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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

18 October 1974

The Honorable Henry A. Kissinger
Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20220

Dear Henry:

As I proposed to you last month, we have given some thought to the kinds of arguments which might be useful, if directed to and discussed among Soviet leaders, in nudging them into action on the SALT question. Enclosed is a short background paper on the Soviet political factors affecting this matter. It is followed by a presentation, cast in the form of an intelligence assessment, of the broad gains available to the USSR in a SALT II agreement, as well as the losses which the USSR is likely to suffer in the absence of an agreement. It is for your possible use or even passage to a Soviet counterpart, if you think that desirable.

Tab I

Tab II

Sincerely,

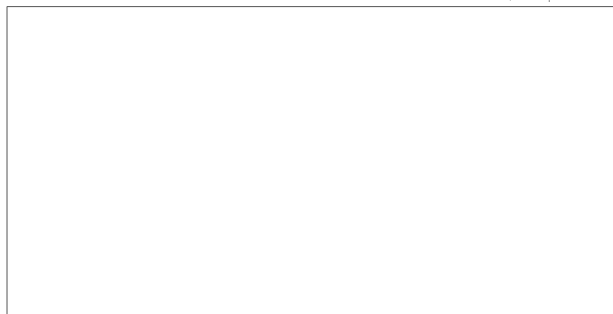
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THE RELATIONSHIP OF SALT AND DETENTE

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The Relationship of SALT and Detente

Brezhnev and other Soviet spokesmen have said more than once that political detente must be accompanied by military detente. Where SALT is concerned, the question is whether the Soviets see the need to translate this principle into specific decisions and actions, rather than merely covering up political, strategic, and economic contradictions under generalities.

Opinion in the Soviet leadership no doubt strongly favors preserving SALT as a process.

--How interested the Soviet leaders are in obtaining significant new agreements in the next stage of SALT is another matter.

Most probably, there are uncertainties within the Politburo as to what suitable terms would be. To complicate matters, much of the expert advice on which they base their assessment of the present and future strategic balance is slanted toward a worst-case analysis.

There are also questions of timing.

--An appreciation of Soviet technological inferiority can be used either as an argument for holding off until something has been done to repair it, or for moving to agreement before the lag becomes wider.

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- Similarly, uncertainty over the policy direction the new US administration will take can be seen as a reason for delay and caution, or for trying to achieve an agreement that will help to sustain US interest in detente.
- And the slow pace of movement in other areas of US-Soviet relations may prompt some to urge a tough stand at SALT and others to look at progress in SALT as a means of developing momentum in these other areas.

Which way Brezhnev leans will have a good deal to do with the Soviet position. He cannot simply impose his own views on his colleagues. The evidence available suggests that, for all the growth in his authority in recent years, he works to a very large extent through consensus. Senior leaders such as Kosygin and Suslov--and Grechko--cannot be easily bypassed. Moreover, uncertainty generated by the change in administrations in Washington may on balance make Brezhnev somewhat more cautious than in the recent past about taking a forward position concerning US-Soviet relations. But Brezhnev is the pivotal influence; unless he pushes, Soviet SALT policy is unlikely to budge.

Brezhnev's interest in further agreements on the limitation or reduction of strategic arms is probably genuine. In speaking of detente and the need to make it "irreversible," he has argued that, though there are risks in limiting or reducing arms, there are greater risks in continuing the arms' race. But his attitude toward arms limitation also derives in good part from his commitment to detente in general. This policy has become a big ingredient in his political strength over the past four years. It is also the basis for many domestic programs and plans with which he is identified. The consumer programs, the large-scale development projects, the attempt to promote economic growth with Western technology, and the efforts

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at long-range planning all assume to varying degrees that international relations and the arms burden will remain manageable and that commerce with the West will expand.

A serious setback to detente need not be politically fatal for Brezhnev. But it would mean, at least, a diminution of his authority and require him to search for new political alliances and new policies in many areas. He can be expected to go a long way to avoid that, particularly at this advanced stage in his probable political tenure. His eagerness for arms agreements will depend, among other things, on how much damage he believes an impasse on this question would do to the overall US-Soviet relationship.

The following paper is cast in the form of an intelligence assessment. Without taking up the specifics of a possible SAL agreement, it analyses the broad consequences of success or its absence in the broad SALT undertaking. It is meant to organize a set of arguments which, accompanied by personal elaborations, could impress Brezhnev and his colleagues with the value of a success in this enterprise and, conversely, the ramified costs to Soviet interests of a continued stalemate.

The Consequences of Success or
Stalemate in the Strategic
Arms Limitation Talks

A large number of analyses have addressed the precise question of what particular negotiated limitations on strategic arms would promote the security interests of both the US and the USSR. This intelligence assessment deals with a different aspect of the matter. It considers the broad consequences, for both countries and for their mutual relations, of an early SALT II agreement and, conversely, the consequences for these relations of a continued inability to reach a final agreement.

I. The Strategic Military Factors

A. Mutual Deterrence

Today a relatively stable deterrent balance exists between the USSR and the US. Their forces are of such a character and size that either one could inflict massive damage in any circumstances on the other. Unless they had lost their senses, political leaders on either side would not deliberately choose to start a general war, and they are careful about taking actions that could risk such a war. This is an historically unprecedented situation for both the USSR and the US.

But it is important to realize how this has happened. It has resulted fundamentally from the advent of nuclear weapons and the development of systems capable of delivering them over great distances. Yet the changes which have brought about this revolution in military affairs are part of a dynamic process. Because of this, we may not be able in future to manage our military forces so as to guarantee the continuation of the present situation of mutual deterrence.

The deterrent balance is especially sensitive to changes in technology. Let us take one illustration. The ABM Treaty has barred the construction of meaningful defenses against ballistic missile attack-- thus assuring that even small offensive forces can inflict massive damage. In this way the deterrent balance has been reinforced. Yet we are faced with a proliferation in the number of missile warheads no longer justified by the need to overcome ABM defenses. New and improved technologies are on the horizon that could upset this balance. Many Soviet and American strategists will suppose that, by developing these technologies an opponent could acquire the potential for attacking offensive weapons swiftly and decisively at their places of deployment, allowing him to count on sharply reducing the possibility of retaliation. Furthermore, the growth in numbers and accuracy of nuclear delivery systems and advances in the means of their control will give either side the option for selective uses of many weapons while the two sides retain huge reserves for a massive nuclear exchange. And if weapons technology is pressed ahead under the stimulus of the fears of each side, other dramatic possibilities are sure to appear.

B. The Political-Military Balance

It should be observed that the strategic relationship between the USSR and US has effects not only for their bilateral relationship but also for their international standing generally. Most of the world now views the strategic forces of the two as being roughly equal, and believes that neither side can deal with the other from a position of strategic superiority. This is so despite certain asymmetries in the present size and composition of US and Soviet forces. Conceivably, this image of rough equality could be altered, to the political disadvantage of one side, by increases in the forces of the other,

but it is clear that changes qualitatively or quantitatively big enough to have this effect would also be destabilizing on the military plane and would call forth strategic reactions.

At the same time that further prosecution of the competition in strategic weapons in circumstances of rapid technological change is potentially destabilizing, it is almost certainly futile. One important but insufficiently acknowledged aspect of debates on both sides over "how much is enough" is that, in strictly technological terms--never mind political sufficiency--as technology progresses the standards by which strategic power is measured are subject to change. Thus, if one side concentrates its efforts in trying to catch up in one of those elements in which it thinks the other side has an advantage, it may find this measure has lost significance by the time it succeeds. Given the likely counter-measures one side will take in reaction to initiatives of the other, the odds are good that neither side can appreciably improve its security through further military efforts, nor tangibly improve its political or diplomatic position by further additions to its strategic arsenal.

C. Strategic Implications for the US

Despite these truths, Soviet programs and plans with respect to strategic weapons nevertheless have created doubts on the American side. There are fears in the US that Soviet weapons deployment programs now getting under way, and programs for new weapons now under development, could materially upset the present rough equality. In its view, the USSR presently has, in addition to a numerical advantage in central systems, the prospect of being able in the next few years to cancel out the US qualitative advantage. The US also believes that the disproportion in the throwweights of land-based missiles in the USSR's favor is a destabilizing factor, since potentially this would allow the Soviets

to launch a first strike against US ICBMs while retaining a huge reserve of missile warheads for use against other targets.

The US recognizes the USSR's concern about strategic threats from China. But the US does not accept this as justification for substantial margins of Soviet advantage in the US-Soviet balance. It believes that the geographic position of the USSR permits it to deploy forces against China that do not simultaneously threaten the US. Moreover, the modest present and likely future military capabilities of China can be more than matched by small fractions of Soviet forces within the limits of new SALT agreements satisfactorily to the US.

The Soviet Union may consider that it would be more advantageous for the USSR to delay serious negotiations until a later date, when the Interim Agreement is nearer to expiration and when the new deployment programs of the USSR are highly visible and the US is still short of deploying several new weapon systems. In this view, such conditions could be construed to give the USSR a certain unique bargaining power.

However, the US, as a practical political matter, cannot allow the appearance of a bargaining situation highly favorable to the USSR to develop. It cannot delay the arms decisions it would hope to avoid through a satisfactory SALT agreement until the expiration of the Interim Agreement. And once those decisions are made, experience shows that they are very hard to reverse.

The US is prepared to live with a situation of mutual deterrence, and it is prepared to accept overall equality in the central, long-range strategic forces of both sides. The US is seriously interested in avoiding the political and economic costs that would attend failure to achieve further limits on strategic offensive forces. At the same time, the

US is able and prepared to compete at any level of nuclear arms effort required by its security interests. This means that improvements to Soviet forces that the US sees as a threat to this balance will be matched, at a minimum.

II. Economic Considerations

The burden of the arms race is obvious to both sides. Indeed, given the quantities of weapons we have piled up, and the benefits we have sacrificed in the process, an outside observer might wonder whether we were not competing in an effort to exhaust the other side first. This is not the sort of economic competition which either side wants. The tragedy is that, without either side wishing it, just such a competition has started.

Enormous expenditures lie ahead for both sides. The political leaders can be sure that the funds which their military advisors now say are necessary to spend over the next ten years are only the beginning. In the future, when each side perceives progress which the other is making, there will be more requests--and they will have their logic.

The evolution of military technology and the accompanying rise in costs are ever-present potential threats to Soviet domestic programs. For the USSR, the advantages to be derived from SALT do not lie mainly in curbing deployments of weapons already developed. Faced with failure in SALT, any US administration would be under great pressure to develop and deploy new weapons systems, no matter how expensive they might be. The USSR could therefore be forced into a substantial increase in military spending, as well as intensified competition in research and development. In this arena the US has decided advantages, and the USSR could well be left far behind.

The outbreak of unconstrained arms competition would certainly narrow if not block US-Soviet economic relations, especially the transfer of technology. It cannot be expected that economic and technological

exchange can be sustained and increased in the face of an arms competition based on fear and suspicion. One would expect a loss of momentum in government-to-government exchanges, and in the activity between Soviet agencies and US firms which these have stimulated. There would also be moves in the US to tighten export controls on high-technology products and licenses. It is no less likely that, in an atmosphere of generally declining bilateral confidence, the question would arise of reducing US export credits, a step which would in turn discourage US manufacturers from supplying technology not subject to export controls.

On the other hand, success in SALT II almost certainly would lead to a growing volume of trade between the USSR and the US. Most of the desired technology would be for sale on favorable terms. The US attitude--positive or negative--would to a good extent influence the attitude of other Western nations.

The same conditions that would curb the flow of Western technology to the USSR would dampen the prospects for expanding other economic ties. Large-scale participation by the US and other Western nations in the development of Siberian petroleum deposits and other Soviet natural resources is not likely to go ahead in an atmosphere of declining mutual confidence.

Finally, should both sides continue a crushing arms competition, the rest of the world, and particularly those in poor nations where hunger and starvation will increase, will judge them harshly--and jointly.

III. The Consequences for Detente

The climate of distrust that has surrounded Soviet-American relations in the past has not been entirely dissipated, and attitudes favoring a further deepening of detente need continuing encouragement if they are to become firm and durable. Without perceptible progress in SALT, the question of national security--and with it the rationale for detente--could, for example, become a contentious issue in the 1976 US election.

It would be wrong to suppose that doubts being expressed in the US about the future development of Soviet-American relations are merely the outcry of inveterate anti-Soviet elements. There are those, of course, who cling to the belief that US strategic "superiority" is attainable and desirable, those who are opposed to the widening of economic and scientific-technological exchange between the US and the USSR, and those who believe that US interests would be better served by accommodation with the Chinese People's Republic than with the USSR.

But there are others who, though in no way hostile to the USSR, wonder whether the present US course is the correct one. There are various sources for their concerns. They fear that US relations with its traditional allies are being prejudiced by detente. They question whether an expanded flow of capital and technology between the US and the USSR will bring a commensurate political return. But their most basic concerns are with regard to the state of the Soviet-US political-military balance. They believe, in a word, that military detente is a prerequisite to the development of a lasting political detente. Should the two sides fail to agree soon, the logic and, unfortunately, the force of this position is likely to increase.

It has been more than two years since the signing of the SALT agreements of 1972. In that time almost no progress has been made in defining a means of further controlling strategic offensive forces. Also in that time the USSR has extensively flight-tested four new ICBMs of great size capable of deployment with MIRVs, and has also taken major additional steps which alter the strategic relationship prevailing at the time the 1973 agreements were signed.

The problem facing the US and the USSR now is to discover where mutual interests with respect to strategic weapons lie. Neither government need extract advantages from the other in this area nor concede any. But unrestrained competition will produce in the future what it has produced in the past, at best mounting anxiety

and a mounting waste of resources. At worst, it could produce nuclear confrontation through miscalculation and the greatest penalty of all, a nuclear war.

The conclusion is plain that the long-run course of Soviet-US relations will depend to an extraordinary degree on the results, over the next year or so, of the negotiations on limiting strategic arms. These negotiations are extremely complex and sensitive. Not only must each side be satisfied with the agreed limits, but ways must be found to reconcile the need for secrecy, on the one hand, with the necessity for confident verification that these limits are being observed. But the consequences of success or of continuing stalemate are farreaching, extending beyond the strategic balance to determine whether the entire Soviet-US relationship is to develop into increased detente, with its benefits, or to revert to contest and waste.