusive, but it is certainly expensive. The Joint Chiefs of Staff have indicated that a 5 percent real increase in the defense budget for at least the next five years is a minimum figure. I am prepared to accept and endorse that judgment. Let me also point out that I am not a latter-day convert to the kind of defense program I have outlined. The spending which I proposed when I was in office provided for more than a 5 percent annual increase in the defense budget. The present administration's budgets for the years 1978 to 1983 have fallen behind my proposals by \$66 billion in the critical area of military procurement alone. That difference in military hardware averages out to over 21 percent a year.

Now, if we can't be certain of our strength today and during the next decade, what should we do about SALT and the SALT II treaty?

First, we simply must resist the temptation to think of any SALT treaty as a substitute for summoning the will and the money to make our defense and deterrence forces truly effective. To use SALT as an answer to our defense needs is the most dangerous kind of wishful thinking.

Some may say, indeed some have said, that if we're headed into a tough period militarily, isn't a treaty which limits the Soviet Union's capacity for expansion the best answer? Assuming the Soviet Union fully abides by the treaty, it can help, of course. But the best answer to America's inadequate defense and deterrence forces, with or without a treaty, is to spend the funds necessary to make them adequate to the new realities. That's not an argument against the treaty; it is a plea from one who has shouldered the responsibilities of the office, to assure that America's president will have the military tools essential to deter adventurism and to defend our country.

SALT can never be a substitute for the certainty of our strength.

Second, we should firmly reassert our commitment to the SALT process, but with realistic expectations for that process.

SALT will not eliminate U.S.-Soviet competition. It certainly will not eliminate the threat of nuclear war and surely cannot be expected to reduce greatly the extent of destruction should a war occur. It will not permit us to cut the defense budget. Neither the United States nor the Soviet Union is prepared to entrust its fundamental national security to any agreement, no matter how carefully crafted.

What then can SALT do? In military terms, SALT can document the competition that exists and will continue.

SALT can improve the stability of the strategic balance, making an unintended resort to war less likely.

SALT may be able to channel the directions of strategic weapons development, thus lessening the chances that a critically destabilizing breakthrough will occur. It may enable us to avoid some defense expenditures which otherwise might be necessary to achieve a satisfactory strategic balance. And in a perilous rivalry, SALT does perform a service by providing a process of dialogue.

Compared to some extravagant claims and expectations, these are modest benefits, but they are nonetheless significant and well worth our continued serious efforts. Greater expectations are not realistic. And SALT can perform these services only if we do not ask that it also try to regain at the negotiating table what we have unilaterally given up by not strengthening and modernizing our defense programs.

Just as supporters who claim too much for the treaty should not let their euphoria or their rhetoric get the best of them, opponents who allege too little for the treaty should not forget the fundamental point that there is progress in a responsible process.

Third, let us in the future realize what in recent years we seem to have forgotten—that SALT negotiations, like all negotiations, to be successful, are best undertaken from strength.

The current administration is fond of implying that the current treaty is the product of a continuing negotiating process begun with SALT I under the Nixon administration and furthered through the Vladivostok accord under the Ford administration. They miss the critical point.

The truth is that we negotiated a real breakthrough at Vladivostok with the mutual acceptance of the principle of equivalence. But we negotiated the Vladivostok accord in the full expectation of a significantly stronger American strategic posture than what was actually in effect or programmed when this SALT II treaty was signed.

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the bottom line, even if the questions about the treaty are adequately answered, I am opposed to the ratification of the treaty until and unless we can once again be certain of our strength. That means that our necessary strategic force improvements should be clearly in process. It means that the overall necessary defense spending increases should be unequivocally included in this year's budget, next year's, and each succeeding year of the five-year plan. It means clear policies should be established by the administration and backed by the Congress in statutory authorizations and by the necessary appropriations. These requirements undoubtedly will mean that a final vote on ratification would not happen until well into next year. But the delay will be proved worthwhile if ultimate ratification occurs at a time when we are certain of our strength again.
Let me emphasize the point: Some suggest they are for the treaty on the assumption that the necessary defense spending decisions will be made. That is not my position. My position is that I am against the treaty unless the necessary defense spending decisions have been made and have been written into law. I don't believe vague, short-term or revocable assurances are enough; we must be certain of our strength before we accept limits on it.
In very practical terms, only if the Soviets know there is an unacceptable penalty for violations can they be expected to abide by the provisions of SALT II and stay on the safe side of any uncertainties and ambiguities—and be prepared to negotiate seriously on SALT III. The Soviets will not be persuaded either by expressions of goodwill or by pleas for restraint if they believe in their conventional and strategic superiority. They must be convinced by reality that we have other options: Only then will SALT II be a viable instrument and only then will there be any hope of real progress in SALT III.
Many will ask how we can call for a stronger defense program while we face raging inflation, rising unemployment, a recession, a severe energy crisis and a host of pressing domestic problems. The question is reasonable. I do not claim the answer will be easy. But I am not speaking out now from the comfortable vantage point of a sidelines observer. During my term of office, I did increase the defense budget—by 5.8 percent in real terms in FY77 alone, even after substantial congressional cuts. I did get under way a substantial five-year shipbuilding program—providing almost twice the number of ships in the current program—to ensure our naval predominance in the years ahead. I did have under way an MX missile and a B1 bomber program as well as other force improvement packages. And, I was doing this while helping reduce inflation from 12.5 percent to 4.8 percent. It can be done. We can afford it; what we cannot afford are self-defeating "guns or butter" arguments.
Let me close with a deep personal concern. My greatest fear for this country is that the obvious danger signals for our economic security will blind our leadership or our people to the more subtle danger signals for our national security.

Dealing from strength, our goal was the rapid conclusion of a SALT II agreement, thereby enabling us in SALT III negotiations to deal with remaining intractable issues, such as mutual strategic force reductions.

When the strategic force commitments in place at the time of Vladivostok were cut back in 1977, the certainty of our future military strength was also cut back, and America's negotiating posture for both SALT II and SALT III was weakened.

Fourth, there are a number of specific problem areas in the treaty which should be recognized and hopefully corrected by Soviet agreement or by Senate understandings or reservations.

There are useful elements in the treaty. It does put a cap on some elements of strategic force quantitative competition. The upper limit on numbers of MIRVs per missile is especially worthwhile.

On the other hand, I am concerned at the protocol casting a long shadow over the SALT III negotiations and at the pressures we will certainly face to continue restrictions on cruise missiles beyond the term of the protocol. I disagree with the asymmetric treatment by which peripheral systems such as cruise missiles are included in the treaty while the Backfire bomber is dealt with only in a separate Soviet aside.

There are two aspects of the verification issue which trouble me. The manner of resolution of the issues relating to the encryption of missile telemetry at a minimum invites dispute about what is and what is not essential for treaty verification. I am also disturbed by the so-called "new types" article purporting to limit both sides to one new ICBM. The title appears to be a misnomer at best. The treaty permits the broadest kind of missile modernization to be carried out without hindrance. Both because there is no baseline agreement on the dimensions defined and because the tolerances allowed are too narrow, we cannot adequately verify compliance with this article. While it apparently does constrain changes in MIRV size and numbers, as well as propellant types, the article at the very best can be expected to result in disputes over conformity with its provisions. At the worst, it could permit the Soviet Union to deploy five essentially new missiles.

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The danger signals for our economy are all around us. The experts cite the high inflation rates, the high unemployment rates and the high interest rates. The people don't need the experts to tell them they have problems. They live every day with the costs of energy and food and housing. A clear and present economic danger is obvious.

These pressing economic concerns may keep many Americans from recognizing the importance of the SALT and defense debate. There is no everyday statistical equivalent in the national security area to the cost-of-living index. The erosion of a nation's defenses is not obvious at the supermarket. The priority of our defense budget seems a distant concern in the gas lines. We certainly don't need any more problems. We all would like to wish them away.

But neither Washington's preoccupation with politics nor our people's preoccupation with the high price of everything must be permitted to obscure a clear and present danger to our national security.

The decisions we make on our defense budget and the SALT treaty are as important as any decisions America has ever had to make. The necessity for economic and energy security is inseparable from a commitment to national military security.

Without the deterrence of an adequate range of military resources, our diplomacy can be hamstrung in the face of Soviet adventurism which potentially further challenges our worldwide energy supply lines.

Without a revitalized, diversified and secure strategic capability, our allies cannot recover their confidence in our overall leadership which is a precondition to recovering their confidence in our dollar.

Without the psychological confidence based on the certainty of our strength, no American president can be certain to deter the kind of conflict that makes economic security irrelevant.

Let me repeat: the necessity for economic and energy security is inseparable from a commitment to national military security. A bold America today is the only sure road to a secure and thriving America tomorrow.

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