AN ERA OF NEGOTIATION: SALT IN THE NIXON ADMINISTRATION, 1969-1972

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ABSTRACT

The Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) represented a decisive shift in the Cold War, replacing unbridled strategic competition with a process of superpower bargaining. Despite its importance, however, the Nixon Administration was divided over the purpose of arms control. The State Department and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA) promoted the Cambridge Approach to arms control, which sought to bolster mutual assured destruction by limiting dangerous weapons technologies. The Defense Department and the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) promoted the Philadelphia Approach to arms control, which sought to gain competitive nuclear advantage over the Soviets through a combination of competition and negotiation.

Newly-available archival sources allow us to examine how Nixon and National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger mediated these competing viewpoints to produce SALT policy. Nixon and Kissinger redefined deeper political divisions over the purpose of arms control in terms of technical questions of verification, while delaying any final SALT decision that would alienate proponents of either arms control approach. Facing mounting pressure to conclude an arms control agreement, Nixon and Kissinger resorted to secret backchannel negotiations with the Soviets to present *fait accompli* bargains to the US foreign policy bureaucracy.

The resulting arms control agreements, the 1972 ABM Treaty and Interim Agreement on Offensive Forces, were shaped by the internal bargaining of the Nixon Administration. Proponents of both the Cambridge and Philadelphia Approaches could agree, albeit for very
different reasons, that limiting large intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and anti-ballistic missile (ABM) defenses was beneficial to US security. As a result, ICBMs and ABM were both limited under the 1972 agreements. Conversely, proponents of the two arms control approaches could not agree over the desirability of MIRV. As a result, the 1972 agreements did not limit the deployment of MIRV technology.
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INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 1969, representatives from the United States and the Soviet Union met in Helsinki to begin the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT). The meetings in Helsinki began a process that would redefine superpower relations. Although SALT had antecedents in previous US-Soviet arms control negotiations, none had touched so directly on the international balance of power. From 1969 onwards, the unilateral pursuit of strategic nuclear advantage would be tempered by negotiation. In the years ahead, a process of bargaining in arms control talks would shape the military balance between the superpowers and become a policy topic of immense controversy. Much was a stake in these negotiations as successive US Presidents and Soviet leaders sought to reduce the risk of nuclear competition even as they aimed to prevent each other from gaining a strategic advantage. The process of strategic arms limitation was built on the precedents set between 1969 and 1972.

Although a number of detailed accounts exist of the Nixon Administration’s SALT deliberations, to date none have delved fully into the arms control motives of US policymakers in the 1960s and 1970s. Arms control was a two-level negotiation, taking place simultaneously between the United States and the Soviet Union, and between various parts of the US foreign policy community. US motives for arms control were complex. Many conservatives, Nixon and Kissinger included, hoped that SALT could be used as a tool to increase the United States’ relative nuclear advantage over the Soviet Union, conserving US resources while retaining an edge over the Cold War adversary. Nixon also had to contend with many influential Americans who believed that SALT should be used to stabilize an equal deterrence based on no advantages for either side. This basic division over the proper purpose of arms limitation meant that
achieving a successful SALT agreement was not foreordained.\(^1\) Nixon and Kissinger worked hard to build a tenuous arms control consensus that could please key constituencies within the government and pass Congressional muster. Reconstructing the motives behind SALT can tell us a great deal about how the United States conducted arms control negotiations during the Cold War.

**SALT Motives**

US arms control policy was a response to the dramatic shift in the nuclear balance of power that occurred in the late 1960s. Since 1945, the United States had enjoyed overwhelming superiority in the number of nuclear weapons it could deliver to the Soviet Union in the event of a general war. US national security strategy was predicated on this superiority in nuclear firepower, which also provided an extended deterrent against possible Soviet aggression against US allies in Eurasia. Beginning in the mid-1960s, however, the size and capability of the Soviet strategic nuclear arsenal expanded dramatically, with the Soviets constructing hundreds of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM) and submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBM) each year. The loss of the United States’ nuclear superiority threatened to undermine US national security strategy more generally. Although parity did not necessarily undermine direct deterrence of a Soviet attack on the United States, many analysts and policymakers feared that the United States might not be willing to deter Soviet aggression against its Eurasian allies if

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\(^1\) Arms limitation is a sub-set of arms control negotiations that seeks to restrict specific weapons. Other types of arms control include “spatial restrictions” on where weapons can be deployed, and “functional measures” on how armed organizations behave; see: Paul Viotti, “A Template for Understanding Arms Control,” in *Arms Control: History, Theory, and Policy, Volume 1: Foundations of Arms Control*, eds. Robert Williams & Paul Viotti (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2012), 8. Under this framework, the ABM Treaty and Interim Agreement on Offensive Forces, which concerned numerical limits on strategic launchers, would be considered “arms limitation” proper, while the Hotline and Accidental War agreements would be considered “functional measures” under a broader arms control framework.
doing so would result in an attack on the United States.

The growing Soviet nuclear arsenal and the threat it posed to national security led to an intensive debate on how the US government should respond. The US expert community was split over how best to manage the growing Soviet nuclear capability. Many prominent physicists, political scientists, and economists promoted a strategic framework known as assured destruction, in which the United States would embrace the international political stability that would accompany strategic nuclear parity. The overwhelming threat of mutual destruction posed by approximately equal nuclear arsenals would serve to reinforce the status quo, since neither side would feel justified in risking war to revise the current international situation. Assured destruction suggested that nuclear parity would not imperil the United States’ containment of the Soviet Union, and might actually enhance it.

A number of international relations theorists and Soviet experts challenged the assured destruction strategy and promoted an alternative strategic approach known as competitive strategies. The competitive strategies approach claimed that even small nuclear advantages could have outsized international political consequences. If the Soviets gained superiority in nuclear weapons, they would also gain the ability to bully US allies and face down US leaders in a crisis, using their marginal advantage to gradually overturn the status quo. Since it was unlikely that the United States would be able to regain its former massive nuclear superiority, US leaders would need to embrace a bounded but vigorous competition for marginal nuclear advantages, in order to strengthen the containment of Soviet influence.

Although the assured destruction and competitive strategies approaches rested on very different assumptions about the nature of nuclear competition and international politics, both recommended the use of arms control negotiations as a tool for managing the emergence of US-
Soviet nuclear parity. By the late 1960s, most Americans saw arms control as an important tool for achieving key foreign policy objectives, including reducing the chances of nuclear war, reducing the destructiveness of nuclear war if it occurred, and reducing the cost of nuclear competition. In describing this consensus, David Tal has gone so far as to write that “in the late 1960s disarmament was an integral part of world… diplomacy. The United States could not allow itself not to negotiate disarmament.” Although Tal overstates arms control’s inevitability, his work suggests how widely accepted the general idea of arms control had become amongst US foreign policy elites and scholars by the time Nixon took office.

The superficial consensus on arms control’s desirability concealed deeper divisions amongst US foreign policy elites concerning arms control’s deeper purpose. Almost everyone could agree that negotiations to reduce the chances, destructiveness, and cost of nuclear war were desirable. When it came to exactly how to use negotiations to achieve these objectives, however, proponents of the assured destruction and competitive strategies approaches produced very different policy prescriptions. US arms control policy was a product of the interaction of these competing schools of thought.

Proponents of the assured destruction school of thought gathered at Harvard and MIT in the summer of 1960 to discuss concepts of arms control, producing what Jennifer Sims has called the “Cambridge Approach.”

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threat to international peace and stability was the rapidly-changing technical characteristics of new weapons systems, specifically the growing importance of long-range and accurate missiles. Proponents of assured destruction feared that the speed and accuracy of these new weapons made sudden surprise attack both easier and more effective, which in a crisis would incentivize each side to shoot first. As a result, the Cambridge Approach advocated using arms control to limit dangerous and destabilizing weapons technologies, especially large ICBMs and anti-ballistic missile (ABM) defenses. Even many critics of arms control came to implicitly accept that the Cambridge Approach was the approach to arms control, taking aim at its assumptions and assumptions.

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Although the strategy of assured destruction and the concomitant Cambridge Approach to arms control received some support from the US foreign policy community and the general public, they were not the \textit{only} approach to arms control. Conservative proponents of competitive strategy gathered at a series of arms control symposia held at the Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI) in Philadelphia during the 1960s and early 1970s, to formulate their own approach to arms control. Following Sims, I refer to this conservative competitive approach to arms control as the “Philadelphia Approach.” Unlike the Cambridge Approach, the Philadelphia Approach rested on the assumption that the greatest threat of war was Soviet aggression, not weapons technologies themselves. The Philadelphia Approach sought to tame Soviet aggressiveness by using arms control to limit weapons technologies in which the Soviets enjoyed an advantage, while allowing the United States to continue building weapons advantageous to US security. Promoting US competitive advantage, they believed, was the best way to ensure international peace.

The study of arms control in the Nixon Administration allows us to reconstruct in greater
detail the motives behind Cold War arms control. The current literature on arms control tries to explain US arms control policy almost entirely in terms of the Cambridge Approach to arms control. A few scholars have discussed efforts by the US government to gain unilateral advantage through arms control negotiations, primarily in the context of the non-proliferation treaty. Others have written about the Defense Department’s competitive strategies initiative in the later Cold War. To date, no comprehensive account exists of the impact of the competitive

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strategies logic of arms control, enshrined in the Philadelphia Approach to SALT. This is a major shortcoming of existing accounts, since many aspects of US arms control policy cannot be explained without reference to the competitive strategies approach.

**SALT and Domestic Politics**

By the late 1960s, US foreign policy elites had accepted that arms control negotiations would be an important tool for managing the emergence of nuclear parity. The continued divisions between proponents of the Cambridge and Philadelphia approaches meant that developing a coherent arms control policy would be a challenge. Bridging this intellectual gap would have been difficult under any circumstance, but was made all the more difficult by the deepening political polarization of the late 1960s. The Johnson Administration’s conduct of the Vietnam War significantly raised the stakes of major foreign policy decisions, provoking a tremendous domestic political backlash against an overactive and violent US foreign policy. The controversy over Vietnam hardened the attitudes of US hawks, who insisted that world

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The controversy drove Congressional interest in foreign policy into overdrive, complicating presidential efforts to find a workable compromise. Johnson’s efforts to mediate between these groups ultimately failed, and his arms control policy ground to a halt in late 1968. It would be up to the Nixon Administration to implement arms control with the Soviets.

From the very beginning of his presidency, Nixon was caught between the same hawkish and dovish forces as Johnson. Although ending the Vietnam War remained Nixon’s number one priority, arms control became central to Nixon’s efforts to stabilize US-Soviet relations on terms relatively favorable to the United States. Arms limitation was especially important to Nixon because, at least superficially, it was a policy on which most US foreign policy leaders could agree. Ongoing arms control negotiations also provided Nixon with a rationale to expand and modernize the US nuclear arsenal, in order to gain bargaining leverage over the Soviets in SALT, by building new weapons to trade away. In an era in which virtually every aspect of US foreign policy was riven by partisan contention, SALT provided Nixon with a foreign policy program that Congressional liberals and conservatives could support.

Nixon’s handling of SALT is an example of how many aspects of US foreign policy can best be understood within their domestic political context. In recent years, the study of Cold War foreign policy has taken an internationalist turn. Scholars of US foreign relations increasingly seek to place US foreign policy into a variety of international and transnational contexts.

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including decolonization, racism, development, science, and development policy.¹⁶ These new perspectives have greatly added to our understanding of both US foreign policy and the Cold War more generally. The resulting focus on international history, however, has shifted attention away from the crucial role that US domestic politics played in shaping Cold War foreign policy.¹⁷ Some scholars have sought to call attention back to the important role that US politics played in creating the Cold War.¹⁸ The vast amount of primary documents now available on the Nixon Administration makes it an especially fortunate time to revisit the interrelationship of US foreign and domestic politics.

The new archival sources are especially useful as they allow us to peer behind the curtain of secrecy surrounding US arms control policy during the Nixon years. Previous accounts of domestic politics and arms control have focused largely on interest-group politics, drawing on open sources from Congressional politics and civil societal groups in advocating for specific arms control or disarmament measures.¹⁹ Other accounts have tended to focus on a specific part

of the governing bureaucracy, and its political/technical debates over specific weapons
technologies.\textsuperscript{20} New sources allow a much sharper focus on the internal deliberations of the
Nixon Administration itself. Although they were sensitive to Congressional and public pressures
on arms control, key actors within the government also had their own arms control agendas,
which often overlapped with Congressional and public interest in the Cambridge and
Philadelphia Approaches. As a result, Nixon’s arms control policy was shaped by complex and
shifting coalitions between various executive, legislative, and public proponents of differing
arms control approaches.

Focusing on SALT through the domestic political lens can provide us with some insight
into the broader process of détente in the Nixon Administration. Previous accounts of détente
tended to emphasize its transformational quality, viewing détente as an effort to transform US-
Soviet relations and put them on a more peaceful and equitable footing.\textsuperscript{21} More recently, a
number of historians have noted the fundamentally conservative aspects of US détente policy,

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much of which aimed at sustaining the Cold War rivalry on American terms. In the early 1970s, SALT was considered to be the “flagship of détente,” and its progress can tell us much about the nature of détente more generally. A close examination of SALT reveals that détente in the Nixon Administration was a composite policy, which aimed to please both transformative and conservative constituencies. Détente was neither transformative nor conservative, but rather a complex balancing act between competing foreign policy views in a time of domestic political upheaval.

Focusing our account of SALT on US domestic politics also allows us to revisit the dominant memoir accounts of the Nixon Administration’s SALT policy. The depth of controversy surrounding the United States’ strategic weapons and arms control policy can help us understand why Nixon’s arms control process often took such peculiar forms. The Nixon Administration’s constant delaying of major arms control decisions, obsessive focus on minute technical details, and periodic recourse to super-secret backchannel negotiations were all tools to help mediate the deep political divisions over the ultimate purpose of arms control. The focus on domestic politics also allows us to reintegrate important political actors back into the SALT narrative, especially Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird, whose evolving views on arms control largely determined the scope of SALT in the early 1970s. Despite his importance to the Nixon

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Administration’s SALT policy, Laird plays a very limited role in the existing accounts of SALT, largely because he did not write a major memoir. The following account draws on Laird’s personal papers from the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, which provide some new insights into the Defense Department’s central role in the Administration’s SALT policies.

Sources on the Soviet side of SALT are much scarcer. Several key Soviet SALT participants did produce memoirs, including Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko. These memoirs include little detail on the SALT negotiations themselves, confining their commentary to platitudes about the Soviet desire for peace. The most detailed memoir by a Soviet SALT participant is that of Anatoly Dobrynin, the long-standing Soviet Ambassador to the United States. Dobrynin’s memoir account provides some details concerning his back-channel SALT negotiations with Henry Kissinger, as well as some

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recollections of the policy process in Moscow.\textsuperscript{26} None of the original Soviet SALT Delegates appear to have produced a major memoir account as Gerard Smith and Raymond Garthoff did. As a result of this paucity of sources, the motives and process of Soviet SALT policy remains poorly-understood.

While we are tremendously fortunate to have such a rich memoir record of SALT in the Nixon Administration, the steady declassification of documents from Nixon’s first term now provides the opportunity to revisit many of the memoirs’ conclusions from an historical perspective. In this regard, the memoir accounts of Gerard Smith and Raymond Garthoff come in for special attention.\textsuperscript{27} Smith and Garthoff are two of the most commonly-cited sources for information about the Nixon Administration’s SALT policy, in large part because their memoir accounts provide the most specific details about the SALT negotiations. The wealth of detail in Smith and Garthoff’s accounts contrasts sharply with the more generalized treatment that SALT received in Nixon and Kissinger’s memoirs; as a result, most previous accounts of SALT have leaned heavily on Smith and Garthoff’s recollections. As a result, Smith and Garthoff’s conclusions will receive special attention in the following account, as new sources allow us to revise some of their conclusions. The result is a fascinating account of how very different people with very different views nonetheless worked together to fundamentally alter the conduct of US foreign policy in the Cold War. More than anything, the following account is the story of their

\textsuperscript{26} Anatoly Dobrynin, \textit{In Confidence: Moscow’s Ambassador to America’s Six Cold War Presidents (1962-1986)} (New York: Random House, 1995).

\textsuperscript{27} Garthoff’s \textit{Détente and Confrontation} is not strictly-speaking a memoir, and instead draws on a wide variety of interviews and open-source material to present a broad picture of US foreign policy in the 1970s. The narrative draws heavily on Garthoff’s recollections of events, especially ones in which he was a key participant, like SALT. As a source for understanding US arms control policy during the Cold War, \textit{Détente and Confrontation} is best treated as a sophisticated and insightful memoir.
often-contentious collaboration.

**The SALT Story**

This account provides the first comprehensive, archivally-sourced account of SALT in the Nixon Administration, from its first SALT deliberations in January 1969 to the aftermath of the 1972 Moscow Summit. Chapter 1 covers the history of SALT prior to the Nixon Administration. It begins by describing the origins of the Cambridge and Philadelphia Approaches to arms control in the early 1960s, as well as how the US government came to be divided between these two approaches. The first chapter also includes a brief account of SALT’s origins in the Johnson Administration.

The remaining chapters provide a chronological account of the Nixon Administration’s SALT policies. Chapters 2 and 3 cover the first twelve months of SALT in detail. Chapter 2 focuses on Nixon’s initial difficulties in managing the different SALT perspectives within the Administration. Worried that divisions within the government might embolden Congressional opposition, Nixon and Kissinger relied on a number of bureaucratic improvisations: delaying major SALT decisions; procuring new strategic forces as “bargaining chips;” and refocusing internal debate on highly-technical questions of verification and negotiability. Chapter 3 details how these initial improvisations were codified over the summer of 1969 via the Verification Panel, a special interdepartmental group chaired by Kissinger and designed specifically to mediate the Administration’s differences on SALT.

The work of the Verification Panel was decisive in shaping the Administration’s first SALT proposals, which were introduced to the Soviets at the second round of SALT in April 1970. Chapter 4 describes the Administration’s spring 1970 debate on SALT policy. The lead-up to SALT II in Vienna saw the emergence of a strange compromise between the Defense
Department and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA) on ABM policy. Congressional opposition to the Administration’s Safeguard ABM program had convinced Defense leaders that the United States would not be able to deploy a militarily-relevant ABM system. If the United States could not deploy a large ABM system, then Defense believed it was imperative to prevent the Soviets from deploying one, as well. Defense’s Philadelphia Approach desire for relative advantage thus temporarily aligned with ACDA’s Cambridge Approach desire to limit all ABM for the purpose of strategic stability. The result was a strange compromise, with the Administration agreeing to strict ABM limits in SALT. Although Defense would quickly come to regret this compromise, once presented to the Soviets the idea of a low-ABM agreement was very difficult to walk back.

Although the United States and the Soviet Union reached a quick agreement to limit ABM to low levels, limitations on offensive strategic forces were more controversial. The Soviets insisted that any limitation of offensive forces should include US tactical nuclear forces based in Europe, a position which the US government adamantly opposed. Given the impasse, the Soviets suggested that perhaps the United States might accept an ABM-only SALT agreement, something which Nixon also opposed. Chapter 5 reviews the long stalemate at the second, third, and fourth rounds of SALT, which lasted over a year from April 1970 to May 1971. The lack of significant progress on SALT worsened the Nixon Administration’s domestic political difficulties: proponents of the Cambridge Approach in Congress urged Nixon to accept the Soviets’ ABM-only proposal, while prominent supporters of the Philadelphia Approach opposed surrendering the United States’ ABM technology without putting limits on the Soviets’ expanding offensive forces. In this politically-charged atmosphere, the Verification Panel struggled to produce effective counterproposals to Soviet negotiating initiatives, since any
movement from earlier tenuous bureaucratic compromises risked emboldening opponents on either the Left or Right.

The stalemate on offensive forces in SALT was dramatically broken on 20 May 1971, when Nixon and Kissinger announced a new agreement with the Soviet leadership. The United States would accept an ABM-only agreement along the lines suggested by the Soviets. In return, the Soviets would agree to freeze all deployment of strategic offensive forces for five years, while a second phase of negotiations sought more comprehensive controls on offensive forces. Chapter 6 recounts the convoluted negotiating process leading to the 20 May Agreement. The 20 May Agreement provoked more controversy in memoir accounts of SALT than any other topic. Nixon and Kissinger concluded the agreement directly with the Soviet leadership, excluding virtually the entire US government in the process. The resulting negotiation was messy and left several major loopholes for the Soviets to exploit in further negotiations. Nevertheless, the secret backchannel produced a workable SALT framework while avoiding a major domestic political collision.

Nixon and Kissinger’s SALT backchannel breakthrough put the Administration on track to conclude the first phase of SALT at the May 1972 Moscow Summit. Concluding the final details of this agreement still required a major effort. Chapter 7 reviews the negotiations at the sixth and seventh rounds of SALT in late 1971 and early 1972, where most of the details of the ABM Treaty and Interim Agreement on Offensive Forces were worked out. Chapter 8 begins with the 1972 Moscow Summit itself, as well as the concurrent negotiations with the Soviets in Helsinki and with US conservatives in Washington. Once the SALT agreements were formulated, the Nixon Administration faced its real SALT test. Congress reviewed the ABM Treaty and Interim Agreement over the summer of 1972. Nixon and Kissinger redeployed the
techniques of four years of bureaucratic infighting to secure conservative support for the Administration’s SALT agenda. The brief conclusion considers Nixon’s SALT precedents and achievements in the broader context of the Cold War and nuclear history.
CHAPTER 1 – Approaches to Arms Limitation

The Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) were initially a Johnson Administration initiative aimed at achieving limitations on ICBM and ABM deployments. The Johnson Administration’s efforts took many years to bear fruit, as the Soviets were initially skeptical of limiting strategic defenses. Negotiations were scheduled to begin in the fall of 1968, but the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August caused Johnson to cancel the talks, leaving them for the Nixon Administration to begin. Although Johnson was able to get the Soviets to agree to SALT, Nixon inherited a divisive and difficult arms control negotiation, which took tremendous effort to bring to conclusion.

SALT had many sources. Its timing was dictated by a number of structural factors, including the onset of US-Soviet parity and the development of accurate reconnaissance satellites. Both of these factors enabled SALT to occur, but neither determined it. Arms control was largely a US foreign policy initiative, and its practitioners pursued very specific goals. The negotiations were complicated, because the US government was divided over exactly what those goals should be. One school of thought hoped that SALT could stabilize the strategic balance by ensuring that both the United States and the Soviet Union would retain a second-strike capability – the Cambridge Approach to arms limitation. Another school believed that SALT could be used to retain US advantages over the Soviets by limiting areas of Soviet strategic advantage – the Philadelphia Approach to arms limitation. On the US side, the SALT process was driven by the need to mediate between these two competing approaches to arms control. In the polarized political environment of the late 1960s, achieving a workable SALT compromise proved very difficult.
Why SALT?

At its most basic level, the timing of SALT was driven by the relative size and capabilities of the US and Soviet strategic arsenals. By the mid-1960s the Johnson Administration had embraced a force-sizing concept known as assured destruction, which called for the United States to retain sufficient strategic forces to destroy at least one third of the Soviet population and three quarters of Soviet industrial capacity, even after absorbing a Soviet first strike. This admittedly arbitrary metric provided a rationale for levelling off US strategic nuclear deployments around a level of 1,700 launchers by the late 1960s.¹ The mid-1960s also saw a Soviet crash program to produce hundreds of ICBM and SLBM, in an effort to reduce and overcome the United States’ huge lead in long-range missiles. By the end of the 1960s, the Soviet strategic nuclear arsenal was approaching that of the United States in size. Several previous attempts at strategic arms limitation had foundered on the Soviets’ unwillingness to be locked into a position of strategic nuclear inferiority. The imminent arrival of strategic nuclear parity thus provided the context in which both the United States and the Soviet Union could both consider arms limitation, without conferring an obvious advantage on either side.²

Another important structural factor driving arms limitation negotiations in the late 1960s was the development of reliable strategic reconnaissance capabilities by both of the superpowers, especially overhead reconnaissance satellites. In previous disarmament and arms control negotiations, the United States and the Soviet Union had been at odds over how best to verify compliance with possible agreements. In order to ensure that the Soviet Union did not cheat on

its arms control commitments, the United States had usually insisted that inspectors be allowed to visit the nuclear facilities of both superpowers. The Soviets had generally rejected on-site inspections as espionage, in part to conceal how much larger the US nuclear arsenal had been for so many years. By the mid-1960s, the United States was conducting regular overflights of the Soviet Union by photographic reconnaissance satellites. These satellites formed the linchpin of a much larger system of technical intelligence collection, which included a variety of signals intelligence systems capable of intercepting Soviet radio broadcasts, and the US Navy’s Sound Surveillance system (SOSUS), a network of undersea hydrophones capable of tracking Soviet submarines.³

Taken together, these national technical intelligence capabilities could provide fairly accurate data on the number of Soviet missiles and submarines, largely alleviating the need for on-site inspections for agreements limiting the number of strategic launchers.⁴

The combination of nuclear parity and strategic reconnaissance were necessary for SALT, but not sufficient. These conditions help explain why arms limitation became a viable policy option in the late 1960s, but they do not explain why any US leader would wish to pursue such a policy. Arms control was not so natural a policy choice as to require only opportunity: motive was also necessary. Explaining the United States’ motives in SALT is considerably more difficult than describing the structural factors that enabled arms limitation negotiations between the superpowers to occur.

Previous attempts at understanding US motives in SALT have focused on the arms control views of the highest-level decision-makers, especially Nixon and Kissinger. Most of the original memoir accounts concerning SALT explain the United States’ arms control policy as an attempt to stabilize deterrence between the United States and the Soviet Union by ensuring that each retained the ability to inflict unacceptable damage on the other in the event of a war – the logic of mutual assured destruction. Although he wanted to stabilize assured destruction, Nixon ultimately delayed entering into arms limitation talks with the Soviets in an attempt to leverage SALT for “linkage” bargaining with the Soviets to resolve ongoing crises in Vietnam and the Middle East. The importance of assured destruction and linkage in explaining the Nixon’s SALT deliberations has merit, but only partially so. Other important factors were at work that can help explain why SALT was such a tortuous process for the Nixon Administration.

Some more recent works have taken up the question of Nixon’s motives in arms control, drawing on parts of the documentary archive that has become available over the last decade. New sources indicate that Nixon and Kissinger did not really value arms control as a tool for stabilizing assured destruction because they did not believe that mutual assured destruction was a goal that the United States should pursue. Kissinger wrote in his memoirs that mutual assured destruction was an ineffective and immoral strategy. Recent scholarship has backed up this recollection, showing that neither Nixon nor Kissinger believed that arms control should aim at stabilizing mutual assured destruction. Instead, recent works have tended to hold up “linkage” and the domestic political popularity of arms control as the reasons that Nixon and Kissinger

6 Newhouse, Cold Dawn, 169-170; Garthoff, Détente and Confrontation, 146-151.
pursued SALT with the Soviets.\textsuperscript{8} Much like the memoir accounts, recent works contain important insights into the Administration’s SALT deliberations, including Nixon and Kissinger’s skepticism of assured destruction and the importance of domestic politics in explaining the Administration’s SALT deliberations.

Even with new sources, we must proceed with caution in evaluating Nixon and Kissinger’s views on arms control, because both Nixon and Kissinger were highly performative individuals who tailored their arguments and on occasion even their emotive states to achieve a desired effect on a particular audience. A graphic example of this can be seen in Kissinger detailing his mock fear and anger with Dobrynin to Nixon during the 1969 Readiness Test alert, complete with a fake “angry phone call” from the President for Dobrynin’s benefit.\textsuperscript{9} This aspect of personalities matters for how we evaluate their statements on arms control. For example, in a 23 April 1971 meeting with Kissinger, Nixon described SALT as “a bunch of shit, as you know.

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It’s not worth a damn.” Yet in a private 6 May 1971 conversation with Robert Haldeman, his chief of staff, Nixon admitted that he had been deliberately overstating his opposition to SALT in order to put Kissinger in his place. Nixon told Haldeman that he really believed that SALT was “enormously important,” to which Haldeman agreed. Historians must exercise caution in drawing conclusions on Nixon or Kissinger’s views on any issue from a few dramatic statements. Nixon had occasion to both praise and condemn arms control when he believed it benefitted him.

One factor that is missing from previous accounts is a full consideration of the competing schools of thought on arms control that existed in the late 1960s. While most works implicitly assume that there was a single Cold War logic of arms control, with which Nixon and Kissinger could either agree or disagree, in fact by the time Nixon took office there were at least two distinct logics of arms control competing for influence within the US government. Even amongst those who agreed that arms control should try to avoid war, limit destructiveness, and decrease costs, significant variation could exist on the best specific policies to achieve these objectives. The “Cambridge Approach” to arms control believed that arms limitation talks should be used to bolster assured destruction by limiting dangerous first-strike weapons on both sides. The “Philadelphia Approach” to arms control instead believed that arms limitation talks could and should be used by the United States to gain a competitive advantage over the Soviet

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The interplay of these two approaches to arms control drove the Nixon Administration’s SALT deliberations.

The Purposes of Arms Control

To understand arms control in the Nixon Administration, it is essential to understand the two approaches to arms control that so divided the government. Jennifer Sims has usefully described one school of thought on arms control as the “Cambridge Approach,” named for the centrality of scholars at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in formulating it. The Cambridge Approach to arms control built on the work of US foreign policy experts and scientists during the 1950s to manage US-Soviet rivalry in ways that would minimize the chances of nuclear war and limit its destructiveness if it occurred. By the late 1950s, a new generation of social scientists, including Thomas Schelling, Donald Brennan, and Morton Halperin were giving serious consideration to the issue of how arms control negotiations could improve the national security of both the superpowers.

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In 1960, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (AAAS) sponsored two conferences on arms control theory, one at Harvard and one at MIT, which brought together a number of foreign policy experts for an extended discussion of the purpose of arms control negotiations in regulating superpower rivalry. These conferences produced a number of seminal works on arms control which defined the Cambridge Approach, including Schelling and Halperin’s *Strategy and Arms Control*, Brennan’s *Arms Control, Disarmament, and National Security*, and Frisch’s *Arms Reduction*, all published in 1961, along with British political scientist Hedley Bull’s *The Control of the Arms Race*, published the same year. Taken together, the Cambridge Approach provided the theoretical framework for much public discussion of arms control.

The creators and proponents of the Cambridge Approach represented a wide variety of viewpoints on issues of national security and politics, but embraced a common set of assumptions about the purpose of arms control. The most acute danger of war was seen to be the threat of surprise/pre-emptive attack. If one side could use its nuclear forces to destroy the nuclear forces of the other side in a surprise, then in a period of crisis the second party would be placed in a use-them-or-lose-them dilemma. Bull wrote,

> The danger of pre-emptive war, though it appears to rest on very subtle calculations, is clearly more serious than that of premeditated war. The cold-blooded decision to abandon peace for nuclear war would require great certainty on the part of a Chief of Staff… but the decision to launch a pre-emptive attack, to which the alternative is felt not to be peace but certain and immediate defeat, is one that might readily be taken in the

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nervous climate of an international crisis…

According to this view, the problem to be addressed by arms control was rooted in the nature of modern missile technology, which dramatically increased the ability of one side or another to launch a sudden and overwhelming surprise attack. The solution to this problem was to ensure that each side retained a second-strike assured destruction capability. Arms control could contribute to this stable deterrent force by placing agreed-upon limits on weapons systems capable of launching a disarming first strike.

The Cambridge Approach to arms control rested on the assumption that symmetrical restrictions on the deployment of certain types of weapons would lead to symmetrical outcomes for both superpowers. Limiting large and accurate ICBMs in both the US and Soviet arsenals would improve the security of both countries, by reducing the ability of each side to launch an effective first strike, thereby reinforcing deterrence. Anti-ballistic missile defenses, which could potentially limit damage from a retaliatory attack, were also widely believed by proponents of the Cambridge Approach to be inherently destabilizing. Limiting large ICBMs would also be an objective of the Philadelphia Approach to arms control, but for an entirely different reason, as discussed below. To the extent that the Cambridge Approach concerned itself with relative

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24 This was not universally true: there were a few Cambridge Approach advocates, like Freeman Dyson and Donald Brennan, who argued that extensive ABM deployments on both sides would in fact be beneficial for mutual security. These voices were largely drowned out in the anti-ABM campaign of the late 1960s. See: David Goldfinscher, *The Best Defense: Policy Alternatives for U.S. Nuclear Security from the 1950s to the 1990s* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 147-174.
advantage, it was primarily concerned with cheating, especially the possibility that one side might gain an illicit advantage by ignoring the restrictions being observed by the other. For the most part, the Cambridge Approach’s focus on the characteristics of specific weapons systems as being either inherently stabilizing or destabilizing led to the conclusion that restraint on deploying inherently first-strike weapons technology was in the common interest of both sides.

The Cambridge Approach to arms control gained significant influence within the US foreign policy establishment in the 1960s. The most direct route of influence was the incorporation of a number of the original Cambridge Approach theoreticians directly into the government. The Kennedy and Johnson Administrations sought to employ the “best and brightest” to develop new and effective foreign policy concepts. This led to a number of academics sympathetic to the Cambridge Approach being hired directly by the government, including Morton Halperin and Alain Enthoven at the Defense Department, and Walt Rostow in the National Security Council. Unsurprisingly, Halperin became one of the most prominent proponents of the Cambridge Approach in the government, drafting much of the Johnson Administration’s original SALT material in 1968 with an eye towards stabilizing assured destruction between the superpowers.

The Cambridge Approach to arms control was also eagerly adopted by many US scientists. Notable physicists including Robert Oppenheimer, Hans Bethe, and Herbert York

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were early advocates of reducing superpower tensions through limitations on weapons.\[^{28}\] Physicists Jerome Wiesner and Paul Doty were both major contributors to the 1960 AAAS studies at Harvard and MIT that formalized the Cambridge Approach.\[^{29}\] Scientists helped disseminate ideas about assured destruction and secure second-strike capability via fora like the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* and the Pugwash Conferences, including widely-read articles like Hans Bethe and Richard Garwin’s 1968 critique of anti-ballistic missile systems.\[^{30}\] Within the government, the President’s Science Advisory Committee, and especially its Strategic Military Panel, advised the President to adopt the Cambridge Approach to arms control.\[^{31}\]

The Cambridge Approach also won support in the US foreign policy establishment and Congress. Many members of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) came to accept the Cambridge Approach’s assumptions about arms control, and lobbied for arms limitation to bolster mutual assured destruction.\[^{32}\] John McCloy, one of the most influential members of the CFR, served as the chairman of the General Advisory Committee (GAC) on Arms Control and Disarmament during the Nixon Administration.\[^{33}\] McCloy and other members of the GAC generally favored an arms control policy based on stabilizing assured destruction and solidifying

nuclear parity between the superpowers. Support from scientists and establishment figures meant that the Cambridge Approach also enjoyed popularity on Capitol Hill, especially in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee where Senators William Fulbright, John Sherman Cooper, and Clifford Case promoted its views on arms control. The incoming Nixon Administration would find strong proponents of the Cambridge Approach in the State Department and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA), including Secretary of State William Rogers and ACDA Director Gerard Smith.

Proponents in government and Congress were drawn to the Cambridge Approach for a variety of reasons. Although the theory itself was backed by significant social scientific research in the works of Schelling, Halperin, and Brennan, the Cambridge Approach also appealed to many policymakers for its ability to support pre-existing agendas for the future of US foreign policy. Especially important was the Cambridge Approach’s utility in helping organize and reduce US strategic nuclear procurement expenditures during the Vietnam War. Secretary of

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36 Michael Latham has noted that Cold War leaders selected social science theories that supported their preconceived biases about US superiority and development (Michael Latham, Modernization as Ideology: American Social Sciences and “Nation Building” in the Kennedy Era, Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000, 21-60). A similar dynamic was at work in the field of arms control.
Defense Robert McNamara increasingly turned to the assured destruction paradigm offered by the Cambridge Approach to justify reductions in expenditures on strategic weapons systems, especially the decision not to deploy a large and expensive area-defense anti-ballistic missile (ABM) system.\textsuperscript{38} The Cambridge Approach also allowed theorists and policymakers to cast arms control dialogue between the United States and the Soviet Union in a pedagogical mode, with the United States teaching the Soviets about the realities of national security policy in the nuclear age.\textsuperscript{39} US Pugwash participants certainly saw their role as teaching the Soviets about the dangers of weapons technologies like ABM.\textsuperscript{40} The Soviets did not always respond well to US attempts to educate them; Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin objected strongly to the long lecture by McNamara on the dangers of ABM at the 1967 Glassboro Summit.\textsuperscript{41} The Cambridge Approach helped sustain the idea of the intellectual superiority of the United States over its Soviet adversary.

Despite the prevalence of the Cambridge Approach to arms control, it faced competition from more conservative US academics and policymakers who believed in the need to compete for advantage with the Soviets in the strategic nuclear realm. I borrow the vocabulary of “competitive strategy” from the work by the Department of Defense to shape both US and Soviet weapons acquisition in the latter half of the Cold War.\textsuperscript{42} Although few people in the 1960s spoke


\textsuperscript{40} Evangelista, \textit{Unarmed Forces}, 202-204.


\textsuperscript{42} Thomas Mahnken, ed., \textit{Competitive Strategies for the 21st Century: Theory, History, and Practice} (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012); Andrew Krepinevich & Barry Watts,
explicitly of a “competitive strategy,” the basic concept of playing to US strengths while limiting Soviet strengths was embraced by US hawks long before Andrew Marshall’s tenure at the Pentagon. Furthermore, the broader competitive strategies concept also suggested a possible competitive motive for arms control. Following Sims, I refer to this conservative arms control rationale as the Philadelphia Approach, after the series of symposia on arms control held by the Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI) at the University of Pennsylvania in the 1960s and 1970s.

The origins of the Philadelphia Approach to arms control can be traced to the writings of prominent conservative foreign policy critics of the Eisenhower Administration’s defense policies. Eisenhower’s effort to limit defense spending through a strategy of Massive Retaliation led prominent conservatives like Robert Strausz-Hupé, Stefan Possony, and Henry Kissinger to question whether the Administration was sufficiently prepared to deal with the total political-economic-military threat posed by the Soviet Union.\(^4\) Especially influential was Strausz-Hupé’s *Protracted Conflict*, co-written with his colleagues William Kintner, James Dougherty, and Alvin Cottrell.

The basic thesis of *Protracted Conflict* was that the greatest threat to world peace was the continuous efforts by the Soviets to improve all aspects of their national power while sapping Western strength, in preparation for the ultimate victory of communism over capitalism.\(^4\) Strausz-Hupé wrote:

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According to the Communists’ doctrine of protracted conflict, war, politics, diplomacy, law, psychology, science and economics – all form a continuum and all are closely integrated in the conduct of foreign policy… [the Communists] have mastered the techniques of staging aggression against social institutions and human minds, without physically violating political borders.\textsuperscript{45}

Although much of \textit{Protracted Conflict} dealt with the growing threat of communist irregular warfare and insurgency in the developing world, it also contained a call for continued competition for nuclear advantage over the Soviets:

In many quarters, the achievement of terminal firepower (in the form of the H-bomb) by three nations has been interpreted to mean that the technological race has come to an end and that the contestants are stalemated militarily… such an assumption is dangerous, given the reality of the continuing race for weapons superiority… Undoubtedly, the Soviet efforts to paralyze the West and to disrupt its policy apparatus through bluff, bluster and blackmail will increase with advances in Soviet weapons technology.\textsuperscript{46}

Although it lacked specific policy recommendations, \textit{Protracted Conflict} laid out a number of assumptions crucial to the Philadelphia Approach: the multiple sources of international power (war, diplomacy, science, psychology); the specific political and psychological salience of strategic nuclear advantage; and the need to organize US foreign policy around a long-term competition with the Soviets, especially in the nuclear realm.

In order to promote his views on long-term competition with the Soviet Union, Strausz-Hupé organized the Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI) at the University of Pennsylvania

\textsuperscript{45} Strausz-Hupé \textit{et al}, \textit{Protracted Conflict}, 33.
\textsuperscript{46} Strausz-Hupé \textit{et al}, \textit{Protracted Conflict}, 125.
in 1955. Originally, FPRI was the government contracting arm of the Penn Political Science faculty, roughly analogous to a number of other university contracting think-tanks that would become important to the formulation and dissemination of conservative ideas on foreign policy, including Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) at Georgetown and the Hoover Institute at Stanford. FPRI became the source of numerous monographs on foreign policy subjects, as well as the editorial center of the foreign affairs journal *Orbis*.\(^{47}\)

On the other side of the country, analysts at RAND were coming to similar conclusions about the need for long-term competition with the Soviets, albeit from a very different theoretical perspective. In the mid-1950s, RAND’s Strategic Objectives Committee served as a forum for thinking about long-term US-Soviet interaction. The Committee drew on a number of rising talents in the fields of economics and mathematics, including Andrew Marshall, J.F. Loftus, Charles Hitch, Sidney Winter, Herman Kahn, and James Schlesinger. Marshall, Loftus, and Winter especially became fascinated with the idea that bureaucratic and organizational culture might limit the rationality of Soviet decision-makers when it came to issues of weapons procurement. This group drew on insights from several sources: the Carnegie School of Behavioral Economics, especially the work of Herbert Simon on bounded rationality; theories of business strategy developed by Joseph Bower and C. Roland Christensen at Harvard; and the evolutionary anthropology of Robert Ardrey, Konrand Lorenz, and Robin Fox.\(^{48}\) An early


product of this collaboration was an unpublished study on “The Next Ten Years” by Marshall, Hitch, and Bernard Brodie.\textsuperscript{49} Although originally focused on improving US intelligence analysis, Marshall’s work would eventually provide a more theoretical basis for long-term competition with the Soviets.

In the meantime, FPRI served as a focal point for conservative thinking about the emerging field of arms control. Beginning in 1964, the University of Pennsylvania co-hosted a series of symposia on nuclear strategy and arms control theory, organized by Strausz-Hupé, Kintner, and Dougherty at FPRI. The impetus for the original conference came from a group of students at various universities in Philadelphia, especially John Lehman, Jr., who helped organized the Philadelphia Collegiate Disarmament Conference from 6-8 March 1964.\textsuperscript{50} As Dougherty and Lehman wrote in their review of the Collegiate Disarmament Conference:

One of the most unusual features of the conference was the fact that every one of the principals involved was invited on the basis of his professional competence and his adherence to a centrist or moderately conservative (or “hard line”) position… all the experts exhibited a keen awareness of the difficulties which governments encounter along the road to the making of a safer world…\textsuperscript{51}

This avowedly conservative conference on arms control and disarmament was sufficiently successful that FPRI institutionalized future meetings as the “International Arms Control Symposium,” which met in April 1966, October 1969, October 1971, and November 1973 to


\textsuperscript{51} Dougherty & Lehman, \textit{The Prospects for Arms Control}, 11-12.
discuss contemporary issues of arms control policy. These conferences produced semi-regular publications of the proceedings, as well as provided material for a number of books and journal articles by conservative foreign policy commentators like Kintner, Robert Pfaltzgraff, and Herman Kahn, as well as some defectors from the Cambridge Approach like Donald Brennan. Although these conferences represented a variety of viewpoints, including regular appearances by advocates of the Cambridge Approach, they also provided a forum for conservatives to promote their own ideas about arms limitation and competitive strategies.

As with the Cambridge Approach, the Philadelphia Approach to arms control encompassed a wide variety of differing viewpoints on national security policy and arms control. Proponents of the Philadelphia Approach shared a number of underlying assumptions. The first was that the United States remained enmeshed in a long-term political, economic, and military confrontation with the Soviet Union. In this competition, the greatest danger of war was not the technical characteristics of weapons themselves, but rather what they saw as Soviet political and psychological aggressiveness in the face of weakening US resolve and disheartened US allies. The closer the Soviets came to overtaking the United States in strategic arms, the greater the danger of war would become. Kintner wrote,

The Soviets are engaged in an immense and continuing effort to destabilize the strategic balance at the top of the weapons spectrum in order to gain greater freedom of action for revolutionary warfare at the bottom. Yet, paradoxically, it is inconceivable to many Americans that the Soviets are seeking to neutralize U.S. strategic superiority in order to destabilize the existing world situation.  

Even if the Soviet drive for strategic nuclear superiority did not result in war, it would still seriously undermine the national security of the United States. In a world where both side retained the ability to annihilate each other, the military utility of nuclear weapons might be decreased, but the political utility of marginal advantages in nuclear weapons technology would remain important. CSIS Soviet expert Robert Crane wrote, “Neither the Chinese Communists nor the Soviets believe that general war can be a valid instrument of policy. They do believe, however, that the concept of nuclear war and its supporting military doctrines can be manipulated to support political offensives.”

Faced with both the military and the political-psychological threat of Soviet nuclear advantage, the United States would need to redouble its efforts to retain its lead in strategic nuclear weaponry over the Soviet Union. This would involve a redoubled effort to increase both the size and sophistication of the US nuclear arsenal, with special emphasis on matching and

surpassing Soviet developments in heavy ICBMs and ABM technology. Given the United States’ relative advantages in economic and technological strength, most conservatives assumed that the United States could retain a significant advantage in strategic nuclear weapons, if the political will could be summoned to develop and deploy the necessary technologies.\textsuperscript{57} The conservative emphasis on the need for continued competition often translated into a criticism of arms control measures that they believed would limit US strength and allow the Soviets to catch up in key areas of strategic nuclear technology.\textsuperscript{58}

Despite their skepticism of arms control, conservative proponents of renewed competition with the Soviet Union also recognized that under the right circumstances arms control agreements might be used as tools to gain or sustain marginal competitive advantages over the Soviets, with all the political benefits that these advantages would entail.\textsuperscript{59} Pfaltzgraff linked the political impact of a specific arms control measure to the position of the two negotiating parties within the international system:

The rationale for arms control for an anti-status quo power is likely to differ from that of a status quo power. The anti-status quo power, far more than the status quo power, is likely to seek to use arms control negotiations either to promote or to ratify change in the international system. For the status quo power, in contrast, the rationale for arms control

may be to forestall the emergence of a changed configuration of strategic power that might favor the anti-status quo power… Under certain circumstances, a superpower may use arms control negotiations to slow its adversary’s rate of technological innovation either to gain some form of strategic-political advantage or to reduce the uncertainty that new weapons systems may introduce into the strategic equation.\textsuperscript{60}

Arms control negotiations could serve as a tool for one or both sides to seek relative advantage, becoming yet another front in the broader political-military-economic-psychological competition between the superpowers.\textsuperscript{61}

Unlike the Cambridge Approach, the Philadelphia Approach to arms control argued that symmetrical restrictions on the deployment of certain weapons technologies could have asymmetrical outcomes for national security, since the strategic meaning of weapons technologies was mediated by a number of political, economic, organizational, geographic, and diplomatic factors, the balance of which differed greatly for the United States and the Soviet Union. For conservatives writing in the 1960s, one obvious example of adverse outcomes was the 1963 Limited Test Ban Treaty, which conservatives accused of freezing a marginal Soviet lead in high-altitude atmospheric tests.\textsuperscript{62} On the other hand, arms control asymmetries might also


\textsuperscript{61} A few studies have noted that the United States benefited disproportionately from certain arms control agreements (Neil Cooper, “Putting Disarmament back in the framed,” \textit{Review of International Studies} 32, 2, 2006, 353-376; Shane Maddock, \textit{Nuclear Apartheid: The Quest for American Atomic Supremacy from World War II to the Present}, Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), but these studies have not examined bilateral US-Russian arms limitation from a competitive strategies perspective.

work to the benefit of the United States. Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Admiral Thomas Moorer believed that the geography, alliance relationships, and naval traditions of the United States meant that an arms control agreement that limited land-based systems like large ICBMs but allowed continued competition in sea-based systems on both sides would redound to the advantage of the United States. As this example demonstrates, the prescriptions of the Philadelphia Approach were not always different than those offered by the Cambridge Approach, even if both sides arrived at their conclusions by different logics.

By the late 1960s the Cambridge Approach had developed a fairly consistent set of prescriptions for arms control policy, while the Philadelphia Approach’s theoretical recommendations lagged significantly behind. For example, as noted above, proponents of the Cambridge Approach generally agreed that ABM was a destabilizing technology, since it allowed one side to limit damage from a retaliatory second strike. By comparison, proponents of the Philadelphia Approach differed significantly on where exactly the United States’ competitive advantages lay. Conservatives did not agree whether the Soviets enjoyed an advantage in ABM or not. During the last years of the Johnson Administration, there was considerable panic amongst hawks that the Soviets were pulling far ahead in ABM technology. By the time Nixon came into office conservatives like Deputy Secretary of Defense David Packard believed that ABM was an area in which the United States was pulling ahead technologically. By the end of

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65 Newhouse, Cold Dawn, 72-73.
1969, Laird and Packard changed their minds, arguing that the United States should limit its commitment to ABM, due to the domestic political opposition faced by Safeguard, while Nixon and JCS continued to support ABM deployment. Although the general concept of competitive arms control negotiations gained powerful adherents in the government, these policymakers were largely left to feel their way towards what a competitive arms limitation agreement would look like.

The Philadelphia Approach also suffered significant problems of negotiability, as many analysts were skeptical that the Soviets would knowingly accept an arms control agreement that put them at a disadvantage. ACDA Director Gerard Smith argued that the Soviets would not negotiate on the basis of competitive advantage at the 19 June 1969 NSC Review Group meeting on SALT, in response to Helmut Sonnenfeldt’s suggestion that the United States could bargain with the Soviets by trading off different areas of relative advantage to produce a final agreement. In this regard, too, the Philadelphia Approach’s formal theory emerged after the practical negotiations had begun. In 1972, Andrew Marshall’s work on the behavioral bases of Soviet foreign policy came together in the seminal paper “Long-Term Competition with the Soviets: A Framework for Strategic Analysis.” Marshall suggested that the United States might

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exploit Soviet organizational and behavioral blind-spots to gain advantages that would be unexpected and surprising to the Soviets.\(^7^0\) Because both the Soviets and the United States had limited resources, if the United States could manipulate the Soviets into investing in capabilities that were “relatively expensive, it could significantly reduce the resources available to the Soviets for those capabilities that were most threatening to the United States. Specifically, Marshall believed that the United States should compete with the Soviets in hard-target kill capabilities, high-technology weapons that were an area of relative US strength and would provoke the Soviets into many expensive investments in defensive countermeasures. The strategic and organizational culture of the Soviet military would drive them to waste tremendous resources on defenses, allowing the US to retain a significant offensive advantage.\(^7^1\)

Just as the Cambridge Approach appealed to some policymakers due to their prior assumptions about the United States’ role as the world’s chief pedagogue, so too the Philadelphia Approach was able to win strong support in large part by its appeal to conservative policymakers’ existing assumptions about the future of US foreign policy. The Philadelphia Approach affirmed policymakers’ perception of long-term competition with the Soviets for international influence and prestige. The Philadelphia Approach also provided an easy apologetic for the continued pursuit by the United States of hegemonic power as virtuous and necessary to defend the universal-yet-American values of peace, liberty, and justice.\(^7^2\)

Although lagging behind the Cambridge Approach in theoretical rigor, the Philadelphia Approach to arms control gained powerful adherents within the foreign policy establishment,

\(^7^1\) Marshall, “Long-Term Competition with the Soviets,” viii-xi, 7-14.
whose numbers were bolstered by the incoming Nixon Administration. Most obviously, a number of proponents of the Philadelphia Approach were appointed to important positions in the new Administration. Most prominent was Henry Kissinger, a one-time collaborator with Strausz-Hupé and Kintner who shared their fears about the Soviet Union’s long-term efforts to supplant US global leadership. William Kintner served as a member of Nixon’s foreign policy transition team, helping seed the NSC Staff with conservative arms controllers like James Lehman. At the Defense Department, William Baroody, Jr., an economist with strong ties to American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and CSIS, served as Melvin Laird’s assistant.

In addition to these appointments, the growing network of conservative foreign policy think-tanks made regular efforts to lobby the Administration on strategic nuclear and arms control issues. These groups, including FPRI, the Hudson Institute, AEI, CSIS, and the Hoover Institute, worked to promote the Philadelphia Approach to arms control in the government. These organizations enjoyed especially close intellectual and financial ties to the Defense Department, and worked to promote Administration policy on controversial issues like ABM deployments. In addition to the International Arms Control Symposia in Philadelphia, conservative arms controllers organized conferences in the Washington, DC, area to convince important policymakers and media figures on the importance of strategic nuclear competition.

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75 Dale Van Atta, With Honor: Melvin Laird in War, Peace, and Politics (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 55-56, 141.
with the Soviets.\textsuperscript{77} Even out of government, therefore, conservative social scientists continued to exercise important influence.

Conservative ideas about the Soviet threat and the need for vigilance also had an important popular electoral dimension. Conservative activists Phyllis Schlafly and Admiral Chester Ward were two of the most widely-read authors on US nuclear strategy in the late 1960s. Although not proponents of arms control, Schlafly and Ward shared assumptions common to the Philadelphia Approach about the competitive nature of the international system.\textsuperscript{78} In 1968, Nixon needed the support of conservative leaders, in order to solidify his primary victory and to prevail over Hubert Humphrey in the general election. As a result, the Nixon campaign embraced a platform of strengthening US strategic forces, especially the deployment of a national ABM system.\textsuperscript{79} Conservative ideas about competition and arms control also had strong proponents in the Congress, especially with Senators John Stennis, Henry Jackson, Richard Russell, Strom Thurmond, and John Tower, who had worked together to criticize the Johnson Administration on its Vietnam and ABM policies.\textsuperscript{80} The Nixon Administration thus received strong electoral and Congressional support for vigorous strategic nuclear competition with the Soviets. Although

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Nixon largely shared the views of these conservative activists about the danger posed by the Soviet Union, their fervor limited his ability to compromise with proponents of the Cambridge Approach on arms control policy.

Although in principle the Philadelphia and Cambridge Approaches operated according to different logics of arms control, in practice the dividing line between the two approaches was blurred, with proponents of the Philadelphia Approach paying lip service to the Cambridge Approach in public, while privately continuing to evaluate arms control options on the basis of competitive advantage. This was largely due to the Philadelphia Approach’s difficulties with negotiability. Proponents of this approach could not state publicly their desire to gain relative advantage via arms limitation negotiations, for fear of alienating the Soviets and causing negotiations to collapse. As the Nixon Administration was preparing to consider the results of the NSSM 28 Report on SALT, Kissinger sent Nixon a private memo that reviewed the various arms control options being considered. Kissinger evaluated arms control options on the basis of the relative advantages enjoyed by the United States and the Soviet Union under each agreement. While Kissinger predicted that State and ACDA would argue that relative advantage did not matter, Kissinger maintained that it did, in order to provide a future President with the resolve to stand up to the Soviets in a crisis, a classic Philadelphia Approach argument about the political utility of marginal nuclear advantage.\(^8\) Despite this high-level endorsement of seeking strategic advantage through arms limitation, the final NSSM 28 study considered by the NSC Review Group on 12 June 1969 contained no discussion of the competing motives at work within the

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Although it remained covert, the struggle for influence between the Philadelphia and Cambridge Approaches would exercise a decisive influence on the Nixon Administration’s consideration of arms control.

The struggle between the Philadelphia and Cambridge Approaches to arms control in the Nixon Administration has also been muted in the major memoir accounts of SALT. The two most cited SALT memoirs, Smith’s *Doubletalk* and Garthoff’s *Détente and Confrontation*, both place the Cambridge Approach to SALT front-and-center, unsurprisingly as both Smith and Garthoff were proponents of this approach to arms limitation. More surprisingly, proponents of the Philadelphia Approach to arms control have been more reticent to lay out their arms limitation views in their memoirs. In his memoirs, Nixon cited the Cambridge Approach as motivating his interest in SALT; in fact, Nixon consistently sought relative advantage over the Soviets in negotiations. Kissinger downplayed the importance of the Cambridge Approach in his memoir, but did not make any effort to outline the competitive logic of the Philadelphia Approach, despite its importance to his work on SALT. Nitze’s memoir contains the most unambiguous statement of the Philadelphia Approach in SALT, claiming at several points that both the United States and the Soviet Union were seeking relative advantage in the talks. Even

83 Smith, *Doubletalk*, 18-19, 85-86; Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 57-73.
84 Nixon, *RN*, 618.
86 A few examples: Nitze asserts that the massive nuclear buildup under the Eisenhower Administration was necessary to “restore crisis stability;” equating US strategic nuclear superiority with general international stability was a hallmark of the Philadelphia Approach. Similarly, Nitze also admits that he “knew that the reality of the situation was such that each side would more than likely try to achieve for itself gains relative to the other side.” Nitze justified the US search for advantage on the basis that the Soviets were doing the same thing (Paul Nitze, *From Hiroshima to Glasnost: At the Center of Decision, A Memoir*, New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1989, 286, 289, 301-303).
Nitze ultimately falls back on the justification that the Nixon Administration conducted SALT on the basis of “non-zero-sum” equal security for both sides.\footnote{Nitze, \textit{From Hiroshima to Glasnost}, 291, 306.} It is perhaps not surprising that in retrospect proponents of the Philadelphia Approach preferred to portray themselves as seeking a fair and equitable arms limitation agreement, rather than an aggressive effort to sustain US strategic nuclear advantage. Although it is downplayed in most of the memoirs, the major theme of this account is that SALT in the Nixon Administration can only be understood as the result of the interplay of the Cambridge and Philadelphia Approaches to arms control.

\section*{SALT Origins}

Although Nixon would win accolades for concluding the first SALT agreements, the arms limitation process was originally a Johnson Administration initiative. The international control of armaments was a long-standing goal of US foreign policy.\footnote{Trevor Dupuy & Gay Hammerman, \textit{A Documentary History of Arms Control and Disarmament} (New York: R.R. Bowker Company, 1973); Robert Kaufman, \textit{Arms Control During the Pre-Nuclear Era: The United States and Naval Limitation Between the Two World Wars} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); Emily Goldman, \textit{Sunken Treaties: Naval Arms Control Between the Wars} (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994); Keith Hamilton & Edward Johnson, eds., \textit{Arms Control and Disarmament in Diplomacy} (Portland, OR: Arms and Disarmament in Diplomacy, 2008).} The United States and the Soviet Union had been engaged in on-again, off-again negotiations concerning nuclear disarmament and arms control since the 1940s, with little success.\footnote{James Lebovic, \textit{Flawed Logics: Strategic Nuclear Arms Control from Truman to Obama} (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 9-40; Ronald Powaski, \textit{March to Armageddon: The United States and the Nuclear Arms Race, 1939 to the Present} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 29-45, 74-92; David Thomson, \textit{A Guide to the Nuclear Arms Control Treaties} (Los Alamos, NM: Los Alamos Historical Society Publications, 2001), 17-20.} By the early 1960s, the US government was increasingly convinced that negotiations on more limited arms control measures would have a greater chance of success. Johnson was especially interested in concluding a number of limited arms control agreements, following Kennedy’s Limited Test Ban Treaty with...

Over time, the idea of strategic arms limitation negotiations gained traction within the US government, as the technology for anti-ballistic missile (ABM) systems matured. Domestically, Johnson faced strong pressure from hawks to build an ABM system, as well as strong pressure from doves not to do so. Caught between the two sides, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara believed that the best solution was to deploy a limited ABM system, known as Sentinel ABM, while also beginning arms limitation talks with the Soviets. Arms limitation negotiations would serve to legitimate the ABM deployment as part of a bilateral US-Soviet agreement, while also providing a rationale for limiting the scope of the deployment.\footnote{Walter Poole, \textit{Adapting to Flexible Response, 1960-1968} (Washington, DC: Historians Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2014), 270-278; Newhouse, \textit{Cold Dawn}, 77-94; Brands, “Progress Unseen,” 274-277; Drea, \textit{McNamara, Clifford, and the Burdens of Vietnam, 1965-1969}, 351-354, 356-364, 371-373.} ACDA remained a strong proponent of some sort of freeze on strategic offensive forces, especially ICBMs, and so the Johnson Administration ultimately folded Defense’s ABM restrictions and ACDA’s ICBM restrictions into a single strategic arms limitation proposal to the Soviets.\footnote{Drea, \textit{McNamara, Clifford, and the Burdens of Vietnam, 1965-1969}, 332-335.}

Getting the Soviets to agree to arms limitation negotiations as a difficult task. Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson formally proposed negotiations on an ABM agreement to the Soviets in December 1966.\footnote{Brands, “Progress Unseen,” 277.} Johnson followed up with a direct appeal to Soviet Premier Alexei
Kosygin during a summit at Glassboro, NJ, in June 1967. Johnson and McNamara attempted to persuade Kosygin of the logic of the Cambridge Approach – that defensive weapons like ABM would undermine strategic stability and decrease the security of both countries. Kosygin disagreed strongly, claiming that self-defense could not be a bad thing, and that only offensive weapons should be limited.\(^94\) Kosygin’s rejection of ABM limitation was partly due to his confusion at McNamara’s presentation. The Soviets were also likely wary of strategic arms limitation, since their ICBM and ABM programs were still very active.\(^95\) As a result, Johnson ordered work to begin on Sentinel, but still sought to reassure the Soviets privately that the door remained open for strategic arms talks.\(^96\)

Despite the initial Soviet hesitance, the timing of Johnson’s SALT proposal was fortuitous. Several factors within the Soviet government were combining to make the Soviet leadership more amenable to arms control. As the size of the Soviet nuclear arsenal caught up to that of the United States, the Soviet leadership had a strong incentive to formalize nuclear parity, to avoid a costly second round of arms racing.\(^97\) Increasing contacts between US and Soviet scientists throughout the 1960s had provided a forum for sharing of ideas about arms control and nuclear disarmament, serving to convince a number of prominent Soviet scientists of the validity of the Cambridge Approach to arms control. Soviet participants in the Pugwash Conferences and Soviet-American Disarmament Study (SADS) included Mikhail Millionshikov, the president of the Soviet Academy of Sciences and primary science advisor to Leonid Brezhnev.


\(^95\) Brands, “Progress Unseen,” 279.


Millionshikov and other Soviet supporters of the Cambridge Approach argued that the Soviet Union should engage the Johnson Administration in an effort to limit destabilizing technologies like ABM.\textsuperscript{98}

The Soviet military’s views on arms control were also evolving throughout the 1960s, as Soviet military leaders came to accept the reality of mutual vulnerability and embrace the possibility that through effective deterrence a future US-Soviet war might not involve an immediate exchange of nuclear weapons. Wartime deterrence of the United States would require denying the Americans any form of damage-limitation capability, including ABM systems.\textsuperscript{99} Along with more missiles, the quality of Soviet command and control systems also improved in the late 1960s, easing Soviet fears of a sudden US surprise attack, and making arms control negotiations more palatable.\textsuperscript{100} Within the Soviet leadership, there was also a strong desire to achieve economy in defense expenditures, though this obviously ran counter to the military’s desire for continued deployment of strategic weapons.\textsuperscript{101} Finally, many within the Soviet leadership and defense establishment worried that the Soviet Union would be left behind in a renewed round of competition with the United States, given the significant economic and technological advantages that the United States enjoyed.\textsuperscript{102}

\textsuperscript{98} Evangelista, \textit{Unarmed Forces}, 124-232.
technological factors suggested that an arms limitation agreement would improve Soviet security, by increasing the salience of Soviet conventional military advantages while staving off the costs and risks of further strategic nuclear competition with the United States.

Finally, the new generation of leaders in the Soviet Union sought to promote détente through arms control, especially Leonid Brezhnev, who was determined to leave his mark on Soviet foreign policy as a man of peace. Brezhnev’s growing power within the Soviet Union was thus accompanied by an increased Soviet interest in arms control negotiations with the United States, as a tool to burnish Brezhnev’s legacy.\textsuperscript{103} Arms control negotiations were seen as the lynchpin for improved East-West relations more broadly.\textsuperscript{104} Observers at the time were aware of these changing motives in Soviet arms control policy, though without better sources it is impossible to say which, if any, were decisive in the Politburo’s calculations. Whatever the exact combination, the Soviets quickly accepted the need to limit ABM via SALT.

As a result, although Kosygin had spurned Johnson’s SALT proposal at Glassboro, by December 1967 the Soviets signaled a new willingness to discuss arms limitation, both for offensive and defensive forces. Preparatory discussions occurred in the spring of 1968, followed by a formal proposal by Johnson to the Soviet leadership in July 1968.\textsuperscript{105} Johnson ordered the

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\textsuperscript{103} Vladislav Zubok, \textit{A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev} (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 192-226. Although Brezhnev was caricatured during the Cold War as a bland gray suit, several works have sought to reconstruct his biography and various policies. In addition to Zubok, see: Paul Murphy, \textit{Brezhnev: Soviet Politician} (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1981); Edwin Bacon & Mark Sandle, eds., \textit{Brezhnev Reconsidered} (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002); and, Thomas Crump, \textit{Brezhnev and the Decline of the Soviet Union} (New York: Routledge, 2014).


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US government to prepare a negotiating position for a first round of SALT in Geneva at the end of September 1968.\footnote{FRUS 1964-68, Vol. XI, Arms Control and Disarmament, eds. Evans Gerkas, David Patterson, & Carolyn Yee (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1997), Editorial Note 274 (hereafter FRUS, with appropriate year, volume, and number).} With a great deal of prodding from Secretary of State Dean Rusk, an Interagency Group on SALT was ultimately able to work out a SALT proposal acceptable to both the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA) by early August 1968.\footnote{FRUS 1964-68, Vol. XI, Editorial Note 274.} Everything seemed ready to secure Johnson’s arms control legacy with SALT.

Johnson’s SALT hopes were dashed when Warsaw Pact forces invaded Czechoslovakia on 21 August 1968. Johnson had planned to announce SALT that morning, but the NSC recommended against proceeding.\footnote{Newhouse, Cold Dawn, 130-131.} The invasion ultimately ended SALT’s chances for 1968.\footnote{Memo, Warnke to Clifford, 25 January 1969, folder Johnson Administration SALT Position, 1968, Box 77, HAK Office Files, Nixon Library.} Johnson did not give up on SALT; some private discussions continued between Johnson and the Soviet leadership, via secret talks between National Security Adviser Walt Rostow and Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin.\footnote{Johnson peremptorily informed Nixon of his plan to begin SALT whether Nixon would agree or not on 25 November 1968. Kissinger advised Nixon not to respond, believing that Johnson’s effort would peter out on its own (Letter, Johnson to Nixon, 25 November 1968, folder SALT January-May [1969] Volume I [2 of 2], Box 873, NSC Files, Nixon Library).} Johnson also attempted to convene a last-minute meeting of US and Soviet leaders to begin SALT negotiations in December 1968, hoping to tie Nixon’s hands and force the President-elect to move quickly on SALT.\footnote{Johnson peremptorily informed Nixon of his plan to begin SALT whether Nixon would agree or not on 25 November 1968. Kissinger advised Nixon not to respond, believing that Johnson’s effort would peter out on its own (Letter, Johnson to Nixon, 25 November 1968, folder SALT January-May [1969] Volume I [2 of 2], Box 873, NSC Files, Nixon Library).} Nixon’s refusal to support Johnson’s initiative meant that the Soviets were unwilling to accept it, leaving the unfinished
business of SALT to the incoming Nixon Administration.¹¹²

Hal Brands has argued that too many studies of SALT have focused on the Nixon Administration, while not giving sufficient credit to Johnson for winning Soviet acceptance of SALT in the first place.¹¹³ Brands is correct that Johnson deserves significant credit for SALT, though he overstates the extent of Johnson’s SALT breakthrough. Winning Soviet acceptance in principle of SALT was a major step forward. By the end of 1968 a SALT agreement was not a foregone conclusion, and numerous specific points of negotiation remained, both within the US government and between the United States and the Soviet Union. By the fall of 1968, there was good reason to question whether the US government would be able to engage the Soviets in effective arms limitation talks at all.

The Johnson Administration worked out an agreed SALT position in August 1968. The Executive Committee of the NSC Committee of Principals met on 8 July 1968 to begin SALT deliberations. The discussions revealed fairly deep divisions between the Defense Department and ACDA concerning the purpose of arms limitation negotiations, between proponents of the Cambridge and Philadelphia Approaches. ACDA Director William Foster and Deputy Director Adrian Fisher were ready to produce a SALT proposal on the basis of ACDA’s previous studies on strategic stability, which drew heavily on the Cambridge Approach’s assumptions about the purpose of arms limitation. Even at this early stage, Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford and Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Nitze argued that SALT would be used by both sides as a tool to gain “relative advantage” over the other side, indicating a belief that the Philadelphia

¹¹² Newhouse, *Cold Dawn*, 137.
¹¹³ Brands, “Progress Unseen,” 279.
Approach should guide arms limitation policy.\textsuperscript{114} In order to assuage the Defense Department’s concerns, Foster and Fisher intentionally kept a low profile, allowing the Defense Department to take the lead in drafting SALT. They were aided in this effort by Morton Halperin, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (ISA), who was given the task of hammering out an agreed SALT negotiating position that would encompass the views of the major agencies – State, ACDA, Defense, and JCS.\textsuperscript{115} It was an auspicious task for one of the founders of the Cambridge Approach to arms control – Halperin had co-authored *Strategy and Arms Control* with Thomas Schelling. Halperin’s key position within the Defense Department allowed ACDA to reduce its profile while still promoting its own SALT agenda.

Developing an agreed arms control position within the Johnson Administration was no easy task, even for an arms control luminary like Halperin. Defense and JCS were especially concerned that any arms control proposal prevent the Soviets from gaining a military advantage, while leaving open the option for continued US progress on strategic weapons.\textsuperscript{116} There were also divisions over how best to verify that the Soviets were not cheating on the SALT agreement. JCS especially believed that the United States should insist on some form of on-site inspection.\textsuperscript{117} The CIA concluded that remote reconnaissance technologies could almost certainly police a freeze on the number of strategic launchers, and could probably also track the progress of MIRV tests or the testing of radars and interceptors in ABM mode. The CIA also concluded that the Soviets would be able to degrade US verification capabilities through active


\textsuperscript{115} Newhouse, *Cold Dawn*, 114-115.


\textsuperscript{117} Record of Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Committee of Principals, 8 June 1968, *FRUS* 1964-68, Vol. XI, Document 252.
deception efforts, which would reduce the probability of detecting Soviet cheating.\(^{118}\) Having

convinced the Soviets to accept SALT, the Johnson Administration remained divided over

numerous important issues, including the very purpose of the negotiations themselves.

On 7 August 1968, the Executive Committee met to discuss the first draft of Halperin’s

SALT agreement. The draft would freeze all new ICBM, SLBM, and MR/IRBM construction as

of 1 September 1968, while allowing the Soviets to finish those missiles already under

construction. ABM interceptors and radars would be limited to equal numbers, though division

remained over exactly what those numbers should be.\(^{119}\) Halperin’s draft was a major

accomplishment – the Defense Department and ACDA both agreed that it would be an effective

starting point for negotiations.\(^{120}\) JCS was ultimately able to reconcile its differences with the

proposal, though they also attached a long list of conditions governing their acceptance,

including a good-faith effort at securing on-site inspection, ABM levels sufficiently high to

defend against China, assurances that Soviet SAMs would not be upgraded into ABMs, clear

withdrawal provisions should the Soviets cheat, direct Defense/JCS involvement in the tactics of

negotiation, and “unilateral safeguards” (that is, more weapons) to ensure that the United States

could maintain its security should the Soviets cheat.\(^{121}\) Rostow forwarded the agreed SALT

terms to Johnson on 16 August 1968, writing, “I regard the agreement reached – and the collegial

way it was accomplished, on a most difficult issue – as the functioning of the U.S. government at

its best.”\(^{122}\) Halperin’s work on SALT, and his ability to bridge the gap between ACDA and JCS


on the difficult question of arms limitation terms, was a major achievement.

Despite his achievement, Halperin’s SALT agreement had only papered over the continued deep divisions within the government concerning SALT’s purpose. Defense and JCS ultimately signed on to the Halperin SALT proposal because it would provide the United States with an advantage in strategic missiles – the freeze date would allow for approximately equal ICBMs, but head off the nascent Soviet SLBM program, leaving the United States with many more SLBMs in its arsenal. The Soviets were to be compensated for their inferiority in SLBMs with their superiority in theater nuclear weapons in Europe. At the same time, Halperin’s SALT proposal had intentionally avoided specifying the level of allowed ABM deployment, side-stepping a major dispute between ACDA (which preferred a very low level) and Defense (which preferred a very high level). Ultimately, the Administration decided to propose an undefined equal ABM aggregate to the Soviets, simply to see whether they would accept this idea in principle, while avoiding any final decision that would alienate either ACDA or Defense on the level of ABM allowed. Halperin’s deft side-stepping of the ABM issue was a direct predecessor to Nixon and Kissinger’s arms control policy, which would rely heavily on delay to avoid major disruptive decisions.

Because Johnson never presented his Administration’s SALT proposal to the Soviets, we will never know what would have happened in the fall of 1968 had SALT begun. Johnson was walking into an arms control minefield unprepared by his advisers, and his decision not to initiate SALT with the Soviets may have actually avoided a serious arms limitation debacle. Johnson took very little interest in the details of arms limitation, and his Administration allowed

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Halperin to work out his own deal with ACDA and JCS on the terms that the United States would offer to the Soviets. When Johnson was presented with this draft SALT agreement, he was informed of a few outstanding issues on ABM levels, SAM upgrades, and on-site inspections. It does not appear that Johnson was particularly well-informed concerning the deeper divisions within his government over SALT’s ultimate purpose, or the tenuous nature of the ACDA-Defense SALT compromise, which rested uneasily on the premise that the Soviets would accept inferiority in SLBM as part of a SALT bargain.\(^\text{125}\) Johnson’s SALT proposal would almost certainly have been non-negotiable with the Soviets. During the Nixon Administration, the Soviets would totally reject the idea that their theater nuclear forces should be counted in SALT, and in fact insisted that the Soviets themselves deserved an advantage in ICBM and SLBM to offset the United States’ tactical nuclear forces in Europe.\(^\text{126}\) There is no reason to believe that the Soviets would have accepted a SALT agreement codifying US strategic superiority in late 1968.\(^\text{127}\)

Without a quick Soviet assent to the Administration’s carefully-developed SALT terms, Johnson would have faced a sudden and (at least from the President’s perspective) unexpected breakdown of the SALT consensus within his government. Negotiations would no doubt have evolved from there, but Johnson himself was woefully underprepared to manage the disputes over arms limitation that would have ensued. A bad opening to SALT negotiations, compounded by the major fight over ABM coming in 1969, might have fatally harmed SALT’s chances,


\(^{126}\) Memo, Smith to Nixon, 19 August 1970, folder SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol. XII 7/20/70 – Sept, 70 [1 of 1], Box 879, NSC Files, Nixon Library.

\(^{127}\) In fact, there is some evidence that the Soviets were already preparing to reject the US proposal, including a discussion that General Wheeler had with Ambassador Dobrynin on 5 August 1968 (Memorandum for the Record, 5 August 1968, *FRUS* 1964-68, Vol. XI, Document 265).
ending superpower arms limitation negotiations before they had really begun. Although Johnson
deserves credit for winning Soviet acceptance of SALT in principle, making SALT a reality
would depend on the extraordinary efforts of Nixon and Kissinger.
CHAPTER 2 – The Politics of Delay

Nixon had campaigned on both the promise of renewed strategic nuclear superiority, and the promise of securing the peace through serious negotiations with the Soviet Union. Although Nixon himself was determined to engage in arms limitation talks with the Soviets, he and Kissinger quickly ran into deep divisions within the Administration between proponents of the Philadelphia and Cambridge Approaches to arms control. The Administration’s desperate fight to secure funding for its Safeguard ABM program dramatically increased the importance of these differences, as opponents of the Administration’s ABM program sought to exploit divisions within the bureaucracy in order to deny funding for Safeguard. Nixon had real reason to doubt whether his strategic weapons and arms control program would succeed as proponents of both the Cambridge and Philadelphia Approaches began constructing coalitions of like-minded Congressmen, bureaucrats, and public experts to advance their particular strategic programs.

In the face of this fraught political environment, the Nixon initially sought to manage SALT policy by delaying any major decisions for a more propitious time. Delaying the onset of SALT came with its own costs, especially as the Soviets continued to deploy new missiles at a rapid pace. Caught in a maelstrom of different domestic and international pressures, the Nixon Administration developed new techniques for managing differing bureaucratic objectives on SALT. Nixon sought to justify new weapons deployments in terms of “bargaining chips,” tying new strategic weapons deployments directly to the fate of SALT negotiations. At the same time, Nixon and Kissinger sought to redefine deeper political and strategic differences within the government, focusing instead on superficial technical differences, especially in the field of intelligence collection and verification. These patterns of behavior would continue to shape US SALT policy throughout Nixon’s first term.
The Nixon Administration

Nixon would take a much more active interest in arms control than Johnson, but he would also face serious difficulties convincing his Administration to work together on SALT. The White House National Security Council would be headed by Henry Kissinger, a well-known conservative academic who had worked as a national security consultant in previous Administrations.1 Kissinger would rely on a small cadre of conservative proponents of a competitive strategy towards the Soviet Union, especially his military adviser and later deputy General Alexander Haig2 and Kremlinologist Helmut Sonnenfeldt.3 At least initially, Kissinger also received advice from prominent Cambridge Approach proponent Morton Halperin, who provided key advice on formalizing the Nixon Administration’s NSC process, but was quickly marginalized on arms control issues and forced into retirement.4 Kissinger would also employ a series of assistants for in-house arms control analysis, primarily drawn from the Defense Department's Office of Systems Analysis: Lawrence Lynn from 1969 to late 1970; K. Wayne Smith from late 1970 to early 1972; and Philip Odeen from 1972 onwards.5 All three favored a

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2 Hersh, The Price of Power, 55-60.

3 Kissinger and Sonnenfeldt were both German-Jewish refugees from Nazi persecution who met while serving in US Army Intelligence in occupied Germany following the Second World War. Sonnenfeldt’s interest in Soviet influence in German politics led him to a career as a Soviet expert at State INR, prior to his being invited to join Kissinger’s NSC staff (Ferguson, Kissinger, 201, 542).

4 Hersh, The Price of Power, 29.

5 John Newhouse, Cold Dawn: The Story of SALT (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1983), 50; Hersh, The Price of Power, 299, 539. There were a number of individuals within the Nixon Administration named “Smith,” but Gerard Smith and K. Wayne Smith are especially prominent. For the purposes of this account, “Smith” will be reserved for Gerard Smith, who
strong, competitive approach to arms control negotiations.

The NSC staff was expected to mediate the differing viewpoints of the bureaucracy on SALT issues. By early 1969, these views were decidedly mixed. Nixon attempted to head off moderate opposition from the State Department by staffing its leadership with close associates. William Rogers, a successful New York lawyer and former Attorney General under Eisenhower, was appointed Secretary of State.\(^6\) His Undersecretaries, Elliot Richardson (1969-1970) and John Irwin, II (1970-1972) had also held prominent positions in the Eisenhower Administration.\(^7\) None had any real experience on arms control issues, and in practice the State Department’s arms control policy remained in the hands of career State Department experts like Assistant Secretary of State for Political Affairs U. Alexis Johnson and State INR Office Director Frank Perez.\(^8\) Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson, one of the State Department’s most experienced Soviet and arms control experts, would represent the State Department on the US SALT Delegation in 1969 and 1970, before his poor health compelled him to step down.\(^9\) Ambassador Graham “Jeff” Parsons, who had little experience in arms control policy but a great deal of skill played a much larger role in SALT, while “Wayne Smith” will be used in the text for the NSC staff member. Other Smiths will be identified specifically as they are discussed.

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in treaty negotiations more generally, would take Thompson’s place on the Delegation. Another State Department Soviet and arms control expert, Raymond Garthoff, would serve as executive secretary and adviser to the SALT Delegation. Since the State Department’s arms control experts were generally proponents of the Cambridge Approach to arms control, the Department’s stance on SALT remained a problem for Nixon, despite his high-level appointments.

State’s advocacy of the Cambridge Approach to arms control was matched by that of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA). Nixon had appointed Gerard Smith to be the director of ACDA, as well as the head of the US SALT Delegation. Smith had a long background in arms control policy, having served as the head of the State Department Policy Planning Staff in the 1950s on Atoms for Peace, the London Disarmament Conference, Open Skies, and the abortive NATO Multilateral Force. Smith selected Philip Farley, a State Department arms control expert, to be the Deputy Director of ACDA – Smith and Farley had worked together on arms control issues during the Eisenhower Administration. Smith and Farley were supported by a number of arms control experts at ACDA, especially Spurgeon Keeny, a technical adviser on arms control verification issues. Like the State Department, ACDA was thoroughly committed to using arms control as a tool to bolster mutual assured destruction between the superpowers.

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10 Smith, Doubletalk, 43.
13 Smith, Doubletalk, 38.
Nixon also faced numerous proponents of the Philadelphia Approach, concentrated heavily in the Pentagon. Nixon nominated Melvin Laird, Congressman from Wisconsin and senior Republican Congressional leader, to serve as Secretary of Defense. Laird retained strong personal connections to key members of both houses of Congress, which made him a useful ally and a dangerous adversary for Nixon on arms control issues.\footnote{Kissinger, \textit{The White House Years}, 32-33; Richard Hunt, \textit{Melvin Laird and Nixon’s Quest for a Post-Vietnam Foreign Policy, 1969-1973} (Washington, DC: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2014), 1-3, 20.} Laird’s power was increased dramatically by the free hand that Nixon gave him in appointing posts within the Defense Department. Laird selected David Packard, computer scientist and co-owner of Hewlett-Packard, to serve as Deputy Secretary of Defense. Packard’s expertise in precision sensors and computers gave him key insight in ABM technology, perhaps the most politically-charged defense technology issue of the day. Laird also decided to retain a number of key appointments from the Johnson Administration, including Director of Defense Research and Engineering (DDR&E) Dr. John Foster, Jr., a well-known arms control skeptic.\footnote{Dale Van Atta, \textit{With Honor: Melvin Laird in War, Peace, and Politics} (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 126-146; Hunt, \textit{Melvin Laird and Nixon’s Quest for a Post-Vietnam Foreign Policy}, 18-19.} Arms control policy in the Defense Department would also be heavily influenced by the Office of Systems Analysis, headed by Assistant Secretary of Defense Gardiner Tucker, another computer scientist (this time from IBM) with an interest in missile defense.\footnote{Jean Ford Brennan, “The IBM Watson Laboratory at Columbia University, A History,” accessed 29 May 2017, \url{http://www.columbia.edu/cu/computinghistory/brennan/}.} Also important to Defense’s SALT policy were its
SALT Delegates. Laird tapped Paul Nitze to represent Defense officially on the SALT Delegation. Nitze was an experienced Cold Warrior, having served as Director of Policy Planning at the State Department under President Truman, authoring the influential NSC-68 defense planning document, as well as Secretary of the Navy and Deputy Secretary of Defense under President Johnson. Nitze was also a co-founder and fellow of the School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) at Johns Hopkins University, and a founding member of the Committee to Maintain a Prudent Defense Policy (CPD) in the 1950s.\textsuperscript{18} Dr. Harold Brown, former DDR&E, Secretary of the Air Force, and President of the California Institute of Technology, was also asked to serve as a SALT Delegate, due to his expertise on ABM and radar issues.\textsuperscript{19} Although Brown did not officially represent Defense, and did not report to Laird as Nitze did, he nonetheless shared the Defense Department’s general commitment to pursuing a competitive strategies approach to arms control.

The US military also promoted a Philadelphia Approach to SALT, though its direct input on SALT policy was limited primarily to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS). Army General Earle Wheeler, Johnson’s CJCS, had been prepared to retire at the end of 1968, but was persuaded by Nixon to remain for another year during the transition to the new Administration. Wheeler was succeeded by Admiral Thomas Moorer, who had a stronger interest in strategic arms control issues, as well as a greater willingness to engage in bureaucratic political debate.\textsuperscript{20} CJCS was represented on the SALT Delegation by Air Force General Royal Allison, a fighter pilot and staff member who had represented JCS in the Johnson

\textsuperscript{19} Newhouse, \textit{Cold Dawn}, 48-49; Smith, \textit{Doubletalk}, 40.
\textsuperscript{20} Kissinger, \textit{The White House Years}, 34-36.
Administration’s abortive SALT deliberations.\textsuperscript{21} Although all three men had very different approaches to policy planning, they all agreed that arms control negotiations should be used to pursue relative advantage over the Soviets.\textsuperscript{22}

In addition to the major agencies, Nixon also received arms control advice from a number of other important sources. Chief amongst these was Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) Richard Helms, a long-serving US intelligence professional who had served in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) during the Second World War. Nixon intensely distrusted Helms due to his relatively privileged background, but most others in the government admired his competence and professionalism.\textsuperscript{23} Nixon also had access to other expert arms control advice, though for the most part he treated these advisers as hindrances rather than assets. John McCloy, a successful New York lawyer and influential member of the CFR, headed the President’s General Advisory Committee on Arms Control and Disarmament, a group of policy luminaries available to provide specific arms control advice, should Nixon desire it.\textsuperscript{24} Nixon could also draw on the technical expertise of the President’s Science Advisory Committee (PSAC), chaired by physicist Lee Alvin DuBridge, and especially the PSAC Strategic Capabilities Panel, led by

\textsuperscript{21} Newhouse, \textit{Cold Dawn}, 8; Smith, \textit{Doubletalk}, 41.
\textsuperscript{22} Previous observers have noted JCS as an impediment to arms control negotiations; see, for example, William Bundy, \textit{A Tangled Web: The Making of Foreign Policy in the Nixon Presidency} (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 87-96. Few have tried to understand JCS’s perspective on arms control, which embraced certain proposals that would enhance the competitive advantage of the United States.
physicist Sidney Drell. In 1970, DuBridge retired, and electrical engineer Edward David took his place. Although the CIA officially had no opinion on the purpose of arms control policy, the GAC and PSAC were both staunch advocates of the Cambridge Approach to arms control.

Nixon and Kissinger believed that the best way to mediate between these competing views on arms control and other key issues was to ensure that the White House had direct control over the foreign policy process, which would be centralized through the NSC. Kissinger worked with Roger Morris and Morton Halperin to plan out a new NSC system that would establish a clear process by which major foreign policy issues would be deliberated and decided. As National Security Adviser, Kissinger and his staff would begin studying a foreign policy issue by circulating a National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM), which would define the scope of the topic and assign its study to a primary agency. The resulting study would be discussed in a Deputies-level NSC Review Group, chaired by Kissinger, to make sure that each agency’s position was taken into account. The Review Group would forward important issues to the full National Security Council, where Nixon could hear the various advice of the key agencies directly. Once Nixon had made a decision, the NSC staff would draft a National Security Decision Memorandum (NSDM), which would lay out the basic instructions for the

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relevant agencies to execute. The purpose of the system was to place as much decision-making power in the hands of Nixon and Kissinger, while providing a structured process for organized, long-term planning on important foreign policy issues.  

Since its purpose was to curtail the decision-making power of the foreign policy bureaucracy and concentrate it directly in the White House, the new NSC system was not popular with the vast majority of the government. State objected to the dismantling of the Senior Interdepartmental Group (SIG) of the Kennedy-Johnson Years, which had performed a similar function but was run by the State Department. Although Defense would not miss the SIG, its leaders were nonetheless concerned that the new NSC system would cut the Secretary of Defense off from the President, and place too much agenda-setting power in Kissinger’s hands.  

Nixon upheld Kissinger’s plan and ordered the agencies to cooperate with the NSC staff in the new system, but neither State nor Defense were ever truly reconciled to their new, subordinate positions. Nixon would soon discover that a few NSDMs would not be sufficient to manage his Administration’s deep divisions, especially on the issues of strategic weapons procurement and arms control policy.


Delaying SALT?

Despite Nixon’s hawkish campaign rhetoric, there was never much question that the Administration was going to pursue some sort of talks on strategic arms limitation with the Soviet Union. For the incoming Administration, the real question on SALT was one of timing. On 14 January 1969, Kissinger sent Nixon a briefing memo covering key issues in US-Soviet relations. On the issue of arms limitation, Kissinger wrote that SALT was a promising initiative with many good arguments in its favor. Many in the government were hoping for a rapid commencement to SALT, believing that the time was ripe to stem the superpower arms race. Despite this, Kissinger thought that the best course of action would be for the Administration to take its time in considering its SALT options. Taking some time to study SALT options would allow the Administration to consult more closely with its European allies and reassure them that the US was taking their views into account. Kissinger’s views were echoed by some others in the government. On 17 January 1969, General Robert Ginsburgh, an NSC military aide, wrote to Kissinger saying that despite pressure from the Soviets, allies, and US public to begin SALT quickly, the Administration should take its time and consider its options before making any public commitment to SALT.

On the other hand, Nixon was also receiving a good deal of pressure to begin SALT as soon as possible. On 20 January 1969, the day of Nixon’s inauguration, the Soviet Foreign Ministry announced that the Soviet Union was ready for immediate arms limitation talks with the United States. The first days of the Administration were accompanied by numerous front-page

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articles, editorials, and op-ed pieces on Soviet readiness for SALT, urging Nixon to begin negotiations as soon as possible.\textsuperscript{35} Senator Fulbright emphasized the importance of peaceful coexistence and negotiation with the Soviets when the Senate Foreign Relations Committee considered Rogers’ appointment as Secretary of State on 15 January 1969, noting with displeasure some recent statements by Laird that progress on talks with the Soviets might have to wait for improved political circumstances.\textsuperscript{36} The Council on Foreign Relations recommended that Nixon begin SALT immediately, and that the negotiations be accompanied by a unilateral cessation of US MIRV and ABM testing and deployment, to demonstrate seriousness.\textsuperscript{37} The NATO allies were also eager to see arms limitation talks begin between the United States and the Soviets, although they were also concerned that enough time be left to allow full consultation with NATO before the talks began.\textsuperscript{38}

Despite promising in his Inaugural Address to replace superpower confrontation with “an era of negotiation,” Nixon was unwilling to begin arms limitation talks with the Soviets in January of 1969.\textsuperscript{39} Taking the initiative on SALT would have meant relying heavily on the


preparatory work done during the Johnson Administration, something that Nixon was loathe to do.\footnote{Smith, Doubletalk, 22-24; Raymond Garthoff, Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan, Revised Edition (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1994), 146-148.} Nixon’s general disdain for the disorganization of the Johnson Administration made it unlikely that he would choose to rely on any bureaucratic compromise on arms control achieved during the Johnson years.\footnote{Kissinger, The White House Years, 38-48; Newhouse, Cold Dawn, 113.} Johnson’s late-1968 attempt at a lame-duck summit had also poisoned Nixon’s opinion of the previous Administration’s work on SALT.\footnote{Newhouse, Cold Dawn, 134-139.} At the same time, Nixon and Kissinger were both preoccupied with a number of other pressing policy issues, especially reformulating the United States’ policy towards Vietnam.\footnote{William Hyland, Mortal Rivals: Superpower Relations from Nixon to Reagan (New York: Random House, 1987), 38-39.}

The delay in beginning SALT would also allow the Nixon Administration to seek bargaining advantage over the Soviets through “linkage” of progress on SALT to other areas of geopolitical concern. At his first Presidential press conference on 27 January 1969, Nixon explained that the Administration hoped that progress on SALT would be accompanied by progress on other major issues of political conflict. Nixon elaborated on this point in a 4 February 1969 letter to Rogers and Laird, writing,

I believe our decision on when and how to proceed [with arms limitation talks] does not depend exclusively on our review of the purely military and technical issues, although these are of key importance. The decision should also be taken in light of the prevailing political context and, in particular, in light of progress toward stabilizing the explosive Middle East situation, and in light of the Paris talks [on Vietnam]. I believe we should retain the freedom to ensure, to the extent that we have control over it, that the timing of talks with the Soviet Union on strategic weapons is optimal.

As Kissinger wrote in an 18 February 1969 memo, Nixon’s concept of linkage was based in the failed SALT experience of the Johnson Administration during the summer of 1968. Johnson and his advisers had attempted to insulate the upcoming Johnson-Kosygin summit and the commencement of SALT from the growing tensions over the Prague Spring. When the Soviets invaded Czechoslovakia, Johnson had been forced to cancel the summit, much to the detriment

command/control capabilities of US strategic nuclear forces. NSSM 8 was eventually folded into the NSSM 3 strategic forces study (National Security Study Memorandum 8, 21 January 1969, FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXXIV, Document 3). Kissinger recalled being disappointed with the results of the NSSM 8 study, which he had hoped would push the Defense Department to consider nuclear options short of all-out nuclear war (Kissinger, The White House Years, 215).


of the arms limitation process. Kissinger maintained that Nixon’s desire for linkage was therefore not a tactic, but rather a natural recognition of the inability of arms control talks to succeed absent genuine political progress on issues of mutual concern.  

Unsurprisingly, the members of the Administration who wanted to move forward quickly with SALT saw linkage as a simple bargaining ploy, doomed to fail. Llewellyn Thompson, then Ambassador to the Soviet Union, urged Kissinger not to hold off on SALT in the hopes that the Soviets would concede on other political issues, since this would only alienate the Soviets from SALT. At the 6 February 1969 NSC Review Group meeting, acting director of ACDA Adrian Fisher objected that holding off on SALT for linkage purposes risked missing a crucial opportunity to stem the arms race: the Soviets were ready for SALT now, but there was no way to know whether they would still be willing in two or three years’ time. Gerard Smith, the incoming Director of ACDA for the Nixon Administration, agreed that SALT should proceed as quickly as possible, and provided only tepid support for the Administration’s linkage approach.

More importantly, the Soviets responded very negatively to attempts to link SALT to

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48 Smith, Doubletalk, 25-27; Garthoff, Détente and Confrontation, 77-78.  
51 In preparation for the March 1969 meeting of the Eighteen Nation Disarmament Conference (ENDC) in Geneva, Nixon instructed Smith to avoid discussing specifics of SALT, and instead tell the Soviets that the US was ready to begin whenever the political circumstances were viable (Letter, Nixon to Smith, 15 March 1969, FRUS 1969-76, Vol. I, Document 16), instructions which emphasized the importance of linking SALT to progress on other political issues. In Geneva, Smith’s comments to the Soviet representative Alexei Roshchin instead expressed hope that SALT would be able to begin soon, and that it “need not be tied, in some sort of package formula, to the settlement of specific international problems” (Kissinger, The White House Years, 135-136). A “package formula” may not have been what Nixon had in mind for linkage, but the emphasis of Smith’s comments on SALT progress was definitely at odds with the message that Nixon had hoped to send.
broader political issues.\textsuperscript{52} Kissinger raised the idea of linking progress on negotiating SALT to Vietnam and the Middle East in his 18 December 1968 meeting with Soviet Embassy counselor Boris Sedov, and reiterated this request on 2 January 1969.\textsuperscript{53} The Soviets saw linkage as a crude attempt by Nixon to gain leverage, and pushed back hard. At a 29 January 1969 lunch meeting, Soviet charge d’affairs Yuri Tcherniakov told White House assistant Robert Ellsworth that the Soviets resented US attempts to “blackmail” the Soviets on SALT.\textsuperscript{54} Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin was more polite when he met with Nixon for the first time on 17 February 1969, but also expressed Soviet concern and skepticism about the Administration’s handling of SALT linkage.\textsuperscript{55} Linkage would go nowhere if the Soviets were unwilling to play the game.

While delaying SALT did not help Nixon and Kissinger’s linkage policy, it did have one other, likely unintended, benefit: it prevented a major fight over differing SALT objectives early in Nixon’s term. The NSSM 3 study on strategic forces provided an easy excuse for putting off any systematic discussion of US objectives in SALT, since arms limitation would depend on the broader military objectives of US foreign policy, which NSSM 3 was meant to determine. This delayed a confrontation between proponents of the Cambridge and Philadelphia Approaches within the government.

\textsuperscript{52} Anatoly Dobrynin, \textit{In Confidence: Moscow’s Ambassador to America’s Six Cold War Presidents (1962-1986)} (New York: Random House, 1995), 201-202.
\textsuperscript{55} \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Editorial Note 4. Dobrynin’s objections to linkage were more forcefully stated in his 13 March 1969 meeting with Rogers, where he repeated the Soviets’ rejection of creating artificial connections between unrelated issues for the purpose of gaining bargaining leverage (Garthoff, \textit{Détente and Confrontation}, 148-150). Dobrynin’s criticism of Nixon’s linkage policy was more aggressive in the Soviet press (Memcon, Volkov & Bowden, 13 June 1969, Political and Defense, DEF 18-6 4/1/69 to DEF 18-6 7/1/69, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, RG59, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD (hereafter NARA)).
In the Administration’s first few months, a superficial agreement on generic arms control objectives concealed the depth of division over SALT objectives between the Philadelphia and Cambridge Approaches. One example was the September 1968 study convened by DDR&E to consider possible objectives for SALT. The Panel’s membership had included a wide spectrum of viewpoints, including hawks Albert Latter and Herman Kahn, moderate Thomas Schelling, and dove Jack Ruina. The panel’s conclusions were non-controversial: SALT could serve to reduce the probability of war by enhancing deterrence, limiting the scope of violence should war occur, and reducing the costs of the arms race, while also helping ease international tensions and reduce complexity in strategic calculations.\textsuperscript{56} An NSC Staff briefing paper prepared for a meeting on 14 February 1969 similarly described major objectives in SALT to include reducing uncertainty, gaining information about Soviet views, and spending marginally less on strategic programs.\textsuperscript{57} These long lists of SALT objectives seemed to indicate a broad consensus on what the United States hoped to achieve in arms limitation talks with the Soviets. The Nixon Administration’s early SALT objectives were as vague as they were broad. If the primary objective of SALT was to decrease the chances of war by structuring US and Soviet strategic forces to improve the stability of deterrence, then the next logical question was: what sort of force structure would actually improve deterrence stability. On this point, the seeming consensus on SALT rapidly began to break down.

The Cambridge Approach insisted that SALT should seek stable deterrence through solidifying mutual assured destruction between the superpowers. The September 1968 DDR&E

study on SALT objectives had concluded that strategic stability could be enhanced by constraining damage-limiting capabilities like MIR’ed ICBMs and ABM for population defense, while allowing force protection measures like silo-hardening and ABM for point defense of ICBM silos. This would allow each side to annihilate the other in an unavoidable retaliatory blow if war came, strengthening incentives to avoid war in the first place. Gerard Smith advocated the assured destruction objective for SALT. Smith hoped to begin SALT quickly using the Johnson Administration’s SALT planning, which had sought not only seek to improve mutual deterrence, but also prevent the pursuit of any military advantage on either side. Restrictions on dangerous first-strike forces would improve the security of both the United States and the Soviet Union.

The military, especially, preferred the Philadelphia Approach, which claimed that SALT should be used not to avoid military advantage, but to seek it actively. Unlike Smith, Chief of Naval Operations Thomas Moorer believed that President Nixon should consider the relative

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58 Memo, Foster to Kissinger, 12 February 1969, folder SALT January-May [1969] Volume I [2 of 2], Box 873, NSC Files, Nixon Library. Although this study was commissioned by DDR&E, these conclusions were far from DDR&E’s actual preferences on SALT, which tended much more towards a competitive strategies mindset.

59 Memo, Haig to Kissinger, 22 February 1969, folder SALT January-May [1969] Volume I [2 of 2], Box 873, NSC Files, Nixon Library. Smith believed that the SALT material from the Johnson Administration could be made to work with only minor modifications. Nixon’s decision to initiate NSSM 28 superseded any previous work by the Johnson Administration, leaving this initiative dead.

60 Smith maintained this position in his memoirs, recalling that the major reason for SALT was that the militaries on both sides realized that there was no further advantage to be gained in building more weapons, that assured destruction was the new paradigm, and that SALT was intended to bolster assured destruction (Smith, *Doubletalk*, 24-25, 27-29). Given that the Joint Chiefs generally embraced the competitive strategies approach to arms control, Smith’s understanding of the Administration’s motives in SALT must be significantly modified. For his part, Kissinger recalls his own skepticism of assured destruction, which he believed to be the “most inhumane strategy for conducting a war,” and lacking credibility in a real crisis (Kissinger, *The White House Years*, 215-218). Kissinger fails to lay out the competitive logic that he often employed in evaluating SALT proposals.
strengths and weaknesses of the United States and the Soviet Union when considering what sort of SALT agreement would be best. Unsurprisingly, as CNO Moorer believed that the United States’ greatest advantages lay in its sea-based strategic weapons. Moorer argued that the United States should not try to limit SLBM in SALT, because the United States enjoyed a significant advantage in submarine and anti-submarine technology. Similarly, Moorer believed that any ABM agreement should allow sea-mobile ABM but not land-mobile ABM, because the Soviet Union’s larger land mass gave it a major advantage in land-mobile systems. Moorer sought to use arms control as a tool for sustaining and enhancing US strategic advantages over the Soviet Union. Moorer believed that exploiting US advantages in sea basing was the best way to strengthen deterrence – US deterrence of Soviet aggression.61

The Philadelphia Approach also had strong backers in the White House, where it was expressed through appeals to the purported lessons of the Cuban Missile Crisis. During that crisis, the United States had supposedly prevailed because it had enjoyed (and was perceived to enjoy) a competitive advantage over the Soviet Union in terms of nuclear weapons. The value of strategic nuclear advantage was therefore not simply military, but rather deeply enmeshed in the politics and psychology of US foreign relations. One highly-polemical White House memo linked the alleged loss of US nuclear superiority in the 1960s with the rise of attacks on US embassies around the world, leading to the North Korean attack on the Pueblo.62 The geopolitical stakes were believed to be larger than the Pueblo. Soviet nuclear parity threatened US guarantees of extended deterrence, which in turn threatened the very foundation of NATO and

European security. Admiral Elmo Zumwalt predicted that the emergence of Soviet nuclear parity would cause a fundamental shift in European politics in the Soviet Union’s favor, foreseeing “Finland becoming a Latvia, Sweden becoming a Finland, and Norway, within the next five years, becoming a Sweden.” Nixon himself believed that the Cuban Missile Crisis was an excellent example of the political and psychological importance of nuclear advantage. In a future confrontation, Nixon wondered whether a US President, facing an equal or superior Soviet arsenal, would be able to prevail as Kennedy had in a game of nerves. Even if the era of US nuclear superiority was over, many in the Administration still believed that marginal advantages in strategic nuclear forces had important political and diplomatic consequences.

In the first months of the Nixon Administration, the new NSC system provided few opportunities for these competing schools of arms control to speak to each other. John Foster forwarded the September 1968 DDR&E study was forwarded directly to Kissinger. Similarly, Smith’s attempt to revive the Johnson-era SALT objectives document went to Kissinger’s office. Moorer intended his initial thoughts on SALT for Presidential consideration. By delaying the commencement of SALT for study and linkage, Nixon and Kissinger had headed off any significant interdepartmental consideration of SALT’s objectives, which might have raised these difficult questions in the Administration’s first months. This did not stop the press

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63 Kissinger, *The White House Years*, 81-86.
from speculating that deep divisions on strategy existed within the Administration, but at least for the first few months there was little evidence for the rumors.\footnote{Memo, Haldeman to Kissinger, 24 January 1969, folder SALT January-May [1969] Volume I [2 of 2], Box 873, NSC Files, Nixon Library.}

portion of NSSM 3 might be accelerated in order to begin SALT deliberations more quickly. Kissinger remained adamant that delay remained the best option for linkage, but given the agreement between State and Defense on moving forward with SALT Kissinger requested that the Defense Department prepare a paper on the consequences for the military balance of delaying SALT by six months, to help the President decide whether delay was appropriate.70

The threat of uncontrolled Soviet missile deployments was effectively conveyed to President Nixon at the briefing of the NSC by the Joint Strategic Target Planning (JSTP) Staff on 12 February 1969. The JSTP presentation showed Soviet strategic forces catching up and surpassing the United States in payload and missile numbers. The presentation concluded that while the United States enjoyed a secure second-strike force for the time being, its ability to limit damage from a Soviet nuclear attack had been seriously compromised by the continued Soviet deployment of massive ICBMs like the SS-9, and the upcoming large-scale production of the Soviet Yankee-type SSBN. Nixon commented that the JSTP briefing was “astounding,” and wondered how the United States could have fallen behind the Soviets so quickly.71

JSTP’s briefing on the current balance was further reinforced when the Defense Department completed its paper on the military consequences of a six-month delay in opening SALT. The paper concluded that the rapid increase in Soviet offensive forces meant that it was important to begin SALT as quickly as possible, to cut off Soviet SS-9 deployments, and to prevent the Soviets from deploying even more dangerous technologies like land-mobile ICBMs

and MIRV.\textsuperscript{72} The paper specifically couched the beginning of SALT in terms of relative US-Soviet advantage; because the US was not deploying any major strategic offensive systems, beginning SALT sooner was clearly to the advantage of the United States.

As a result, the 14 February 1969 NSC meeting focused almost exclusively on Nixon’s concern about the Soviet threat. Packard and Laird emphasized the importance of defending the United States’ advantage in advanced technologies, retaining funding for strategic weapons R&D and deploying some sort of ABM system to remain competitive with the Soviets. Nixon remained in crisis-mode, worrying about how the United States would deal with a future Sputnik-like Soviet technological breakthrough, or a political confrontation on the scale of the Cuban Missile Crisis. The meeting concluded with Nixon ordering Packard to speed up the strategic portion of the NSSM 3 memo, and telling Rogers that the Administration should be ready for SALT within the next three months. In the meantime, Nixon hoped to continue pressing the Soviets on linkage.\textsuperscript{73} Given the speed of the Soviet arms buildup, it was clear that delaying SALT would neither stabilize assured destruction, nor work to the competitive advantage of the United States. Moving forward more quickly thus received broad support from both the Cambridge and Philadelphia Approaches.

Due to Nixon’s sudden about-face, the Nixon Administration went from delaying consideration of SALT to accelerating it in the span of two months. On 6 March 1969, the White House issued NSSM 28, ordering the creation of a SALT Steering Committee to prepare SALT options for Presidential consideration \textit{concurrent with} the ongoing NSSM 3 study, to be


completed by May 1969.\textsuperscript{74} The SALT Steering Group, chaired by Gerard Smith, convened for the first time on 19 March 1969 to begin its work.\textsuperscript{75} After a brief delay, the Administration’s SALT program was underway.

\textbf{Safeguard and SALT}

Even as the Administration was taking up SALT, it was also beginning consideration of another central national security issue: the deployment of an anti-ballistic missile (ABM) system. Nixon had inherited the controversial ABM issue from the Johnson Administration. Secretary of Defense McNamara announced the Johnson Administration’s intention to build Sentinel on 18 September 1967, to provide a “thin” area defense against a small Chinese or Soviet attack.\textsuperscript{76} The Sentinel program provoked a tremendous public backlash. The incipient anti-ABM coalition drew on several different sources of support. First, Sentinel faced opposition from prominent US scientists, many of whom had become convinced that anti-ballistic missile defenses would destabilize US-Soviet relations by compelling each side to deploy more offensive forces to defeat the defenses of the other side, undermining assured destruction.\textsuperscript{77} Scientific opposition to Sentinel ABM was most famously stated in the March 1968 \textit{Scientific American} article by physicists Hans Bethe and Richard Garwin, who argued that ABM was dangerously

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destabilizing, technically unsound, and needlessly expensive.\textsuperscript{78} The scientists were joined by a growing grassroots movement against ABM in urban areas in New England and the Pacific Northwest, where initial Sentinel deployments were to take place. The deployment of nuclear-armed missile interceptors provoked opposition out of concerns for everyday safety and fears that interceptor sites would make neighborhoods targets of Soviet attack.\textsuperscript{79} Scientific and public resistance to Sentinel found allies in Congress. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee became a locus of anti-ABM sentiment, with Senators William Fulbright, John Sherman Cooper, and Philip Hart taking the lead in questioning the Administration’s rationales for Sentinel.\textsuperscript{80}

Controversy surrounding Sentinel spilled over into the 1968 election, where it became a campaign issue for Nixon. Although Sentinel ABM had many enemies, it also had powerful backers in the US conservative movement.\textsuperscript{81} Sentinel proponents also included influential conservative Senators Henry Jackson, John Tower, and Strom Thurmond. In 1968, Nixon needed the support of conservative leaders in order to solidify his primary victory and to prevail over Hubert Humphrey in the general election. Nixon ran on a platform of reinvigorating US strategic forces, including and especially the deployment of a national ABM system.\textsuperscript{82} Once in office, in deference to Senatorial opponents of Sentinel, the Administration agreed to defer

preparatory work on Sentinel until it had conducted a thorough review of its ABM options.\textsuperscript{83}

The debate about ABM deployment touched not just on strategic policy, but also on deeper questions of the future of US foreign policy. The Vietnam War had caused many Americans to question whether US foreign policy had become overly-militarized. The questions raised by Vietnam were compounded by ongoing domestic political turmoil on civil rights, gender roles, and economic opportunity. In this environment, the question of whether to deploy a multi-billion-dollar ABM system became a political symbol whose meaning extended far beyond the system’s strategic utility in superpower relations. Opponents of ABM characterized it as a wasteful boondoggle that would further the militarized quagmire of US foreign policy while diverting important resources from solving key economic and social problems at home.\textsuperscript{84}

The broader political divisions about the desirability of ABM were mirrored within the Nixon Administration itself. Sentinel’s role in national security and arms control policy was taken up at the 19 February 1969 NSC meeting. Laird and Packard outlined the Defense Department’s evolving thoughts on ABM. Both had concluded that a thick area defense against a large Soviet attack was technically infeasible for the time being. Instead, Defense favored a modified Sentinel deployment could be tailored to defend increasingly vulnerable US ICBMs and bombers, rather than to provide an area defense of US cities. An ABM system oriented to defend US strategic forces would be more militarily useful, deterring a Soviet first strike against


these forces. It would also be less provocative to the Soviets, since it would not threaten the
ability of their retaliatory forces to strike US cities in the event of war.\textsuperscript{85} Nixon supported the
idea of a limited modified Sentinel deployment, which he hoped would head off domestic
opposition to ABM by demonstrating the Administration’s seriousness and restraint.\textsuperscript{86}

Discussion then turned to modified Sentinel’s impact on SALT. Smith said that he did
not believe Sentinel ABM was necessary for the United States to have successful arms limitation
talks with the Soviets. Instead, Smith believed that delaying ABM construction was the best way
to signal US seriousness on SALT to the Soviets. Laird disagreed, saying that the best ABM
policy for SALT was to begin deploying ABM as soon as possible and refuse to state an upper
limit on deployment, maximizing the Soviet incentive to make serious concessions in order to
halt US ABM deployment. For his part, Nixon said that military capabilities could not be
publicly justified as “bargaining chips,” since this would undermine the bargaining leverage that
the US would gain from them; for a weapons system to have any bargaining worth in arms
limitation, the Soviets had to believe that the United States was pursuing the weapons for their
own merits.\textsuperscript{87} In the meantime, Nixon headed off further conflict between his advisers by saying
that he hoped to keep both his SALT and ABM options open for the time being.\textsuperscript{88} A few days
later, Kissinger issued NSSM 23, ordering the Defense Department to prepare a paper with more

XXXII, Document 5; Hunt, \textit{Melvin Laird and Nixon’s Quest for a Post-Vietnam Foreign Policy,
XXXIV, Document 8.
XXXIV, Document 8.
XXXII, Document 5.
explicit ABM options for NSC consideration.\textsuperscript{89}

With hindsight, the 19 February 1969 meeting provided a window into the competing views on ABM and SALT lying just below the surface. Smith’s desire to avoid a major ABM deployment stemmed from his ultimate objective of using arms limitation talks to stabilize mutual assured destruction between the superpowers, per the Cambridge Approach. From this perspective, ABM had a double disadvantage: it threatened strategic stability, and it threatened to alienate the Soviets from arms limitation talks. On the other hand, Laird’s advocacy of moving forward with ABM stemmed from his ultimate objective of using arms limitation talks to gain advantage over the Soviet Union, per the Philadelphia Approach. From this perspective, ABM had a double advantage: it could strengthen the US deterrent in the face of the growing Soviet threat, and it would provide the US with leverage to extract further concessions from the Soviets during negotiations, improving the United States’ relative position. As a result, Smith argued that ABM would not be effective for bargaining, while Laird said that it would.

When Laird and Smith disagreed over the deeper purpose of ABM deployments in SALT, Nixon employed a tactic that would become central to his management of the Administration’s SALT process: he delayed. When serious differences between agencies threatened to spill out into the open, Nixon and Kissinger would often end a meeting abruptly with the injunction to keep future options open. By delaying major decisions, Nixon could avoid having to alienate either the proponents of the Cambridge or the Philadelphia Approach, each of whom could project their hopes and fears onto future policy that had not yet been set in stone. Nixon was famously introverted, and avoided personal confrontation whenever possible, which

probably contributed to his desire to avoid a major confrontation with either Laird or Smith on the purpose of ABM and SALT. 90 Whatever Nixon’s personal motives, the delay of controversial decisions on arms limitation policy allowed Nixon to manage the disputes between proponents of differing arms control concepts within his Administration.

One subtle manifestation of Nixon’s politics of delay was the growing importance of “bargaining chips” to the Administration’s SALT policy. Although ostensibly a technique to manage negotiations with the Soviets, the idea that weapons could be procured for bargaining purposes was also an important tool in for forging bureaucratic consensus between competing camps within the Administration. The supposed need for weapons systems as bargaining chips in SALT meant that even those who doubted the utility of new weapons might support them publicly. If weapons *did* provide bargaining leverage and SALT were successful, then the Administration would be able to dismantle them before they became too expensive or dangerous, and the net outcome would be a significant win for assured destruction and the Cambridge Approach. In the meantime, Philadelphia Approach proponents would get the weapons they wanted, with the support of their peers. Bargaining chips were a two-way street. Proponents of the Cambridge Approach would only support new bargaining chips if they believed that they would get their desired arms control policy in the end. As a result, the pursuit of bargaining chips meant that proponents of the Philadelphia Approach had an even stronger incentive to support the Cambridge Approach to arms control, at least in public, since the only way to justify new weapons for bargaining purposes was to make a good-faith effort at negotiating an arms limitation agreement along the Cambridge lines. In this way, Nixon and Kissinger were able to

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turn uncertainty about the future outcome of SALT into political capital in the present. While hard decisions about which systems to retain and which to dismantle might still lie in the future, for the time being the Administration was able to agree on certain weapons programs, provided that it also agreed on certain SALT initiatives.

No weapons program challenged the Nixon Administration’s ability to formulate a coherent policy quite like anti-ballistic missiles. Competing views on ABM within the national security bureaucracy were difficult enough to manage, but became a serious threat when combined with scrutiny from Congress and the press. Given the differences within the bureaucracy, the Administration struggled to present a coherent public rationale for its ABM decisions. The New York Times drew attention to this difficulty in a 21 February 1969 piece that compared testimony by Rogers and Laird before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Rogers had testified that he felt the United States should avoid ABM deployment until the Administration had a better idea of how SALT would play out with the Soviets (Nixon’s clear interest in ABM notwithstanding). For his part, Laird had said that the United States should begin deploying ABM immediately, given the magnitude of the Soviet threat. Sheer awkwardness aside, this sort of public division also threatened to embolden Senatorial opposition to any ABM program, which by late February had gained a significant number of adherents. On 1 March 1969, Laird forwarded Kissinger the Defense Department’s response to NSSM 23, covering various ABM options available to the Administration. The paper

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92 John Finney reported on 25 February 1969 that approximately 53 Senators were likely to oppose funding for an ABM deployment, and predicted that moving forward with Sentinel ABM would result in the Administration’s “first major political defeat in the Senate,” based on anonymous comments by Defense officials and Senate aids (Finney, “Foes of Sentinel in Senate Claim Majority Against It,” The New York Times, 25 February 1969, 1).
recommended that Nixon order a modified Sentinel ABM system whose first phase of deployments would defend US ICBMs and command facilities from Soviet attack, while later phases of deployments would expand to defend US cities against a small attack by Chinese ICBMs. The Defense Department’s recommended ABM plan became known as the “Safeguard” ABM system. The plan leaked almost immediately, with a front-page *New York Times* story the very next day announcing that Laird was backing a new ABM system that would be aimed primarily at defending US ICBMs. In any event, Defense’s recommendation for Safeguard ABM was close to Nixon’s own thoughts on the subject. On the day that the paper was submitted, Nixon was meeting with French President Charles DeGaulle in Paris, and discussing his hopes for an ABM system that would begin by defending US missile sites.

Most of the NSC meeting on 5 March 1969 was taken up by a long presentation by Packard of the four ABM rationales, and the Defense Department’s support of the Safeguard option. Laird emphasized Packard’s conclusions, arguing that the defense of the deterrent from Soviet attack was the more pressing concern. Laird also stressed the importance of the anti-China rationale, since Safeguard’s defense of US ICBMs would rely on deployment of the entire area defense system. Another topic of discussion was whether Nixon had ruled out seeking a thick area defense system; for the time being, Nixon preferred to end the meeting while keep his

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94 In fact, the Administration referred to this ABM program as “modified Sentinel” up until Nixon’s announcement of the system; shortly after the announcement, Buchanan began working on a new name for the system (Memo, Buchanan to Nixon, 14 March 1969, *FRUS* 1969-76, Vol. XXXIV, Document 24). To avoid confusion, I will generally refer to “modified Sentinel” as “Safeguard” from this point forward.
The Defense Department’s presentation of Safeguard rationales emphasized the technical and military advantages of the system, but little time was left to discuss its political ramifications. Despite this, the Defense Department set to work developing a specific program for how to fund Safeguard. Nixon made his final decision to move forward with Safeguard on the evening of 11 March 1969. In *The White House Years*, Kissinger recalled that Nixon chose to move forward with ABM in 1969 for two reasons: first, to gain leverage in SALT; and second, to defend Americans from an accidental attack or a small attack by a third party. Nixon himself remembered worrying primarily about the Soviet threat to the United States, though he also remembered thinking that ABM would be a valuable bargaining chip in SALT. The documentation surrounding Safeguard in 1969 seems to bear out this mixed-motive account of Safeguard’s origins.

Public criticism of Safeguard began before the new ABM program was even announced. A leak of the Safeguard plan provided opponents with enough information to begin: Safeguard was designed primarily to defend Minuteman ICBMs from Soviet attack, using components

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derived from the older Sentinel system.\textsuperscript{102} By 10 March 1969, White House adviser Bryce Harlow predicted that getting the Senate to approve Safeguard would require “maximum effort.” If the Senate voted the next day, Harlow predicted that Safeguard would lose 58-42. Although he believed Safeguard possible, Harlow predicted that it would be a tough fight.\textsuperscript{103} The next day, Moynihan sent Nixon a memo warning that moving forward with ABM would tie Nixon to the “military-industrial complex” in the public’s eye and derail Nixon’s domestic agenda.\textsuperscript{104}

Congress entered the fray directly on 11 March 1969, when the Senate Subcommittee on Disarmament began hearings on ABM policy. George Kistiakowsky, Herbert York, and James Killian, three prominent defense technology experts, testified that an ABM system based on Sentinel components was a bad idea. Any system based on Sentinel would be defeated by even the most basic enemy countermeasures. Furthermore, ABM would spur the Soviets to deploy more offensive weapons of their own. Instead, the United States should hold off on any major ABM deployments to signal US seriousness on SALT.\textsuperscript{105} Two days later, Soviet experts Marshal Shulman and Allen Whiting provided similar testimony,\textsuperscript{106} followed by economist Karl Kaysen.

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\textsuperscript{103} Memo, Harlow to Nixon, 10 March 1969, folder ABM – Memoranda [March 1969] [2 of 2], Box 843, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
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on 13 March. Haldeman wrote in his diary that the Administration was facing a serious crisis over ABM.

On the morning of 14 March 1969, Nixon met with the bipartisan Congressional leadership to announce his decision to seek funding for Safeguard ABM. In his presentation, Nixon said that he had considered all possible ABM options, and ultimately settled on Safeguard as a proportional response to the Soviet and Chinese threat. Unlike Sentinel, Safeguard would be deployed in phases, with an annual review based on new technical developments, the evolution of the threat to the United States, and the progress of US diplomacy, especially arms limitation talks. Safeguard would not be provocative to the Soviets, because while it would provide some defense of Minuteman, it would still leave US cities vulnerable to Soviet attacks. Instead, Safeguard would secure the US deterrent while helping to curb the arms race. Nixon’s meeting with the Congressional leadership was followed by a press conference where the President announced his Safeguard plan to the public.

The Administration followed up the Safeguard announcement with a public relations offensive to win support for the program, led by the Defense Department. Laird and Packard

107 “Statement of Carl Kaysen for the Subcommittee on Disarmament Senate Foreign Relations Committee – Thursday, March 13, 1969,” folder ABM-System Vol. II [Mar 1969], Box 840, NSC Files, Nixon Library. In The White House Years, Kissinger recalls that opponents of ABM were too trusting of the Soviets (Kissinger, The White House Years, 198-207). In fact, opposition to ABM had less to do with assessments of Soviet motives, than with the belief that under conditions of mutual assured destruction, neither side would be able to threaten the other, whatever its motives.
emphasized the Soviet threat in their testimony on Safeguard, especially the large Soviet SS-9 ICBM and the threat it posed to US ICBMs. The press at first responded positively to this testimony, with headlines emphasizing the Soviet threat. ABM opponents quickly pushed back, accusing the Defense Department of inflating the Soviet threat and undermining the President’s original Safeguard rationale. While Nixon had introduced Safeguard as a measured response to an evolving strategic environment, Laird was now defending Safeguard as a last-ditch effort to hold off an overwhelming Soviet threat. Safeguard opponents also shifted their technical criticism from the specific components of the Safeguard system to the Defense Department’s methodology for estimating the Soviet threat, introducing further expert testimony that Soviet strategic forces were not as dangerous as Laird claimed. The Defense Department responded by trying to build its own pro-Safeguard interest groups in Congress, the press, and the scientific community. The public debate over Safeguard quickly escalated beyond the


In the Safeguard debate, the Administration’s greatest liability was the increasingly-apparent divisions within the bureaucracy over the desirability of Safeguard. In their testimony, Laird and Packard emphasized the danger of the Soviet Union’s growing strategic forces, and the need for Safeguard to defend the US deterrent against a Soviet disarming attack. In his 27 March 1969 testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Rogers said that if the Soviets proposed a zero ABM option in SALT that the Administration would be happy to accept it, and that if the Soviets were willing to dismantle their Moscow ABM system, then the United States would stop all work on Safeguard. After his testimony, Rogers told Smith that he did not believe he had said anything very different from what Laird had been saying, only in a more hopeful tone. This did not stop Time from running an article on 4 April 1969 contrasting Administration…” 17 April 1969, folder ABM – General (2) April-June 1969, Box A51, Laird Papers, Ford Library; Teller, “Statement on the Ballistic Missile Defense,” 21 April 1969, folder Sentinel ABM System Vol. II 4/1/69 – 5/31 69 [1 of 2], Box 844, NSC Files, Nixon Library; “Statement of Albert Wohlstetter, University of Chicago, The Role of ABM in the 1970’s,” 23 April 1969, folder Sentinel ABM System Vol. II 4/1/69 – 5/31 69 [1 of 2], Box 844, NSC Files, Nixon Library; Memo, BeLieu to Nixon, 14 April 1969, folder Sentinel ABM System Vol. II 4/1/69 – 5/31/69 [2 of 2], Box 844, NSC Files, Nixon Library. 117 In The White House Years, Kissinger argued that opponents of ABM and MIRV misunderstood the nature of the strategic competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. Abandoning progress on ABM and MIRV while the Soviets were building 200 or 300 missiles per year would not cause the Soviets to enter talks, but would rather cause them to delay beginning SALT, “to tilt the balance as much in their favor as possible while we paralyzed ourselves.” Ongoing MIRV and ABM programs were essential to getting SALT started (Kissinger, The White House Years, 212). 118 FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Editorial Note 6; “Statement by Deputy Secretary of Defense Packard before the Committee on Armed Services…” 20 March 1969, folder ABM – David Packard Testimony, 1969, Box A50, Laird Papers, Ford Library; “Statement by Deputy Secretary of Defense David Packard Before the Subcommittee on International Organization and Disarmament Affairs…” 24 March 1969, folder ABM – David Packard Testimony, 1969, Box A50, Laird Papers, Ford Library. 119 Kissinger was much more critical of Rogers’ performance (FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Editorial Note 6).
Laird’s insistence that Safeguard was necessary with Rogers’ admission that the United States was willing to give up ABM if the Soviets would. Rogers’ testimony suggested that Safeguard was only loosely tied to the Soviet ICBM threat, and that the United States might consider suspending Safeguard deployment even if the Soviets continued building and improving their ICBMs.\textsuperscript{120} Rogers’ testimony reflected his own personal ambivalence towards the system in a way that emboldened Safeguard’s opponents. 

In a 14 April 1969 memo, Nixon chastised Rogers, Laird, and Kissinger, saying that public opposition to the Administration’s policies on Vietnam and Safeguard was being fed by the disarray within the Administration itself. Nixon believed that it was important to move away from overly-technical arguments and instead emphasize the bigger-picture issues: Safeguard was necessary to prevent the Soviet Union from achieving strategic superiority, and it was desirable for bargaining in arms control because the Soviets had an ABM system of their own. While Nixon recognized that there were differences of opinion between State and Defense on ABM, Nixon could not tolerate any public displays of division.\textsuperscript{121} Despite Nixon’s admonition, the Administration’s public divisions on national security policy were only beginning. 

The SALT-ABM-MIRV Pileup

The Administration’s difficulties with Safeguard were compounded by ongoing debates about MIRV and SALT. The NSSM 28 SALT Steering Committee met for the first time on 19 March 1969, chaired by Smith, to discuss an options paper prepared by ACDA.\textsuperscript{122} The paper listed a number of objectives for SALT, including improving US deterrence capability, limiting

\textsuperscript{121} \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXIV, Editorial Note 25.
the chances of war, and limiting the damage the US would take from a Soviet attack, as well as
the possible reactions of the Soviets, allies, and the US public to an agreement. It also
considered a number of possible agreements, including force reductions, comprehensive freezes
of all strategic weapons, or limited restrictions that would still allow ABM and MIRV. The
meeting established working groups to examine specific issues in detail.

NSSM 28 ran into some difficulty over the question of Multiple Independently-Targeted
Reentry Vehicles (MIRV). By late April, Smith was becoming concerned that US progress on
MIRV testing and deployment might reach a point at which rolling back MIRV deployment
would no longer be a viable option. If this occurred, then MIRV would be excluded from a
SALT agreement. To keep the possibility of controlling MIRV alive, Smith suggested that the
Administration defer further testing and deployment of MIRV for the time being, at least until
the United States had discussed MIRV with the Soviets in SALT. Smith hoped to discuss the
MIRV deferral issue in the NSSM 28 Working Group, as a precursor to an NSC meeting on the
subject. General Wheeler strongly opposed deferring MIRV testing, and did not want the issue
discussed as part of NSSM 28. Sonnenfeldt, the NSC Staff representative on the Steering Group,
worried that a special high-priority discussion of delaying MIRV would prejudice the group
against SALT options that included MIRV. Furthermore, if the US delayed MIRV testing and
then discovered that the Soviets did not want a MIRV ban in SALT, then the Administration
might be forced to resume MIRV testing during or immediately after the first round of SALT,

123 “Possible Alternative Options for Strategic Arms Control,” folder NSSM-28 2 of 2 [1 of 3],
Box H-140, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
XXXII, Document 14, fn1.
which would be a public relations nightmare.\textsuperscript{125}

Smith’s proposal for delaying MIRV testing would have had little resonance in the White House, were it not for events transpiring outside of the government. On 16 April 1969, Senator Brooke sent Nixon a letter offering to support the Administration’s Safeguard ABM for the coming year if Nixon would support Brooke’s Senate resolution for a unilateral moratorium on MIRV testing.\textsuperscript{126} Nixon opted not to reply directly; instead, Sonnenfeldt and Lynn briefed Brooke’s staff on reasons for continuing MIRV testing.\textsuperscript{127} The presentation was unconvincing, since Brooke made his moratorium proposal public the following week.\textsuperscript{128} Brooke’s moratorium campaign meant that Smith’s otherwise inoffensive proposal for delaying MIRV became a ticking political time bomb. Opponents like Brooke would be strengthened by the news that a MIRV testing moratorium was receiving consideration at high levels in the government.\textsuperscript{129} Worried that Smith would provoke a major MIRV dispute, Kissinger opted to send the question of MIRV testing to the NSSM 3 Working Group instead, no doubt hoping that Packard would quash the issue.\textsuperscript{130}

\textsuperscript{125} Memo, Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 22 April 1969, folder NSSM-28 1 of 2 [2 of 4], Box H-108, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
\textsuperscript{126} Letter, Brooke to Nixon, folder ABM – General (1), Undated – 1969, Box A50, Laird Papers, Ford Library.
\textsuperscript{129} In fact, Kissinger and his staff believed that Safeguard and MIRV opponents were receiving advice from factions within the government (Memo, Lynn to Kissinger, 25 April 1969, folder Sentinel ABM System Vol. II 4/1/69 – 5/31/69 [1 of 2], Box 844, NSC Files, Nixon Library).
\textsuperscript{130} Memo, Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 22 April 1969, folder NSSM-28 1 of 2 [2 of 4], Box H-108, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
Smith’s MIRV moratorium also ran afoul of the Defense Department’s convoluted efforts to defend Safeguard on Capitol Hill. Laird and Packard emphasized that heavy Soviet ICBMs would become an intolerable danger once the Soviets had deployed multiple warheads on them. A MIRV’ed SS-9 was the real threat – carrying multiple warheads greater than a megaton each, a single SS-9 would be able to threaten several US ICBMs. Defense believed that emphasizing the imminence of Soviet MIRV deployment strengthened the case for Safeguard, to defend Minuteman. Of course, this also raised the question of whether a ban on MIRV might make Safeguard unnecessary. By linking Safeguard to Soviet MIRV, Defense had inadvertently rendered support to the idea of a MIRV moratorium.

The apparent inconsistency in Defense’s ABM-MIRV position did not go unnoticed by Safeguard opponents: the Defense Department claimed that MIRV and ABM were provocative if the Soviets had them, but stabilizing if the United States had them. Of course, the Defense Department also claimed that US and Soviet deployments were apples and oranges. Soviet MIRV would employ high-yield warheads more capable of destroying hardened silos, while US MIRV contained low-yield warheads with little utility against missile silos. Soviet ABM was designed for area defense of major cities, especially Moscow, while the initial phase of Safeguard would focus on point defense of US missile silos. None of this resolved the basic

dilemma: the Defense Department appeared to be using a double standard in evaluating the impact of US and Soviet strategic deployments.

One way for the Defense Department to escape this dilemma and put pressure back on Safeguard opponents was to claim that the Soviet MIRV threat was imminent. Earlier testimony by Laird and Packard had treated Soviet MIRV as a longer-term threat, one for which the United States needed to be prepared. In April 1969, the Soviets conducted a test of an SS-9 missile with multiple warheads. The Defense Department seized on this news to push back against opponents of both Safeguard and MIRV. The imminent Soviet MIRV killed two birds with one stone. On the one hand, it dramatized the need for an immediate active defense of US Minutemen ICBMs via Safeguard. On the other hand, it ruled out delaying US MIRV testing, for fear that the Soviets would pull ahead in this critical technology. Laird began talking about the Soviet multiple-warhead test in early April. The story exploded on 22 April 1969, when Rogers mentioned the SS-9 test as a new and troubling development in US-Soviet relations. The idea that a multiple-warhead SS-9 monster weapon might already exist helped reinvigorate the Administration’s campaign for Safeguard.

Emphasizing the threat posed by Soviet MIRV had no real cost for the Defense Department, because most Defense officials opposed the idea of a MIRV testing moratorium already. State and ACDA still worried that absent some sort of slow-down on MIRV testing,

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the program would proceed beyond the point of no return. On 22 May 1969, Richardson sent Nixon a memo indicating that if US MIRV flight testing proceeded at its current pace, the Soviets would decide that the US was too far ahead in testing for MIRV to be included in a SALT agreement. Richardson wrote that slowing MIRV testing was important for SALT because the NSSM 28 Study Group was considering the possibility that the US MIRV program might be an important bargaining chip to get the Soviets to stop deploying large SS-9 ICBMs.\textsuperscript{138} Smith sent a similar letter to Packard. Smith argued that MIRV’s value for SALT bargaining would only diminish as the US flight testing program approached completion.\textsuperscript{139} Packard responded that continued progress on MIRV was the best way to pressure the Soviets into negotiating, and that there was still time for the US to roll back its MIRV program if the Soviets really wanted a MIRV ban.\textsuperscript{140} The issue was sufficiently contentious that Kissinger felt it necessary to bring it to the President’s attention. For his part, Kissinger advised against delaying US MIRV testing.\textsuperscript{141} Richardson and Smith had cleverly redeployed the logic of bargaining chips as a rationale to slow a major weapons program. Even if Nixon was unlikely to agree with Richardson and Smith, their argument against MIRV testing would seriously impede the Administration’s MIRV and Safeguard efforts, if it were made public.

Facing opposition on delaying MIRV, State and ACDA sought also to speed up SALT. On 25 April, Rogers requested that Nixon approve a message to the Soviets to set a date for the beginning of SALT, hopefully in early July. Nixon responded on 7 May that he preferred to wait

\textsuperscript{141} \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXIV, Editorial Note 43.
for the completion of NSSM 28 before making any decisions about SALT timing.\textsuperscript{142} Despite Nixon’s desire to wait, Rogers met with Dobrynin the next day to say that he hoped to discuss the timing of SALT in the near future.\textsuperscript{143} Rogers’ initiative was not appreciated by the White House, which still hoped to complete NSSM 28 prior to setting a SALT date.\textsuperscript{144} Public speculation about the imminent commencement of SALT was also causing problems with US allies, especially after the \textit{Washington Post} reported that the Administration planned to begin SALT in early June.\textsuperscript{145} Nixon had promised that the United States would consult fully with NATO prior to beginning any SALT negotiations with the Soviets. The rumors that SALT would begin soon created concerned that the United States would not have the time to take allies’ views into account.\textsuperscript{146} Due to the public confusion, Rogers’ efforts were successful in provoking the Administration into considering a start date. On 21 May 1969, Nixon asked Richardson to produce a timeline for the lead-up to SALT, leaving plenty of time for NSC consideration and allied consultation. Ambassador Cleveland was instructed to reassure the NATO allies that the

\textsuperscript{142} Memo, Kissinger to Nixon, 23 May 1969, folder SALT January-May [1969] Volume I [1 of 2], Box 873, NSC Files, Nixon Library.


\textsuperscript{144} Memo, Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 21 May 1969, folder SALT January-May [1969] Volume I [1 of 2], Box 873, NSC Files, Nixon Library.


The convoluted debate about ABM, MIRV, and SALT was given new intensity in late May when the CIA concluded that the Soviet SS-9 test was not a MIRV, but rather a basic Multiple Reentry Vehicle (MRV). A MRV was any warhead that split into multiple parts, often landing in a circular pattern around a single aim point. MIRV was a type of MRV, but much more refined: rather than releasing multiple warheads in a fixed pattern, MIRV could fire a series of warheads towards a sequence of different points, allowing a single missile to strike several targets with great accuracy. MIRV could be a dangerous first-strike weapon; MRV had marginal strategic utility. The CIA also believed that the Soviet MRV test provided the Soviets with relatively little useful data on how to build a working MIRV capability. If the Soviets wanted to deploy a MIRV, they would first have to conduct a series of highly visible tests, which would provide the United States with several years’ warning. If the CIA was correct, and the Soviets were not close to deploying MIRV’ed ICBMs, then the Defense Department’s public rationale for Safeguard would suffer a serious blow.

The Department of Defense pushed back against the CIA’s conclusions vigorously. Laird asked that a special National Intelligence Estimate on the Soviet strategic threat be prepared immediately. In the meantime, Packard argued that even if the SS-9 test were a

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149 In Look Over My Shoulder, Helms believed that the Defense Department’s violent assertion of an existing Soviet SS-9 MIRV was meant almost entirely as a political ploy to drum up Congressional support for an extensive ABM system. By comparison, Helms recalls that the CIA did not believe that the Soviets were pursuing a major first strike capability (Richard Helms & William Hood, A Look Over My Shoulder: A Life in the Central Intelligence Agency, Revised Edition, New York: Presidio Press, 2004, 384-388).
simple MRV, there were other major interpretive issues to be determined. While the SS-9 probably did not possess an immediate capability to destroy Minuteman, it was nonetheless indicative of a Soviet desire to develop an anti-Minuteman capability. Furthermore, Packard believed that the Soviets might have derived information from the test that would be useful in deploying a future MIRV. Depending on how much the Soviets had learned from their test, there was no guarantee that they would need many more tests before deploying a MIRV of their own. 151

Kissinger and Haig worried that the dispute over intelligence assessment would leak and provide opponents in Congress with further ammunition against Safeguard. Kissinger ordered that Laird’s requested SNIE on the Soviet threat move forward as quickly as possible, to establish an agreed estimate. 152 Kissinger also met with Helms to try to narrow some of the differences between the CIA and Defense positions. 153 Despite these efforts, on 2 June 1969 the New York Times ran an article about an “intelligence gap” between the CIA and the Defense Department, reporting that Defense and CIA briefers were providing contradictory information to Senators, imperiling the Administration’s ABM program. Nixon was furious, and ordered Helms to crack down on any CIA leaking of information damaging to Safeguard. 154 Kissinger forwarded a long briefing memo to Nixon, covering the difference between MRV and MIRV, and the dispute over the meaning of the Soviet test. Kissinger believed that the Soviets were actively working on an anti-Minuteman missile system and not far away from a working MIRV

capability, and recommended that the Administration continue to hold up the SS-9 threat as the key reason for Safeguard.\textsuperscript{155}

Nixon still hoped to avoid a public disclosure of the depth of the Administration’s divisions on intelligence analysis, but the Administration’s divided counsels continued to be a topic of considerable interest to the press and Congress.\textsuperscript{156} PSAC Chairman Ken BeLieu wrote that Safeguard opponents were making inroads with the news about the Administration’s divided intelligence estimates, which supported the opposition narrative that Defense was intentionally inflating the Soviet threat to secure funding for an unnecessary ABM system.\textsuperscript{157} Nixon ordered Kissinger to speak to Helms about the CIA’s undermining of the Administration’s Safeguard position, saying that Helms had “fifteen minutes to decide which side he was on.” Kissinger reported back that Helms was not working against the Administration’s Safeguard policy, but simply telling the truth, because there was no evidence that the Soviet SS-9 test was a MIRV.\textsuperscript{158}

Interpretation of technical intelligence data concerning a Soviet missile test was not usually a function exercised by the President or his immediate advisers. That an obscure technical issue caused so much difficulty was indicative of another important aspect of the Nixon

\textsuperscript{157} Memo, BeLieu to Nixon, 11 June 1969, folder Sentinel ABM System Vol. III 6/1/69, Box 844, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
\textsuperscript{158} Memo, Packard to Kissinger, 28 May 1969, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXIV, Document 31, fn3. In \textit{The White House Years}, Kissinger recalled originally leaning towards the Defense Department’s interpretation of the Soviet SS-9 test, and that to clarify matters Kissinger became heavily involved in this dispute, much to the resentment of “traditionalists who jealously guarded the independence of the estimating process.” Helms stood his ground against Kissinger’s objections, and Kissinger conceded that Helms’ interpretation was later proven correct (Kissinger, \textit{The White House Years}, 37).
Administration’s national security process: the tendency to reduce complicated political disputes into complex technical ones. The question of whether the Soviet SS-9 test was a MRV or a MIRV was complicated, requiring extensive data collected by US intelligence capabilities and expert interpretive processes to make sense of it. Despite the complication, technical questions were assumed by most in the government to have a “right” answer. If enough information could be marshalled, if enough expertise applied, then the Administration could actually reach a consensus on the question of whether Soviet SS-9 testing was a MRV or a MIRV. Of course, what an SS-9 MIRV meant for US national security depended on deeper assumptions about the utility of military force to US foreign policy. Unlike the technical issues, the political differences dividing the Administration were less amenable to easy answers. Should the United States embrace the mutual assured destruction, or continue to seek advantage over the Soviet Union through continued competition? Should it pursue the Cambridge Approach or the Philadelphia Approach in its arms control negotiations? The Administration lacked datasets or technical processes to answer these question, and no clear set of rules existed to adjudicate who was right. Open dispute over complex political issues might result in intractable paralysis that would strengthen Congressional and public opposition. As a result, whenever possible Nixon and Kissinger sought to define the Administration’s internal debates in terms of technical questions, rather than political ones.

In the case of Soviet SS-9 testing, events outside the Administration would not await the completion of the SNIE on whether the Soviet SS-9 test was a MRV or a MIRV. On 17 June 1969, Senators Brooke and Case introduced a resolution, supported by 41 Senators, urging the Nixon Administration to propose a joint moratorium on MIRV testing with the Soviet Union.\footnote{\textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Editorial Note 18.}
In a memo to Kissinger, Haig noted that Brooke’s continued advocacy of a delay in MIRV testing was exacerbating the Administration’s internal disputes over MIRV and ABM. In response to Brooke’s initiative, on 19 June 1969 Nixon gave a televised press conference. Nixon called Brooke’s resolution a constructive contribution to the ongoing debate about SALT, but he also categorically ruled out the possibility of any unilateral moratorium or slow-down on MIRV testing. Nixon’s statement headed off any immediate anti-MIRV chatter from within the government. The ongoing dispute about ABM and MIRV would cast a long shadow as the Administration began its SALT deliberations.

NSSM 3 and NSSM 28

It was in this environment of contention over ABM and MIRV that the Administration finally began to discuss its options for SALT. In a series of high-level meetings in June 1969, the NSC considered the results of both the NSSM 3 and NSSM 28 studies. Serious discussion of SALT posed new challenges for the Administration, which had to this point avoided debate over arms control. With the beginning of talks approaching, the Administration was reaching a point where delay seemed no longer possible. The result was a tense month of debate over arms control policy, set against the backdrop of continued acrimony over ABM and MIRV.

As early as 1 May 1969, Sonnenfeldt was reporting that the NSSM 28 study was unlikely to produce the settled SALT policy. The NSSM 28 report was filled with “conflicting views and prejudices that are now barely below the surface… many of the papers are pervaded with implicitly polemical advocacy of early and rapid talks, and the necessity for the most

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Sonnenfeldt attributed this difficulty to the fact that many of the Steering Group members were holdovers from the Johnson Administration, and were pushing for Nixon’s acceptance of the Johnson-era SALT compromise without discussing the relevant pros and cons of other options. Crucially, Sonnenfeldt reported that verification was emerging as the most significant issue of contention – the study on verification accompanying NSSM 28 had omitted the introductory section, because there would be too many dissenting footnotes. On the subject of verification, by far the most contentious issue was that of MIRV. State and ACDA were hoping to begin SALT with a joint MIRV testing moratorium in order to set the stage for a MIRV ban, which JCS opposed.\footnote{Memorandum of Conversation, Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 1 May 1969, folder SALT January-May [1969] Volume I [2 of 2], Box 873, NSC Files, Nixon Library.}

The Department of Defense was also unhappy with NSSM 28. The NSSM 28 study seemed to be proceeding on the assumption that a SALT agreement would be based on the Cambridge Approach, with neither side able to limit damage from the other. If the United States had no ability to limit damage, then it was not clear how it would be able to extend deterrence to its European allies, given the Soviet Union’s assumed superiority in conventional arms. Per the Philadelphia Approach, Defense maintained that the United States required some margin of advantage to sustain its alliance commitments. The Defense Department also objected to the conclusion in NSSM 28 that the Soviets would never accept on-site inspections, which Defense believed would be necessary to verify that the Soviets were not deploying MRV or MIRV, or to detect whether the Soviets were constructing newer, larger SS-9 missiles inside older SS-7 silos.\footnote{“Questions on SALT;” folder Issue Areas – General, 1969 (1),” Box A74, Laird Papers, Ford Library. Nitze also recalled that the US SALT process was “badly split both over the philosophy of verification and the question of whether the Soviets should not be allowed to deploy multiple warheads.”} As Sonnenfeldt suggested, verification (especially of MIRV) was shaping up to be the...
most controversial issue in NSSM 28.

Given these disagreements, there was a very real threat that a leak might compromise the entire SALT study process. The conclusions of the NSSM 3 earlier study appeared on the front page of the *New York Times* on 1 May 1969.\textsuperscript{164} Later that day, Smith called Kissinger to discuss how to avoid a similar leak of NSSM 28 material. Smith was worried that a leak on NSSM 28 might reveal how deep the divisions were inside the Administration on SALT, which might negatively influence the Administration’s arms control deliberations. Kissinger assured Smith that the NSSM 3 leak did not come from the White House, but had probably been from the Defense Department. Smith said that he hoped Laird would discipline his people; Kissinger assured Smith that Nixon would be speaking to Laird about this.\textsuperscript{165}

While Smith was shepherding the NSSM 28 study to completion, he was also working to assemble a Delegation for the talks themselves. Smith intended to serve as the head of the Delegation himself, with Philip Farley as his deputy. The Delegation would also include Dr. Harold Brown, a radar expert and former Secretary of the Air Force; General Royal Allison, an Air Force expert on arms control; and Ambassador Thompson, one of the State Department’s foremost Soviet experts. The Delegation would be assisted by Soviet experts Raymond Garthoff and Alexander Akalovsky from the State Department. Kissinger approved this composition of the Delegation, intentionally avoiding placing a member of the NSC Staff on it to avoid a

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\textsuperscript{165} Telcon, Smith and Kissinger, 1 May 1969, folder SALT January-May [1969] Volume I [1 of 2], Box 873, NSC Files, Nixon Library. Smith would later be critical of Nixon’s excessive secrecy on SALT (Smith, *Doubletalk*, 64-65), but at the time Smith and most members of the Administration recognized that secrecy was important to SALT. Of course, Smith did not approve of Nixon and Kissinger keeping major secrets from him.
conflict of interest.\textsuperscript{166}

Before discussing SALT, the Administration was committed to reviewing broader US strategic and military objectives in the NSSM 3 study. In a series of meetings in early June, the NSC hammered out a new objective of “strategic sufficiency” to guide US national security policy. The meetings revealed some disagreements over what the objectives of US strategic forces should be in an era of nuclear parity, especially on the question of whether the United States should retain some sort of damage-limiting capability in the event of a war with the Soviet Union. Most in the government believed that a true nuclear war-fighting capability would be impossible to maintain, but JCS insisted that sufficiency include some sort of criteria for evaluating the outcome of a nuclear exchange, and not focus entirely on the maintenance of deterrence.\textsuperscript{167} The meaning of “sufficiency” was finally promulgated on 24 June 1969 in NSDM 16, which defined strategic sufficiency as: 1) high confidence in second-strike deterrence; 2) deterrence of a Soviet first-strike under crisis conditions; 3) denying the Soviets the ability to do more damage to the United States; and 4) deploying defenses to limit damage from minor attacks.\textsuperscript{168}

The definition of nuclear sufficiency represented a development in the Administration’s

\textsuperscript{166} Memo, Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 2 May 1969, folder SALT January-May [1969] Volume I [1 of 2], Box 873, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
approach to bureaucratic consensus-building. Previously, the Administration had avoided major rupture within the bureaucracy by delaying consideration of serious issues. With the completion of NSSM 3, further delay on strategic objectives was no longer viable. The Review Group and NSC meetings concerning NSSM 3 revealed that deep visions still existed between Defense and ACDA, especially, on whether the United States should rely on assured destruction, or compete for nuclear advantage. Rather than pick a single definition of sufficiency, one that might displease an important agency and push it into alliance with Congressional opponents, Nixon and Kissinger opted to produce a multi-part definition of sufficiency, which combined various bureaucratic preferences into a long, vague definition. This laundry-list approach to compromise would be applied repeatedly throughout the Administration’s SALT deliberations.\(^{169}\)

While the NSC was debating the definition of strategic sufficiency, the Administration was putting the final touches on its NSSM 28 study. In order to develop criteria for evaluating different arms control options, ACDA produced a thought-experiment known as “Stop Where We Are” (SWWA), in which both the United States and the Soviet Union would immediately stop all progress on strategic weapons testing and deployment. Initially, the purpose of the SWWA concept was to show that a comprehensive arms control proposal would better advance US national security objectives than a limited one. Stopping all progress immediately would freeze the existing strategic balance in perpetuity, ensuring that each side retained its existing assured destruction capability. SWWA would also halt the Soviet ICBM and ABM programs, which posed the greatest threats to US security. ACDA also believed that SWWA would be

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\(^{169}\) Nixon and Kissinger were not the only ones who saw a laundry-list approach to SALT as an effective tool of managing bureaucratic differences on arms control; Donald Brennan was recommending a similar approach to Administration arms control officials (Letter, Johnson to Brennan, 20 June 1969, Political and Defense, DEF 18-6 4/1/69 to DEF 18-6 7/1/69, Central Foreign Policy Files, 1967-1969, RG59, NARA).
easier to verify than more limited proposals, since under a total freeze all that would be required was evidence of any Soviet strategic progress at all, whereas limited agreements would require some way to count specific weapons or detect specific weapons upgrades. Smith forwarded a SWWA draft to Rogers on 9 May 1969, suggesting that this thought experiment might be useful in evaluating other SALT options.\(^{170}\)

Not everyone agreed that a more comprehensive SALT option would be a better option. On 28 May 1969, Lynn sent Sonnenfeldt a memo concerning some of the shortcomings in the NSSM 28 process. Lynn believed that more emphasis should be given to relative areas of US and Soviet advantage, to provide some guidance on how the United States and the Soviets might trade off areas of advantage in a bargaining process. Nor did Lynn automatically believe that a comprehensive agreement was more easily verified. Especially on the issue of MIRV, Lynn believed that NSSM 28 did not do enough to analyze how a comprehensive freeze of strategic weapons development would be verified by US intelligence capabilities. Finally, Lynn was not convinced that the Soviets would want so comprehensive a freeze of strategic programs, especially in areas like MIRV where the United States was perceived to be ahead of the Soviet Union.\(^{171}\) Lynn’s analysis reflected the growing disconnect between those who sought a comprehensive SALT agreement for assured destruction, and those who hoped to use limited SALT agreements as a tool for gaining competitive advantage.

Given these serious differences, the final NSSM 28 report was vague in its conclusions on SALT. The report listed several possible objectives for SALT, roughly based on the strategic


\(^{171}\) Memo, Lynn to Sonnenfeldt, 28 May 1969, folder NSSM-28 2 of 2 [3 of 3], Box H-140, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
sufficiency guidelines: reducing the likelihood of war, protecting the United States and allies from attack, and producing a relatively advantageous environment in the aftermath of a nuclear war. As for SALT options, the United States could pursue a limited agreement, or a more comprehensive one; it could seek to ban ABM and MIRV, or seek to retain them. On verification, the report noted that US technical intelligence capabilities were sufficient to verify a wide variety of different agreements, but that on-site inspection might be beneficial for certain types of agreements. Finally, the report included four illustrative SALT packages: one that froze ICBM launchers only; one that froze ICBM and SLBM launchers, but allowed freedom to mix between the two; one that froze ICBM and SLBM launchers, and also prohibited certain qualitative improvements to offensive missiles; and one that would freeze ICBM, SLBM, and MIRV. As with the strategic sufficiency guidelines, NSSM 28 listed a wide spectrum of options, rather than try to reduce the differences between the various agencies.

By early June 1969, the NSC was ready to consider SALT. On 10 June 1969, Kissinger sent Nixon two memos outlining the upcoming process for SALT decision. Based on the NSSM 28 study, Nixon would need to select a basic approach to the talks – whether the US wanted a limited or comprehensive agreement, and what sort of forces it wanted included. Based on that decision, the government would develop a presentation for the NATO allies. Finally, at some point the US would need to set a start date for SALT with the Soviets. Kissinger noted that the two most important choices would be whether the US wanted to retain MIRV, and what level of ABM the US would like to deploy. On these two subjects, there was a very serious division over

\[ \text{Paper Prepared by the Interagency SALT Steering Committee, undated, } FRUS 1969-76, \text{ Vol. XXXII, Document 14.} \]

\[ \text{Memo, Kissinger to Nixon, “Preparations for Strategic Arms Talks,” 19 June 1969, folder NSSM-28 2 of 2 [2 of 3], Box H-140, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.} \]
whether the United States should seek a reciprocal moratorium with the Soviets on MIRV testing and ABM deployment while negotiations for SALT proceeded. While a moratorium might make it easier to include MIRV and ABM limits within the agreement, opponents maintained that including MIRV and ABM in a SALT agreement was not necessarily desirable, and until the US was sure of Soviet interest in banning these technologies in the long term, there was little reason to give up the United States’ technical advantages in these fields.174

For his own part, Kissinger advised Nixon to evaluate arms control in terms of the Philadelphia Approach, paying close attention to the relative advantage that it would provide to the United States. Kissinger predicted that Smith and other advocates of the Cambridge Approach would likely argue that the United States should not be concerned by relative gains and losses under a comprehensive SALT agreement, since any limited increase in Soviet capability would not actually imperil the vast second-strike forces available to the United States. Kissinger argued that several of the more popular comprehensive options would leave US capabilities relatively unchanged while allowing the Soviets to continue improving their forces. For example, banning ABM would to the advantage of the Soviets, because under an ABM ban Soviet second-strike capability would improve markedly as the Soviets added more ICBMs, while US second-strike capability would remain the same. Similarly, banning MIRV would reduce US second-strike capability, while having little impact on that of the Soviets, who as yet had no MIRV of their own. Kissinger reminded Nixon that relative advantage in strategic arms still had political and psychological importance for a decision-maker seeking to maintain his

resolve. Kissinger’s analysis was especially interesting for its explicit comparison of the two logics of arms control: the Cambridge Approach, favoring a comprehensive agreement to secure assured destruction; and the Philadelphia Approach, favoring a more limited agreement to bolster the United States’ competitive advantage. This analysis was also notable for its secrecy. Kissinger’s memo was sent only to Nixon, and the formal NSSM 28 report contained nothing like it. As the NSC prepared to discussion of SALT, Nixon and Kissinger continued to ensure that the more fundamental divisions within the Administration over arms control policy remained deeply buried.

As Nixon prepared to consider NSSM 28, the various differences within the bureaucracy on SALT policy began to boil over, as various agencies attempted to bypass the NSSM 28 committees and appeal directly to the President. On 16 June 1969, Sonnenfeldt sent Kissinger a memo detailing a number of SALT-related papers circulating through the government outside of the NSSM 28 Steering Group. Defense had a long list of provisions that the United States might want included in a SALT agreement to aid in verification. The CIA had produced a paper on “Monitoring Soviet Compliance with a MIRV Flight-test Ban,” which concluded that the United States’ technical intelligence capabilities would be sufficient to monitor a MIRV test ban, a conclusion with which DDR&E disagreed. Neither of these papers had been adequately discussed by the NSSM 28 Steering Group itself; Sonnenfeldt believed that the agencies in question were trying to wait out the NSSM 28 process, and present their ideas directly to the President. Sonnenfeldt worried that the breakdown of NSSM 28 would diminish the NSC’s

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ability to mediate the disputes between agencies.\textsuperscript{176}

By far the largest breach of the NSSM 28 process was coming from Smith himself, who was now proposing that ACDA’s SWWA thought experiment be considered as an actual negotiating option for SALT. Smith forwarded a more fully developed SWWA proposal to Kissinger and Packard on 12 June 1969, as a parallel effort to the NSSM 28 options, for consideration by the NSC. ACDA held SWWA to be a superior option to those developed via NSSM 28, since it would stabilize the strategic balance and reduce the Soviet threat to the United States, all while easing verification problems. ACDA concluded that the Soviets would appreciate a broad agreement, so negotiability would not be a problem, though the study contained little in the way of analysis to back up this. ACDA concluded that if the United States wanted to pursue SWWA, it should push for a joint moratorium on all strategic testing while negotiations moved forward, to prevent either side from perfecting technologies like MIRV and ABM that would upset the balance that SWWA was designed to preserve.\textsuperscript{177}

In fact, the idea of a negotiating moratorium on MIRV and ABM developments was gaining in popularity within the government. Although Nixon had ruled out unilateral delay in MIRV and ABM deployments, the SWWA proposal focused on a \textit{joint} testing moratorium, in which both the United States and the Soviet Union would agree not to pursue these technologies while SALT negotiations took place. ACDA’s moratorium proposal was also supported by the

\textsuperscript{176} Memo, Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 16 June 1969, folder NSSM-28 2 of 2 [1 of 3], Box H-140, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library. In Doubletalk, Smith recalls that the dysfunction of the NSC system was such that he would often seek to appeal directly to Nixon and Kissinger on issues of real concern (Smith, Doubletalk, 112). Of course, this attitude created a collective action problem, in which \textit{everyone} sought to appeal directly to Nixon and Kissinger, creating the very dysfunction that everyone sought to avoid.

PSAC, which on 13 June 1969 submitted a study recommending a comprehensive freeze on all strategic developments, preceded by a bilateral moratorium on ABM and MIRV deployments.\(^\text{178}\) Of course, not everyone in the government thought that a testing moratorium, even a bilateral one, was a good idea. JCS especially opposed the idea of limiting MIRV by an agreement in any form.\(^\text{179}\) As the government prepared for a thorough review of its SALT options, Kissinger predicted to Nixon that one point that would require Presidential mediation was whether to pursue a joint MIRV testing moratorium or not.\(^\text{180}\)

The NSC Review Group examined the results of the NSSM 28 study on 12 June 1969. Kissinger’s talking points for the meeting stressed taking into account the Administration’s new definition of “strategic sufficiency” when considering SALT options. The biggest topic for the meeting was how best to present the NSSM 28 results to the President – what information did he need to make an informed choice about SALT policy? Kissinger’s talking points predicted that the Review Group participants would say that Nixon needed more information and more options for decision, to which Kissinger should agree, and push for a more detailed presentation of the issues at the upcoming NSC meeting.\(^\text{181}\) As Kissinger’s staff had predicted, at the meeting itself there was general agreement on the issues that Nixon would need to consider when making his SALT decision. The NSSM 28 report contained some examples of both comprehensive and limited options. On the specific issue of SWWA, Kissinger suggested that it be withheld from


\(^{181}\) “NSSM 28 HAK Talking Points (Revised),” folder Review Group SALT (NSSM 28) [part 1] 6/12/69, Box H-037, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
Presidential consideration until the NSSM 28 Study Group could review its conclusions further, to which Smith agreed. Smith suggested that important topics for the first NSC meeting would be the relationship of ABM, MIRV, and verification issues to SALT.\textsuperscript{182}

The Review Group meeting became more contentious when discussion turned to substantive issues covered in the paper. The CIA believed that the paper focused too much on Soviet objectives in SALT, and not enough on US objectives. Defense replied this was to be expected, because Soviet objectives were unfamiliar, while US objectives were well-known to the participants. Kissinger also questioned the report’s conclusion that the Soviets preferred a more comprehensive SALT agreement, which seemed to have little evidence to support it. Smith justified this conclusion by claiming that the Soviets had in the past consistently advocated for complete nuclear disarmament, though Kissinger believed that previous Soviet proposals had been primarily propagandistic. The parts of the NSSM 28 report covering negotiating moratoria and verification procedures were also contentious, with Smith arguing that a MIRV testing moratorium was desirable and verifiable, while General Allison claimed that a testing moratorium was neither. In the end, Kissinger suggested that the differing viewpoints be codified in the report sent to the President, for his final consideration. Kissinger ended the meeting without a decisive conclusion.\textsuperscript{183}

As the time for Presidential consideration of SALT approached, the utility of this sort of delaying tactic was quickly diminishing, as was demonstrated when the MIRV moratorium question spilled over into the 18 June 1969 NSC meeting on NSSM 3 results. Although the

purpose of the meeting had been to ratify the definition of strategic sufficiency, Wheeler and Smith spent much of the meeting debating whether a MIRV moratorium would be beneficial for US security or not. Wheeler maintained that MIRV was required to cover all of the required targets in the Soviet Union, and to defeat Soviet ABM, and that a testing moratorium would impede the ability of the United States to meet these important military objectives. Smith replied that over the longer term, MIRV would be a Soviet advantage, because the Soviets’ much larger missiles would be able to carry many more warheads.184

Unable to grapple effectively with the political meaning of MIRV for US national security, the discussion turned instead to a technical topic: the ability of the United States to verify a MIRV test moratorium. Smith believed that the United States would be able to verify a MIRV ban by watching for any signs of Soviet MIRV testing, while Wheeler believed that the Soviets would be able to conceal their MIRV testing from US observation.185 In this regard, the issue of on-site inspection was also raised, with Rogers and Smith arguing that any on-site inspection proposal would be entirely unacceptable to the Soviets. Nixon suggested that on-site inspection should be raised at the start, so that if the Administration backed off later it could bargain for concessions from the Soviets on other verification issues.186 In this way, on-site inspection became a sort of “bargaining chip” like ABM or MIRV, not just for negotiations with the Soviets. Framing on-site inspection as a bargaining ploy could help gain acceptance within the government for proposing it as part of SALT, even when many at State and ACDA believed

that proposing on-site inspection was a waste of time. Perhaps more crucially, the technical issues of verification were becoming a key proxy argument for more political issues about the desirability of MIRV. As time went on, debates about verification would increasingly come to dominate the Administration’s SALT deliberations.

On 19 June 1969, the NSC Review Group met a second time, this time specifically to discuss ACDA’s SWWA proposal. Kissinger’s talking points for the meeting insisted that SWWA had not yet gone through the same review process as the options considered in NSSM 28, and therefore did not contain sufficiently comprehensive analysis of issues like verifiability and negotiability. The existing ACDA proposal claimed that a SWWA SALT agreement would be easy to negotiate and verify, but not everyone in the government believed this was the case. As a result, Presidential consideration of SWWA should be delayed in favor of considering the fully-reviewed NSSM 28 SALT options.187 The objections that Kissinger’s talking points predicted came out forcefully in the meeting itself. General Allison, speaking for JCS, claimed that SWWA’s controls on technology were infeasible, because they could not be adequately verified or enforced. Allison was also frustrated that ACDA was trying to sneak SWWA through to the President without proper interagency review; after all, SWWA had originally been introduced as a thought experiment, not an actual proposal. For his part, Smith was frustrated by JCS’s intransigence on “controlling technology;” if strategic arms limitation was not meant to control technology, then what was its purpose? Absent realistic controls on technology, the arms race would simply continue in different forms.188

When it came to SALT, Smith said that the fundamental question at stake was whether

the government wished to control as much of the arms race as it could verify, or not. Smith worried that there was no agreement on this basic point, and that absent agreement SALT simply could not work. Sonnenfeldt replied that the purpose of SALT was not to limit the arms race per se, but rather to advance the national interest of the United States, and that in this regard verification was only one criterion to be considered. Sonnenfeldt believed that it was not in the interest of the United States to limit systems in which the United States enjoyed an advantage, even if complete verification were possible. Smith replied that picking and choosing would not be possible, because the Soviets would never negotiate on terms of US advantage. Sonnenfeldt countered that perhaps the United States and the Soviet Union would trade off advantages in exchange for concessions from the other side. Smith admitted that this might be possible, but would result in a protracted and complicated process that SWWA would avoid.189

The Smith-Sonnenfeldt exchange on the scope of SALT was as close as the Administration had come to an honest conversation on US motives in arms control, but discussion quickly turned back to the technical questions of whether SWWA was verifiable or not. ACDA and CIA claimed that SWWA would be the easiest to verify, but Lynn disagreed. SWWA was structured such that even if the United States detected Soviet cheating, it would have no options for countermeasures other than to abrogate the entire agreement. Furthermore, SWWA would prevent the United States and the Soviet Union from taking appropriate steps to ensure the reliability of their existing forces, which would over time actually decrease the reliability of the strategic balance. After this, discussion devolved further into the specific capabilities of US technical intelligence. In the end, Kissinger agreed that SWWA should be forwarded to the President for consideration, but only if JCS got the opportunity to express its

objections to it in detail. Smith and Allison agreed to this procedure.\textsuperscript{190} Shortly after the Review Group meeting, Nixon sent instructions for the NSSM 28 Steering Group to prepare a paper detailing NSSM 28’s four alternative options for SALT for his consideration at a full NSC meeting on 25 June 1969.\textsuperscript{191}

Although tempers were running high, the Administration’s divisions over SALT were eased by the reticence of the Soviets to begin talks. In early June, when the end of the SALT review process had seemed to be in sight, Nixon had instructed Rogers to tell Dobrynin that the United States would be ready to begin SALT as early as 30 July. While Geneva had been previously discussed as a location, Rogers and Dobrynin agreed that an alternative neutral venue like Vienna or Helsinki would be more appropriate, to separate SALT from the previous disarmament negotiations. Dobrynin promised to report this issue to his government.\textsuperscript{192} When the Soviets did not immediately respond, Nixon made his desire for SALT public, announcing the United States’ readiness for SALT on 20 June 1969.\textsuperscript{193} Despite their earlier desire for SALT, the Soviets were surprisingly slow in responding to the Administration’s proposal. Days quickly

\textsuperscript{192} Telegram, SecState to AmEmbassyMoscow, 12 June 1969, folder SALT June-July [1969] Volume II [2 of 2], Box 873, NSC Files, Nixon Library. In \textit{Doubletalk}, Smith recalls that the Soviets latched on to the idea of holding SALT in Helsinki. Smith had originally proposed Helsinki as a possible SALT option, but only of last resort (Memo, Kissinger to Nixon, 24 June 1969, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 21, fn2), but as the start of SALT approached, Smith sought to convince Rogers and Kissinger to push back for a different venue, especially when it became clear that the first round of SALT would take place in the winter. Rogers maintained that the US had already offered the Soviets a choice, and to then object to the Soviet choice would be a bad way to begin SALT. Ultimately, the White House sought to compromise, with the first round taking place in Helsinki, and future rounds taking place elsewhere (Smith, \textit{Doubletalk}, 78).
turned into weeks with no response from the Soviets on when they would like to begin SALT.\textsuperscript{194} The Soviet delay was a disappointment for those who hoped for a quick beginning to the talks, but it also decreased pressure on the Administration to produce immediate SALT decisions.

Without a fixed starting date for negotiations with the Soviets, Nixon felt more comfortable falling back into previous patterns of compromise-through-delay. The first NSC meeting on SALT on 25 June 1969 turned into yet another Administration delaying action. In his briefing memo, Kissinger advised the President to avoid favoring any SALT position, since the Administration could present a number of notional SALT options to the NATO allies in consultation, prior to any final decision. Kissinger’s only real suggestion was that Nixon order the government to conduct a full study of SWWA in the NSSM 28 Steering Group before the NSC considered ACDA’s favored proposal.\textsuperscript{195} At the meeting itself, Smith and Laird clashed over how the US should approach SALT. Laird accused ACDA and others of promoting the idea that any arms control agreement was better than no arms control agreement at all, and of assuming that the Soviets’ motives were a mirror image of ACDA’s own. Laird instead maintained that the United States had strategic goals other than retaining a second-strike capability, and that its SALT policy needed to reflect those goals of self-defense and damage limitation enshrined in strategic sufficiency.\textsuperscript{196} Wheeler chimed in with us concerns about

\textsuperscript{194} Garthoff, \textit{Détente and Confrontation}, 151.
\textsuperscript{195} Memo, Kissinger to Nixon, 24 June 1969, folder NSC Meeting 6/25/69 SALT NSSM 28, Box H-023, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
\textsuperscript{196} In \textit{Doubletalk}, Smith recalls that Laird and the Department of Defense would often resort to straw-men arguments concerning the opinions of State and ACDA to score points with the President (Smith, \textit{Doubletalk}, 113-114). In this instance, while Laird had a cogent point about the differing strategic views of Defense and ACDA, he was certainly incorrect in claiming that Smith and ACDA preferred \textit{any} arms control agreement to no agreement at all.
verification, which he did not believe the CIA was taking as seriously as it should.\textsuperscript{197}

The meeting also featured some discussion about how the United States should approach the opening of SALT. Smith believed that a limited SALT proposal—one that sought to limit only ICBMs and SLBMs—would not be negotiable, since the Soviets were building these types of weapons, and the United States was not. The Soviets would have no incentive to cease construction of their offensive missile forces while the United States continued to deploy MIRV and Safeguard. As a result, the United States would have to offer to trade assets like MIRV and Safeguard in order to halt the Soviet buildup. Smith also suggested that the Administration might use the first round of SALT as an exploratory venture, to put several notional options to the Soviets and get their comments, without committing the US to any single option. Nixon thought the idea of an exploratory round was a good one.\textsuperscript{198} No doubt learning more about Soviet intentions appealed to Nixon, but beginning with an exploratory round would also provide the Administration with more time to delay and consider its own options.

Per the Administration’s policy of delay, Nixon opted to present all four of the notional SALT options contained in NSSM 28 to the NATO allies. On 26 June 1969, Nixon ordered Rogers, Smith, and Laird to prepare these four options for presentation to NATO. The objective of the consultation was to give the European allies some sense of participation in SALT, while reassuring them about their security concerns. The consultation should seek to avoid giving the sense of which option the government was leaning towards, in order to avoid the possibility of

leaking.\textsuperscript{199} Given that the NSSM 28 options spanned everything from a simple freeze on ICBM numbers to a total freeze of all offensive missile forces,\textsuperscript{200} Nixon’s first major SALT policy decision was, in effect, a non-decision; similar to the “laundry list” definition of strategic sufficiency, Nixon’s first SALT decision contained a list of divergent options that was guaranteed to have a little something for everyone. Nixon’s trepidation did not impede NATO consultation, which began on 30 June 1969, clearing one major hurdle to beginning SALT.\textsuperscript{201}

The Administration reached another important SALT road mark on 5 July 1969, when the White House announced the composition of the US SALT Delegation. The announcement signaled the Administration’s seriousness about beginning SALT, both to the US public and to the Soviets. As per Smith’s earlier request, the Delegation would include Smith as chairman, with Farley as his deputy, as well as Harold Brown, General Allison, and Llewellyn Thompson. The one major addition was Paul Nitze, who would be representing the Secretary of Defense.\textsuperscript{202}

In outward appearances, the Administration appeared ready for SALT. In reality, the internal debate over SALT policy had barely begun.

\textbf{The Art of the Non-Decision}

Although the Soviets’ refusal to set a starting date for SALT meant that the Administration could continue to put off difficult SALT decisions, over the longer term it was clear that the Administration would need to find ways to reach some sort of consensus, no matter

\textsuperscript{199} Memo, Nixon to Laird, Rogers, and Smith, 26 June 1969, folder NSC Meeting 6/25/69 NSSM 28, Box H-022, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
how tenuous, on issues of nuclear strategy and arms control. Building this fragile consensus would rely increasingly on techniques of bureaucratic obfuscation. The Administration used the logic of bargaining chips to rationalize its weapons procurement policy, winning the support of arms controllers for new weapons, while also drawing hawks into the arms control process. At the same time, the Administration sought to focus debates on complex technical problems while avoiding complicated political issues. Finally, Nixon and Kissinger sought to formulate compromise decisions that were in actuality long lists of competing viewpoints, the better to appease all parties involved. Both the definition of strategic sufficiency and the 25 June 1969 SALT options reflected this tendency towards compromise by non-decision.

All of these tools of building consensus without discussing deeper differences had serious shortcomings. At a time when the Administration was under siege by opponents of Safeguard, a brittle compromise was believed to be preferable to an intractable division between proponents of the Cambridge and Philadelphia Approaches. Although initially improvisations to ongoing events, the techniques of compromise pioneered in the Administration’s first six months would exercise a strong influence on the SALT policy process for years to come. Over the summer of 1969, these various *ad hoc* methods would be institutionalized in new NSC organizations designed to manage and minimize the Administration’s differences over SALT.
CHAPTER 3 – The Verification Panel

The intense public debate over Safeguard ABM increased the stakes of divisions within the Administration between proponents of the Cambridge and Philadelphia Approaches to arms control. Nixon and Kissinger originally sought to manage these differences through delay. By putting off any final decision on SALT policy, Nixon and Kissinger hoped to avoid alienating either Congress or agencies within the government, by keeping all options on the table. Over the summer of 1969 Nixon’s compromise-by-delay approach would become institutionalized in a new series of NSC Committees designed to regulate and shape intra-Administration discussion of SALT. By the fall of 1969, SALT policy would be nearly monopolized by a new Verification Panel, which sought to reformulate political disagreements over arms limitation policy in terms of technical disputes over verification capabilities. In the Administration’s first year, Nixon and Kissinger walked a tightrope between advocates of the Cambridge and Philadelphia Approaches, as they struggled to win Senate approval for Safeguard while trimming the Defense budget and preparing for the first round of SALT.

The Safeguard Context

The public debate over Safeguard ABM continued throughout the summer of 1969. The first round of debate closed on 27 June 1969, when the Senate Armed Services Committee voted 10-to-7 to forward the Safeguard program to the entire Senate for consideration. The split vote in Committee was highly unusual, and reflected the difficulty that the Administration would face in the coming Senate floor debate over Safeguard, where Committee Chairman John Stennis would have to defend his Safeguard decision against members of his own committee, including
Senators Margaret Smith and Stuart Symington. Tellingly, the Committee’s majority opinion supporting Safeguard began by describing Safeguard ABM’s utility as a bargaining chip for the upcoming SALT negotiations. Although Nixon and Kissinger had originally intended the logic of “bargaining chips” for use within the Administration, the Armed Services Committee expanded the bargaining chip rationale into the public domain, further linking Safeguard’s fate to that of SALT. The Committee’s minority opinion focused almost exclusively on the technical shortcomings of the Safeguard system, and its inability to provide a meaningful defense from a Soviet attack. The bargaining chip rationale largely sidestepped the military effectiveness of the system. Even if the finished Safeguard could not shoot down a single missile, if the Soviets feared it, then it had some utility in negotiation.

The stage was set for a major Senate showdown over Safeguard and SALT. On 8 July 1969, the Senate floor debate on Safeguard began with a report by Senator Stennis on the Armed Services Committee’s deliberations. Despite months of intensive debate in various Senate committees and the press, the final outcome remained unclear. As they had in Committee, Safeguard opponents’ strategy relied on the testimony of numerous scientific and technical experts, including prominent physicists Herbert York and Jack Ruina, that Safeguard was technically deficient and strategically unsound. In the meantime, proponents of Safeguard were also hard at work building their case. The Defense Department continued to provide support for

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pro-ABM Senators in the form of information and speech drafts in favor of Safeguard. One such speech argued that the technical credentials of Safeguard opponents were doubtful, since many of the same scientists had previously argued that thermonuclear weapons would not be viable. The speech concluded that Safeguard was necessary to ensure Soviet cooperation on SALT, strengthening further the importance of the bargaining chip logic. The Defense Department’s efforts to mobilize pro-Safeguard public opinion also began to bear fruit in July. A number of influential Safeguard advocates convened in Washington on 12 July 1969 for a major meeting of the “Committee to Maintain a Prudent Defense Policy.” The Committee was chaired by former Secretary of State Dean Acheson, with Albert Wohlstetter as its Vice Chairman, and included conservative strategic analysts like Donald Brennan, Morton Kaplan, and Irving Kristol, amongst others. The Committee sent out mass mailings of short papers claiming to refute common objections to Safeguard, defending its technical feasibility and its compatibility with SALT. The Committee also prepared a longer report for Congress, which supported the Defense Department’s contention that Safeguard was technically sound and strategically necessary.

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6 Paul Nitze had originally been the Committee’s Vice Chairman, but had stepped down from this role in late June when he was appointed to represent the Defense Department on the US SALT Delegation, leaving Wohlstetter to take his place; see: Wohlstetter, “Safeguard: Compromise or Assured Waste in Kwajalein,” folder ABM – General (3) July-Dec 1969, Box A50, Laird Papers, Ford Library; and Richard Rhodes, Arsenals of Folly: The Making of the Nuclear Arms Race (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 110-114.
The Senate debate over Safeguard reached its height on 17 July 1969, when the entire Senate met in a closed-door session to see classified testimony on Safeguard’s technical characteristics. The Defense Department had been laying the basis for such testimony since early June, when a Defense staffer had claimed that a classified Defense briefing chart shown to the Senate Armed Services Committee provided foolproof justification for the deployment of Safeguard. This claim proved difficult for Safeguard opponents to refute, since Armed Services Committee members were forbidden from revealing details of classified testimony to the public. Senator Symington flatly denied the Pentagon’s claim, arguing that the briefing charts he had been shown actually demonstrated that Safeguard ABM was deficient. Still, rumors about secret briefing charts persisted, so Safeguard opponents challenged the Defense Department to offer a classified briefing to the entire Senate, hoping to deflate claims of superior classified information. In what became known as the “Battle of the Charts,” Senator Symington drew on classified testimony offered to the Armed Services Committee to try to prove that Safeguard was technically unsound. Symington’s testimony was overshadowed by Senator Henry Jackson, who provided a new pro-Safeguard presentation supported by a brand-new set of impressive charts from the Defense Department. Although the issue was not decisively settled one way or another, the Jackson-Defense presentation seemed to convince some fence-sitters that Safeguard would not be a total waste of money.

By July 1969, the Safeguard debate appeared to be shifting in the Administration’s favor.

Despite continued efforts by Safeguard opponents to emphasize the technical flaws of the system and mobilize popular opposition to Safeguard deployments, a number of undecided Senators shifted to the Administration’s position. On 14 July 1969, Senator Winston Prouty of Vermont, a major opponent of the Johnson Administration’s Sentinel ABM program, announced that he was convinced that Nixon’s Safeguard ABM program would be a useful tool in negotiating SALT with the Soviets, a major surprise to those who had expected Prouty to follow his senior Senatorial colleague George Aiken in opposing Safeguard. Prouty credited Packard and other Defense Department briefers in convincing him to support the Administration. Deft maneuvering behind the scenes by Laird also helped win the support of Senator Margaret Smith, who had opposed Safeguard in the Armed Services Committee but ultimately voted against defunding Safeguard on the Senate floor. By 21 July 1969, Senator Richard Russell was confident in predicting that the Administration’s Safeguard proposal would pass the Senate without significant amendment.

The MIRV Panel Report

As public debate about the merits of the proposed Safeguard ABM system continued, the Administration continued to debate the technical characteristics of recent Soviet SS-9 multiple warhead tests. The White House and Defense Department continued to claim in public that

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Safeguard was justified by the imminent threat of MIRV’ed Soviet SS-9 missiles.\(^{17}\) Within the Administration, there was no consensus on the meaning of Soviet SS-9 tests. On 23 June 1969, the CIA issued an update to NIE 11-8-68 on “Soviet Strategic Attack Forces,” specifically covering new information on Soviet SS-9 tests. The report concluded that current Soviet SS-9 designs lacked the accuracy and range to attack Minuteman effectively, and that Soviet SS-9 tests were merely MRVs that might improve Soviet penetration of a US ABM, but would pose no direct threat to Minuteman survivability.\(^{18}\) The SNIE drew extensive criticism from all over the government, with numerous dissenting footnotes from the DIA, the Services, and State INR. The DIA in particular disagreed with nearly all of the report’s conclusions, arguing instead that the SS-9 had the accuracy and range already to strike Minuteman, and that even if the SS-9 test were a simple MRV, it would still enable a Soviet first strike, since the MRV test’s footprint was almost exactly the distance between Minuteman silos. In his summary for Kissinger, Lynn noted that the Defense Department’s claims about the specific SS-9 tests were less than convincing, but that the CIA was relying too heavily on benign assumptions about Soviet motives and the future pace of Soviet technical development.\(^{19}\)

Differing assumptions within the Administration about Soviet motives were mirror-images of the preferences of the participants involved. Defense and the Services feared aggressive Soviet competition in the future, and favored a competitive approach on the part of


the United States to compensate. State, ACDA, and CIA believed that the Soviets were trying to catch up to the United States in deterrent capability, and favored an arms control program that would stabilize mutual deterrence to ensure the security of both parties. As a result, disputes over the meaning of Soviet SS-9 testing were especially intractable, as each side’s interpretation of the available intelligence data was heavily colored by its assumptions about the nature of international competition and cooperation under conditions of nuclear parity.

In an effort to break this deadlock, Kissinger organized a special NSC-level study group to work out an agreed Administration framework on MIRV, known as the MIRV Panel. Although the Safeguard debate provided the crucial context for the Administration’s MIRV disputes, the question was further complicated by Senator Brooke’s MIRV testing moratorium resolution and ACDA’s continued support of restrictions on MIRV in SALT. The NSC MIRV Panel met for the first time on 19 June 1969, chaired by Frank Perez from State INR and including representatives from DDR&E, CIA, ACDA, JCS, and the NSC Staff. The Panel met at least three more times in June and July 1969, providing a forum for developing an agreed interagency position on issues pertaining to MIRV technology.

Rather than trying to untangle the complicated knot of competing political and strategic preferences between the Cambridge and Philadelphia Approaches, Kissinger tasked the MIRV Panel with examining exclusively technical issues pertaining to MIRV and SALT. The Panel’s primary mandate was to determine whether or not a MIRV testing moratorium could be verified using national technical means alone, an issue that had sparked considerable contention during the formulation and discussion of NSSM 28. In order to answer this question, the MIRV Panel

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first needed an agreed-upon assessment of Soviet progress on MIRV technology, which in turn meant finding some resolution to the SS-9 MRV/MIRV dispute. This work program was tailored to avoid broader judgments concerning the strategic desirability of MIRV or its role in US national security more broadly.

The MIRV Panel worked quickly, presenting its conclusions to Kissinger on 17 July 1969. By far the most important conclusion drawn by the Panel was that an agreement to limit MIRV deployment would be very difficult to verify, since existing reconnaissance technologies could not detect remotely the internal differences of MIRV’ed and non-MIRV’ed missiles, which were often externally identical. As a result, the Panel concluded that any MIRV limitation would need to be accompanied by a ban on MIRV flight testing, to reassure both the United States and the Soviet Union that neither side had the capability to deploy a working MIRV. Finally, the panel agreed that at the current state of development, a flight test ban would probably not provide adequate reassurance to the Soviets, since the United States had already reached the point where it could deploy MIRV systems, albeit with some limitations on accuracy and reliability. The MIRV Panel produced enough of a technical consensus to set the ground rules by which the Administration’s future deliberations of MIRV in SALT would be conducted, especially by concluding that a MIRV ban would likely be non-negotiable with the Soviets whatever the United States did.

On the specific question of interpreting Soviet SS-9 testing, the MIRV Panel provided very little progress. The Panel’s final report, “The Technological Consequences of a MIRV Flight Ban,” reflected serious continued divisions over Soviet progress on MIRV. A rough

consensus was reached that the SS-9 tests contained MRV warheads, and not a true MIRV capability. Furthermore, the Panel concluded that the SS-9 MRV as currently configured would probably not pose a threat to Minuteman, though the Defense Department maintained that with some improvement a future Soviet SS-9 MRV might pose a threat. Most agencies felt that the Soviets would have learned little about MIRV from their MRV tests, and that any Soviet MIRV deployment would be preceded by a series of highly-visible tests of actual MIRV capability. DDR&E and JCS continued to maintain that Soviet SS-9 MRV tests might have provided the Soviets with enough data to covertly construct a MIRV capability absent any further testing.  

The MIRV Panel’s attempt to paper over political differences with a technical consensus could not entirely conceal the deeper dispute of opinion concerning the nature of US-Soviet relations. NSC Staffer Morton Halperin acknowledged the depth of these divisions in a 16 July 1969 memo to Kissinger, when he wrote: “No amount of interagency staffing at whatever level is going to erase these differences regarding MIRV.” Influenced by the Cambridge Approach, State, ACDA, and the CIA believed that competition for marginal advantage under conditions of rough nuclear parity was a politically-futile exercise, and so tended to discount the possibility that the Soviets would run the risks of cheating in order to gain some military “advantage” that did not markedly improve Soviet security. Defense and JCS instead believed that marginal military advantages would still have significant international political consequences even under conditions of rough parity, per the Philadelphia Approach, and therefore were resistant to the idea of losing US competitive advantage in a key weapons technology like MIRV. Even if both sides agreed that the Soviets were testing MRV, the political implications ascribed to that

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technical intelligence fact would continue to vary. This was especially true while the Administration was under siege by opponents of its Safeguard ABM program, for which the imminent arrival of a Soviet MIRV capability was a persuasive justification.

The work by the MIRV Panel helped to moderate some of the Defense Department’s public rhetoric surrounding MIRV, but it could do nothing to change the basic relevance of MIRV to the contentious Safeguard debate. On 24 June 1969, under questioning from the Senate, Laird backed away from some of his earlier public statements on the SS-9, admitting that Soviet tests likely represented only a MRV capability, and that even a perfect SS-9 MIRV would provide the Soviets with little protection against the US SSBN force. Despite these admissions, Laird maintained that the imminent possibility of MIRV’ed SS-9 still justified the Administration’s Safeguard program, which would stabilize deterrence by ensuring that more Minutemen would survive a Soviet attack.\(^\text{26}\) MIRV remained a hot-button issue into the final moments of the Safeguard debate. As late as 5 August 1970, DDR&E John Foster testified to Congress that the Soviets might deploy a three-warhead MIRV as soon as 1970. Although under questioning Foster conceded that the intelligence reports on Soviet SS-9 testing were inconclusive, he nonetheless maintained that his personal judgment was that the Soviets would soon deploy a dangerous MIRV capability.\(^\text{27}\) The MIRV Panel may have convinced Foster that SS-9 was not yet a MIRV, but that did not change Foster’s perception that a Soviet MIRV was coming, and soon.

Given the Defense Department’s public relations strategy, the Administration’s MIRV difficulties were only really eased when the Senate finally agreed to fund Safeguard. On 6

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August 1969, a Senate amendment to defund the Administration’s Safeguard proposal was defeated 51-50, with Vice President Spiro Agnew casting the tie-breaking vote, clearing the way for eventual Senate approval of the Administration’s entire defense budget proposal in November.\(^\text{28}\) Nixon cast the victory in highly personal terms, ordering Haldeman, Kissinger, and Ehrlichman to make sure that the press knew that Safeguard’s success was a tremendous victory for the “Nixon Style” of leadership.\(^\text{29}\) Not coincidentally, the passage of Safeguard also marked a significant decrease in the salience of the Administration’s internal divisions over MIRV. In late August 1969, when JCS sought to reopen the question of whether a MIRV flight test ban could be adequately verified, Kissinger tacked the issue on to an existing study on verification options in SALT for minor amendment, rather than setting up a second MIRV Panel.\(^\text{30}\) Although the Administration’s troubles with MIRV were not over, the political stakes of the issue were significantly decreased.

Although the MIRV Panel’s technical analysis had failed to resolve all of the Administration’s differences over MIRV technology, it nonetheless set an important precedent for future work on divisive issues of weapons procurement and arms control. Debating the finer technical points of MIRV verification provided the Administration with an outlet for different viewpoints concerning the future of strategic nuclear policy while avoiding a fundamental conceptual rupture between the Cambridge and Philadelphia Approaches that might have derailed the Administration’s Safeguard proposal. At the very least, the work by the MIRV


\(^{30}\) Memo, Lynn to Kissinger, 26 August 1969, folder Verification Panel Meeting 8/29/69, Box H-004, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
Panel on how to interpret technical intelligence data had delayed the onset of intractable differences over questions of strategy and policy until the public debate on Safeguard had passed. This success of substituting technical issues as proxies for larger political disputes, however partial, would set an important precedent for the Nixon Administration’s organization of SALT policy in general.

**NSSM 62 and the Verification Panel**

In the meantime, the continued lack of Soviet response to the US SALT proposal left the Administration’s SALT policy in limbo. Nixon had opted to avoid selecting any preferred option from the results of the NSSM 28 study, in favor of presenting all four possible SALT options to the NATO allies. This would provide the allies the greatest sense of participation, but would also enable Nixon to delay selecting a preferred SALT option that might alienate either State or Defense. The first round of NATO consultations occurred on 30 June and 1 July 1969.\(^31\)

In general, the allies seemed happy with the consultation process, though Kissinger believed that some allies were also concerned that strategic nuclear parity might increase Western Europe’s vulnerability to Soviet aggression or manipulation.\(^32\)

The original NSSM 28 study had produced four illustrative concepts for SALT, but no consensus on which was superior. Smith had been responsible for chairing the NSSM 28 Study Group, but by the time the NSC reviewed NSSM 28 in June 1969 Smith believed that the NSSM 28 options should be discarded in favor of ACDA’s new SWWA proposal.\(^33\)

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were opposed to SWWA. The fundamental purpose of SWWA was to halt all strategic nuclear competition and establish a state of mutual vulnerability in perpetuity, but JCS was skeptical that any arms control agreement could freeze entirely the scientific and technological progress of the superpowers. No matter how comprehensive an agreement, JCS believed that competition for marginal advantage would continue in one form or another.³⁴ Laird supported JCS’s objection to SWWA, telling Kissinger that while it might be desirable to freeze certain aspects of superpower strategic competition, there was no good rationale to freeze all areas of competition.³⁵ SWWA posed a serious challenge to the Nixon Administration’s SALT policy process because of its immediacy. Immediately restricting all strategic weapons deployments would invalidate the logic of bargaining chips for new weapons procurement, an especially difficult proposition for Nixon while Safeguard was being debated in the Senate.

The growing dispute between ACDA and Defense over SWWA during the final months of the Safeguard debate might have been a major problem for Nixon, but the Soviets still refused to discuss a start-date for SALT.³⁶ Absent a clear start date, Nixon and Kissinger opted to delay selecting a preferred SALT option in favor of further study. On 2 July 1969, Kissinger issued NSSM 62, which ordered the NSSM 28 Steering Group to prepare four detailed SALT negotiating positions based on the sufficiency criteria and the NSC’s discussion of NSSM 28. The Steering Group was instructed to produce a number of different SALT options, including a limited option, an “intermediate” option, a comprehensive option, and a SWWA option, as well

³⁶ Ambassador Beam believed that the Soviets were marking time on SALT in order to see how the Safeguard debate would play out (Telegram, AmEmbassyMoscow to SecState, 11 August 1969, folder SALT June-July [1969] Volume II [1 of 2], Box 873, NSC Files, Nixon Library).
as commentary from the various agencies on which option was best. The options were to be more detailed than the illustrative proposals produced in NSSM 28.\textsuperscript{37} NSSM 62 thus embraced a laundry-list approach to arms control policy, ensuring that the preferred options of every agency would receive consideration, with no real indication of preference to one or the other.

While the Steering Group began the NSSM 62 study, Kissinger also began a second study specifically on issues of SALT verification. Smith first proposed a high-level NSC group on verification in a 30 June 1969 memo to Kissinger. NSSM 28 had produced a verification report, but its accuracy had been challenged by JCS. Smith thought that a deputy-level \textit{ad hoc} group chaired by Kissinger could produce material for a special NSC meeting on the subject of verification, to smooth out some of the differences between agencies.\textsuperscript{38} Shortly thereafter, Kissinger forwarded Smith’s recommendation to Nixon, agreeing that an NSC Verification Panel would help iron out some of the differences between CIA and JCS over US verification capabilities. Kissinger also wrote that the real basis of the disagreement between the CIA and JCS was not technical, but political. JCS believed that the Soviets might gain a major military or political advantage by cheating, while the CIA and other agencies believed that any small advantages the Soviets gained by cheating would be politically irrelevant. Kissinger believed that a Verification Panel would allow the Administration to reach some consensus on the capabilities of US technical intelligence, and whether these capabilities were able to police a SALT agreement without risking Nixon’s strategic sufficiency criteria. Given the importance of


\textsuperscript{38} Memo, Smith to Kissinger, 30 June 1969, folder Miscellaneous Verification Panel, Box H-108, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
the issue, Kissinger would chair the Panel personally. From the very beginning, therefore, Nixon and Kissinger saw the Verification Panel as a tool for building SALT consensus by reformulating political differences as solvable technical problems.

In arms control negotiations, verification is rarely a straightforward issue. As numerous scholars have noted, the question of arms control verification is still ultimately a political one, albeit one with very important technical characteristics. No amount of technical intelligence capability will produce certainty that an adversary is abiding by its treaty limits. Rather, the question is what level of uncertainty political leaders are willing to risk, in order to gain the expected benefits of the agreement itself. Although technical intelligence capabilities can ideally reduce the risk that an adversary will successfully cheat, in the end it is up to the decision-maker whether or not an arms control agreement is worth the remaining risk. As a result, proponents of different arms control concepts would often arrive at different conclusions concerning whether the United States’ technical intelligence capabilities justified the risks of limiting certain weapons systems. Proponents of the Cambridge Approach tended to believe there was little risk

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of Soviet cheating, since they believed that a small advantage in strategic nuclear weapons (of the sort that the Soviets might feasibly achieve without being detected) would have little impact on the international political balance. By comparison, proponents of the Philadelphia Approach believed that winning or losing small advantages in strategic nuclear weapons was the very purpose of arms control negotiations, and therefore tended to be risk-averse when it came to verification.\footnote{Michael Krepon has an excellent description of the differing assumptions behind these alternative risk assessments, although he frames it in terms of arms control proponents (risk-tolerant) and arms control skeptics (risk-averse); see, Michael Krepon, “The Political Dynamics of Verification and Compliance Debates,” in Verification and Arms Control, ed. William Potter (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1985), 135-151. Within the arms control community, a similar dynamic existed between the risk-tolerant Cambridge Approach and the risk-averse Philadelphia Approach. On competing assumptions of Soviet motives and verification, see also: Katz, Verification and SALT, 22-27.} Thus, it comes as little surprise that verification became an intensely-debated political issue within the Nixon Administration.

Although scholars have long recognized verification’s complex political character, however, policymakers within the Nixon Administration rarely referred to verification issues in such nuanced terms.\footnote{On the “Manichaeian” conception of verification in US arms control politics, see: Katz, Verification and SALT, 3.} To be sure, policymakers often acknowledged the level of uncertainty inherent in any system of arms control verification, but rarely would they debate the specific political merits and verification risks of certain arms control options.\footnote{A rare example of serious debate over the relative political benefits and verification risks of different arms control proposals occurred during the NSC Review Group Meeting on 19 June 1969 (“Minutes of a Review Group Meeting,” 19 June 1969, FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 20).} Rather, the Administration’s SALT policy process sought to translate verification issues into simple binaries: agreements that were either verifiable, or not. For example, while Nixon’s 21 July 1969 instructions to Smith admitted the inherent uncertainty of any verification judgment, they
nonetheless maintained that “Any agreed limitations must therefore meet the test of verifiability.”

Similarly, while the Verification Panel’s extensive work was grounded in the language of risk assessment, its real utility to Nixon and Kissinger was its ability to characterize certain proposals as either technically verifiable or unverifiable, allowing certain arms control proposals to be discarded without fatally offending their powerful constituents.

The Verification Panel’s importance grew as the NSSM 62 study failed to produce decisive results. NSSM 62 was conducted by the original NSSM 28 study group chaired by Smith. This caused tension between Smith, on the one hand, and Defense and JCS on the other. Laird was unhappy that NSSM 62 left consideration of SALT policy under ACDA’s direction, because ACDA was promoting the Cambridge Approach in SALT, despite the fact that the NSDM 16 sufficiency definition included damage limitation. Laird believed that there were arms limitation agreements that were consistent with damage limitation, such as an agreement that would allow high levels of ABM. Furthermore, State and ACDA were assuming that the Soviets were negotiating in good faith to secure mutual assured destruction, but DDR&E and JCS still worried that the Soviets might take extraordinary efforts to cheat in order to gain advantage.

Laird’s objections had less to do with NSSM 62 itself, which contained options supported by Defense and JCS, and more to do with Smith’s influence over the SALT policy process. Laird worried that under Smith’s direction, SALT would pursue the Cambridge Approach to arms control, without taking into account Defense’s support of the Philadelphia Approach.

In the end, NSSM 62 produced five detailed SALT options for NSC consideration.

Option I, the most limited option, would freeze ICBMs, with an agreed limit on ABM deployments, while allowing modernization and replacement on each side. This option would be easy to verify and would stabilize second-strike on each side, but would allow full competition on qualitative improvements. Option II was similar to first, but would also freeze SLBM deployments, with freedom-to-mix between ICBM and SLBMs for replacement and modernization. This option controlled SLBM and allowed the US to replace vulnerable ICBMs with SLBMs in the future, but introduced some verification difficulties related to tracking Soviet replacement of ICBMs with SLBMs, and vice versa. Option III was similar to the first two, but without freedom-to-mix provisions, which would improve verification but limit future US deployment options. Option IV was similar to the third option, but would also ban the testing and deployment of MIRV. Banning MIRV would improve Minuteman survivability, but would degrade US retaliatory capability if Safeguard-level ABM were allowed. Option V was a version of SWWA, “a quantitative and qualitative freeze on those aspects of strategic offensive missile systems that can be adequately verified,” perhaps with some agreed limit on ABM and ABM-capable radars. In general, Defense and JCS tended to favor less comprehensive options, while ACDA preferred Option V. Per the original instructions, NSSM 62 contained different options to please different constituencies.

What NSSM 62 did not produce was an agreed framework for how to evaluate the desirability of these options. When the NSC Review Group met to discuss the results of NSSM 62 on 7 July 1969, ACDA and JCS remained totally at odds over whether a limited or comprehensive agreement was desirable. For his part, Kissinger did not believe that NSSM 62

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added any new information for Nixon to decide amongst the competing options. Furthermore, Kissinger believed that all of the NSSM 62 options contained serious verification difficulties, though it seemed that the difficulties increased as the options became more comprehensive. 47

The meeting itself provided no resolution to these differences. On 12 July 1969, Sonnenfeldt sent Kissinger a memo reviewing NSSM 62, which had only deepened the divisions between Defense and JCS, on the one hand, and State and ACDA, on the other. Specifically, Defense and JCS had serious doubts about the verifiability of a MIRV ban, which was central to ACDA’s conception of SALT. 48 Halperin agreed that the MIRV issue was probably too divisive to be worked out via NSSM 62, and instead suggested that Nixon select Option III as an opening position and leave it up to the Soviets to raise MIRV, which would allow the US to press for Soviet concessions on other issues for MIRV’s inclusion. 49 Shortly thereafter, Packard wrote to Kissinger telling him that Defense did not believe that any of the NSSM 62 options were acceptable, and that Packard was working with Nitze to develop new SALT options that the Defense Department would prefer. 50

On 17 July 1969, the NSC Review Group met for a second time to try to work out some sort of agreed position on the presentation of NSSM 62 to the President. Kissinger opened the meeting by introducing the possibility of delaying final decision on a SALT option in favor of

49 Not coincidentally, Halperin’s preferred Option III was very similar to the Johnson Administration SALT proposal that Halperin had played a key role in drafting (Memo, Halperin to Kissinger, 16 July 1969, folder SALT June-July [1969] Volume II [1 of 2], NSC Files, Box 873, Nixon Library).
holding an exploratory opening round with the Soviets; this would provide more information on Soviet preferences, and help the Administration tailor its own initial SALT proposal to be in line with Soviet thinking on the subject. Smith believed that an exploratory round was possible, but favored opening with some sort of concrete US negotiating position, to prevent the talks from degenerating into political recrimination on unrelated issues. For his part, Kissinger worried that tabling an opening position would reduce the Administration’s bargaining leverage, since once a preferred position was selected it would be very difficult to convince the government to switch to a new negotiating posture. The CIA representative claimed that the real question was not what the Soviets wanted, but whether the Administration was ready to select a preferred SALT option or not. Smith favored selecting a comprehensive option, while Kissinger preferred to delay further.51

The largest substantive debate at the Review Group meeting was between proponents of a comprehensive opening position, including State, ACDA, and CIA, and proponents of a more limited opening position, including Defense and JCS. On the specific issue of a MIRV ban, Defense and JCS maintained that some sort of on-site inspection would be required to verify Soviet compliance, which in turn suggested that a MIRV ban might not be negotiable with the Soviets. Smith argued that on-site inspection might be nice to have, but was not necessary to verify a MIRV ban, especially if the US secures a comprehensive SALT agreement limiting Soviet opportunities to cheat.52 Although the debate about a comprehensive versus a limited SALT agreement had more to do with competing concepts of future superpower relations than it

did with specific details of technical intelligence, verification was emerging as the single most important issue shaping the Administration’s SALT deliberations, since its technical aspects held out the possibility of achieving some sort of consensus on which SALT options were possible, if not desirable.

Soon after the 17 July Review Group meeting, Kissinger sent Nixon a memo describing NSSM 62’s lack of progress. After reviewing the various options under consideration, Kissinger explained that the biggest problem was that the various agencies had not yet developed criteria for evaluating which potential agreement was best. Rather than holding an NSC meeting to discuss NSSM 62 and select a preferred option, Kissinger recommended that Nixon order the Delegation to prepare for an exploratory opening round. This would provide the Administration with more information on Soviet motives, but it would also allow Nixon to delay making a decision that might alienate a large part of his government. Reflecting his own preferences, Kissinger recommended that Nixon order the US SALT Delegation to present a limited option as an illustration to the Soviets, and avoid discussing a MIRV ban for the time being. In the face of disarray over the NSSM 62 options, Nixon and Kissinger ultimately fell back on further delay, keeping all of the NSSM 62 options open for future consideration and avoiding a decision that might displease ACDA or JCS.

In lieu of a full NSC meeting, on 21 July 1969 Nixon met with Smith to discuss preparation for the first round of SALT. Smith made a personal appeal to Nixon that the United States should begin negotiations with a proposal for a comprehensive SALT option, coupled to an immediate moratorium on MIRV and ABM while the comprehensive agreement was

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negotiated and concluded. Smith took the opportunity to provide Nixon with a letter containing a number of arguments in favor of an immediate bilateral missile testing moratorium, which would halt all qualitative improvements to Soviet SS-9 missiles while also keeping open the option of negotiating a MIRV ban at some point in the future. Nixon did not respond directly to Smith’s proposals, but later that day forwarded Smith a letter containing instructions for the Delegation. Nixon concluded that since the Soviets had not been forthcoming about the sort of agreement they hoped to reach under SALT, the best course of action was to delay selecting a preferred option from NSSM 62 in favor of an initial exploratory round. Nixon would reserve final judgment until he had gauged Soviet seriousness on SALT. Although Nixon justified his decision for an exploratory round in terms of sounding out Soviet motives, the delay also allowed the full gamut of NSSM 62 options to remain viable options, at least until the Soviets agreed to set a starting date.

Nixon’s 21 July instructions also emphasized the importance of developing an agreed position on verification within the government. To this end, the Verification Panel met for the first time on 22 July 1969. Kissinger used the original meeting to introduce the Panel’s purpose, and to lay out the structure whereby the Panel would conduct its work. The Panel was

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57 In The White House Years, Kissinger recalled that Nixon decided to pursue an exploratory round primarily due to the lack of consensus within the government concerning the best SALT proposal (Henry Kissinger, The White House Years, New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1979, 149-150).
59 The organization that would eventually become known as the Verification Panel was originally called the “Verification Committee” during its first meetings in mid-1969. For clarity’s sake, I refer to the organization as the Verification Panel throughout.
to review US technical intelligence capabilities as they related to SALT, to provide a baseline for evaluating whether different types of SALT agreements could be adequately verified, and under what conditions. To conduct this study, the Verification Panel would appoint a special assistant-level Working Group, chaired by Lynn, to conduct the necessary technical analysis and draft a Verification Report for consideration by the Panel and eventually the NSC.\textsuperscript{61} At the meeting itself, Packard outlined a number of the Defense Department’s concerns over verification, especially surrounding MIRV and ABM. For his part, Smith sought to gain assent from the Panel that a more comprehensive agreement would be easier to verify than a limited one, but Packard maintained that that was the very question that the Working Group was meant to study. In general, the participants agreed that more work needed to be done on issues of verification, especially what sorts of corollary restraints might be included in various SALT agreements to improve transparency and complicate cheating.\textsuperscript{62} The Verification Panel Working Group held its first meeting later that week on 25 July 1969. Lynn emphasized that the Working Group should not feel beholden to the previous NSSM 28 work on verification, but instead should study the entire issue from scratch. A team of “ramrods” chaired by Perez (who had overseen the MIRV Panel Report) would supervise the work of a number of expert groups on various Soviet weapons systems and the verification problems entailed therein. Special attention would be given to future US technical intelligence capabilities, as well as the problem of on-site inspection.\textsuperscript{63}

Although initially intended to produce a single report on verification capabilities, the

\textsuperscript{61} “HAK’s Talking Points First Meeting of Verification Panel,” folder Verification Panel Meeting – Review of Capabilities 7/22/69, Box H-004, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.


\textsuperscript{63} Memo for the Record, 24 July 1969, folder Verification Panel Meeting – Review of Capabilities 7/22/69,” Box H-004, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
Verification Panel’s authority quickly expanded to encompass all aspects of SALT policy planning. The original expansion of the Panel’s authority was driven by the continued dispute between CIA and JCS over the status of Soviet MIRV testing. Although the MIRV Panel had achieved some rough consensus on this issue, Smith’s 21 July 1969 proposal that the US open SALT by proposing a joint moratorium on missile testing began a second fight over MIRV, even as the Administration’s Safeguard ABM proposal gained Senatorial approval. On 1 August 1969, Wheeler sent Laird a memo covering JCS’s strong objections to a MIRV moratorium, which JCS believed would be impossible to verify and which would force the US to stop one of its most important strategic weapons programs with no compensation. JCS worried that once a MIRV testing moratorium was concluded, it would be politically impossible for the Administration to restart MIRV testing, which would effectively trade away an area of US advantage in exchange for nothing from the Soviets.\(^{64}\) The CIA disagreed with JCS’s analysis. On the specific point of verification, the CIA maintained that monitoring a missile testing moratorium would be relatively easy, since any Soviet missile test would constitute a violation. Whether a pure MIRV test ban could be verified remained an open question, but the CIA was much more hopeful than JCS that the Verification Panel would conclude that a MIRV test ban was viable.\(^ {65}\) As a result of this dispute, the Verification Panel Working Group was also tasked with reviewing the MIRV Panel’s conclusions, to produce an updated version that would include JCS’s objections.\(^ {66}\) Verification was becoming the central technical issue to all of SALT, and therefore the most important for adjudicating disputes between different parts of the government.

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\(^{66}\) Memo, Lynn to Kissinger, 26 August 1969, folder Verification Panel Meeting, 8/29/69, Box H-004, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
The Verification Panel’s remit expanded even further in early August, moving beyond specific questions of verification to encompass a total review of the NSSM 62 options. The Verification Panel met on 8 August 1969 for a preliminary report on the Working Group’s progress. Although the verification study was taking longer than expected, the Panel would need to begin considering how best to present the highly-technical subject of verification to the President once the verification report was completed, especially if it failed to resolve all of the outstanding divisions over SALT policy. At the meeting itself, Richardson suggested that Nixon would need to be familiar with the various risks and trade-offs associated with the verification of specific SALT agreements. Kissinger agreed, saying that the Working Group could produce an additional report reviewing the verification pros and cons of each of the NSSM 62 options. A few days later, Lynn relayed Kissinger’s instructions to the Working Group, which was now tasked with preparing a study on the verification implications of each of the NSSM 62 SALT options. The study would examine each of the options on its own, and also in the context of various collateral restraints that might improve their verifiability.

As a result, the Verification Panel superseded the older NSSM 28 Steering Group in the evaluation of SALT options. From Nixon and Kissinger’s perspective, the Verification Panel enjoyed two advantages over the previous Steering Group. First, it was chaired directly by Kissinger, with a working group chaired by Lynn, which decreased ACDA’s influence on SALT policy formulation and strengthened the NSC staff’s hand. Second, it was focused almost

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67 Memo, Lynn to Kissinger, folder Verification Panel MIRV 8/8/69, Box H-004, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
69 Memo, Lynn to Carl Duckett et al, 11 August 1969, folder Verification Panel MIRV 8/8/69, Box H-004, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
exclusively on the technical issues of verification, which made it easier to avoid troublesome political questions about the ultimate purpose of arms limitation. The 29 August 1969 Verification Panel meeting confirmed the Panel’s status as the central organ of SALT policy analysis. Lynn requested that the Panel confirm the Working Group’s plan to produce a detailed, itemized analysis of each of the NSSM 62 SALT options from a verification perspective, including various collateral restraints or hedges that might be desirable for each option. While this was a very ambitious research program, Lynn was satisfied that this “building blocks” approach would provide a more comprehensive technical basis for deciding between SALT options than NSSM 28 or NSSM 62 had provided.\(^71\) The Panel ultimately approved this detailed analysis of SALT options; in fact, the Panel’s remit was broadened even further to consider not only the risks entailed in various SALT agreements, but also the risks to US national security should a SALT option not be concluded.\(^72\) By early September, the Verification Panel’s original task – the verification report – was largely concluded.\(^73\) The Panel’s larger work on SALT was only beginning.\(^74\)

In retrospect, the ultimate effectiveness of the Verification Panel as a tool for managing SALT policy was contentious. In his memoirs, Smith recalled that the NSC “building block” studies were largely busy-work. In actual negotiations with the Soviets, the SALT Delegation generally relied on its own technical expertise rather than that of the Verification Panel Working Group. Within the Administration, Smith believed that the extensive technical work generally

\(^{71}\) Memo, Lynn to Kissinger, 26 August 1969, folder Verification Panel Meeting, 8/29/69, Box H-004, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
\(^{73}\) Memo, Lynn to Verification Working Group, 2 September 1969, folder Verification Panel Meeting, 8/29/69, Box H-004, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
\(^{74}\) Memo, Lynn to Verification Working Group, 9 September 1969, folder Verification Panel Meeting 8-29-69, Box H-004, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
went over the heads of higher-level decision makers.\textsuperscript{75} For his part, Kissinger believed that the Verification Panel’s work was an invaluable educational experience for him, providing exposure to both substantial issues of arms control, but also to the positions staked out by the bureaucracy on various issues. Kissinger relied heavily on the Verification Panel’s preparatory work in private negotiations with the Soviets. The “building block” approach provided him with the background necessary to conduct these negotiations, though Kissinger noted that the Verification Panel’s work could not protect him against “Monday-morning quarterbacking” by bureaucratic rivals.\textsuperscript{76} The Verification Panel had an advantage noted by neither Smith nor Kissinger: it held out the possibility that various SALT options might be ruled out on their technical characteristics alone, absent a serious political decision by Nixon. The Verification Panel thus became the nerve center of the Administration’s SALT policy deliberations, institutionalizing the Nixon Administration’s efforts to replace divisive political disputes with solvable technical ones.

\textbf{Brinkmanship and Defense Management}

In addition to Safeguard and SALT, Nixon and Kissinger also sought to pioneer new uses for US strategic nuclear forces that would sustain strategic nuclear advantage even under conditions of parity. The need for restoring US nuclear superiority seemed especially great as the summer of 1969 wore on, and the Administration observed the violent skirmishes along the Sino-Soviet border with growing concern.\textsuperscript{77} The nascent Chinese nuclear program significantly

\textsuperscript{76} Kissinger, \textit{The White House Years}, 148-149.
increased the stakes of Sino-Soviet conflict, which now threatened to escalate into nuclear war.\textsuperscript{78}

The sense of impending crisis intensified in August when a mid-level Soviet diplomat asked his US colleague how the United States would react to a Soviet nuclear strike on China.\textsuperscript{79} This unexpected query caused alarm at the highest levels. In a 10 September 1969 memo, Rogers concluded that a sudden Soviet nuclear attack on China was unlikely, though he admitted that further skirmishing might escalate to large-scale war. Kissinger disagreed, instead believing that the Soviets would not have raised the issue if they were not considering it.\textsuperscript{80} The crisis blew over, but the experience left some in the Administration concerned about the paucity of military options.\textsuperscript{81}

Kissinger believed that the key to retaining US strategic nuclear advantage was the development of limited strategic nuclear attack options. Limited nuclear attack options would threaten punishment of Soviet aggression, without immediately provoking an overwhelming Soviet nuclear response.\textsuperscript{82} Kissinger had originally intended to the NSSM 3 study to begin developing limited strategic nuclear options, but the resulting study contained little new


\textsuperscript{82} Kissinger had a long-standing interest in the question of limited nuclear war; see, Henry Kissinger, \textit{Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy} (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1957). While Kissinger’s earlier work had focused primarily on the possible tactical uses of nuclear weapons on the European battlefield, in government Kissinger’s efforts were directed much more towards the development of limited strategic nuclear operations against the Soviet Union itself.
material. As a result, over the summer of 1969 Kissinger issued NSSM 64 on “U.S. Strategic
Capabilities” and NSSM 69 “U.S. Nuclear Policy in Asia,” which aimed to provide the basis for
limited strategic nuclear options for the President. NSSM 64 was completed by late November
1969, though its conclusions remained somewhat vague on details. Kissinger’s search for
limited nuclear options would remain a longer-term objective.

While Kissinger worked to develop limited strategic nuclear options, Nixon was
practicing his own personal theory of nuclear brinkmanship. Nixon’s theory of brinkmanship
grew out of his memory of Eisenhower’s statecraft, especially during the Taiwan Straits and
Berlin Crises. Nixon believed that the primary criterion for successful nuclear brinkmanship was
not superiority in weapons, but rather the perceived willingness on the part of the commander-in-
chief to escalate to nuclear warfare. Nixon believed that Eisenhower had enjoyed a serious
credibility advantage due to his wartime prestige, and that this credibility had proven decisive in
Eisenhower’s standing firm in the face of communist aggression. Although he did not enjoy
Eisenhower’s prestige, Nixon believed that he could improve his nuclear credibility by
cultivating an image of instability and irrationality, causing potential adversaries to fear that
Nixon might resort to disproportionate violent escalation if provoked.

Nixon believed that he could use his image as a rapid anti-communist to intimidate the
Soviets and North Vietnamese into settling the Vietnam conflict on terms favorable to the United

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84 National Security Study Memorandum 64, 8 July 1969, *FRUS 1969-76*, Vol. XXXIV,
States. As early as March 1969, Nixon was contemplating increasing US bombing of Vietnam, to include feigned or actual use of nuclear weapons, to break the negotiating deadlock and end the war quickly.\textsuperscript{87} The NSC discussed escalatory options in Vietnam in May 1969, with Nixon pushing his subordinates to consider larger gestures to intimidate the Soviets.\textsuperscript{88} By July 1969, Nixon and Kissinger were considering a major escalation of the air war in Vietnam, code-named DUCK HOOK. Rogers and Laird both opposed this escalation, and ultimately Nixon opted not to proceed for fear of the domestic political repercussions.\textsuperscript{89} Instead, Nixon chose to conduct a secret “Readiness Test” of US strategic nuclear forces, in an attempt to intimidate the Soviets and North Vietnamese into ending the fighting in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{90}

The US military conducted Nixon’s world-wide Readiness Test in October 1969. Kissinger briefed Nixon on possible Readiness Test options on 9 October, including sudden radio silence by US strategic forces, unexplained stand-downs and ground alerts of US bombers, increased reconnaissance flights around the periphery of Soviet airspace, and surging US nuclear submarines to sea.\textsuperscript{91} Wheeler issued orders to various commands around the world on 10 October, ordering changes in bomber readiness status and aerial reconnaissance in an effort to test readiness for a nuclear confrontation with the Soviet Union, to run from 13 October to 25

\textsuperscript{88} \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXIV, Editorial Note 59.
\textsuperscript{89} Burr & Kimball, \textit{Nixon’s Nuclear Specter}, 202-264.
\textsuperscript{90} Both Kissinger and Nixon recall that the Readiness Test was intended primarily to deter the Soviets from taking any aggressive action against China (Kissinger, \textit{The White House Years}, 184-186; \textit{Time}, 29 July 1985, 52-53). More recently, Burr & Kimball have concluded that the Readiness Test was intended exclusively to bring a rapid conclusion to the Vietnam War, with China as little more than an afterthought (Burr & Kimball, \textit{Nixon’s Nuclear Specter}, 4-9).
October.\textsuperscript{92} By 15 October, the scale and duration of the Readiness Test expanded, including numerous minor changes in the deployment patterns of aircraft, ships, submarines, and missile batteries around the world.\textsuperscript{93} Nixon tried to accentuate the readiness test by hinting at possible major escalation of the war in Vietnam to Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin.\textsuperscript{94} In the end, both CIA and JCS concluded that although the Soviets likely observed much of the Readiness Test, it did not appear to have much of an impact on Soviet behavior.\textsuperscript{95} Certainly, the Readiness Test had no impact on Soviet attitudes towards the Vietnam War.\textsuperscript{96}

On the face of it, the Readiness Test and the search for limited nuclear options seem an odd fit for an Administration preparing to enter into major arms limitation negotiations with the Soviets. Several recent analyses have cited Nixon and Kissinger’s efforts to retain and exploit strategic nuclear advantage as evidence of their lack of genuine interest in arms limitation negotiations.\textsuperscript{97} Nixon and Kissinger’s motives become easier to comprehend when we consider that both saw SALT as yet another tool to gain strategic nuclear advantage over the Soviets.

SALT, brinkmanship, Safeguard, limited options – all were tools in a largely-improvised effort

\textsuperscript{96} Burr & Kimball, \textit{Nixon’s Nuclear Specter}, 304-309.
to compete effectively with the Soviets in an era of strategic nuclear parity.

Easier to square with Nixon’s pursuit of SALT was the Administration’s efforts to reduce defense expenditure and rationalize defense planning. In *The White House Years*, Kissinger recalled that Nixon was very serious about reorienting fiscal priorities from military spending to domestic spending. Nixon worried that if he did not get a handle on reducing defense spending, that opponents in Congress would force even steeper cuts on the Administration, imperiling US foreign policy around the world.98 Nixon was certainly concerned about a possible isolationist turn in the United States, which might be accelerated if spending were seen as out of control.99 Opposition to the Administration’s defense spending priorities was heightened by the ongoing political battle over US policy in Vietnam. Opponents of the war worried that US foreign policy had become overly-militarized, and that high levels of defense spending were diverting valuable resources that could be better spent at home.100 An important goal of the NSSM 3 study on US military posture was to provide a rational basis for evaluating US defense commitments abroad, and evaluating the costs these entailed.101

Nixon’s efforts to constrain the defense budget also faced opposition from within the government, especially from the Defense Department and the armed services. Although the White House and the Defense Department shared a number of common assumptions about SALT, they differed significantly over how far the Administration could push Congress on the

issue of defense spending. As the NSSM 3 study neared its conclusion, Laird decided to take his differences with Nixon to the public. On 21 August 1969, while Nixon was summering in California, Laird gave a press conference where he announced that the Administration was considering a $3 billion cut to the defense budget for FY1971. Laird explained that Congress was threatening to force even steeper cuts on the Administration, which would come later in the budgetary cycle and completely derail any efforts at rationalizing expenditures and meeting vital missions around the world. Nonetheless, Laird announced that even the contemplated $3 billion cut would likely “reduce our capability to meet current commitments,” exposing the United States to greater risk in its foreign policy. Although Nixon did not reprimand Laird directly, he was fed up with high-ranking members of his government undermining him in public. On 11 September 1969, Nixon issued the “Colorado Springs directive,” which ordered all members of the government to get Kissinger’s prior approval for any public statements on “matters of known or potential Presidential interest.”

By September 1969, the larger NSSM 3 analysis of general-purpose forces was completed. On 1 September 1969, Undersecretary of State Johnson sent Rogers a memo covering NSSM 3’s results. The study sought to justify cuts to defense spending by reassessing US military commitments around the world. The study contained five illustrative options, all of which retained the ability to conduct a 90-day defense of Western Europe from a Warsaw Pact attack, per the United States’ current commitment to NATO. The options differed in their relationship to Asia: the most extensive option would allow the United States to fight a full-scale

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war against combined Soviet-Chinese aggression, while the most limited option would have virtually no general-purpose forces available for an Asian contingency. Johnson believed that the second option, which would allow the US to defend either Northeast or Southeast Asia in a regional war at a cost of $76 billion per year, was the most realistic, in-line with the Administration’s desire to reduce defense expenditures significantly below $80 billion.\footnote{Memo, Johnson to Rogers, 1 September 1969, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXIV, Document 44.}

The final NSSM 3 report also compared the five notional defense strategies against the Administration’s domestic spending priorities. The study organized the Administration’s domestic spending priorities into four tiers. The first tier contained important political commitments like welfare reform, revenue sharing, educational aid, crime control, pollution reduction, child health, and veteran relief, which were expected to expand from $5 billion in the FY71 budget to $21 billion in the FY75 budget. The second and third tiers contained other important spending priorities, including aid to higher education, foreign aid expansion, urban renewal, basic research, and Post Office modernization. The fourth tier contained desirable but less politically-sensitive programs, including space exploration, merchant marine modernization, and national parks funding. The NSSM 3 strategy options were organized according to their impact on the Administration’s domestic spending priorities. The most extensive options would require additional revenue to meet even the Administration’s first tier of priorities. Retaining the current level of spending would barely allow the Administration to complete its first tier. Reducing defense spending would allow the Administration to pursue its second and third tiers, though only at the cost of significantly reducing its general-purpose defense of Asia. The study also noted that the growing Sino-Soviet split, as well as the United States’ continued nuclear superiority over China, meant that reducing general-purpose forces commitment to Asia was at
least possible, if Nixon was willing to run slightly higher risks due to marginally lower military effectiveness.\textsuperscript{105}

The NSC met on 10 September 1969 to discuss the NSSM 3 results. At the meeting, Rogers supported the idea of reducing the commitment of general-purpose forces to Asia, coupled with reducing spending on expensive ground forces while procuring more air and naval forces to support US allies in Asia. For his part, Laird emphasized the risks entailed in reducing defense commitment to Asia after Vietnam, especially the high costs that the United States would have to pay if it were compelled to forcibly liberate allies following a major Chinese invasion. Nixon concluded the meeting by saying that he would take time to consider all of his strategic and budgetary options.\textsuperscript{106}

While NSSM 3 provided a strong rationale for reducing defense expenditure in order to meet the President’s domestic spending goals, Kissinger worried that Defense and the armed services would seek to evade Presidential guidance through their own process of bargaining. Kissinger personally supported a marginal reduction of general-purpose forces in Asia, but only as part of a larger restructuring of general-purpose forces to procure more air and naval forces for the continued projection of US power. Even if Nixon forced a smaller budget on the Defense Department, the armed services would probably compromise by procuring a slightly smaller and less-capable version of the existing military, rather than restructuring as Nixon and Kissinger preferred. Kissinger proposed two solutions to this dilemma. First, Nixon should order the Defense Department to produce a five-year budgetary plan, explaining how its FY71 spending would fit into its larger plan to reorient US military power away from land war in Asia to


\textsuperscript{106} \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXIV, Editorial Note 48.
offshore power projection. Second, Nixon should create an NSC Defense Program Review Committee (DPRC), so that the entire government could continue to evaluate its strategic budgetary options, as it had in the NSSM 3 study.107

Much as the NSSM 28 Steering Group was supplanted by the NSC Verification Panel, the NSSM 3 Steering Group would be replaced by the DPRC, chaired by Kissinger. At the conclusion of the 10 September NSC meeting, Nixon indicated that he was considering establishing a more formal NSC framework for long-term defense planning.108 Kissinger continued advocating for a DPRC to provide more guidance to Defense on how to match military procurement to the President’s larger strategic goals.109 Laird’s dispute with JCS over what sort of naval capabilities should be retained under conditions of reduced spending strengthened Kissinger’s case.110 By the time Nixon met with Laird and JCS on 24 September 1969, he was convinced of the need for greater White House involvement in the defense procurement. The shrinking pie of defense spending was causing serious unrest between Defense, the armed services, and the Bureau of the Budget (BOB). Nixon and Kissinger were especially interested in ensuring that cuts to defense spending came out of general-purpose forces, and did not reduce the strategic military capabilities of the United States.111

In order to ensure an orderly reduction of the Defense budget, on 11 October 1969 Nixon issued NSDM 26, ordering the creation of a DPRC to review defense budgetary and strategic

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issues requiring Presidential approval. 112 The same day, Nixon also issued NSDM 27, selecting
the defense reduction option from NSSM 3 as the Administration’s preferred defense posture.
The Defense Department was ordered to produce a draft budget based on these guidelines, as
well as a “five year force and program plan… consistent with the approved strategy and
budgetary guidelines, together with an explanation and rationale for the forces in each major
force category.” The budget and five-year program would be submitted to the DPRC for
discussion, before being considered by the President. Finally, Nixon ordered that the Defense
Department prepare a new five-year plan every subsequent year for the DPRC to review.113 The
DPRC would now be responsible for working out the Administration’s defense policy, under
Kissinger’s watchful eye.

The new DPRC was not popular with Defense or the services. The Committee met for
the first time on 22 October 1969 to discuss preparation of the FY71 budget. While Packard said
that Defense welcomed greater Presidential guidance on issues of strategy, he and Wheeler
agreed that Defense would need to retain control over individual budget lines, which would be
too complicated to review in Committee. BOB Director James Schlesinger also maintained that
the usual budgetary process, worked out between Defense and BOB, should not be replaced
entirely by the new DPRC process. Packard also worried that it might be too late for the FY1971
budget to meet the President’s NSDM 27 objectives, which might have to be put off until
FY1972. Kissinger was adamant that the FY71 budget needed to be within the President’s
guidelines, though Packard and Schlesinger worried that re-opening specific budgetary issues

Document 55.
113 National Security Decision Memorandum 27, 11 October 1969, FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXXIV,
Document 56.
might take more time than was available.\footnote{Minutes of Defense Program Review Committee Meeting, 22 October 1969, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXIV, Document 96.} For its part, State was pleased to have a larger say in the Defense budgetary process, calling for reorientation of defense procurement to more diplomatically-useful air and naval forces.\footnote{Paper Prepared in the Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs, undated, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXIV, Document 98.} The DPRC also quickly assumed an important role in strategic arms procurement, which would make it an important forum for SALT deliberation.

**Preparing for SALT**

By the fall of 1969, the Administration was finally receiving indications that the Soviets were ready to begin SALT. Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko met with Rogers at the UN General Assembly in late September 1969 for an informal discussion of a number of issues, including SALT preparations. Gromyko indicated that the Soviets would soon be ready to open negotiations on strategic arms.\footnote{Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting, 8 October 1969, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 34, fn5.} On 17 October 1969, Dobrynin called Kissinger to request a private meeting with Nixon to convey a special message from the Soviet leadership on SALT.\footnote{Memcon, Nixon, Kissinger, & Dobrynin, 20 October 1969, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 35, fn1.} Nixon met with Dobrynin on 20 October in the Oval Office. Dobrynin delivered a note from the Soviet leadership proposing that SALT begin on 17 November 1969 in Helsinki. Nixon asked whether the talks had to take place in Helsinki; Dobrynin said that Rogers had included Helsinki in his original proposal, but that the Soviets would be willing to consider beginning talks in Helsinki before shifting to Vienna for a second round. Nixon warned Dobrynin that the United States was preparing for serious and substantive SALT discussion, and that the Soviets should do
the same.\footnote{Memcon, Nixon, Kissinger, & Dobrynin, 20 October 1969, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 35. In \textit{Doubletalk}, Smith recalled being informed that Kissinger and Dobrynin had been discussing some basic details of SALT, including that the first round of SALT would be exploratory. Smith thought little of this at the time, though he later found out that Kissinger and Dobrynin were having much more important conversations on SALT via their back channel (Smith, \textit{Doubletalk}, 80).} On 25 October 1969, the White House announced that SALT would begin on 17 November 1969 in Helsinki.\footnote{News Conference #357, 25 October 1969, folder SALT October-November 16, 1969, Volume IV [2 of 2], Box 874, NSC Files, Nixon Library.} As the opening to SALT approached, the Administration’s efforts to produce an internal SALT consensus would accelerate, even though the United States was not required to table an official position in an original exploratory round.

Nixon and Kissinger worked to ensure that the White House would retain control of SALT policy even after the SALT Delegation departed for Helsinki. On 29 August 1969, Kissinger sent Nixon a memo outlining procedures for backstopping SALT negotiations once they began. Richardson had suggested that given the importance of SALT, negotiating issues should be handled by a principals committee chaired by Rogers and including Laird, Kissinger, Smith, Wheeler, and Helms. Kissinger worried that placing SALT backstopping in Rogers’ hands would override the existing NSC system and potentially place Nixon in an awkward position. Kissinger wrote, “It is a bad idea to put you [Nixon] in the position of having to make the decision of what is policy and what is operational in a forum in which you might have to overrule the Secretary of State.” Nixon wrote in the margin, “Correct.” The basic policy of avoiding confrontation with differing interest groups within the government would remain in effect. As such, Kissinger recommended that tactical decisions on SALT negotiations be handled via the NSC Under Secretaries Committee, chaired by Richardson, while policy issues
would remain with the Verification Panel. Given the sharp differences within the government, Nixon and Kissinger hoped to insulate the President from having to pick sides. On 24 October 1969, Kissinger circulated a memo outlining the new NSC SALT process. The Verification Panel would continue to serve as the primary analytical forum for SALT issues requiring Presidential attention. The SALT Delegation would receive day-to-day support from a Undersecretaries SALT Backstopping Committee, which would handle specific tactical questions of negotiation.

Now responsible for preparing all SALT policy analysis, the Verification Panel Working Group initially struggled under the considerable work load. By the end of September 1969, the Working Group had completed work on its technical intelligence report, though major differences remained between Defense and State/ACDA/CIA over the United States’ ability to monitor Soviet ICBM deployment, MIRV testing, or ABM progress. In addition to this report, the Verification Panel was also working on an updated MIRV report, and a comprehensive analysis of the NSSM 62 SALT options from a verification standpoint.

The Verification Panel’s analysis of SALT options was complicated since, absent any guidance from Nixon, the number of SALT options continued to proliferate. On 17 October 1969, Packard sent Kissinger a memo outlining two new possible SALT Options, which Defense believed were preferable to the five NSSM 62 Options. Defense’s Option VI would place a limit

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on the *throw-weight* of ICBMs, in addition to their number, with a low ABM level and a ban on virtually all multiple-warhead systems. Option VII was a strategic force *reduction* option, with the United States and Soviet Union agreeing to dismantle 100 ICBM launchers per year until each side had only 600 ICBMs, with Safeguard-level ABM and MIRV allowed. Both options would retain a US advantage in SLBM numbers. Defense justified these options as being necessary to secure the survivability of Minuteman ICBMs.\(^{124}\) Since both of these options would limit Soviet ability to deploy SS-9 missiles, and retain US SLBM advantage in the bargain, both also exemplified Defense’s desire for a SALT agreement that would cement US strategic nuclear advantage, per the Philadelphia Approach.

Although it had led the original NSSM 62 review, ACDA continued to refine and modify its original SALT options, producing new material for the Verification Panel to consider. On 27 October 1969, Smith sent Kissinger a memo with two modifications to existing NSSM 62 options. Option III-A would still constrain ICBM and SLBM, with a low limit on ABM, but *would* allow each side one-way freedom to mix, replacing old ICBMs with new SLBMs. Option V-A was a modification of ACDA’s SWWA option, which would allow some limited testing and replacement of ICBMs to retain confidence in their reliability. The idea of one-way freedom to mix would become an important one for the Administration’s SALT deliberations. ACDA believed that one-way freedom to mix could help stabilize mutual assured destruction, as SLBMs were both more survivable and less accurate than fixed silo-based ICBMs.\(^{125}\) In time, Defense would come to support one-way freedom to mix as a tool to gain long-term advantage over the

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\(^{124}\) Letter, Packard to Kissinger, 17 October 1969, folder SALT October-November 16, 1969, Volume IV [2 of 2], Box 874, NSC Files, Nixon Library.

\(^{125}\) Memo, Smith to Kissinger, 27 October 1969, folder SALT October-November 16, 1969, Volume IV [2 of 2], Box 874, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
Soviets, since it would incentivize a move from ICBMs (an area of Soviet advantage) to SLBMs (an area of US advantage).¹²⁶ For the time being, Defense remained wedded to its reductions option.

The Verification Panel’s work increasingly focused on two familiar areas of disagreement: MIRV and ABM. The work of the Verification Panel provided a new vocabulary for these disputes in the form of “primary” and “collateral” constraints. The Verification Panel Working Group began its research by identifying each “primary” constraint in each option; that is, the constraints that were designed to affect directly the strategic balance. Examples of primary constraints included the number and type of ICBMs allowed, or the number of ABM interceptors allowed. The Working Group then matched each primary constraint to a series of “collateral” constraints, or limitations on superpower behavior intended to ease the verification of the primary constraints.¹²⁷ One prominent example of a collateral constraint was the banning of land-mobile ICBMs under any freeze on ICBM construction. Although land-mobile ICBMs were potentially more survivable than silo-based weapons, they were also very difficult to count remotely via satellite imagery. By the fall of 1969, virtually everyone in the government agreed that allowing land-mobile ICBMs under an ICBM ban would make it much harder to ensure that the Soviets were not secretly stockpiling illegal missile launchers.¹²⁸ Therefore, there was a compelling argument that the deployment of land-mobile ICBMs should be banned as a collateral constraint on any freeze on ICBM construction.

¹²⁶ “Evaluation of Possible Strategic Arms Control Agreements Between the United States and the Soviet Union,” folder SALT October-November 16, 1969, Volume IV [2 of 2], Box 874, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
¹²⁷ Memo, Lynn to Verification Working Group, 9 September 1969, folder Verification Panel Meeting 8-29-69, Box H-004, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
As Helsinki approached, disputes over ABM and MIRV in SALT were re-characterized as disputes over the collateral constraints that would be necessary for an ABM or MIRV ban. For example, ACDA still hoped to open SALT with a bilateral MIRV testing and deployment moratorium; Defense and JCS still opposed introducing MIRV in the first round. Increasingly, debate shifted from the merits of a MIRV moratorium to the collateral constraints that would be required to enforce such a moratorium. All parties agreed that any ban on deploying MIRV would have to be accompanied by a collateral constraint banning the testing of MIRV; otherwise, each side would perfect MIRV technology, and then secretly deploy it inside existing missiles. Defense and JCS also argued that a collateral constraint on MIRV testing would require further collateral constraints on any test resembling a MIRV, including: MRV warheads, missile decoys, and virtually all forms of space-vehicle separation. JCS had originally raised this point over the summer of 1969 as part of the MIRV Panel’s report on US and Soviet MIRV testing, but by the fall of 1969 the problem of collateral constraints in a MIRV ban had become the primary argument against including MIRV in SALT. Defense and JCS worried that extensive collateral constraints would necessitate a virtual halt to both the US and Soviet space programs, including perhaps US reconnaissance satellites, which ejected film canisters to return their imagery to earth. The substance of the debate had not really changed: ACDA believed MIRV to be a

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129 Letter, Smith to Kissinger, 3 November 1969, folder NSC Meeting 11/10/69 SALT (NSSM 62) [1 of 2], Box H-025, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
133 Memo, Lynn to Kissinger, 26 August 1969, folder Verification Panel Meeting, 8/29/69, Box H-004, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
destabilizing weapon, while Defense and JCS believed it to be an area of US advantage. The terms had shifted to much safer technical ground, with the debate focusing on specific questions of intelligence capabilities and missile testing regimes.

The Verification Panel encountered a similar debate concerning the necessary collateral constraints surrounding the limitation of ABM interceptors. Most agencies agreed that any limitation on ABM interceptor deployment would have to be accompanied by collateral constraints on ABM-capable radars. Interceptors were relatively easy to produce and could potentially be stockpiled in secret. Large radars capable of tracking high-speed ballistic missile warheads took years to construct, and were highly visible. The fear was that the Soviets would limit themselves to a certain number of interceptors, but in the meantime build numerous large ABM-capable radars for the purposes of air defense or civilian space tracking. Once these radars were deployed, the Soviets would be able to abrogate the ABM agreement suddenly and roll out a sudden area defense system. The agencies differed on whether meaningful radar restrictions could be negotiated, given the technical complexities of categorizing different radar capabilities. State, ACDA, and CIA believed that the US would be able to police an appropriately-worded radar ban utilizing national technical means. JCS believed that no workable definition of “ABM-capable radar” could be developed, and that any attempt at negotiating on this basis would leave loop-holes for the Soviets to exploit. As such, JCS favored a simple ABM limitation that would leave both sides free to continue building radars; that way, the United States could offset any Soviet radar construction with new radars of its own. The Defense Department was divided on

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the issue. While many at Defense shared JCS’s skepticism that a verifiable definition of ABM-capable radar could be developed, they also agreed with State and ACDA that some sort of radar limitation was necessary to have a meaningful limitation of ABM capability. No solution presented itself in the short term; the question of radar controls for an ABM agreement would remain one of the most troubling throughout the Administration’s SALT negotiations.

In addition to collateral constraints, the Verification Panel also described the capabilities that would be useful as “hedges” for various primary constraints, so that the United States would retain some ability to respond should the Soviets be discovered cheating. The discussion of technological hedges served to tie the debates about ABM and MIRV even closer together, since the Verification Panel identified US MIRV technology as an important hedge against Soviet cheating on an ABM agreement. Defense believed that MIRV was especially important if the United States and the Soviet Union wanted to retain some ABM capability for defense against third parties. If the United States wanted to retain its full Safeguard program, it would need to allow the Soviets to build an ABM system of comparable size. The problem was that a Safeguard-sized system would make it much easier for the Soviets to cheat on an ABM agreement, by building numerous ABM-capable radars and then either stockpiling ABM interceptors in secret or perhaps upgrading their existing surface-to-air missile (SAM) force into ABM interceptors. Safeguard against the Chinese threat, therefore, held out a high risk of Soviet cheating on ABM. The best possible hedge against Soviet ABM cheating was the continued deployment of MIRV on Minuteman and Poseidon missiles. Therefore, Defense concluded, if

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136 “Evaluation of Possible Strategic Arms Control Agreements Between the United States and the Soviet Union,” folder SALT October-November 16, 1969, Volume IV [2 of 2], Box 874, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
137 Memo, Lynn to Verification Working Group, 9 September 1969, folder Verification Panel Meeting 8-29-69, Box H-004, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
Nixon wanted Safeguard and SALT, the United States would need to retain MIRV.\textsuperscript{138} This was especially the case if, as Defense and JCS argued, banning MIRV testing would also require a collateral constraint on the testing of all ABM countermeasures.\textsuperscript{139} State and ACDA believed that the United States would be able to tell the difference between MIRV and non-MIRV separation testing, and therefore claimed that non-MIRV countermeasures would be a sufficient (though slightly riskier) hedge against Soviet cheating on ABM.\textsuperscript{140} They also argued that the interrelationship of MIRV and ABM provided a compelling rationale for why the United States should prefer a SALT agreement that limited ABM to a very low level, much lower than the current planned Safeguard deployment.\textsuperscript{141} The question of desired ABM levels would become increasingly contentious when the Administration began its review of Safeguard progress after Helsinki.

The Verification Panel’s analysis of SALT issues was ultimately compiled into a massive “Evaluation Report,” which was completed by early November 1969.\textsuperscript{142} Due to the continued disputes over numerous verification issues, Kissinger concluded that more study was necessary before the President would make his final decision,\textsuperscript{143} though Kissinger remained wedded to

\textsuperscript{138} Memo, Tucker to Laird, 7 November 1969, folder SALT October-November 16, 1969, Volume IV [2 of 2], Box 874, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
\textsuperscript{139} Memo, Lynn to Kissinger, 26 August 1969, folder Verification Panel Meeting, 8/29/69, Box H-004, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
\textsuperscript{140} Memo, Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 19 January 1970, folder SALT 1/70 Volume VII [2 of 2], Box 876, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
\textsuperscript{142} “Evaluation of Possible Strategic Arms Control Agreements Between the United States and the Soviet Union,” folder SALT October-November 16, 1969, Volume IV [2 of 2], Box 874, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
\textsuperscript{143} “HAK Talking Points Verification Committee,” 4 November 1969, folder Verification Panel Meeting SALT 11-4-69, Box H-004, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library; Paper Prepared by the National Security Council Staff, undated, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 38; “HAK
developing SALT options that would support the Philadelphia Approach’s pursuit of competitive advantage.\textsuperscript{144} Privately, Lynn reflected that the large volume of technical analysis had produced little real consensus on SALT issues. Serious divisions remained over the nature of US strategic capabilities, Soviet objectives, and the meaning of arms control. Lynn was coming to doubt that any real reconciliation could be achieved between proponents of cooperation and proponents of competition. Instead, Lynn believed that the Verification Panel should continue trying to narrow the differences over specific technical issues, while avoiding commitment to any one SALT option.\textsuperscript{145} Facing continued difficulties in building a SALT consensus, the Administration doubled down on its policy of delaying decision in favor of continued technical debate.

Because Helsinki would be an exploratory round, Nixon did not need to make any final decisions about the desirability of various combinations of MIRV and ABM. Instead, final preparations for Helsinki were dominated by debate over whether or not to propose a MIRV testing moratorium to the Soviets. Smith was a strong advocate of a MIRV testing moratorium, which he believed could be coupled to a temporary halt on Soviet SS-9 deployments.\textsuperscript{146} Over the longer term, Smith also worried that the Soviets’ advantage in throw-weight would mean that once the Soviets perfected MIRV technology, their MIRV’ed ICBMs would give them a major advantage over the United States.\textsuperscript{147} Smith’s argument for a MIRV ban therefore adopted much

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\textsuperscript{145} Memo, Lynn to Kissinger, 27 September 1969, folder Verification Panel Meeting, Status Report, 9/29/69, Box H-004, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
\textsuperscript{146} Letter, Smith to Kissinger, 3 November 1969, folder NSC Meeting 11/10/69 SALT (NSSM 62) [1 of 2], Box H-025, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
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of the Defense Department’s own logic about relative advantage in SALT. Smith argued that the most logical response to the threat of Soviet SS-9 MIRV to Minuteman was to restrict the ability of the Soviets to deploy both SS-9 and MIRV. Defense disagreed, claiming that the Soviets had already deployed enough SS-9 throw-weight to threaten Minuteman even if MIRV were banned.\textsuperscript{148} Paul Nitze, Defense’s representative on the SALT Delegation, was an especially strong proponent of the Defense Department’s strategic reductions option, while retaining MIRV as a hedge against Soviet cheating on ABM.\textsuperscript{149} Because MIRV technology was moving forward at such a rapid pace, Nixon would have to decide whether a MIRV ban was desirable sooner rather than later.\textsuperscript{150}

On 10 November 1969, with the Helsinki round only a week away, the NSC met to discuss final instructions to the SALT Delegation. Most of the meeting was taken up by an extended debate between Smith and Nitze about the desirability of a MIRV testing moratorium. Smith argued that MIRV was “about 70% of the issue” in SALT, and that constraining progress on it was necessary to head off the arms race and protect Minuteman. Nitze maintained that a MIRV ban would not be sufficient to ensure Minuteman’s survivability, and that the US should avoid making any concessions on its MIRV progress until the Soviets had agreed to reduce the throw-weight of their ICBM force. Furthermore, Nitze believed that the US would not have high enough confidence in an ABM agreement to justify limiting MIRV. Tellingly, Nixon’s biggest

\textsuperscript{148} “HAK Talking Points Verification Committee,” 4 November 1969, folder Verification Panel Meeting SALT 11-4-69, Box H-004, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library; Memo, Tucker to Laird, 7 November 1969, folder SALT October-November 16, 1969, Volume IV [2 of 2], Box 874, NSC Files, Nixon Library.

\textsuperscript{149} Memo, Kissinger to Nixon, 11 November 1969, folder SALT October-November 16, 1969, Volume IV [2 of 2], Box 874, NSC Files, Nixon Library.

question on MIRV was which side was ahead. Packard replied that MIRV was an area of US advantage, because the Soviets were generally at a disadvantage in sophistication and reliability of technology, though Smith added that over the longer term the greater throw-weight of Soviet missiles would make MIRV an area of Soviet advantage. Nixon concluded the meeting without making any decision, saying he would consider his options and issue serious instructions for the Delegation soon. It was clear from the meeting that relative advantage was foremost in Nixon’s mind as he considered his SALT options.

Two days later, Kissinger issued NSDM 33, providing instructions to the SALT Delegation for their preliminary talks with the Soviets in Helsinki. The NSDM reaffirmed that Helsinki would serve as an exploratory round to solicit Soviet views on issues. The Delegation was instructed to make clear to the Soviets that the United States saw the limitation of offensive and defensive strategic weapons as inextricably linked, and that any agreement would need to be readily verifiable. In order to provide specific material for discussion, the Delegation was instructed to draw on NSDM 62 Option II, which called for a freeze on ICBM and SLBM with an agreed limit on ABM deployment, but would allow MIRV and other qualitative improvements. On the controversial issue of MIRV, NSDM 33 instructed the Delegation to avoid raising the issue until the Soviets did, and then only discuss it in terms of verification and possible collateral constraints on flight testing. The Delegation should avoid discussing a MIRV testing moratorium, and should refer back to Nixon for further instructions should the Soviets raise the issue.

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Even with an exploratory opening round, Nixon could not entirely avoid making a decision about the MIRV controversy. Nixon’s decision to let the Soviets raise MIRV first was not arbitrary. Defense and JCS believed that a MIRV moratorium was inconsistent with US national security, and that MIRV was especially important to hedge against large-scale Soviet ABM deployment. In addition, there were also serious questions about whether the Soviets would want a moratorium on MIRV testing, given that the United States was so far ahead in testing MIRV technology. One of the primary conclusions of the MIRV Panel Report was that US MIRV testing was sufficiently advanced that the Soviets would not be able to verify a MIRV deployment ban based on national technical means alone. Many in the Administration also believed that the United States would gain a bargaining advantage by waiting for the Soviets to mention MIRV first; for example, Nitze hoped to use Soviet desire for a MIRV ban to convince the Soviets to reduce the size of their ICBM force. Despite being a proponent of US-Soviet cooperation, Halperin arrived at a similar conclusion, arguing that the United States should wait for the Soviets to raise MIRV, as a bargaining tactic. Nixon’s comments in the 10 November NSC meeting suggest that his decision to avoid a MIRV testing moratorium was driven primarily by a desire to gain a competitive advantage over the Soviets, by retaining a technology in which the United States was ahead. Despite this, Nixon’s decision to avoid discussing a MIRV testing moratorium enjoyed considerable support within the government.

On the morning of 17 November 1969, Nixon briefed the Congressional leadership on the opening of SALT. Nixon sought to reassure Congressional leaders that his Administration was

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approaching SALT with the utmost seriousness, but also convince them that even “simple” steps like a MIRV moratorium were in fact quite complicated to negotiate. Most importantly, Nixon stressed that there were no major disagreements within the government concerning the approach to SALT at Helsinki.\footnote{Memo, Kissinger to Nixon, 15 November 1969, folder SALT October-November 16, 1969, Volume IV [2 of 2], Box 874, NSC Files, Nixon Library.} Nixon’s reassurances were at best a half-truth. Although the initial negotiating approach to Helsinki had received support from much of the government, the differing agencies remained fundamentally divided over the ultimate purpose of SALT.\footnote{Memo, Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 15 November 1969, folder SALT October-November 16, 1969, Volume IV [2 of 2], Box 874, NSC Files, Nixon Library.} While the choice of an exploratory round had delayed a major confrontation of these competing viewpoints, it could not hold them off indefinitely. As the Administration approached its second year, the discussions of the Delegations in Helsinki would set the stage for further internal negotiation over SALT.
CHAPTER 4 – SALT Decisions

The first round of SALT in November 1969 in Helsinki was the occasion of great fanfare. Nixon’s decision to pursue an exploratory first round meant that the talks in Helsinki were inconclusive. As a result, the Verification Panel continued its study of arms limitation policy, seeking to reduce the Administration’s differences in preparation for the second round of SALT in Vienna. Within the Administration, ACDA and Defense remained at loggerheads over the desirability of MIRV. ACDA still saw MIRV as a destabilizing counterforce weapon; Defense continued to see it as an important area of US advantage that should be exploited fully. On ABM, Defense and ACDA’s positions actually converged in early 1970. Defense had previously argued for a Safeguard-level deployment, but the intense fight for Safeguard funding in 1969 convinced leaders at Defense that ABM was an area of Soviet advantage: even if the United States held the advantage in technology, political resistance to ABM would prevent the United States from competing effectively against the Soviets in this field. If Safeguard was politically impossible, Defense instead preferred that both sides retain a low level of ABM, to limit Soviet deployments to the level that the US Congress would authorize.

The Administration’s debates in the spring of 1970 would largely determine the status of MIRV and ABM in SALT. Although negotiations would continue for two more years, the first proposals put to the Soviets in April 1970 carried great weight, setting the terms for most future debate. Because major proponents of both arms control approaches could agree, ABM would be held at a low level. The deep divisions over the desirability of MIRV meant that this technology would remain unlimited. Proponents of both approaches would have reason in the coming years to regret the terms of these initial proposals. Both sides discovered that, once presented to the Soviets, the initial compromise positions would be very difficult to alter.
SALT Begins

On 17 November 1969, the Delegations from the United States and the Soviet Union met in Helsinki to begin SALT. ACDA Director Gerard Smith chaired the US Delegation. Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson, one of the United States’ foremost Soviet experts, represented the State Department. Veteran policy guru Paul Nitze represented the Defense Department, while General Royal Allison represented JCS. Caltech President and former Secretary of the Air Force Harold Brown provided technical advice. The Soviet Delegation was led by Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Semenov, a senior Soviet negotiator with extensive experience on European and Middle Eastern issues, but little background in arms control. General Nikolai Ogarkov, an experienced military engineer and staff officer, represented the Soviet military, while General Nikolai Alekseyev represented the defense industry establishment. Aleksandr Shchukin, an expert on electronics, and Petr Pleshakov, an expert on radar, provided technical advice, while Ambassador Georgi Korniyenko provided input on US politics.¹

SALT began well. The US and Soviet Delegations exchanged opening statements on the first day, congratulating each other for agreeing to such an important negotiation. The US Delegation was pleased that the Soviets’ opening remarks avoided the polemics against capitalist warmongering that had characterized previous disarmament talks. The Soviet SALT Delegation appeared ready for serious negotiations on limitation of strategic weapons. Smith noted that Semenov’s opening remarks emphasized the dangers of nuclear war for both sides, especially the possibility of miscalculation or unauthorized use of weapons. The next week, the US Delegation

presented the illustrative Option II to the Soviet Delegation, detailing various parts of the notional agreement and how they fit into US thinking on issues like offense-defense linkage and adequate verification. The Soviets were slow to respond, providing little feedback and preferring instead to solicit further information from the United States.²

Although negotiations in Helsinki began well, in Washington the Administration’s SALT troubles continued. Given the continued differences over the ultimate purpose of SALT, the Administration found it difficult to project a public image of solidarity, as differences of opinion continued to leak out. On 19 November 1969, Sonnenfeldt and Farley briefed the Senate Disarmament Subcommittee on the opening of SALT. Although the briefing went well overall, at one point Farley said that Nixon believed an agreement to be “feasible,” only to have Sonnenfeldt correct him that Nixon merely hoped an agreement was possible.³ Kissinger was also displeased by the efforts of US scientists to relay their own perspective on SALT directly to the Soviets, via the Pugwash Conference that convened around the same time as SALT. At the Pugwash meeting in Sochi, the US Pugwash Delegation, including prominent science advisors Paul Doty, Richard Garwin, George Rathjens, and Jack Ruina, told their Soviet counterparts that the United States was looking to eliminate MIRV and ABM, because Congress would authorize neither, and that the United States would accept a SALT agreement that banned US ABM while allowing the Soviets to keep their existing Galosh ABM system around Moscow. Although the Pugwash Delegates represented themselves and not the US government, their prominent positions within the foreign policy establishment meant that their contradiction of Nixon’s

thinking on SALT was especially galling.\(^4\) Press leaks also remained a concern; on 8 December 1969, *Newsweek* published a column by Stewart Alsop criticizing some of the details of the Administration’s illustrative proposal in Helsinki. After interviewing some of the NSC staff, Haig concluded that the leak probably came from someone in the intelligence community, though he could provide no evidence to support this conclusion.\(^5\)

Within the government, too, the beginning of negotiations caused tension over how SALT was to be managed. The Undersecretaries SALT Backstopping Committee was required to handle numerous daily communications from the US Delegation in Helsinki, seeking new specific guidance on how to implement the NSDM 33 instructions. As a result, the Backstopping Committee became another battleground for the Administration’s interminable debates over MIRV and ABM in SALT, as various members of the Committee sought to interpret the NSDM 33 instructions in the way that best suited their agency’s views. On MIRV, Farley and Sonnenfeldt were able to work out a compromise in Committee that the Delegation should mention MIRV as one of a number of possible qualitative improvements on missiles that might be discussed in a future round of SALT. On ABM, the Committee split over what NSDM 33 meant when it said that the US wanted an “area defense” ABM system. State and ACDA argued that “area defense” was a flexible concept that could encompass a number of ABM systems, including very limited ones; Defense and the NSC staff maintained that the NSDM 33 instructions clearly meant for the Delegation to support the Administration’s current Safeguard


\(^5\) Memo, Haig to Kissinger, 8 December 1969, folder SALT 1 Dec 1969 – 31 Dec 69, Volume VI [1 of 2], Box 875, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
plan. The issue required Kissinger to intervene directly to instruct the Committee and the Delegation to support Safeguard. The entire incident confirmed fears that the Backstopping Committee might be used as a mechanism to evade the President’s instructions on SALT, to the detriment of other strategic objectives. Nor was this the end of the issue: Defense especially continued to worry that the Delegation would go beyond its mandate and offer the Soviets some sort of SALT deal that was inconsistent with the Administration’s strategic priorities. On 8 December 1969, Packard complained that the Delegation was still hinting at the possibility of low ABM levels to the Soviets, rather than complying with Nixon’s instructions. Sonnenfeldt worried that the Delegation would sneak subversive language on ABM or MIRV into the final agreed Work Program draft, in order to strengthen the case of Administration opponents to these programs. For the time being, the discussions with the Soviets were proving to be significantly less contentious than the internal negotiations over SALT policy.

In the meantime, the Soviets provided little information on their own SALT preferences. By the beginning of December, the Soviets had made few comments on the US illustrative proposal, except to say that medium and intermediate-range ballistic missiles should be excluded from the talks, while US tactical and theater nuclear forces should be included. The “forward-based systems” (FBS) issue would come to dominate much of the negotiations in the coming years. In brief, the Soviets argued that any nuclear weapon capable of striking the homeland of the adversary should be counted as a “strategic” weapon for the purposes of SALT. Therefore,

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6 Memo; Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 24 November 1969, folder SALT 17 Nov 1969 – 30 Nov 69, 1969, Volume V [1 of 1], Box 875, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
Soviet theater nuclear forces, which could only strike Western Europe, would not count as strategic in a US-Soviet negotiation, while US tactical nuclear forces, most of which could strike the Soviet Union under certain circumstances, would count as strategic. The Soviet FBS formula would mean that the United States would either need to accept a smaller core strategic triad than the Soviets, or withdraw virtually all tactical and theater nuclear weapons from Eurasia. The United States argued that only the core strategic forces of each side – ICBMs, SLBMs, and long-range bombers – should be included in the agreement, while Soviet medium- and intermediate-range missile silos should be limited as a corollary restriction to help verify an ICBM ban.

Unsurprisingly, the United States was not willing to dismantle tactical nuclear forces that were central to US alliance commitments around the world. Although the Soviets likely hoped to score points by insisting that the United States dismantle its theater nuclear forces as an opening position for negotiations, the Soviets also appear to have been genuinely convinced that the United States’ vast network of military bases around the Eurasian periphery threatened to upset the strategic nuclear balance between the superpowers.

Other than FBS, the Soviets were tight-lipped about their SALT preferences. Smith especially was surprised that the Soviets had not mentioned MIRV, which had been explicitly excluded from the US Delegation’s illustrative option in order to force the Soviets to raise the issue first. Smith speculated that the Soviets might also have calculated that raising MIRV

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would result in a loss of bargaining power, and so refrained from discussing the issue. In keeping with the MIRV Panel Report’s conclusions, Smith also speculated that the Soviets might have avoided mentioning MIRV because it was an area in which they were behind in testing.\textsuperscript{11} Although the Backstopping Committee had concluded that MIRV should only be raised as one part of a larger discussion of qualitative missile improvements, Smith still believed that it deserved more direct attention. On 3 December 1969, Smith sent Nixon a private message requesting special permission to discuss MIRV with the Soviets, just to see if they had any thoughts on the subject.\textsuperscript{12} Nixon put Smith’s request back into the Backstopping process. On 5 December 1969, the Backstopping Committee issued new instructions to the Delegation, reaffirming that MIRV should only be mentioned as one of a number of qualitative missile improvements to be discussed at a later time. Only if the Soviets raised the issue first should Smith probe them on the topic.\textsuperscript{13}

In his memoir, Smith recalled that the United States did not do enough to raise the issue of MIRV in Helsinki, arguing that the Soviets had not raised the issue because they felt it was proper for the United States to raise it, given the US advantage in MIRV testing. As a result, Smith claimed that the United States missed an opportunity to limit MIRV.\textsuperscript{14} A MIRV breakthrough at Helsinki was probably unlikely in any event. The Soviets were happy to raise the FBS issue, even though this was an area of US advantage. A more likely explanation for Soviet reticence was offered by Smith in his December 1969 reports to Nixon, where Smith

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Editorial Note 41.
\textsuperscript{12} Telegram, Smith to Nixon, 3 December 1969, folder SALT 1 Dec 1969 – 31 Dec 69, Volume VI [1 of 2], Box 875, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
\textsuperscript{13} Telegram, SecState TOSALT, 5 December 1969, folder SALT 1 Dec 1969 – 31 Dec 69, Volume VI [1 of 2], Box 875, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
\textsuperscript{14} Smith, \textit{Doubletalk}, 164-168.
concluded that despite some signs to the contrary the Soviets did not want to discuss MIRV at all, preferring instead to continue testing to catch up with the United States.\textsuperscript{15} Given that the MIRV Panel Report had concluded by the summer of 1969 that US MIRV testing had already proceeded beyond the point of no return, it seems unlikely that an extended discussion of MIRV in Helsinki would have elicited a positive Soviet response.\textsuperscript{16}

Instead of responding to the US Delegation’s illustrative proposal, the Soviets spent most of their time in Helsinki emphasizing the importance of political agreements on pressing issues of mutual concern. The Soviets believed that further cooperation and consultation between the United States and the Soviet Union was necessary to reduce the chances of the accidental use of nuclear weapons.\textsuperscript{17} The Soviet Delegation was also very interested in the possible cooperation of the United States and the Soviet Union against “provocative attack” by third countries, a political issue of tremendous sensitivity, especially given the Soviet Union’s recent solicitation of US interest in a joint preventive nuclear attack on China.\textsuperscript{18} From the remarks by the Soviet SALT Delegation, Smith concluded that the Soviets were more interested in improving communications to avoid an unintentional superpower nuclear war in the event that China attacked either the United States or the Soviet Union, rather than any formal nuclear coordination against the Chinese.\textsuperscript{19} Although not originally part of the Nixon Administrations’ thinking on SALT, the

\textsuperscript{17} Memo, Sonnenfeld to Kissinger, 24 November 1969, folder SALT 17 Nov 1969 – 30 Nov 69, 1969, Volume V [1 of 1], Box 875, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
accidental and provocative attack problems would become an important component of US-Soviet arms limitation negotiations.

As the first round of SALT wound down in early December, the US Delegation was cautiously optimistic about the chances of arms limitation negotiations with the Soviets. In their reports, members of the Delegation agreed that the Soviets seemed to share important conceptual bases with US leaders concerning parity, strategic stability, and the interrelationship of offensive and defensive forces. In a dramatic turn from their previous position, the Soviets seemed especially interested in limiting ABM deployments. Finally, although the Soviets had insisted on the primacy of national technical intelligence capabilities for verifying any arms limitation agreement, Semenov had explicitly not ruled out discussing cooperative verification, potentially allowing on-site inspection for the verification of especially sensitive SALT restrictions.²⁰ Overall, this seemed like a productive basis from which to conduct serious negotiations on limiting strategic nuclear weapons.

The Delegation was more divided over how to assess Soviet motives in SALT, reflecting deeper divisions of motive within the Delegation itself. Smith, Farley, and Thompson, representing ACDA and State, reported that the Soviets seemed ready to negotiate in good faith on the basis of mutual deterrence and equal security, including limiting or even abolishing strategically-destabilizing weapons like ABM.²¹ At the same time, Nitze, Brown, and Allison, representing Defense and JCS, concluded that the Soviets were laying the groundwork for an arms limitation agreement that would benefit the Soviets disproportionately, including banning

key areas of US technical advantage like ABM and MIRV, while allowing the Soviets to continue producing larger and larger ICBMs. Both sides of the debate were guilty of mirror-imaging their Soviet opposites. State and ACDA, favoring the Cambridge Approach, maintained that the Soviets wanted to stabilize mutual deterrence; Defense and JCS, favoring the Philadelphia Approach, believed that the Soviets were seeking relative advantage. In private, Nixon and Kissinger were clearly of the latter opinion. On a 17 December 1969 memo summarizing the results of the Helsinki round, Nixon wrote that the Soviets desired an ABM deployment ban but opposed a MIRV testing ban because they were ahead in ABM deployment and behind in MIRV testing. The Delegation’s final report, drafted by ACDA, papered over these divisions, concluding that the Soviets shared US goals in stabilizing mutual deterrence. The divisions within the Administration over whether to pursue the Cambridge or Philadelphia Approach continued to be concealed behind a façade of unanimity.

The Y-Papers

With the end of the Helsinki round, attention turned to preparing for the resumption of SALT, to be held at some point in the spring of 1970. The first and most pressing question was where the next round of talks would take place. Sorting out this relatively simple task was the first SALT negotiation worked out privately by Kissinger and Dobrynin via their secret “back channel.” Kissinger and Dobrynin had been meeting periodically to discuss important issues in US-Soviet relations since February 1969. Their early discussions had focused primarily on

22 Memo, Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 3 December 1969; folder SALT 1 Dec 1969 – 31 Dec 69, Volume VI [1 of 2], Box 875, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
major political issues in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. On 19 December 1969, Nixon suggested that Kissinger raise the issue of SALT location in his next meeting with Dobrynin, and said that since the United States had agreed to hold the first round of talks in Helsinki, perhaps the Soviets would agree to hold the second round of talks in Vienna. Kissinger relayed this message to Dobrynin on 22 December 1969, and Dobrynin agreed that as a show of good faith the Soviets would consent to holding the second round in Vienna. On 29 December 1969, Kissinger asked Dobrynin whether the Soviets would like to include SALT as a topic for back channel negotiation; Dobrynin agreed that the back channel might be used to work out high-level policy issues, with agreement followed by rapid negotiation of technical details by the Delegations. Kissinger and Dobrynin would not turn to serious negotiation on SALT for another year. In time, Kissinger and Dobrynin’s secret discussions on SALT would have a major impact on the outcome of the negotiations.

For the time being, Nixon and Kissinger continued their efforts to produce a front-channel consensus on SALT policy through the Verification Panel’s technical analysis. The Soviets had provided little indication of their preferred approach to SALT in Helsinki, so the Administration was left to its own devices in developing its opening SALT proposal for Vienna. On 24 December 1969, Lynn sent Kissinger a long memo laying out a work program for the Verification Panel Working Group in the lead-up to the next round of SALT in Vienna. The Working Group would conduct a series of major studies, called Y-Papers, on a number of outstanding technical issues. Proposed Y-Paper topics included: the advantages and

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disadvantages of banning land-mobile missiles; whether to limit bombers and air defenses in SALT; whether qualitative limits on missile accuracy and throw-weight would be desirable or verifiable; how nuclear force reductions would impact the strategic nuclear balance over the longer term; how to prevent accidental or provocative attacks; how to implement and verify freedom-to-mix between ICBMs and SLBMs; and a host of remaining verification questions concerning non-interference with technical intelligence and on-site inspections, amongst others.27 Kissinger described this comprehensive analysis effort in a memo to Nixon on 6 January 1970, hoping that the Working Group’s efforts would help bridge at least some of the divisions over what SALT provisions were desirable.28

On 21 January 1970, the Verification Panel met to debrief the SALT Delegation about its experience in Helsinki, and to further define the scope of the Verification Panel Working Group’s Y-Papers. Smith had originally requested that the Delegation have the opportunity to meet with the Verification Panel to coordinate the approach to SALT policy. Among the topics that Smith hoped to discuss were what levels of MIRV and ABM the Administration intended to propose in Vienna.29 Sonnenfeldt predicted that State and ACDA were likely to argue that ABM and MIRV required no further technical analysis, and that the Administration should move immediately to decide its preferred position on these issues. Sonnenfeldt believed that Defense and JCS still disagreed with State and ACDA on important issues surrounding MIRV and ABM,

28 Memo, Kissinger to Nixon, 6 January 1970, folder SALT 1/70 Volume VII [2 of 2], Box 876, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
29 Letter, Smith to Kissinger, 20 January 1970, folder SALT 1/70 Volume VII [1 of 2], Box 876, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
especially the risks of Soviet cheating and the corollary restraints required to ensure proper verification. As a result, Sonnenfeldt advised Kissinger to insist that the Verification Panel Working Group be allowed to complete its Y-Paper studies of these key subjects before any final decisions were made.\footnote{Memo, Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 19 January 1970, folder SALT 1/70 Volume VII [2 of 2], Box 876, NSC Files, Nixon Library.}

Smith also proposed that the CIA prepare a special paper on Soviet attitudes towards SALT, likely in response to the government’s divided opinions over Soviet intentions in the aftermath of the Helsinki round.\footnote{Letter, Smith to Kissinger, 20 January 1970, folder SALT 1/70 Volume VII [1 of 2], Box 876, NSC Files, Nixon Library.} While the Verification Panel Working Group trudged away on its Y-Paper studies, the intelligence community set to work parsing through Soviet statements in Helsinki to arrive at some conclusion concerning Soviet motives and likely future Soviet negotiating positions. State INR completed its analysis by early February 1970, concluding that the Soviets appeared to have accepted the concept of mutual deterrence, though there was some question as to whether the Soviets agreed that parity in numbers was desirable. The Soviets had certainly come around entirely on the issue of ABM, which Semenov had suggested might be entirely eliminated under SALT to improve deterrence stability. Whatever their motives, INR suggested that the Soviets might not yet have a fully-developed SALT position by the time the Vienna round began, because the Soviet bureaucracy moved so incredibly slowly.\footnote{Memo, Cline to Rogers, 6 February 1970, folder SALT 1/70 Volume VII [1 of 2], Box 876, NSC Files, Nixon Library.} INR’s report served as the basis for SNIE 11-16-70 “Soviet Attitudes Toward SALT,” issued on 19 February 1970. The report concluded that the Soviets would probably not arrive in Vienna with a fully-formed negotiating package, though they would probably prefer a limited, quantitative
agreement to a complex and comprehensive one.\textsuperscript{33} These “official” estimates of Soviet motives – that the Soviets were seeking a stable and equitable parity, per the Cambridge Approach – remained at odds with the Philadelphia Approach views held by Nixon, Kissinger, and much of the Defense Department and military, as expressed in their immediate reflections on Helsinki.

**Safeguard Phase II**

The Administration’s SALT policy remained inextricably tied to the progress of Safeguard, though as 1970 approached the bureaucratic positions on ABM were undergoing a tectonic shift. The Safeguard debate of 1969 had seen a stark divide between ACDA and Defense over the feasibility and desirability of ABM defenses. By the end of 1969, the trauma of the previous summer’s Safeguard debate was causing some in the Defense Department to reevaluate their assumptions about ABM and US national security. Because it was so reliant on digital computers and precision electronic equipment, ABM remained an area of US technical advantage over the Soviets. Proponents of the Philadelphia Approach believed that relative advantage was not a purely technical matter, but rather the result of a complex web of technical, political, economic, organizational, and other factors. Given the difficulties winning Senate support for even two Safeguard sites, Laird and Packard increasingly suspected that large-scale competition for ABM might not be an area of US relative advantage after all. Even if the United States enjoyed a technical lead in ABM accuracy and reliability, these advantages would be invalidated if the United States would not fund ABM deployments, leaving the Soviets free to compensate for their technical deficiencies through numerical superiority. If Congress would not fund ABM, then an effective competitive strategy demanded that Soviet ABM deployments also

be held at a comparable low level.\textsuperscript{34} In \textit{The White House Years}, Kissinger recalled that the Administration’s SALT policy was complicated by opposition to ABM from Congress, State, and ACDA, which Kissinger claimed undermined the Administration’s bargaining power.\textsuperscript{35} By the end of 1969, the most troubling opposition to Safeguard was coming not from ACDA, but from the Defense Department.\textsuperscript{36}

Defense began digesting the results of the summer 1969 ABM debate as soon as Congress had authorized the funding. Congressional experts predicted that the FY71 budget would face a similarly stiff fight to renew funding for Safeguard, and that the dispute might spill over into opposition to funding other strategic weapons program.\textsuperscript{37} By late October, Laird and Packard were convinced that the best approach was to limit the Administration’s liability to Safeguard. At the 22 October 1969 DPRC meeting, Packard said that Defense was still studying the issue, but that his tentative conclusion was that the Administration should not request more money for Safeguard in FY71, and instead focus on securing funding for ICBM and SLBM upgrades.\textsuperscript{38} Lynn concluded that Laird, Packard, and Foster believed that Safeguard area defense was not worth the fiscal and political costs. Defense increasingly favored focusing ABM deployments exclusively on defending Minuteman. Similarly, both the Army and Air Force now


\textsuperscript{37} Memo, Knight to Baroody, 7 October 1969, folder Issue Areas – General, 1969 (2), Box A74, Laird Papers, Ford Library.

opposed further ABM deployment; in an era of fiscal austerity, both services had other funding priorities. Lynn believed that Laird was trying to pressure Nixon into increasing the Defense budget, by insisting that funding Safeguard (a project that Nixon favored) could only be afforded if the Defense budget were increased beyond the allowed NSDM 33 guidelines.\textsuperscript{39} A few weeks later Lynn revised his conclusion, claiming that Laird now seriously believed that Congress would not approve funding for Safeguard Phase II, and that the Administration should cut its losses.\textsuperscript{40} Evidence suggests that Packard shared this opinion, preferring to focus funding on offensive forces upgrades, while conducting further R&D on advanced ABM concepts for Minuteman defense.\textsuperscript{41}

Defense’s decision to drop Safeguard was also related to concerns that the Soviet threat to Minuteman might mature more quickly than had previously been believed. In September 1969, the CIA issued NIE 11-8-69 on “Soviet Strategic Attack Forces.” The report concluded that although the Soviets had overtaken the United States in ICBM numbers, their total strategic delivery forces remained inferior due to the US lead in SSBNs and bombers. The CIA concluded that given Soviet progress on MRV testing, the Soviets might test and deploy a working MIRV capability by as early as 1972, but that their MIRV deployment might be significantly delayed, depending on how quickly their testing program matured.\textsuperscript{42} Defense was concerned that a large Soviet ICBM force, coupled with rapid accuracy improvements, might

\textsuperscript{39} Memo, Lynn to Kissinger, 23 October 1969, folder Sentinel ABM System Vol. III 6/1/69, Box 844, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
\textsuperscript{41} Memorandum for the Record by Packard, 8 December 1969, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXIV, Document 106.
allow the Soviets to threaten Minuteman even without deploying MIRV. With sufficient
accuracy improvements, even the Soviets’ medium-weight SS-11 might pose a counterforce
threat. Laird especially believed that the Soviets might be trying to structure a SALT agreement
to allow them to legally improve SS-11 into an offensive weapon, and that as a result the United
States should focus its ABM efforts on a comprehensive defense of Minuteman. To Defense,
Safeguard seemed like an increasingly poor choice to meet the Soviet threat.

Defense’s concerns about the technical viability of Safeguard ABM were supported by
the PSAC, whose Strategic Military Panel was conducting a review of possible ABM options.
After extensive consultation with the Army Ballistic Missile Defense Agency (AMBDA) and
DDR&E, the Panel concluded that Safeguard was a poor choice to meet the growing Soviet
ICBM threat to Minuteman. Safeguard’s centralized command and control, large radars, and
long-range interceptors made some sense for a thin area-defense system, but Minuteman defense
would be better accomplished by a dedicated hard-site ABM system that would use dispersed
smaller radars and numerous short-range point-defense interceptors. Hard-site ABM would
defend Minuteman with higher reliability and at less cost, which would also make the system
scale more easily to defeat Soviet countermeasures or saturation attacks. Therefore, the PSAC
concluded that the Administration should not request any Safeguard Phase II deployments, and
instead focus on R&D for future hard-site ABM. Although the PSAC’s opposition to Safeguard
was not new, its arguments gained strength in early 1970 because they were shared by Defense

45 Letter, Drell to DuBridge, 23 December 1969, folder ABM-System 1-70 – 3-70 Vol. III
Memos and Misc. [2 of 2], Box 840, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
and the Army.\textsuperscript{46}

The growing tension between the White House and the Defense Department over Safeguard became the first major dispute handled by the Defense Program Review Committee (DPRC). Nixon and Kissinger sought to use the DPRC to edit the Defense budget directly, incorporating Safeguard and cutting programs that Nixon and Kissinger believed to be less essential.\textsuperscript{47} Laird and Packard pushed back, arguing that the Defense budget was too complicated to be line-edited in Committee, because each line item was balanced against numerous other items, and revising one required re-opening the entire budget.\textsuperscript{48} In an 11 December 1969 breakfast meeting, Kissinger reminded Laird that Nixon had ordered the creation of the DPRC, and that Nixon expected the Committee to review all procurement issues with important strategic, diplomatic, or economic consequences.\textsuperscript{49} Nixon believed that his political prestige was caught up in the success of the Safeguard program, so he was willing to overrule Defense on the issue of Safeguard funding. He was also under pressure from the Bureau of Budget to make a final decision on strategic weapons spending, so that a budget proposal could be finalized for submission to Congress.\textsuperscript{50} On 27 December 1969, Nixon ordered Laird to fund Safeguard Phase II by delaying some R&D investments in bombers and SLBM until the FY72 budget.\textsuperscript{51} Three days later, Kissinger told Packard that the money for Safeguard would need to be used for actual

\textsuperscript{46} Memo, Lynn to Kissinger, 5 January 1970, folder ABM-System 1-70 – 3-70 Vol. III Memos and Misc. [2 of 2], Box 840, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
Phase II deployments, not retained for R&D purposes.\footnote{Telcon, Kissinger & Packard, 30 December 1969, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXIV, Document 113.}

Nixon’s decision to pursue Safeguard Phase II was unusually decisive, but Nixon and Kissinger retained some room for ambiguity. At the 9 December 1969 DPRC meeting, Kissinger insisted that at least some Safeguard Phase II deployments would need to be included in the FY71 budget, but admitted that Nixon cared less about where the Phase II sites were deployed, as long as they could still be reasonably justified as building towards an ultimate area defense system.\footnote{Notes of Defense Program Review Committee Meeting, 9 December 1969, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXIV, Document 107.} Defense concluded that within these broad requirements, there were any number of possible deployments for FY71.\footnote{Paper Prepared by the National Security Council Staff, undated, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXIV, Document 108, fn2.} At the 20 December 1969 DPRC meeting, Kissinger debated Safeguard deployment schemes with representatives from Defense and the armed services. Secretary of the Army Stanley Resor claimed that Defense preferred that FY71 include funding for Safeguard Phase II sites at Washington, DC, and Whiteman AFB, Missouri, though the DC site could be replaced with another deterrent defense site at Warren AFB in Wyoming. Kissinger said that a new Safeguard site in the Pacific Northwest would better demonstrate Nixon’s commitment to deploying Safeguard area defense, but Resor maintained that Defense’s preferred sites would theoretically contribute to the ultimate area defense system, while also improving the defense of Minuteman in the near term. Resor and Foster also insisted that focusing on Minuteman defense would allow Safeguard Phase II to pass Congressional scrutiny, since Minuteman defense had been the winning argument in 1969. Kissinger said that Nixon would consider Defense’s position, and asked that Defense prepare a more detailed summary of a few
Safeguard options. Defense’s study covered a number of possible options, including: no Phase II deployment; Whiteman/DC; Whiteman/Warren; and Whiteman/Pacific Northwest. Crucially, Kissinger argued that some sort of Safeguard Phase II deployment was necessary for successful bargaining in SALT, if the US was to achieve an advantageous position. Packard seemed to accept the validity of this line of reasoning. The “bargaining chip” logic continued to be a useful tool for Nixon and Kissinger to win bureaucratic support for their preferred programs.

Winning support from Defense was one thing, but Nixon and Kissinger also faced Safeguard opposition from ACDA. At the 20 December 1969 DPRC meeting, Farley argued that the Administration should focus its efforts on upgrading and improving Minuteman, rather than spending further money on Safeguard. Farley’s opposition to Safeguard was similar to that of Defense, though at the meeting itself Foster remained committed to the idea of point-defense ABM for Minuteman. On 30 December 1969, Smith sent Nixon a letter asking that the Administration reconsider the central relationship of Safeguard ABM to SALT. While Nixon and Kissinger had argued that Safeguard Phase I had worked as a bargaining chip, Smith claimed that Safeguard Phase II deployments would not be required to win Soviet cooperation in SALT. Instead, Smith believed that the Administration could best signal its seriousness on SALT by only deploying Safeguard Phase I, and reserving FY71 funds for advanced ABM R&D.

56 Memo, Lynn to Kissinger, 5 January 1970, folder SALT 1/70 Volume VII [2 of 2], Box 876, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
Smith’s logic was somewhat different than that of Laird, but in the end both had agreed that deploying Safeguard Phase II was probably not worth the effort. This strange consensus posed a serious threat to Nixon’s desire to move forward with Safeguard.

With both Defense and ACDA increasingly skeptical of ABM deployments, Nixon and Kissinger retained one important ally: the Joint Chiefs. Unlike Defense, JCS still believed that widespread ABM deployment was necessary for US security.\textsuperscript{60} Wheeler was one of the few people at the 20 December 1969 DPRC meeting to support the President’s agenda to procure the full 12-site Safeguard program.\textsuperscript{61} On 31 December 1969, Wheeler sent Laird a memo outlining JCS’s arguments for moving forward with Safeguard Phase II in FY71, as a precursor to the full 12-site Safeguard system. To that end, JCS believed that the Administration should request funding in the FY71 budget for two Safeguard Phase II sites at Whiteman and Pacific Northwest, as well as advanced preparation of three additional sites.\textsuperscript{62} The support of JCS was an important asset in Nixon’s efforts to secure some sort of Safeguard Phase II deployment.

By early January 1970, the Administration’s Safeguard policy was in total confusion. Despite the best efforts of the White House, the Defense Department continued to vacillate between supporting Safeguard for SALT bargaining, and opposing Safeguard in favor of a future hard-point ABM system. On the other hand, JCS maintained that Safeguard was necessary to provide area defense against China, and perhaps serve as a springboard for a thicker anti-Soviet

\textsuperscript{60} Memo, Lynn to Kissinger, 5 January 1970, folder SALT 1/70 Volume VII [2 of 2], Box 876, NSC Files, Nixon Library.


Although privately Laird continued to favor cutting all Safeguard Phase II funding in favor of more ABM R&D, Defense and JCS ultimately worked out a compromise position, which would fund Phase II deployments at Whiteman and Northwest, while also providing further funds for advanced ABM R&D concepts. The Defense/JCS compromise position still had serious flaws, not the least of which was that State and ACDA opposed it as threatening SALT. Although Smith assured Kissinger that he would respect the President’s decision, he nonetheless maintained that Safeguard Phase II deployment was not necessary for bargaining in SALT, and might actually alienate the Soviets and derail negotiations. Additionally, Defense and JCS continued to differ on what parts of the compromise were important. Defense’s insistence that R&D on future concepts was important seemed to imply that current Safeguard technology was somehow deficient. At the same time, several key Senators had supported Safeguard primarily for ICBM defense, and might oppose Safeguard in JCS overplayed its area defense mission. Absent a coherent Safeguard rationale, Nixon and Kissinger feared that the FY71 Safeguard request would be undermined by public displays of bureaucratic division in the same way that the FY70 request had been, especially since the press remained interested in any

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63 Memo, Lynn to Kissinger, 5 January 1970, folder SALT 1/70 Volume VII [2 of 2], Box 876, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
possible internal divisions.  

The Administration debated Safeguard deployment modalities and rationales in the DPRC and NSC throughout January 1970. The central issue of debate was whether Safeguard Phase II deployments in FY71 would be useful bargaining chips in SALT. Smith argued that Safeguard deployments were just as likely to provoke the Soviets as they were to entice them, especially since the Soviets had just recently changed their initial opposition to limiting ABM and agreed to discuss strategic defenses in SALT. Smith also worried that public opposition to Safeguard might lead Congress to reject Safeguard Phase II funding, which would be a major blow to the Administration’s bargaining leverage. Smith effectively re-deployed Safeguard proponents’ bargaining chip logic against them, since many in the White House and Defense worried that Safeguard Phase II would not secure Congressional approval. Smith argued persuasively that Safeguard could be a major liability to the Administration in SALT.

Smith’s arguments about Congressional opposition and SALT bargaining failure ultimately redounded to the Defense Department’s benefit. Nixon had already ruled out Smith’s preferred option of no Safeguard Phase II deployments, which had been Defense’s preferred position only a few months before. Kissinger and Laird were by now both convinced that putting too much emphasis on area defense was a non-starter with Congress. Kissinger also

worried that only retaining Safeguard Phase I was not politically viable, since Safeguard opponents would argue (correctly) that Phase I could not operate as an independent system, and should be dismantled.  

For Nixon, the obvious solution was to double down on ABM defense of Minuteman, which would keep Safeguard moving forward without provoking a major fight over the desirability of area defense. At the 23 January 1970 NSC meeting, Nixon reversed his previous instructions to prepare for area defense, instead ordering Defense to prepare several detailed Safeguard Phase II options focused on Minuteman defense. Defense and JCS’s previous compromise of one Safeguard site at Whiteman and one area defense site in the Pacific Northwest was invalidated, leading to several weeks of chaos as various agencies jockeyed for position. Packard concluded that the best Safeguard Phase II deployment was two further ICBM defense sites at Whiteman and Warren AFBs, the better to lay the groundwork for the longer-term deployment of an advanced hard-site point defense ABM system. Kissinger and the NSC staff preferred that the Administration include a Safeguard Phase II site for Washington, DC, ostensibly to defend command and control functions, but also to sneak in some urban area defense capability for the Northeast. Although they still opposed Safeguard Phase II deployment, State and ACDA also thought that if any Safeguard site had to be constructed, DC was the best choice, because it would establish greater symmetry between US and Soviet ABM deployments, simplifying negotiations. All agencies agreed that any Safeguard deployments

75 Memo, Slocombe to Kissinger, 3 February 1970, folder ABM-System Vol. IV 2-70 – 30 Apr 70 Memos and Misc. [3 of 3], Box 841, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
around DC would meet with serious Congressional opposition, which might imperil funding for Safeguard entirely.\textsuperscript{77}

Having surrendered the principle of pursuing area defense in FY71, Nixon’s concern was simple: select any Safeguard option that could win Congressional approval. Of all the Safeguard options under consideration, there was one obvious choice to meet Nixon’s objective. In early February, Kissinger sent Nixon a memo outlining the status of the various agency positions on Safeguard. One possible option considered by Kissinger was to deploy Safeguard Phase II only at Whiteman AFB. From a SALT perspective, Kissinger believed that this was a sub-optimal choice: deploying Safeguard around Washington, DC, would provide the Administration with the most bargaining leverage. Kissinger admitted that the Whiteman-only option had major political benefits. Defense preferred it, because it was most likely to pass Congress and was consistent with a longer-term program of ICBM defense. State and ACDA would support it, since it would move the government away from an area defense rationale; for that reason, JCS preferred other options, but would no doubt support any deployment scheme if Nixon insisted.\textsuperscript{78} Kissinger reaffirmed this advice in a second cover memo accompanying a more detailed analysis of Safeguard deployment options.\textsuperscript{79} These memos and Nixon’s subsequent decision support Kissinger’s claim in \textit{The White House Years} that Nixon’s FY71 Safeguard proposal was driven

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{77} Memo, Kissinger to Nixon, Undated, folder ABM-System 1/70 – 3/70 Vol. III Memos and Misc. [1 of 2], Box 840, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
\item \textsuperscript{78} Memo, Kissinger to Nixon, folder ABM-System 1/70 – 3/70 Vol. III Memos and Misc. [1 of 2], Box 840, NSC Files, Nixon Library. Kissinger’s conclusions were seconded by Richardson and Smith, who had seen an advanced copy of the memo and concurred with its descriptions of agency positions (Memo, Kissinger to Richardson & Smith, folder ABM-System Vol. IV 2-70 – 30 Apr 70 Memos and Misc. [3 of 3], Box 841, NSC Files, Nixon Library).
\end{itemize}
primarily by concerns that Congress would only support Safeguard for ICBM defense, though of course for Nixon winning Congressional support was inextricably linked to winning bureaucratic support.\textsuperscript{80}

As a result, on 20 February 1970 during his military posture statement to Congress, Laird announced that the Administration would be seeking funding for construction of a Safeguard Phase II site at Whiteman AFB, with advanced preparation at several other sites and increased R&D funding for advanced ABM concepts.\textsuperscript{81} The Defense Department’s vociferous support of Safeguard Phase II throughout 1970 should not conceal the fundamental shift on ABM policy that had occurred. In 1969, Defense had supported a vigorous Safeguard program as necessary to retain US competitive advantage in an era of strategic nuclear parity. By early 1970, Defense had concluded that the Soviets would benefit disproportionately from a competition to deploy area defense ABM, since Congress would not provide funding for an area defense system. Ironically, Defense’s growing fear of Soviet ABM led to a narrowing of the differences between Defense and State on ABM issues, albeit for very different reasons. The growing consensus on the danger of unregulated ABM competition would have a decisive impact on the Administration’s SALT deliberations in the lead up to the Vienna round.

\textsuperscript{80} Kissinger, \textit{The White House Years}, 538-541.
The Moment of Decision

In his classic account of US foreign policy, *Détente and Confrontation*, Raymond Garthoff recalls that the spring of 1970 was the crucial deciding point for much of the Nixon Administration’s SALT policy, with an extended series of Verification Panel and NSC meetings resulting in the selection of preferred negotiating options for the Vienna round.\(^8^2\) Nixon had managed to delay making any serious SALT policy choices for over a year, but the United States would need to enter Vienna with an official negotiating position, which meant choosing between competing positions on SALT. With Congressional and public debate on Safeguard Phase II picking up steam, the stakes for the Administration remained high. Nixon continued to hope that the Administration could arrive at a single SALT position without agency divisions spilling out into the public. The Verification Panel Working Group’s Y-Papers represented a final effort to build some sort of technical consensus on which SALT options were possible, and which could be safely discarded. As Garthoff recalled, the course of SALT in the Nixon Administration was largely determined by the policy discussions in March and April 1970.

The Verification Panel met multiple times throughout the month of March, in preparation for NSC consideration of SALT options for Vienna. The tone of the meetings was very contentious, as each agency sought to promote its own preferred SALT position. The topics of discussion ranged widely, including tactical and theater nuclear forces, bombers and air defenses, submarine-launched cruise missiles, and deployment and sharing restrictions.\(^8^3\) Most of the Panel’s time was spent discussing the now-familiar cluster of MIRV, ABM, and SAM

technology. The crux of the issue was whether or not MIRV was a useful hedge against Soviet cheating on an ABM agreement. The agency positions on MIRV had changed little since the previous fall. Defense and JCS maintained that the United States would not be able to verify an ABM agreement with high enough confidence to warrant banning MIRV, since MIRV would be necessary to break through a Soviet ABM system should the Soviets cheat. State and ACDA believed that as long as ABM was held to a low level, the United States would be able to defeat any Soviet cheating by using non-MIRV penetration aids, including decoys and chaff clouds.\footnote{Paper Prepared by the National Security Council Staff, 23 March 1970, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 58; “Task Y-1 ABM/MIRV Options,” 13 March 1970, folder ABM-System Vol. IV 2-70 – 30 Apr 70 Memos and Misc. [1 of 3], Box 841, NSC Files, Nixon Library; Paul Nitze, \textit{From Hiroshima to Glasnost: At the Center of Decision, A Memoir} (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1989), 307-308.} While the Verification Panel’s Y-papers had done little to narrow this fundamental gap, they had provided a number of new corollary technical issues over which the agencies could fight.

State and ACDA sought to use the Soviet SS-9 threat to Minuteman as a reason to ban MIRV in SALT. They argued that Minuteman’s survivability depended on restricting qualitative improvements of Soviet strategic forces, especially MIRV. State and ACDA believed that since the United States’ missile capabilities were already sufficient to launch a secure second strike, from the US perspective MIRV was not desirable. Crucially, they believed that a comprehensive restriction on missile upgrades could be verified as long as there were strict restraints on missile testing. Defense disagreed strongly, saying that limitations on qualitative upgrades to existing missiles would be almost impossible to verify, since even under a strict test ban some provision would have to be made for confidence firings, which might in turn be used covertly to improve accuracy and reliability in ways that threatened US strategic forces. Defense, and Nitze in particular, believed that the only way to manage Minuteman vulnerability was to reduce the total...
number of missiles in the Soviet strategic forces, and especially the Soviets’ SS-9 forces. JCS opposed both qualitative restrictions and force reductions, favoring instead a simple quantitative freeze that would limit future Soviet ICBM deployments while leaving the United States free to take whatever qualitative countermeasures it deemed best.\footnote{Memo, Lynn to Kissinger, 11 March 1970, folder Verification Panel Meeting SALT 3-12-70, Box H-004, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.}

The basic division over how best to ensure Minuteman’s survivability was complicated by overlapping preferences on a number of more specific technical issues. Both Defense and ACDA supported the idea of one-way freedom-to-mix between ICBMs and SLBMs, allowing each side to replace older ICBMs with newer SLBMs, but not \textit{vice versa}. Both believed that one-way freedom to mix would incentivize the Soviets away from further upgrading their heavy SS-9 ICBMs, which ACDA believed were inherently destabilizing, and Defense believed were an area of Soviet advantage. JCS opposed one-way freedom to mix, which the Air Force in particular saw as defeatism on the issue of Minuteman survivability. On the other hand, JCS and ACDA both agreed that the United States should ban land-mobile ICBMs in SALT, since these created serious verification problems and had little demonstrable military value. Defense was still considering various concepts for mobile Minuteman, and wanted to retain the option to deploy land-mobile ICBMs.\footnote{“HAK Talking Points Verification Meeting,” 12 March 1970, folder ABM-System Vol. IV, 2-70 – 30 Apr 70 Memos and Misc. [2 of 3], Box 841, NSC Files, Nixon Library.} For the time being, these specific disputes were overshadowed by the larger fight over ABM and MIRV. Overall, Minuteman vulnerability provided State and ACDA with a powerful argument to ban MIRV in SALT.

While State and ACDA argued that Minuteman vulnerability justified banning MIRV, Defense and JCS argued that the US could not ban MIRV because the Soviet Union’s extensive...
surface-to-air missile forces made it easy for the Soviets to cheat on an ABM agreement. All agencies agreed that the Soviets would be able to upgrade their SAMs into some sort of ABM capability. There were serious differences over what the impact of such an upgrade would be. State, ACDA, and CIA believed that Soviet SAM upgrades would provide such a limited ABM capability and be so easily defeated by US countermeasures that the Soviets were unlikely to even make such upgrades. Defense claimed that over time the Soviets might replace their existing SAMs with new, larger interceptors that could threaten the ability of the United States to launch a credible retaliatory attack, and therefore argued that any SALT agreement would need to include some sort of hedge against the sudden deployment of a Soviet area defense ABM system. 87 State and ACDA also worried that any attempt to restrict SAM upgrades would be non-negotiable with the Soviets, a point with which Defense largely agreed. 88 For Defense, the SAM upgrade issue was primarily about retaining the United States’ MIRV capability, not actually limiting SAM deployments. 89 The threat of SAM upgrades made a MIRV ban doubly hard to verify, since a ban would require corollary restraints not just on Soviet MIRV testing, but also on Soviet SAM forces. 90 Defense and JCS believed that the solution to this dilemma was to retain US MIRV capability, while State and ACDA did their best to argue that Soviet SAMs would provide only a marginal ABM capability, and that non-MIRV decoys and countermeasures

89 Memo, Lynn to Kissinger, 3 March 1970, folder Verification Panel Meeting SALT 3-5-70, Box H-004, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
90 Memo, Tucker to Kissinger, 16 March 1970, folder ABM-System Vol. IV 2-70 – 30 Apr 70 Memos and Misc. [1 of 3], Box 841, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
would be sufficient to defeat even a very large Soviet ABM system.\textsuperscript{91}

The Verification Panel’s most complex argument concerned the corollary restriction of ABM-capable radars. The issue was complicated by the Defense Department’s vacillation on the issue. In early March, Defense, State, and ACDA all agreed that the risk of Soviet cheating on an ABM agreement would be significantly reduced if the agreement contained strong corollary restraints on the deployment of ABM-capable radars. As long as radars were strictly controlled, the Soviets were unlikely to be able to deploy a covert area defense system, whether through stockpiling interceptors or upgrading their SAMs. Only JCS opposed radar restraints as non-negotiable.\textsuperscript{92} As the debates over ABM and MIRV intensified, Defense’s position on restricting ABM-capable radars suddenly shifted. At the 18 March 1970 Verification Panel meeting, the Defense Department suddenly announced that it now agreed with JCS that there could be no feasible restriction of ABM-capable radars in SALT. At the same time, Defense maintained that any viable ABM agreement would need corollary restraints on radars, calling into question whether the Defense Department believed that any limitation on ABM in SALT was viable. Lynn described this shift as throwing the Administration’s SALT deliberations into “total disarray.”\textsuperscript{93} Within a week, Defense had returned to its original position that corollary restraint of ABM-capable radars was both necessary and desirable.\textsuperscript{94} Questioning the ability of the United

\textsuperscript{91} “HAK Talking Points Verification Panel Meeting,” 5 March 1970, folder ABM-System Vol. IV, 2-70 – 30 Apr 70 Memos and Misc. [2 of 3], Box 841, NSC Files, Nixon Library; Memo, Lynn to Kissinger, 5 March 1970, folder ABM-System Vol. IV, 2-70 – 30 Apr 70 Memos and Misc. [2 of 3], Box 841, NSC Files, Nixon Library.


States to adequately verify an ABM agreement, strengthened Defense’s case that the United States needed to retain MIRV as a hedge against Soviet cheating.

The substantive debate surrounding MIRV and its related ABM and SAM issues was complicated by continual efforts by both sides to bypass the Verification Panel process and present their ideas directly to Nixon and Kissinger, without the technical critiques and dissenting footnotes from other agencies. The Defense Department especially pursued a parallel series of SALT studies, often introducing its own papers directly for Kissinger’s consideration in the Verification Panel, bypassing the other agencies in the Working Group. Kissinger was forced to insist repeatedly that Defense analysts share their conclusions with the Verification Panel Working Group before they were presented to the Panel proper, to provide other agencies with the opportunity to challenge Defense’s conclusions. Lynn defended the Verification Panel process, writing, “If we try to start all over again on a new approach to presenting the issues [to Nixon], we may produce the bureaucratic confrontations we have sought to avoid as each agency bolts for the pole position.” In the end, the Verification Panel produced an updated version of November’s “Evaluation Report,” detailing all of the continued differences between the agencies on SALT. 95 As the NSC began direct consideration of SALT in late March, proponents of competing SALT positions like Richardson, Smith and Nitze sought to bypass the process entirely, appealing directly to the President, often via Kissinger. 96 These secret conversations

95 Memo, Lynn to Kissinger, 3 March 1970, folder Verification Panel Meeting SALT 3-5-70, Box H-004, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library; Memo, Davis to Members of NSC, 21 March 1970, Box H-005, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
further complicated efforts to produce bureaucratic consensus on SALT policy.

The intensity of the disputes surrounding MIRV and the general disorganization of the Administration’s SALT policy process served to conceal the emergence of an important commonality on ABM policy. The Y-1 paper on ABM and MIRV concluded that any SALT agreement would need to limit as much as possible Soviet ABM deployments, which provided a strong argument for a lower-level or zero ABM agreement in SALT. A lower-level ABM agreement would also be easier to verify, since it would allow for stricter limits on Soviet ABM-capable radars, which would in turn reduce the threat of Soviet SAM upgrades. Some differences remained about what sort of specific ABM agreement would be best. ACDA still preferred a zero-ABM option. Defense was increasingly convinced that the United States might be able to negotiate an asymmetric ABM agreement, in which the Soviets would get light ABM deployments around Moscow and extensive SAM deployments, while the US would get heavy but localized ABM deployments for ICBM defense. Despite these differences, Defense and ACDA both agreed that the most viable limited, symmetrical SALT agreement on ABM would be to limit both sides to NCA-defense deployments.97 Lynn reported this growing commonality on ABM in a 20 March 1970 memo to Kissinger, expressing his surprise that the agencies were narrowing the gap on this issue.98 In his memoirs, Kissinger recalled that the push for NCA-only ABM in SALT came primarily from ACDA and the Delegation. However, ACDA had been

supporting low- or zero-level ABM in SALT from the beginning; the decisive shift in the Administration’s ABM proposal in the spring of 1970 came not from ACDA’s zeal, but rather from Defense’s ambivalence. The budding consensus was less surprising if one took into account the Defense Department’s growing ambivalence towards extensive ABM deployments, as expressed in the Administration’s recent debate on Safeguard options. If Congress would not support the deployment of an extensive ABM system, Defense intended to use SALT to prevent the Soviets from gaining a unilateral advantage in ABM. Although they approached the issue from completely different theoretical positions, in the spring of 1970 Defense and ACDA agreed that a low-level ABM agreement was good for US security.

For the time being, the tenuous consensus on ABM was completely overshadowed by the continued rancor over MIRV and its various associated issues. Nixon opened the 25 March 1970 NSC meeting with a rare admission of the divisions within the Administration, but reminded everyone of their common interest in negotiating a SALT agreement with the Soviets. Despite this beginning, the meeting quickly degenerated into arcane debates over the technical details of force reductions, qualitative restrictions, SAM upgrades, and radar definitions. The meeting shed far more heat than light, providing Nixon with no decisive technical rationale to accept or reject any of the nine options still listed in the lengthy “Evaluation Report.” The Verification Panel’s efforts to produce technical consensus had failed. That failure was on display two days later, when Nixon issued NSDM 49, ordering the Verification Panel to set the Evaluation Report aside and instead produce four brand-new negotiating positions: one in which ABM and MIRV

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99 Kissinger, The White House Years, 539-540.
were allowed; one in which ABM was limited but MIRV was allowed; one in which ABM and MIRV were banned; and one with strategic force reductions.  

With Vienna right around the corner and the agencies at each other’s throats, the job of drafting the four new SALT options was given to Raymond Garthoff, the executive secretary of the SALT Delegation, whose expertise in arms control allowed him to synthesize four options with great speed. Garthoff’s original draft was reviewed by the Verification Panel Working Group, including numerous dissenting footnotes by various agencies. By the time the Verification Panel met to consider the new SALT options on 6 April 1970, the NSDM 49 options paper contained no less than forty substantive agency disagreements, of which ten were considered to be fundamental to the Administration’s SALT policy. In the Panel meeting, Kissinger sought to resolve as many of these outstanding differences as possible, while still avoiding a major fight over the ultimate purpose of SALT. At one point, Smith and Packard began arguing about whether SALT should seek to limit all strategic weapons technology, or whether the United States should continue to pursue technologies in which it enjoyed an advantage. Faced with a possible fight between the Cambridge and Philadelphia Approaches, Kissinger retorted that the issue was not “theological” but rather technical, and pushed discussion back towards the specific differences within the options paper. With Vienna approaching,

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103 Memo, Garthoff to Members of the Verification Panel Working Group, 4 April 1970, folder Verification Panel Meeting SALT Options 4/6/70, Box H-005, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
104 Memo, Lynn to Kissinger, 4 April 1970, folder Verification Panel Meeting SALT Options 4/6/70, Box H-005, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library; “ABMs: Should SAMs Be Counted as ABMs,” folder Verification Panel Meeting SALT Options 4/6/70, Box H-005, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
Kissinger did not think the government had the time to engage in a major interagency dispute over SALT’s purpose. A number of minor differences were eliminated, but the options paper submitted to Nixon still contained within it twenty-two major technical disagreements, which were outlined in a long memo accompanying the options paper itself. In *Doubletalk*, Smith recalls that, following the Verification Panel’s failure to achieve a SALT consensus, Garthoff’s was called on to draft the final NSDM 49 options, demonstrating that the Verification Panel’s work was a waste of time. Smith’s account makes the final report sound like Garthoff’s work alone, when in fact Garthoff’s first draft was heavily edited by the Verification Panel Working Group and the Verification Panel prior to its submission to the President. Garthoff’s work was not a substitute to the Verification Panel process, but a part of it.

**Nixon’s Choice**

With only a week until the opening of the Vienna round, four options were still under consideration. Option A would limit ICBMs and SLBMs to a total limit of 1,710 (the current US total), with a sub-limit on large ICBMs like the SS-9, one-way freedom to mix, a ban on land-mobile ICBMs, and a corollary restraint on medium and intermediate range missiles. Qualitative improvements would not be limited. Each side would be allowed either 1,000 ABM interceptors, or the United States would get several thousand point-defense interceptors for ICBM defense as compensation for Soviet SAM deployments, with strict numerical limits on ABM-capable radars. Option B was similar to Option A, but would also prohibit “externally observable” modifications to missile silos, an effort to limit certain qualitative improvements, but explicitly allowed qualitative improvements that would not require silo modification, such as

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107 Smith, *Doubletalk*, 118-119.
MIRV. Each side would be allowed either a single small NCA defense site, or zero ABM, with strict numerical limits on ABM-capable radars. Option C was similar to Option B, except that MIRV flight testing and deployment was banned. Verification of this option remained contentious: Garthoff’s draft claimed that the ban would be verified by national technical means only, though a long footnote by Defense and JCS claimed that this option would require extensive on-site inspections to supplement the flight test ban. Option D was a new iteration of Defense’s “reduction” agreement. The United States and the Soviet Union would dismantle one hundred ICBMs per year until they had 1,000 launchers apiece, beginning with the oldest launchers. This sequence would require the Soviets to dismantle all of their older SS-7 and SS-8 launchers, and then a number of their older SS-9 weapons. While Defense’s previous “Option VII” reductions proposal had insisted on Safeguard-level ABM, Option D allowed several ABM configurations, including zero ABM, a small NCA defense site, or perhaps Defense’s interceptors-for-SAMs tradeoff option.108

Like the previous options, the new NSDM 49 Options were entangled in a web of competing bureaucratic preferences. State and ACDA preferred Option C, which would prevent MIRV deployment and thus head off a major qualitative arms race.109 Defense and JCS believed that Option A was probably the best agreement of the four,110 though Laird personally had concluded that Defense’s proposed point-defense-for-SAM proposal was non-negotiable, and

108 Memo, Garthoff to Members of the Verification Panel Working Group, 4 April 1970, folder Verification Panel Meeting SALT Options 4/6/70, Box H-005, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
109 Memo, Rogers to Nixon, 6 April 1970, folder SALT 1/70 Volume VII [1 of 2], Box 876, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
that the threat of Soviet SAM was not serious as long as the United States retained MIRV.\textsuperscript{111} Nitze remained the strongest proponent of force reductions, which also enjoyed some support from Defense, especially as an opening bargaining position.\textsuperscript{112} Kissinger and the NSC Staff favored Option B as being both advantageous for the United States and also possibly negotiable with the Soviets, especially if the United States were willing to accept a low-level ABM agreement.\textsuperscript{113} As a result, although NSDM 49 had pared the relevant SALT options down from nine to four, Nixon was still required to make a choice that might alienate a large portion of the government.

The NSC met on 8 April 1969 so that Nixon could hear various agency positions on the NSDM 49 SALT options. By this point, the relevant bureaucratic positions on major issues were reasonably well-known: in his memoirs, Kissinger described the meeting as “a Kabuki play… performed before a President bored to distraction.”\textsuperscript{114} Most of the meeting was taken up by each agency’s criticism of the other’s position. State and ACDA argued that Defense’s preferred Option D reductions were theoretically desirable, but not negotiable. Defense and JCS argued in turn that State and ACDA’s preferred Option C MIRV ban could only be verified by on-site inspection, and that it would remove an important hedge against Soviet cheating on ABM. Smith denied that on-site inspection was necessary. Nitze claimed that reductions were the only way to secure Minuteman. Nixon concluded the meeting by emphasizing the importance of

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\item \textsuperscript{111} “ABMs: Should SAMs Be Counted as ABMs,” folder Verification Panel Meeting SALT Options 4/6/70, Box H-005, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
\item \textsuperscript{113} Kissinger, \textit{The White House Years}, 542-545; Telcon, Kissinger & Smith, 7 April 1970, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 63.
\item \textsuperscript{114} Kissinger, \textit{The White House Years}, 542.
\end{itemize}
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verification, and urging all agencies to accept whatever decision he made. Shortly after the meeting, the NSC staff forwarded Nixon a long memo of the outstanding divisions over SALT policy, including one-way freedom to mix, land-mobile ICBMs, radar limits, SAM upgrades, on-site inspection, bomber limitations, air defense limitations, missile testing, and qualitative constraints.

Most of the remaining divisions – force reductions, radar limits, SAM upgrades, on-site inspection, and qualitative constraints – were related directly or indirectly to the differing agency positions on the desirability of MIRV. Defense and ACDA’s differing conceptions of SALT’s purpose prevented consensus on this issue: ACDA wanted to restrict MIRV to prevent an arms race, while Defense wanted to retain MIRV in order to win one. A year and a half of SALT deliberations had failed to resolve this basic difference between the Cambridge and Philadelphia Approaches. In the face of this difference, Nixon reverted to form, and opted to present both Options C and D to the Soviets in Vienna. NSDM 51, issued on 10 April 1970, ordered the Delegation to present both options to the Soviets as co-equal proposals, and see how the Soviets responded. In his memoirs, Kissinger recalled that he fully expected the Soviets to reject both Options C and D, which would finally allow Nixon to put aside both Defense and ACDA’s pet projects and move forward on a compromise position, while putting the onus of rejecting the options on the Soviets rather than on the President. Despite considerable effort to build some sort of technical consensus, Nixon’s policy of delaying SALT decision remained alive and well.

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118 Kissinger, The White House Years, 542-545.
Despite the non-decision to present both Options C and D to the Soviets, NSDM 51 contained two momentous decisions that would have a lasting impact on the Administration’s SALT policy. The first concerned MIRV. Both Defense and JCS were strongly opposed to the Option C MIRV ban, which they believed would surrender an important US advantage. Defense generally chose to express its opposition to a MIRV ban not in terms of strategic desirability, but rather in terms of technical verification capability. By the spring of 1970, Defense and JCS were adamant that any MIRV ban would need to be accompanied by on-site inspection of Soviet missile facilities, in order to verify whether the Soviets were covertly deploying multiple warheads on their missiles. Absent the hedge provided by MIRV, Defense also maintained that Soviet SAM sites would need to be open for inspections, to prevent the covert deployment of ABM interceptors. State, ACDA, and CIA believed that a MIRV ban could be adequately policed with only technical intelligence, as long as an effective test ban were implemented, to prevent the Soviets from developing MIRV technology entirely. The NSDM 49 Option C had not contained on-site inspection, though it had contained dissenting footnotes from Defense and JCS calling for them. The NSDM 51 instructions to the Delegation ordered them to present Option C to the Soviets with a requirement for on-site inspection for both MIRV and SAMs.

In later accounts of SALT, Nixon’s addition of on-site inspection to Option C would

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119 See, for example, Packard’s comments at the 6 April 1970 meeting about the need to retain technological superiority (FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Editorial Note 62).
120 “ABMs: Should SAMs Be Counted as ABMs,” folder Verification Panel Meeting SALT Options 4/6/70, Box H-005, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
121 Memo, Garthoff to Members of the Verification Panel Working Group, 4 April 1970, folder Verification Panel Meeting SALT Options 4/6/70, Box H-005, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
provoking significant controversy. In their memoirs, Smith and Garthoff remembered Nixon adding on-site inspection to the Option C MIRV ban proposal at the last second, despite there being no technical recommendation to that effect, with the Verification Panel only taking up the issue of on-site inspection after it had already been proposed to the Soviets in Vienna. Smith and Garthoff concluded that on-site inspection was intended as a poison pill to compel the Soviets to reject the US MIRV proposal, clearing the way for Nixon’s own preferred policy. The available evidence calls into question this account of Nixon’s motives. While it is true that the Verification Panel prepared a paper on specific on-site inspection techniques after the start of the Vienna round, it is also true that the Y-13 paper on verification issues, considered by the Verification Panel in March 1969, concluded that on-site inspection would reduce uncertainty surrounding a MIRV ban, a month prior to the beginning of the Vienna round. ACDA and CIA maintained that on-site inspection was not necessary for a MIRV ban, but there was no dissent that inspections, if implemented, would improve the United States’ confidence in such a ban. The conclusion of Y-13 provided Nixon with one important technical “consensus” on SALT verification, allowing him to rule out a MIRV ban absent on-site inspection without appearing entirely unreasonable. The Options paper that Garthoff drafted for Nixon’s consideration included numerous footnotes from Defense and JCS calling for on-site inspection in a MIRV ban, so Nixon’s decision was not without bureaucratic proponents. Nixon’s addition of on-site inspection was not a spur-of-the-moment decision, but rather part of the Administration’s longer

123 Smith, Doubletalk, 168-173; Garthoff, Détente and Confrontation, 155-159.
126 “ABMs: Should SAMs Be Counted as ABMs,” folder Verification Panel Meeting SALT Options 4/6/70, Box H-005, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
debate over how best to verify SALT.

Nor was it entirely clear at the time that the Soviets would automatically reject on-site inspection. After all, Semenov had not ruled out inspections in his discussions with Smith in Helsinki.127 Both Rogers and Nitze advocated including on-site inspection at the 25 March 1970 NSC Meeting on SALT.128 In a 9 April 1970 memo to Kissinger, Lynn predicted that opponents would characterize the Administration’s on-site inspection proposal as a gimmick, but Lynn nonetheless believed that the issue should be raised with the Soviets in good faith.129 Not everyone agreed: Smith and Thompson, especially, were convinced that the Soviets would never accept on-site inspection as part of SALT, and warned Nixon personally on multiple occasions.130 Crucially, most in the government realized that if the Soviets refused to consider inspections, the Administration could always walk back from its inspection proposal, and perhaps even win some concessions from the Soviets in the process.131 Nixon’s own motives for including on-site inspection are less clear, but there is no evidence to suggest that he believed the Soviets would reject Option C specifically because of its inspection provisions. Rather, Nixon appears to have believed that the Soviets would reject a MIRV ban regardless of its verification provisions, because of the United States’ lead in MIRV testing.132 Nor was Nixon alone in this: the interagency MIRV Panel Report had arrived at a similar conclusion concerning Soviet

131 “ABMs: Should SAMs Be Counted as ABMs,” folder Verification Panel Meeting SALT Options 4/6/70, Box H-005, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
interest in a MIRV ban.\textsuperscript{133} Smith and Garthoff are undoubtedly correct that Nixon’s decision for on-site inspection for Option C had more to do with the internal politics of the Administration than it did the technical necessity of verification – on-site inspection was included as a way to appease Defense and JCS, while still allowing ACDA to present Option C to the Soviets. Nixon did not add on-site inspection in order to sabotage Option C’s chances; rather, he believed the MIRV ban proposal would fail either way.\textsuperscript{134}

While the decision for on-site inspection has caused considerable controversy, the second major SALT breakthrough – on ABM – has received far less attention. This is largely because Defense and ACDA remained seriously divided over a number of ABM-related issues, especially radar controls and SAM upgrades. These specific differences were driven by differences about the desirability of MIRV, and its role as a hedge against Soviet ABM cheating, rather than the desirability of ABM itself. Defense’s skepticism of the political viability of ABM pervaded the final decision-making process. Although the final SALT Options paper described a notional large-scale ABM deployment purportedly favored by Defense, in private both Laird and Nitze opposed the point-defense-for-SAM option, preferring instead a simpler ABM agreement along with a vigorous MIRV program to defeat any Soviet ABM cheating.\textsuperscript{135} Defense’s evolving view on ABM could be seen in the major changes from the Option VII reductions proposal from the fall of 1969 to the Option D reductions proposal of the spring of 1970. Option VII had insisted

\textsuperscript{134} Other observers came to similar conclusions about the MIRV ban’s unviability by the spring of 1970. See: William Bundy, \textit{A Tangled Web: The Making of Foreign Policy in the Nixon Presidency} (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 96-100.
\textsuperscript{135} Memo, Garthoff to Members of the Verification Panel Working Group, 4 April 1970, folder Verification Panel Meeting SALT Options 4/6/70, Box H-005, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library; “ABMs: Should SAMs Be Counted as ABMs,” folder Verification Panel Meeting SALT Options 4/6/70, Box H-005, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
on retaining a Safeguard-level ABM capability, while Option D allowed that NCA-level or zero-level ABM might be preferable.\textsuperscript{136} As a result, Defense and ACDA’s positions on ABM in SALT had converged on a low-level ABM agreement. Although Defense preferred point-defense of Minuteman ICBM, and ACDA preferred zero ABM, both could agree that NCA defense was a viable alternative, dramatically decreasing the ability of the Soviets to cheat on an ABM agreement.\textsuperscript{137} In the face of this growing bureaucratic consensus, Nixon had agreed several months earlier that the Safeguard ABM program need not necessarily lead to an area defense capability, if an area defense ABM was not in the United States’ interest.\textsuperscript{138} As a result, although the Administration selected two separate SALT options to present to the Soviets in Vienna, \textit{both} options contained the same ABM provisions: either zero ABM, or a limited NCA defense.\textsuperscript{139} This consensus on ABM limitation, and the ensuing decision to propose NCA-only ABM defense to the Soviets, would decisively shape the coming years of negotiations. The strange consensus between Defense and ACDA on ABM occurred at just the right time to influence the original SALT proposals to the Soviets. Once suggested to the Soviets, the low-ABM proposal would prove impossible to walk back.

NSDM 51 was handed down just in time for the Delegation to depart for Vienna. On 14 April 1970 the US SALT Delegation briefed NATO leaders on the content of Options C and D, emphasizing that both would be given equal weight, and that both were consistent with NATO

\textsuperscript{136} Letter, Packard to Kissinger, 17 October 1969, folder SALT October-November 16, 1969, Volume IV [2 of 2], Box 874, NSC Files, Nixon Library; Memo, Garthoff to Members of the Verification Panel Working Group, 4 April 1970, folder Verification Panel Meeting SALT Options 4/6/70, Box H-005, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.

\textsuperscript{137} “Task Y-1 ABM/MIRV Options,” 13 March 1970, folder ABM-System Vol. IV 2-70 – 30 Apr 70 Memos and Misc. [1 of 3], Box 841, NSC Files, Nixon Library.

\textsuperscript{138} \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Editorial Note 50.

security.\footnote{Memo, Kissinger to Smith, 13 April 1970, folder SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol. VIII 4/9/70 – 5/10/70 [1 of 2], Box 877, NSC Files, Nixon Library; \textit{FRUS} 1969-76 XXXII, SALT I, Document 70.} On 16 April 1970, as the Delegations met in Vienna, Nixon briefed Congressional leaders on the upcoming talks, outlining the Options C and D that would be presented to the Soviets. The Verification Panel’s technical analyses continued to pay significant dividends for Nixon; at the meeting, the President emphasized the solidarity within the Administration, claiming that the Verification Panel’s would allow the SALT negotiators “to cope with whatever issues arise on the basis of an agreed set of facts and analyses.”\footnote{Memo, Kissinger to Nixon, 15 April 1970, folder SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol. VIII 4/9/70 – 5/10/70 [1 of 2], Box 877, NSC Files, Nixon Library.} The reality was more complicated. The Verification Panel’s work had provided Nixon with several key compromises that had allowed the Administration to enter the Vienna round absent a total breakdown over SALT policy. The Panel’s work remained a rearguard action against the deep divisions between Defense/JCS and State/ACDA over the ultimate purpose of SALT. These divisions between the Cambridge and Philadelphia Approaches would continue to plague the Administration as it moved into full negotiations with the Soviets.
CHAPTER 5 – SALT Stalemate

The second round of SALT in Vienna in April 1970 transformed the Nixon Administration’s SALT process, as the ongoing US-Soviet dialogue added further complexity to the Administration’s own internal SALT wrangling. From April 1970 onwards, SALT became a two-level game, in which proponents of the Philadelphia and Cambridge Approaches jockeyed for advantage while at the same time negotiating jointly with their Soviet counterparts. The two-level game of SALT negotiations also continued to overlap with the Congressional and public controversy over Safeguard ABM and the defense budget. Partisan tension rose in the domestic political sphere as Congress and the public grew increasingly impatient with the Nixon’s Vietnam policy, which provoked further efforts to limit the perceived militarization of US foreign policy by reducing defense expenditure. The domestic political rancor increased SALT’s political importance, raising both the value of successful negotiations and the risk of their failure.

Despite the Administration’s extensive preparation, however, the negotiations in Vienna quickly stalled over an issue that had received almost no attention: the Soviets insisted that any strategic arms limitation agreement include US tactical nuclear forces in Europe. The Soviets insisted that since US tactical nuclear forces could strike at the periphery of Soviet territory, they should be counted as “strategic” weapons for the purposes of arms control. The United States remained set against counting tactical nuclear forces in SALT, which were believed to be necessary to deter the Soviet threat against US allies. Deadlock in negotiations with the Soviets threw the Administration into a state of paralysis, as Nixon and Kissinger feared that Soviet intransigence would result in sharper clashes between proponents of differing approaches to arms control within the government. The result was the continuation of a familiar cycle of discussion and delay, which lasted three entire rounds of SALT negotiations throughout 1970 and 1971.
As in the previous year, the Administration’s SALT policy took place against a backdrop of Congressional and public furor over Nixon’s Safeguard ABM proposal. In 1969, Safeguard Phase I had passed the Senate by a 51-50 tiebreaking vote; as a result, the Administration entered 1970 planning a full-court press on Safeguard by the entire government, to head off opposition in the Senate and scientific community. The White House and the Defense Department coordinated this effort closely, through an Interdepartmental Safeguard Steering Group organized by DDR&E Foster and chaired by Haig. The group began meeting in late February 1970 to prepare the Administration’s defense of its Safeguard Phase II budgetary proposal. The largest issue for discussion was the Administration’s rationale for Safeguard. In 1969, the Administration had justified its Safeguard proposal as accomplishing several missions: 1) area defense against a small Chinese attack; 2) some protection against a limited or accidental Soviet attack; 3) defense of Minuteman against a Soviet disarming attack, and 4) bargaining leverage for SALT. By early 1970, many in the Administration believed that the Safeguard rationale should be modified to better appeal to Congressional preferences on ABM. In particular, the Defense Department now believed that Minuteman defense and SALT leverage were winning arguments for Safeguard; area defense capability was more easily criticized on technical grounds, and risked provoking opposition in residential areas where ABM sites were scheduled to be deployed. State and ACDA also worried that emphasizing the anti-China rationale of Safeguard too much would undermine the Administration’s SALT chances, since the United States was less likely to trade away an ABM system that was needed to defend against China in bilateral US-Soviet
The growing bureaucratic emphasis on Minuteman defense was dismaying to Nixon and Kissinger, who worried that an explicit shift in public Safeguard rationale would open the program to criticism that the Administration was making it up as it went along. At least initially, the White House’s instructions were followed, and Laird’s 25 February 1970 Annual Defense Report reiterated the Administration’s full previous Safeguard position.

The Administration’s Safeguard lobbying program had several major components. The most important was direct cooperation with supportive Senators. Especially important to the Administration’s efforts was Senator Jackson, who had become strongly identified with his support of Safeguard. Although the White House coordinated this effort, much of the active lobbying was conducted by Defense officials, who both actively solicited support from key Senators, and provided more indirect support to pro-Safeguard members of Congress. As in the previous year, Defense was also a prolific producer of pro-Safeguard speeches for use in Congress. Nixon and Kissinger also took an active role, reaching out early and often to key Senate swing votes in an effort to win their support for Safeguard Phase II.

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4 Memo, Lynn to Kissinger, 26 February 1970, folder ABM-System Vol. IV 2-70 – 30 Apr 70 Memos and Misc. [2 of 3], Box 841, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
5 Memo, Friedheim to Haig, 11 March 1970, folder ABM-System Vol. IV 2-70 to 30 Apr 70 Memos and Misc. [2 of 3], Box 841, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
Another major component of the Administration’s Safeguard lobbying was encouraging friendly commentary on Safeguard in the press. This effort was especially successful in early 1970, when Defense coordinated the publication of pro-Safeguard material in smaller newspapers all across the country. Nixon had some reason to be dismayed, since most of these editorials focused on the need to deploy Safeguard in order to meet the growing Soviet threat to Minuteman’s survivability, while ignoring the Chinese threat that had originally driven Safeguard’s deployment.\(^8\) Several conservative columnists, including Stewart Alsop and C.L. Sulzberger, also took a pro-Safeguard line to the op-eds of the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*.\(^9\) In fact, Defense’s initial efforts were so successful that Nixon came to worry that the Defense Department might come under scrutiny for trying to manipulate public opinion.\(^10\) As

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\(^10\) Memo, Haig to Kissinger, 11 March 1970, folder ABM-System Vol. IV 2-70 – 30 Apr 70 Memos and Misc. [1 of 3], Box 841, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
1970 wore on, the White House took an increasing lead in the Safeguard PR campaign, while allowing Defense to focus on its Congressional lobbying activities.\footnote{11}{Memo, Haig to Haldeman, Timmons & Magruder, 21 March 1970, folder ABM-System Vol. IV 2-70 – 30 Apr 70 Memos and Misc. [1 of 3], Box 841, NSC Files, Nixon Library.}

Finally, both the White House and Defense Department did what they could to promote pro-Safeguard activity amongst private citizens, both as individuals but also as civil social groups. The White House solicited input from prominent conservative commentators like Albert Wohlstetter, Donald Brennan, Foy Kohler, Dean Rusk, and Thomas Schelling on the Administration’s Safeguard proposal, in the hopes that they would then support the proposal in public.\footnote{12}{Memo, Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 24 February 1970, folder ABM-System 1-70 – 3-70 Vol. III Memos and Misc. [1 of 2], Box 840, NSC Files, Nixon Library; Memo, Haig to Kissinger, 8 April 1970, folder ABM-System Vol. IV 2-70 – 30 Apr 70 Memos and Misc. [1 of 3], Box 841, NSC Files, Nixon Library.} A number of the most prominent conservative supporters of Safeguard were also prominent members of the Philadelphia Approach to arms control. In fact, in May 1970 the Fourth International Arms Control Symposium was held not in Philadelphia, but at Airlie House in northern Virginia, with numerous speakers – including Kissinger – discussing the merits of the Administration’s Safeguard proposal in front of a largely-sympathetic press audience.\footnote{13}{Jim Lehman, who had been one of the original organizers of the International Arms Control Symposia in Philadelphia, had since moved on to serve as an NSC Staff liaison to Congress, and helped convince Kissinger to participate in the Fourth Arms Control Symposium (Memo, Lehman to Kissinger, 29 April 1970, folder ABM-System Vol. IV 2-70 – 30 Apr 70 Memos and Misc. [1 of 3], Box 841, NSC Files, Nixon Library; “Fourth International Arms Control Symposium – Airlie House – May 1 and 2, 1970,” folder ABM-System Vol. IV 2-70 – 30 Apr 70 Memos and Misc. [1 of 3], Box 841, NSC Files, Nixon Library).}

Additionally, the Administration sought to win endorsement from a number of conservative civil society groups, including the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, the Chambers of Commerce, the Navy League, and the Boy Scouts, amongst others.\footnote{14}{Memo, Friedheim to Haig, 11 March 1970, folder ABM-System Vol, IV 2-70 – 30 Apr 70 Memos and Misc. [2 of 3], Box 841, NSC Files, Nixon Library; Memo, Colson to Haldeman, 6}

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approval, Defense officials made numerous public speaking appearances in support of 
Safeguard, hoping to overwhelm any public efforts by Safeguard opponents. These efforts met 
with considerable success as the summer wore on, as a number of prominent conservatives 
including Dean Acheson and Henry Cabot Lodge formed a “Citizens’ Committee to Safeguard 
America,” supported by public figures as diverse as Soviet expert Alexander Berkis, political 
scientist Herman Kahn, actor John Wayne, espionage professional Albert Wheelon, and physicist 
Eugene Wigner.

Despite the seeming success of these lobbying efforts, Nixon and Kissinger remained 
intensely concerned that internal Administration disputes on Safeguard would undo all their 
efforts. Of special interest to the White House was Gerard Smith’s public position on ABM; 
although in private Smith had opposed further Safeguard deployments, his public support was 
necessary to emphasize the Administration’s arguments that Safeguard Phase II was necessary 
for SALT bargaining. Although Smith himself sought to avoid public commentary on 
Safeguard, troubling rumors of his opposition to Safeguard persisted. Equally concerning were 
the public reports that Laird had turned against the Administration’s ABM program, and was 
now supporting an exclusive focus on Minuteman defense. For its part, Defense was frustrated

April 1970, folder ABM-System Vol. IV 2-70 – 30 Apr 70 Memos and Misc. [1 of 3], Box 841, 
NSC Files, Nixon Library.
and Misc. [2 of 3], Box 841, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
16 “Statement of Foy Kohler on the Formation of the Citizens’ Committee to Safeguard 
America,” 24 June 1970, folder ABM-System Vol. VI May 70 – 30 July [2 of 2], Box 842, NSC 
Files, Nixon Library.
17 Memo, Kissinger to Nixon, 24 February 1970, , FRUS 1969-76, Volume XXXII, SALT I, 
Document 54 (hereafter FRUS, with appropriate year, volume, and number).
18 Memo, Lynn to Kissinger, 18 March 1970, folder ABM-System Vol. IV 2-70 – 30 Apr 70 
Memos and Misc. [1 of 3], Box 841, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
by a perceived unwillingness by Rogers to come out on the record fully supporting Safeguard Phase II. To top it off, in the spring of 1970 Bell Labs, the principal contractor on Safeguard, began indicating that it hoped to distance itself from and eventually end its participation in antiballistic missile systems. Technicians at Bell were increasingly concerned that they would be blamed for Safeguard’s shortcomings, which they instead blamed on the Administration’s efforts to adapt earlier Sentinel area defense ABM components for point defense of Minuteman, a completely different mission.

By the spring of 1970, the Administration’s Safeguard prospects seemed further dimmed by the growing resistance on Capitol Hill to the Administration’s policy in Vietnam. The ongoing war in Southeast Asia had cast a long shadow over the Safeguard debate in the summer of 1969, but Nixon’s promises of a new direction on Vietnam policy had allayed critics for much of his first year in office. By early 1970, however, Congressional proponents of strategic retrenchment, including Senators Fulbright, Symmington, Cooper, and Church, were becoming more vocally critical about Nixon’s Vietnam policy. In May 1970, as Congress was taking up debate for Safeguard Phase II, opposition to the war was accelerated by the dual shocks of the United States’ invasion of Cambodia and the shooting of anti-war protestors at Kent State University. The Administration’s Safeguard lobbying efforts took place under the shadow of larger questions about the role of military force in US foreign policy and the tradeoffs between military and domestic spending.

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19 Memo, Friedheim to Nixon, 10 April 1970, folder ABM-System Vol. IV 2-70 – 30 Apr 70 Memos and Misc. [1 of 3], Box 841, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
As a result, despite the huge lobbying and PR campaign, both the White House and Defense Department remained nervous about Safeguard’s chances in the Senate, where the vote was expected to be close.\(^\text{22}\) In mid-April 1970, as the Delegations were reconvening in Vienna to begin formal negotiations on SALT, Haldeman sent a memo to the Defense Department, noting that after six weeks of lobbying, Safeguard’s projected chances in the Senate had not significantly improved.\(^\text{23}\) Defense responded that the Administration needed to drill down and focus on its Safeguard proposal, especially as it related to SALT. The press was receiving indications that Nixon was considering surrendering Safeguard as part of a grand SALT bargain with the Soviets – not too far from the truth, given the United States’ NCA-only SALT proposal in Vienna. On the other hand, Defense now believed that spun properly, the bargaining logic of SALT might actually win over a few Senators who were skeptical of Safeguard’s military utility.\(^\text{24}\) As the full Senate met in early July 1970 to discuss Safeguard, Nixon reluctantly agreed to refocus the Administration’s Safeguard efforts, explaining in private to Senators Jackson and Tower that Safeguard’s primary rationale was now Minuteman defense and SALT leverage.\(^\text{25}\) With Jackson and Tower’s help, this last-minute appeal was effective, as an amendment defunding the Administration’s Safeguard request was defeated in the Senate 51-49 on 6 August 1970.\(^\text{26}\) A decisive win was better than the previous year’s tie-breaking vote, but the margin of victory remained razor-slim.

\(^{22}\) Memo, Friedheim to Nixon, 27 March 1970, folder ABM-System Vol, IV, 2-70 - 30 Apr 70 Memos and Misc.. [1 of 3], Box 841, NSC Files, Nixon Library.

\(^{23}\) Letter, Haldeman to Friedheim, 16 April 1970, folder ABM-System Vol. IV 2-70 – 30 Apr 70 Memos and Misc. [1 of 3], Box 841, NSC Files, Nixon Library.

\(^{24}\) Memo, Friedheim to Nixon, 17 April 1970, folder ABM-System Vol, 2-70 – 30 Apr 70 Memos and Misc. [1 of 3], Box 841, NSC Files, Nixon Library.


Despite this victory, the exact status of the Administration’s FY71 Safeguard request remained in limbo, as the Senate considered various modifications to the request. The last-minute scramble to support Safeguard led Kissinger to reach out to Smith, who at this time was still negotiating with the Soviets in Vienna, and ask for a private message supporting the Administration’s Safeguard proposal, to share with a few Senators. Smith obligingly forwarded a short letter indicating that a dramatic Safeguard defeat would undermine the United States’ bargaining position in SALT, and agreed that Kissinger could show the note to a few Senators on the condition of strict confidence.  

On 11 August 1970, Smith also spoke on a conference call with Senators Percy and McIntyre, as well as Haig. Percy and McIntyre wanted to know whether there was some sort of compromise between the various Congressional amendments and the Administration’s Safeguard proposal. Smith confirmed that any indication that Congress was undermining Nixon’s authority would harm the United States’ bargaining position, and promised to discuss Safeguard and SALT in more detail when he returned from Vienna. Smith once again requested that his views be kept strictly confidential, to avoid any negative blowback in his ongoing negotiations with the Soviets.  

Nonetheless, Smith’s comments leaked almost immediately, being reported in the *New York Times* within a day. Smith complained to Kissinger, arguing that some strong “remedial action” was necessary to set the record straight. Smith wanted it to be clear that he did not support any particular ABM program, but rather was in favor of a dynamic process of arms control with the Soviets. Kissinger assured Smith that he too was very upset about the leak, and guessed that it had come from one of the Senators.

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Smith’s position was public, the Administration continued to make use of it in support of Safeguard deployment.\textsuperscript{30} In their memoirs, both Kissinger and Smith recalled that Smith’s intervention as an important turning point in the Safeguard debate.\textsuperscript{31} The incident represented perhaps the high point of the Administration’s “bargaining chip” politics, which had enabled the White House to win public support from Smith for an ABM system that he adamantly opposed on military and technical grounds. The decisiveness of Smith’s intervention has been somewhat overstated; the Senate had already rejected zero-Safeguard amendments the previous week, and the only question that remained was what level and what type of ABM the United States would deploy.

While Smith’s intervention was important, the real breakthrough on ABM policy appears to have come from Laird, who worked behind the scenes with Senator Jackson to establish a compromise on FY71 Safeguard deployment. Jackson had been especially impressed by Defense’s arguments concerning the need for Minuteman defense, and was considering a Safeguard amendment that would limit FY71 deployments in favor of higher R&D for a dedicated Minuteman defense ABM system. In fact, Defense was increasingly interested in the longer-term possibilities for Minuteman defense ABM, increasingly referred to as “Hard-Site Defense” ABM. Unlike Safeguard, which relied on large, high-powered radars and a few hundred long-range interceptors, Hard-Site would instead use numerous smaller, low-powered radars to guide thousands of short-range terminal interceptors co-located with existing Minuteman facilities. The PSAC conducted several studies on future ABM modalities, and

\textsuperscript{30} Letter, Smith to Foster, 17 August 1970, folder SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol. XII 7/20/70 – Sept. 70 [1 of 1], Box 879, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
concluded that Defense’s notional hard-site defense program would improve Minuteman survivability far more than any set of Safeguard sites.\textsuperscript{32} Given that as recently as the previous year Defense had been one of the most vociferous supporters of Safeguard, it seems likely that Defense’s growing interest in hard-site ABM technology was driven as much by Laird’s belief that the Senate would actually fund ABM for Minuteman defense, as it was by a conviction that hard-site represented a superior technical system to Safeguard. In his August 1970 discussion with Jackson, Laird maintained that for the time being, Safeguard and hard-site were actually complementary, rather than competing, programs. Laird asked Jackson to support the Administration’s Safeguard program as a rapid reaction to the growing Soviet threat. Building Safeguard would also retain the skilled missile defense workforce built up over the 1960s, and provide operational experience that would improve the ultimate quality of hard-site at some point later in the decade.\textsuperscript{33}

Laird’s intervention helped break the deadlock and broker a Congressional compromise on Safeguard for the FY71 budget. In the process, Laird also confirmed some of Nixon’s fears that Defense would successfully alter Safeguard’s public rationale from area defense to Minuteman defense, while also tying ABM progress even closer to SALT. As a result, on 24 September 1970, the House and Senate Armed Services Committees reached a compromise amendment that authorized additional procurement for two more Minuteman defense Safeguard sites at Whiteman and Warren Air Force Bases, a major victory over Congressional efforts to

\textsuperscript{32} Memo, Lynn to Kissinger, 18 February 1970, folder ABM-System Vol. IV 2-70 – 30 Apr 70 Memos and Misc. [1 of 3], Box 841, NSC Files, Nixon Library; Letter, DuBridge to Kissinger, 1 July 1970, folder ABM-System Vol. VI, May 70 – 30 July 71 [2 of 2], Box 842, NSC Files, Nixon Library.

limit Safeguard to Phase I deployments. The compromise also denied the Administration’s request to begin advanced work on area defense ABM sites in DC, New England, the Midwest, and the Pacific Northwest. Safeguard area defense was effectively dead. The Defense Department’s hopes for ABM increasingly depended on securing a heavy defense of Minuteman.  

Nixon and Kissinger were less than thrilled by Laird’s growing prominence in the Defense budgetary process, and his ability to engineer major Congressional compromises that shaped Administration defense policy. Kissinger remained skeptical that hard-site ABM defense would be a viable concept, and maintained that Safeguard was a more proven system and a better bet for the time being. Nixon and Kissinger’s concerns about Laird were magnified by his continued resistance to the DPRC budgetary process, which over the course of 1970 had begun work on long-term planning for the FY72 defense budget. Laird continued to object to extensive work by the DPRC in the planning phases, preferring instead that Defense be allowed to conduct its own preliminary strategic and budgetary studies. In contrast, Nixon insisted that the DPRC be given a larger and earlier role in planning, to avoid the massive bureaucratic pileup that had occurred the previous fall over the FY71 budget. The procedural issue was tied up in a larger dispute over the substance of the FY72 budget itself: as they had the previous fall, Laird

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and JCS worried that Nixon’s programmed budget level would undermine US military power and foreign policy goals around the world.\(^39\)

Nixon and Kissinger agreed that reduced military expenditures would lead to higher risks in US foreign policy, but they also believed that the government needed to be proactive in cutting costs to avoid having them imposed by Congress.\(^40\) Nixon and Kissinger remained frustrated by Defense’s insistence on spreading cuts equally across existing forces, rather than reformulating larger force structures to meet new fiscal priorities. As 1970 wore on, the White House was increasingly at odds with the military over the question of whether the United States needed a new generation of surface-to-air missiles to defend against Soviet bomber attack, a prospect which seemed remote to Nixon given the Soviets’ antiquated bombers and large modern ICBM force.\(^41\) The NSC met to discuss possible Defense budgetary cuts on 19 August 1970; although there was general consensus that the United States needed to retain its current strategic force posture, there was less agreement on how this could be achieved given the need for fiscal restraint.\(^42\) On 11 September 1970, Nixon issued NSDM 84, providing instructions for Defense on formulating the FY72 budget. The NSDM ordered that current strategic forces be maintained at least until the conclusion of SALT agreement, and that cost-savings be made up in air defense


**SALT II – Vienna**

Pursuant to Nixon’s instructions in NSDM 51, the US Delegation met once again with their Soviet counterparts in Vienna on 16 April 1970 to begin detailed negotiations on SALT. There was one change to the US Delegation lineup: Llewellyn Thompson’s failing health meant that Ambassador James Parsons, the former US Ambassador to Sweden, assumed the role of chief State Department advisor to the Delegation.\footnote{Memo, Rogers to Nixon, 9 April 1970, folder SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol. VIII 4/9/70 – 5/10/70 [1 of 2], Box 877, NSC Files, Nixon Library.} Prior to their arrival in Vienna, the Delegation met with NATO leaders to present the United States’ opening negotiating positions. Per NSDM 51, the Delegation would suggest two possible SALT agreements: one limiting ICBM and SLBM forces to their approximate levels while banning MIRV, and a second reducing ICBMs while freezing SLBMs and allowing MIRV. Under either agreement, the United States and Soviet Union would agree to restrict ABM deployments to a limited defense of national capitals or eliminate ABM entirely. Both agreements also contained numerous corollary restrictions on radar types and missile sizes, amongst other issues.\footnote{National Security Decision Memorandum 51, 10 April 1970, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 68.} Rogers reported that Smith’s presentation went well, and that the NATO ambassadors were pleased with the two negotiating
options presented.\textsuperscript{46}

On 16 April 1970, as the Delegations met to begin discussions in Vienna, Nixon met with Congressional leaders to explain the positions that the Delegation would be taking. Nixon’s talking points emphasized the Administration’s solidarity on SALT, claiming that Nixon had considered the best possible advice before making his decision, and that the negotiators would now be able to “cope with whatever issues arise on the basis of an agreed set of facts and analyses.” Although Nixon’s talking points admitted that different agencies preferred different components of the proposals, he nonetheless claimed that both proposals were fundamentally Presidential decisions, and that all agencies were ready to support the government’s policy.\textsuperscript{47}

The reality of negotiations was somewhat different from Nixon’s rosy portrayal for Congress. In fact, the bureaucratic divisions that had characterized the Administration’s SALT discussions prior to Vienna continued even as negotiations began. Given ACDA’s preference for banning MIRV, Laird was especially concerned that Smith would prioritize presenting the Option C MIRV ban to the Soviets, rather than Defense’s preferred Option D reductions proposal. Laird also worried that Smith and the Delegation would be so eager for a MIRV ban that they would overstep their instructions and offer one to the Soviets absent the Presidentially-approved verification provisions and strict controls on ABM.\textsuperscript{48} Kissinger did his best to assuage Laird’s concerns, sending repeated reminders to Smith to give Option D equal status in the Delegation’s presentation of US SALT views.\textsuperscript{49} To ensure the Delegation’s responsiveness to


\textsuperscript{47} Memo, Kissinger to Nixon, 15 April 1970, folder SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol. VIII 4/9/70 – 5/10/70 [1 of 2], Box 877, NSC Files, Nixon Library.


\textsuperscript{49} Memo, Kissinger to Smith, 13 April 1970, folder SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol. VIII 4/9/70 – 5/10/70 [1 of 2], Box 877, NSC Files, Nixon Library; Memo, Laird to Kissinger, 27 April 1970, folder SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol. VIII 4/9/70 – 5/10/70 [1 of 2], Box 877, NSC Files, Nixon
instructions, Kissinger continued to insist (as he had during Helsinki) that any substantive SALT issues be forwarded to the Verification Panel for discussion, while the Delegation and the Backstopping Committee confined themselves to purely tactical and rhetorical issues.\textsuperscript{50}

While the US Delegation began Vienna by presenting its two options, the Soviets tabled their own “Basic Provisions” in late April. The Soviet provisions called for a numerical limit on ICBMs, SLBMs, and bombers, with total freedom-to-mix within this basic aggregate. MIRV production and deployment would be banned, but all other qualitative improvements (including replacement of older missiles with newer ones) would be allowed. Most controversially, the Soviet proposal insisted that the United States’ forward-based systems deployed within striking distance of Soviet territory should be counted against the United States’ total aggregate, or should be withdrawn from Europe. Equally provocative to the United States was what the Soviet Basic Provisions did not contain: no sub-limit on heavy ICBMs; no corollary constraints on radars or SAMs; and no corollary constraints to verify the MIRV ban, neither by banning testing nor via on-site inspections. In his analysis for Nixon, Kissinger concluded that this Soviet proposal was one-sided and unsophisticated, and probably indicated that Soviet thinking on SALT was far less advanced than that of the United States.\textsuperscript{51} Both Smith and Rogers agreed that the Soviet opening position was unacceptable, but put a more positive spin on the proceedings, describing the Soviet Basic Provisions as a bargaining gambit, from which the Soviets would

\textsuperscript{50} Memo, Kissinger to Verification Panel \textit{et al.}, 25 April 1970, folder SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol. VIII 4/9/70 – 5/10/70 [1 of 2], Box 877, NSC Files, Nixon Library.

\textsuperscript{51} Memo, Kissinger to Nixon, 23 April 1970, folder SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol. VIII 4/9/70 – 5/10/70 [1 of 2], Box 877, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
almost certainly be willing to compromise.\textsuperscript{52}

Despite the distance between the two opening positions, the Soviets very quickly accepted in principle the idea of an ABM agreement limiting deployments to low levels for the defense of national capitals only – the national command authority (NCA) option. Semenov informed Smith of Soviet interest in this sort of agreement on 27 April 1970.\textsuperscript{53} Soviet acceptance of this idea proved to be a mixed blessing, since the Administration had only agreed on NCA-defense as a component of a more comprehensive SALT package, including limitations on offensive forces and corollary restraints on radars and SAMs, most of which the Soviets rejected. Both Kissinger and Laird worried that this nuance would be lost if news of Semenov’s statement were leaked – the prospect of an NCA-only ABM deal could completely destroy the Administration’s chances in the close-running Congressional debate on Safeguard, since the Administration was focusing its efforts on Safeguard ABM sites for Minuteman defense, not NCA defense.\textsuperscript{54} Administration concerns that the Soviets might be using SALT as a tool to encourage unilateral US disarmament were encouraged by several prominent members of the Philadelphia Approach, including William Kintner and Richard Foster, who provided the White House with cautionary commentary on SALT issues.\textsuperscript{55} Laird recommended avoiding any Congressional consultation on SALT for the time being, and preparing to counter any leaks by insisting that the NCA-only ABM proposal could only happen if the Soviets agreed to stringent


\textsuperscript{55} Memo, Lynn to Kissinger, 8 May 1970, folder SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol. IX, 5/10/70 – 6/12/70 [1 of 2], Box 877, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
restrictions on offensive forces.\textsuperscript{56}

Garthoff speculated that Nixon and Kissinger were disappointed by Soviet acceptance-in-principle of NCA-only ABM defense, claiming that the White House had expected the Soviets to reject NCA-only defense in favor of a more extensive ABM deployment, and provide Nixon with more ammunition for his Safeguard plans.\textsuperscript{57} As noted previously, Nixon and Kissinger appear to have expected the Soviets to reject both Options C and D (a realistic expectation, as it turned out), but on the specific issue of an NCA-only agreement, the primary concern in the spring and summer of 1970 was that Soviet acceptance-in-principle not derail the authorization of Safeguard Phase II in FY71 before a SALT agreement was concluded, especially since Soviet acceptance of the NCA-only concept contained no acknowledgement of the need for corollary constraints on radars or SAMs, which the US insisted were necessary.\textsuperscript{58} Dismay at Soviet acceptance was therefore driven primarily by a continued fear of US unilateral disarmament measures, rather than the failure of Nixon and Kissinger’s Machiavellian SALT schemes.

The seriousness with which the Soviets approached SALT was also demonstrated in the spring of 1970 when US and South Vietnamese forces invaded Cambodia. On 29 April 1970, forces from the United States Army and Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) crossed the border from South Vietnam into eastern Cambodia, with the objective of destroying North Vietnamese supply bases.\textsuperscript{59} In conversation with Dobrynin, Kissinger had received assurances

\textsuperscript{56} Memo, Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 29 April 1970, folder SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol. VIII 4/9/70 – 5/10/70 [2 of 2], Box 877, NSC Files, Nixon Library.


\textsuperscript{58} Memo, Kissinger to Nixon, 27 April 1970, folder SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol. VIII 4/9/70 – 5/10/70 [1 of 2], Box 877, NSC Files, Nixon Library.

that the Soviets would not break off SALT over the Cambodian incursion, despite the harsh public rhetoric that would be issued from Moscow.\textsuperscript{60} The possibility of spillover into SALT was sufficiently real that the White House Press Office drafted a release detailing the United States’ frustration that the Soviets would cancel a negotiation as important as SALT.\textsuperscript{61} The press release was never issued, since although the Soviet Delegation took a brief moment to condemn the US military action, the talks themselves continued without interruption.\textsuperscript{62} With talks already underway, the Soviets appeared unwilling to call off SALT as Johnson had in 1968.

Despite some positive indications, the US and Soviet Delegations remained very far apart on most substantive SALT issues. By the middle of May, Smith had concluded that the Soviets would not accept either of the United States’ currently-proposed SALT positions. Three particularly glaring differences stood out. First, while the Soviets had accepted the idea of an NCA-defense system, they still refused to consider most of the corollary constraints on radars and SAMs that the US believed was necessary to police such an agreement. Second, the Soviets’ MIRV ban proposal was blatantly one-sided, since it would allow the Soviets to continue testing and perfecting MIRV technology while prohibiting the US from any production or deployment. The Soviet MIRV proposal was also entirely unverifiable, since it banned not only MIRV deployments but also the stockpiling of MIRV warheads, a process that could take place entirely within factories and warehouses and therefore could not be verified by satellite or other remote reconnaissance. Third, the Soviets insisted that any comprehensive agreement limiting strategic

\textsuperscript{61} Memo, Lynn to Kissinger, 24 March 1970, folder SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol. VIII 4/9/70 – 5/10/70 [1 of 2], Box 877, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
offensive forces should also limit US FBS stationed in Europe. In the face of these major disagreements, the Soviets began hinting that perhaps the Delegations should consider a more limited form of SALT agreement, to be concluded by the end of the Vienna round in July.

Within the government, proponents of the Philadelphia and Cambridge approaches continued to interpret Soviet motives by projecting their own preferences onto Soviet behavior, leading to divergent explanations for the Soviets’ position in SALT. Harold Brown argued that the Soviets were angling for unilateral advantage in the talks, seeking to limit areas of perceived US advantage (Safeguard ABM and FBS) while leaving open areas in which the Soviets hoped to catch up (MIRV, especially). In contrast, Smith believed that the Soviets were seeking a stable strategic balance between the superpowers, and that their insistence on FBS inclusion in particular was driven by a genuine concern that the US might use its tactical nuclear capabilities to gain a destabilizing advantage over the Soviets. Different interpretations also led to different conclusions about what the United States should do next: Brown believed that the US should be ready to trade off concessions with the Soviets towards a more limited agreement that would meet at least some of each side’s unilateral objectives, while Smith continued to be skeptical that a more limited agreement would effectively constrain the arms race.

The White House

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65 Letter, Brown to Kissinger, 20 May 1970, FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 78; Letter, Smith to Nixon, 19 May 1970, folder ABM-System Vol. VI, May 70 – 30 July 71 [2 of 2], Box 842, NSC Files, Nixon Library. Garthoff’s recollections of Soviet motives at Vienna are somewhat jumbled. He claims that the Soviets rejected Option C primarily because of the OSI provisions attached to the MIRV ban, while rejecting Option D primarily because it did not contain FBS, and because it contained a specific sub-limit on large ICBMs (Garthoff, Détente and Confrontation, 159-162). Garthoff’s description makes it seem as though Option C was somehow more palatable to the Soviets, except for the OSI provisions that he blamed on Nixon and Kissinger’s manipulation. Option C also contained a sub-limit in large ICBMs, and did not include FBS, both reasons that Garthoff cites for the Soviet rejection of Option D. All in all, it
continued to lean towards the competitive strategies interpretation. NSC staff analysis admitted that Soviet foreign ministry officials might have some interest in stabilizing the strategic balance. The NSC analysis concluded that SALT policy was firmly in the hands of Soviet military-industrial officials, who were interested in gaining relative advantage over the US, by limiting US ABM technology and dismantling US nuclear forces in Europe.66

The exact mixture of Soviet motives in SALT remains opaque. Retrospective accounts from interviews with former Soviet defense officials present a mixed picture. On the one hand, by the late 1960s the Soviets seem to have concluded that in a future general war both the United States and the Soviet Union would be destroyed in successive nuclear attacks. Around the same time, the Soviets began placing a much greater emphasis on deterring the United States from launching a preemptive attack on the Soviet Union.67 Despite this change in emphasis from war-fighting to deterrence, Soviet defense officials seem to have remained committed to achieving strategic nuclear superiority over the United States. According to one analysis of the interviews, Soviet defense officials sought strategic superiority “not to insure victory in a nuclear war, but to create a stable situation in order to enhance their general security.”68 Soviet defense officials remained convinced that “the only truly stable nuclear situation was one in which one side had clear superiority over the other. To be both secure and stable, the imbalance had to be in the

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seems that the Soviets disliked both Options immensely, given all of the issues that Garthoff cites; there is little evidence to suggest that the OSI provisions in particular somehow poisoned an otherwise-good MIRV ban.
66 Memo, 4 June 1970, folder SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol. IX 5/10/70 – 6/12/70 [1 of 2], Box 877, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
Soviets’ favor.” Indeed, Soviet military leaders seem to have rejected the idea that parity in strategic forces was desirable from a security perspective. The interviews also suggest that strategic procurement policy remained the province of military-industrial figures, who had strong bureaucratic motives to continue producing missiles, rather than seeking to limit the arms race. Defense industrial figures were especially concerned over their weapon systems’ unreliability. Insofar as the Soviets sought nuclear superiority as a prerequisite for their security, it seems their actions were fundamentally similar to that of the American Philadelphia Approach, which sought a similar superiority for the United States. Indeed, the mutual desire for unilateral security through superior weapons may have contributed to a “security dilemma,” driving each side to expend greater and greater resources on weapons. How the Politburo balanced these strong military-industrial preferences for continued arms production with the Foreign Ministry’s seeming desire for SALT is less clear: much like US leaders, the Soviet leadership had strong incentives to conceal their true foreign policy goals in ambiguity.

The Soviet rejection of the US negotiating position raised an important procedural question of how the Delegation should respond. No doubt anticipating the Soviet rejection, in

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early May Kissinger had ordered a new raft of Verification Panel studies, which sought to analyze which provisions of Options C and D could be safely waived in negotiation without undermining the ability of the United States to verify the agreement. 74 On 20 May 1970, Smith officially requested permission to explore various permutations and modifications of Options C and D with the Soviets, not as official proposals but as hypotheticals to gauge various Soviet reactions. Smith described these new instructions as “search warrants,” claiming that the Delegations’ authorization could be limited to exploring specific topics. 75 Unsurprisingly, the White House was resistant to the idea of giving the Delegation a free hand to explore various options, worrying that the Delegation would use the opportunity to promote its own SALT ideas without sufficient consultation with the remainder of the government. 76 The NSC Staff in particular continued to be very suspicious of the Delegation’s motives, reading into every message from the Delegation possible efforts to subvert the White House’s instructions. A 20 May 1970 memo from Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger gives a typical example: Garthoff had reported a private conversation with a Soviet delegate in which his counterpart had asked whether the US would consider an ABM-only agreement. Garthoff reported that he had “not indicate[d] any receptivity to the idea of an agreement limiting only ABM systems.” Sonnenfeldt took issue with this formulation, claiming that Garthoff had bucked his instructions by avoiding a strong “No.” 77 Even granting the significant substantial differences in SALT views between men like Garthoff and Sonnenfeldt, this level of nit-picking by the NSC staff was undoubtedly

76 Kissinger, The White House Years, 545-547.
77 Memo, Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 20 May 1970, folder SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol. IX 5/10/70 – 6/12/70 [1 of 2], Box 877, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
unproductive and served only to sow needless distrust between different parts of the government.

The Backstopping Committee began to draft instructions as Smith had requested, but Kissinger stopped them, insisting that the President’s previous instructions mandated that any substantive changes to the Delegation’s instructions needed to go through the Verification Panel process first. The Panel met on 26 May 1970 to discuss what further instructions the Delegation should receive, if any. ACDA and State supported the Delegation’s request for new instructions to explore Soviet positions; Defense preferred building a whole new negotiating option based on Options A and B, as well as Soviet feedback in Vienna. Kissinger concluded the meeting by saying that the Delegation should stretch out its presentation of Options C and D for a few more weeks, while the Verification Panel worked out more detailed instructions. Topics for further investigation by the Panel Working Group included a possible total strategic forces aggregate (including bombers); a modified MIRV ban proposal (perhaps dropping OSI); and a trade-off excluding both Soviet theater nuclear forces and US FBS.

The White House’s decision to continue with the existing Options was likely related to Defense’s insistence that the Delegation continue to push Option D. Laird especially preferred that the Delegation attempt to use Soviet interest in NCA-only defense as leverage to gain Soviet acceptance of offensive force reductions; the Soviet interest in a quick ABM agreement only served to further Defense’s belief that ABM technology was an area of US advantage. Although the White House believed Option D to be non-negotiable, Nixon and Kissinger needed

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78 Memo, Sonnenfeldt & Lynn to Kissinger, 22 May 1970, folder SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol. IX 5/10/70 – 6/12/70 [1 of 2], Box 877, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
Laird’s support to win in Congress on Safeguard, and so the Delegation was instructed to keep pushing Option D while the Verification Panel reviewed its options. Movement towards a new SALT position accelerated only once Laird was convinced that new material was needed. In mid-June 1970 Smith, Nitze, and Allison met with Laird during the Secretary’s trip to consult with NATO leaders in Brussels. The delegates convinced Laird that Option D was non-negotiable, because the Soviets rejected the idea of strategic force reductions in the opening phase of SALT. Especially appealing to Laird was Smith’s admission that any likely SALT agreement would require significant modernization of strategic forces by the United States, including B-1 and the Undersea Long-Range Missile System (ULMS), both to retain strategic parity with the Soviets and as bargaining tools for future rounds of negotiations.\footnote{Telegram, Laird to Rogers, Kissinger, & Packard, 11 June 1970, folder SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol. IX 5/10/70 – 6/12/70 [1 of 2], Box 877, NSC Files, Nixon Library.} Thus assured that SALT could work towards US interests, Laird agreed that the Delegation should receive new instructions to move forward with SALT.\footnote{Memo, Lynn & Hyland to Kissinger, 12 June 1970, folder SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol. IX 5/10/70 – 6/12/70 [1 of 2], Box 877, NSC Files, Nixon Library.}

Despite Laird’s approval, progress on a new negotiating position was slow, because the Soviet rejection of Options C and D re-opened a number of crucial substantive issues that had been closed prior to the Vienna round. Chief amongst these was the question of ABM levels. The Defense Department had been willing to accept NCA-level ABM defense as part of a comprehensive SALT agreement placing strict limits on Soviet offensive forces. Given the Soviets’ resistance to the proposed offensive limitations, the question was once again open whether the United States should stick with NCA-only defense as its primary policy, or revisit the zero- or Safeguard-level ABM options. The question of a MIRV ban was also re-opened, as
the Delegation hoped to present a compromise position that would drop on-site inspection and agree to ban MIRV production if the Soviets would agree to ban MIRV testing.  

Smith and Allison returned to Washington in late June to participate in the Verification Panel’s deliberations personally. The Delegation had submitted its own proposal for a SALT Option E, which was now under consideration. This “Vienna Option” would include a single 2,000 launcher aggregate for ICBMs, SLBMs, and bombers, with three-way freedom-to-mix; a sub-limit on SS-9 large ICBMs; a ban on land-mobile ICBMs; ABM defenses limited to NCA-defense, with corollary constraints on radars and SAMs; and the exclusion of both US FBS and Soviet MR/IRBMs. In contrast, the Defense Department was promoting a more stringent offensive forces limit, tied to a complex ABM scheme that would allow the deployment of an extensive hard-site defense system for Minuteman, including perhaps up to one thousand short-range interceptors. Of course, if the United States had the right to deploy one thousand ABM interceptors, then presumably the Soviet would, too, so the Defense proposal also contained draconian restrictions on the qualitative capabilities of ABM interceptors and SAMs as well as associated radars, to ensure that a comparable Soviet hard-site defense system could not be used as the basis for a covert area defense capability. Due to its complexity, the Defense proposal was considered by most agencies to be non-verifiable and non-negotiable. At the Verification Panel meeting on 24 June 1970, a general consensus was achieved on the Delegation’s “Vienna Option” as the new Option E SALT proposal. Despite this superficial consensus, deep divisions

83 Memo, Lynn to Kissinger, 18 June 1970, folder Verification Panel Meeting SALT 6/18/70, Box H-005, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
still remained over the question of ABM levels, with ACDA preferring zero ABM, and Defense holding out for some sort of Minuteman defense. For the time being, NCA-defense remained the Administration’s stated policy, by default more than by design.\footnote{“Verification Panel June 24, 1970,” folder Verification Panel Minutes Originals / 1969 – 3/8/72 [4 of 6], Box H-107, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library. Allison explicitly argued for continuing to negotiate on the basis of NCA-only ABM defense specifically because changing ABM position would complicate negotiations and give the Soviets an opportunity to extract further concessions (Telegram, Allison to Wheeler & Moorer, 29 June 1970, folder SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol. X 6/13/70 – 6/30/70 [1 of 2], Box 878, NSC Files, Nixon Library). Packard soon came around to this point of view (Memo, Lynn to Kissinger, 7 July 1970, folder SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol. XI 7/1/70 – 7/19/70 [1 of 2], Box 878, NSC Files, Nixon Library).} For the time being, this specific compromise had little urgency, since a number of more technical ABM issues remained to be settled with the Soviets, especially concerning limitations on ABM-capable radars.\footnote{Memo, Packard to Kissinger, 2 July 1970, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 87.} As before, controversial decision on a major political issue – the desired mission and deployment configuration of US ABM – was delayed in favor of a very specific, highly-technical question – radar limitation. The politics of delay remained alive and well in the Administration’s SALT policy.

One issue that was settled at the 24 June 1970 Verification Panel meeting was the MIRV ban debate, as Smith reported that the Soviets were no longer interested in limiting MIRV.\footnote{“Verification Panel June 24, 1970,” folder Verification Panel Minutes Originals / 1969 – 3/8/72 [4 of 6], Box H-107, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.} A few strongholds of anti-MIRV opinion held out longer, with the GAC especially arguing that the Administration should insist on some sort of MIRV restriction as the price for an ABM agreement, but in general the Administration was coming to terms with non-inclusion of MIRV in SALT.\footnote{Telegram, Kennedy to Haig, 29 June 1970, folder SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol. X 6/13/70 – 6/30/70 [1 of 2], Box 878, NSC Files, Nixon Library; Telegram, Secretary of State to American Embassy Manila, 1 July 1970, folder SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol. X 6/13/70 – 6/30/70 [1 of 2], Box 878, NSC Files, Nixon Library.} In several memoir accounts of SALT, the Delegation’s request for “search warrants”
has been portrayed as the last possible opportunity for securing a MIRV ban agreement, and the White House’s rejection of these search warrants described as the last nail in the MIRV ban coffin. Smith recalled that the most important “search warrant” concerned a possible compromise on MIRV, in which the US would agree to an unverifiable MIRV production ban if the Soviets would agree to a verifiable MIRV testing ban, but that the government ignored his request. In fact, as discussed above, Smith’s request for new instructions was received, and the Verification Panel Working Group began a new study on possible MIRV trade-offs for future negotiation. By early June 1970 Smith recalled that Semenov was no longer interested in a MIRV ban, and that the Soviets preferred to let the issue drop entirely. Even assuming that the Soviets ever really wanted a MIRV ban at all, Smith’s timeline allowed only a couple weeks for the government to develop a new MIRV proposal, a very short period of time given the complexity and divisiveness of the issue. By 24 June 1970, when the Verification Panel met again to discuss possible SALT modifications (including MIRV modifications), Smith had already concluded that the Soviets had no interest in banning MIRV. Without access to better Soviet sources, there is no way to say conclusively whether the Soviets would have accepted a modified MIRV ban proposal had it been offered on 25 May 1970 instead of 5 June 1970 (though as noted in the previous chapter, several contemporary analyses by various US agencies suggested otherwise). What is clear is that given the need to mediate various bureaucratic interests in SALT policy formulation, the US government was not able to reformulate its SALT position in this short a period of time. The timeline also casts some doubt on Garthoff’s claim that the failure to include MIRV in SALT was primarily the responsibility of the United States.91

90 Smith, *Doubletalk*, 174-175; Garthoff gives a similar account (Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 159-161).
91 Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 1129-1130.
While it is true that the United States hoped to retain MIRV capability, what sources exist suggest that the Soviets were equally unwilling to limit MIRV, especially while the United States enjoyed a lead in testing.

While the Administration worked out the contours of a new SALT proposal, the Soviets were seeking a negotiating breakthrough of their own, in the form of an ABM-only agreement. On 10 June 1970, Dobrynin met with Kissinger to discuss the progress of negotiations in Vienna. At the meeting, Dobrynin contrasted the general consensus on NCA-only ABM with the continued discord over offensive force limitations. As such, Dobrynin suggested that one way to move forward with SALT might be a limited, defense-only agreement to be concluded that summer, with follow-on negotiations to work out lingering differences over offensive force limitation. Following on its previous skepticism of the Soviets’ acceptance of NCA-only defense, the White House saw this Soviet proposal as primarily aimed at derailing the ongoing Safeguard funding debate, which was due to receive full Senate consideration within the month. The White House’s concerns about an ABM-only deal were furthered by the advice it was receiving from some US scientists. On 22 June 1970, Paul Doty wrote Kissinger suggesting that the United States agree to an immediate ABM-only agreement, allowing the Soviets to keep their Moscow system while forswearing any US ABM deployments. Doty’s note was co-signed by a number of prominent Safeguard critics, including Richard Garwin and Wolfgang Panofsky. In hindsight, Doty’s position that the US should just let the Soviets keep Moscow while the US focused on R&D for advanced ABM concepts is almost exactly what happened; at the time, the willingness of Safeguard opponents to give the Soviets a unilateral advantage in strategic

defenses served to further the White House’s concerns that an ABM-only agreement with the Soviets might lead to unilateral ABM disarmament by the United States. The NSC staff also saw Soviet desire for an ABM-only agreement as further evidence that the Administration’s Safeguard program was an effective bargaining tool in SALT, which in turn hardened resolve that the United States should only agree to limit ABM in the context of major Soviet concessions on offensive force limitations.94 Dobrynin repeated his request in a 23 June 1970 meeting with Kissinger, which Kissinger again rejected.95 On 24 June 1970, the Verification Panel affirmed the decision to avoid negotiating an ABM-only agreement for the time being.96 Despite this affirmation, Kissinger also sought Smith’s specific input on Dobrynin’s ABM-only proposal in a secret 4 July 1970 s message. Smith agreed with Kissinger’s analysis that an ABM-only agreement would not be in the United States’ interest, a position that the Delegation all shared.97 For the time being, the idea of an ABM-only agreement was set aside in favor of developing and presenting the Administration’s new Option E proposal.

The Soviet backchannel investigation of an ABM-only agreement was accompanied by a new proposal by the Soviet Delegation to limit the chances of accidental or provocative nuclear

94 Memo, Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 22 June 1970, folder SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol. X 6/13/70 – 6/30/70 [1 of 2], Box 878, NSC Files, Nixon Library; Memo, Kissinger to Nixon, 13 July 1970, FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 95. The question of whether Safeguard ABM actually provided leverage over the Soviets is a major point of contention in the memoir accounts, with Kissinger claiming that Safeguard was important to SALT bargaining (Kissinger, The White House Years, 537-541), and Garthoff disagreeing (Garthoff, Détente and Confrontation, 207-208), replicating the debates that existed at the time between the NSC and Defense, on the one hand, and State and ACDA, on the other. As with many issues concerning SALT negotiations, the resolution of this question awaits better sources for Soviet SALT behavior.


96 Memo, Lynn to Kissinger, 1 July 1970, folder SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol. XI 7/1/70 – 7/19/70 [1 of 2], Box 878, NSC Files, Nixon Library.

war between the United States and the Soviet Union. An “accidental” war would occur if a technical malfunction led to an unintended weapons launch, which could escalate into a much larger conflict. A “provocative” war would occur if a third party launched a nuclear attack on either the United States or the Soviet Union – for example, if the Soviets mistook a small Chinese nuclear attack for the opening phases of a major US offensive, and responded with an overwhelming attack on the United States. On 30 June 1970, Semenov suggested a possible information-sharing agreement, which would include disclosure of unauthorized nuclear use, prior notification of missile tests and bomber flights, and non-interference in early warning systems, as well as specific information sharing on the nuclear activities of third parties that might be preparing to attack one or the other of the superpowers.\textsuperscript{98} The Soviet proposal caused further disagreement within the Administration. ACDA saw it as a very positive proposal, which demonstrated the seriousness of the Soviets’ desire to pursue a stable strategic relationship with the United States. On the other hand, the NSC staff believed that the Soviet proposal went far beyond reasonable provisions for avoiding war. The Soviets might use the provisions for advanced notification of bomber flights, for instance, to gather intelligence on US aircraft operations. More importantly, the NSC staff believed that a Soviet agreement to share information on the activities of third parties was aimed squarely at undermining possible US-Chinese détente, by formulating an anti-Chinese nuclear condominium.\textsuperscript{99} Kissinger expressed these concerns at the 8 July 1970 Verification Panel meeting reviewing the Soviet proposal, ordering the Working Group to produce a detailed paper on the possible political and technical

implications of the Soviet proposal. The Working Group concluded that a number of Soviet proposals would likely improve transparency and reduce the chances of accidental war, but insisted that there should be some provision to prevent the Soviets from abusing the agreement to gather information, or to intimidate third parties.

Garthoff later recalled Kissinger’s response to the Soviet provocative attack proposal as a major overreaction; Garthoff was convinced that this Soviet proposal was simply meant to soften the blow of their ABM-only proposal. In Détente and Confrontation, Garthoff wrote, “Kissinger’s excessively manipulative approach thus led him to misconstrue the Soviet purpose, the nature of the proposal for an ABM agreement accompanied by an accidental measures agreement, and the nature of the provocative attack proposal.” As always, our lack of Soviet sources prevents a definitive conclusion, but whatever the Soviets’ motives, Kissinger’s belief that a provocative attack proposal might be perceived by the Chinese as undermining US-Chinese relations was widely-shared within the government, and certainly not a simple product of Kissinger’s devious personality. In fact, State INR also concluded in July 1970 that the Soviet provocative attack proposal was aimed primarily at undermining US-Chinese relations.

There were other possible explanations, too – Thompson believed that the Soviet interest in provocative attack was probably more related to the nascent Israeli nuclear program and the ongoing Arab-Israeli tensions. Kissinger was hardly alone in reading an ulterior motive into the Soviet

101 Memo, Lynn to Kissinger, 14 July 1970, folder SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol. XI 7/1/70 – 7/19/70 [1 of 2], Box 878, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
102 Garthoff, Détente and Confrontation, 197-203.
While the Verification Panel considered the Soviet accidental/provocative war proposal, negotiations in Vienna continued. On 9 July 1970, Nixon issued NSDM 69 to the Delegation, instructing the Delegates to present the new Option E proposal to the Soviets, including a total aggregate limit on ICBMs, SLBMs, and bombers, with a sub-limit on large ICBMs, and an NCA-only or zero-ABM agreement, along with accompanied corollary limitations. These instructions received some slight modification a few days later, when the Delegation recommended that Option E be modified to allow both the US and USSR to produce heavy ICBMs, even though the US had no intention of producing such missiles. Kissinger gave Dobrynin a brief preview of the Delegation’s upcoming proposal in a meeting on 20 July 1970, indicating that the US would be introducing a new, more limited SALT proposal containing restrictions on both offensive and defensive weapons. On 4 August 1970, the US Delegation presented the new Option E proposal to the Soviets. Smith reported that the Soviet response to

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106 Memcon, Kissinger & Dobrynin, 9 July 1970, *FRUS* 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 93, fn3. Lynn was somewhat concerned that allowing the Delegation to challenge its instructions on this basis would open the possibility of future challenges on more controversial issues, like radar limitations, SAM upgrades, or hard-point defenses (Memo, Lynn to Kissinger, 14 July 1970, folder Verification Panel Meeting SALT 7/15/70, Box H-005, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library). Rogers also objected to the Delegation’s modification, saying that since the US had no intention of building heavy ICBMs, and that insisting on that right would only complicate negotiations (Memo, Rogers to Nixon, 22 July 1970, folder SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol. XII 7/20/70 – Sept. 70 [1 of 1], Box 879, NSC Files, Nixon Library). Kissinger forwarded the issue to Nixon, who ultimately upheld the Delegation’s interpretation be upheld, as “the tougher position” (Memo, Kissinger to Nixon, 20 July 1970, folder SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol. XII 7/20/70 – Sept. 70 [1 of 1], Box 879, NSC Files, Nixon Library). The new instructions were issued in NSDM 76, providing the Delegation with authorization to request the right for equal levels of heavy ICBMs on either side (National Security Decision Memorandum 73, 22 July 1970, *FRUS* 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 97).

the proposal was “reserved.” With less than a week remaining in Vienna, the US Delegation completed its proposal, and both Delegations agreed to reconvene in the fall in Helsinki, giving the Soviet government time to consider Option E in detail.

Nixon met with the returning US Delegation on 19 August 1970 to congratulate them on their hard work in Vienna. Despite the celebration, the Administration remained pessimistic about SALT’s chances at the upcoming Helsinki round. The Soviets had not greeted the Option E proposal warmly, and significant further negotiations no doubt remained ahead.

SALT III – Helsinki

With talks set to reconvene in early November, work began almost immediately on preparations for the next round. While Lawrence Lynn had stepped down from the NSC staff, K. Wayne Smith set out a new work program for the Verification Panel Working Group in mid-September. Given the fact that the Soviets had not yet responded to the United States’ 4 August 1970 Option E proposal, the main topics of discussion were hypothetical, focusing on the explanations and fallbacks should the United States have prepared in anticipation of potential Soviet objections. Kissinger and Wayne Smith sought to keep discussion focused on tactical issues, avoiding re-opening major substantial questions that might re-escalate bureaucratic debate. A number of specific issues required further clarification: what sorts of limitations should the US propose on silo modification to prevent the Soviets from replacing lighter ICBMs

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109 Memo, Smith to Nixon, 19 August 1970, folder SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol. XII 7/20/70 – Sept. 70 [1 of 1], Box 879, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
110 Memo, Kissinger to Nixon, Undated, folder SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol. XII 7/20/70 – Sept. 70 [1 of 1], NSC Files, Nixon Library.
111 Memo, Wayne Smith & Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 11 September 1970, folder SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol. XII 7/20/70 – Sept. 70 [1 of 1], Box 879, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
with newer, heavier ICBMs? What sorts of dismantling procedures should the US insist upon for replacement of ICBMs with SLBMs, or vice versa? What provisions should be included to ensure that the Soviets did not interfere with US technical verification capabilities? The Verification Panel Working Group sought to focus on these issues while awaiting a specific Soviet response to Option E.\(^\text{113}\)

One especially noteworthy topic of discussion was the question of whether the ongoing SALT negotiations might be supplemented by some sort of interim strategic weapons freeze, especially if the Soviets rejected the Option E proposal. The idea of a temporary freeze grew out of ACDA’s previous work on a Stop Where We Are (SWWA) SALT proposal. Smith had raised the possibility of a temporary negotiating freeze during the Vienna round, when it had become clear that the Soviets would accept neither Options C nor D—a temporary freeze covering ABMs and ICBMs would meet Soviet demands to limit ABM deployments, in exchange for meeting US demands to constrain the growth of the Soviet ICBM force.\(^\text{114}\) At the time, Packard supported the idea of a rapidly-concluded, temporary freeze, as a means for immediately constraining Soviet ICBM deployments, before the travails of the Defense budgetary process fatally undermined the United States’ bargaining position.\(^\text{115}\) The NSC staff opposed the idea of a temporary freeze, since this would limit US ABM while allowing the Soviets to continue advancing towards a powerful MIRV’ed counterforce capability.\(^\text{116}\) Instead, the Administration opted to present the Soviets with the Option E compromise proposal. As the Verification Panel prepared for

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Helsinki, ACDA once again raised the possibility of an interim freeze as a possible fallback position should the Soviets reject Option E. 117

While the focus of the Working Group was primarily on anticipating Soviet responses to the United States’ Option E proposal, the Administration also needed to formulate some sort of response to the Soviet accidental war/provocative attack proposal. There was fairly general consensus that the United States should focus on the technical and communications issues of reducing the chances of nuclear war, while avoiding any political commitment to cooperate with the Soviets against third parties. The main division concerned how to refuse the Soviets: ACDA preferred to let them down easily, while the NSC staff preferred to string the issue out for negotiating leverage, insisting that an effective bilateral arms limitation agreement would need to be concluded before the United States would consider a provocative attack agreement. 118 Wayne Smith and Sonnenfeldt preferred that the Delegation be instructed to tread water on an accidental war agreement for the time being, worrying that if given authorization Smith would immediately conclude an accidental war agreement, surrendering a possible source of leverage. 119

The Verification Panel met on 19 October 1970 to discuss these SALT issues. As before, Kissinger limited discussion to a set of specific technical issues, rather than risk a major bureaucratic rupture. As Wayne Smith wrote in Kissinger’s briefing memo, “I do not think we should either turn the agencies loose to open up all the old wounds with a total re-examination of

The meeting ultimately concluded that the Delegation should open Helsinki by awaiting a Soviet response to Option E, rather than offering any new information or modification to the proposal. In the meantime, the Working Group would continue studying possible issues that the Soviets might raise, including FBS, technology transfer, and accidental/provocative war. Although negotiations were well underway, the politics of delay remained alive and well – rather than risking a bureaucratic scuffle, Kissinger preferred to await further Soviet comments, much as the Administration had avoided final commitment prior to Vienna.

While the Verification Panel Working Group spun out new studies on SALT details, Nixon and Kissinger were trying to manage broader relations with the Soviets, hoping to organize a summit meeting for some time in 1971. Given the upcoming Soviet Party Congress in the spring of 1971, the Soviets preferred a meeting at some point later in the year. The attempt to set a summit date was complicated by Nixon and Kissinger’s suspicion of Soviet activity in Cuba. On 16 September 1970, a US reconnaissance aircraft photographed new construction at the Cuban port of Cienfuegos. Given the increasing frequency of Soviet naval visits to Cuba, the CIA concluded that the construction was the beginning of a base for Soviet submarines. Many in the US government and Congress objected to a Soviet submarine base in Cuba, which was perceived as violating the informal 1962 Kennedy-Khrushchev agreement to avoid deploying Soviet nuclear weapons in Cuba. When Nixon and Kissinger raised their

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120 Memo, Wayne Smith to Kissinger, 17 October 1970, folder Verification Panel Meeting SALT 10/19/70, Box H-006, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
objections with Dobrynin, the Soviets quickly disavowed any intention of building such a base, and denied any intention of deploying nuclear weapons to Cuba. Some suspicious Soviet naval activity continued into early 1971, but the “Cienfuegos Incident” was concluded.  

The concerns about Soviet submarines spilled over somewhat into SALT, with Senator Jackson briefly arguing that the Administration should postpone the next Helsinki round indefinitely, which would signal US resolve on Cuba and increase bargaining leverage in future rounds of arms limitation talks. Within the White House, members of the NSC staff also believed that the run-in over Soviet submarine deployments indicated the need for the Administration to take a hard line on SALT. While the White House fretted about Soviet submarines, preparations for the summit developed slowly. Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko visited Washington, DC, in late October 1970, and received an official but private request from Nixon to hold a summit during the summer of 1971. Despite Gromyko’s promise that the Soviets would agree to announce a summit date soon, the Soviets continued to string the Administration along, saying they needed more time to consider the best date. Then, Dobrynin claimed that the Soviets preferred to work out a detailed agenda for the summit in private, before any announcement was made. Nixon and Kissinger were still waiting for an official response when the third round of SALT began.

124 Garthoff, Détente and Confrontation, 76-83.
125 Letter, Smith to Kissinger, 10 October 1970, folder Verification Panel Meeting SALT 10/19/70, Box H-006, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
The Verification Panel met once again on 27 October 1970 to work out more detailed instructions for the Delegation before its return to Helsinki. Topics of discussion included what sorts of limitations to place on ICBM silo modification; how to respond to the Soviet provocative attack proposal; and how to respond should the Soviets insist on FBS inclusion. The Panel ultimately upheld the conclusion of the previous meeting that the United States should not take the initiative in Helsinki, and insist that the Soviets provide a response to Option E before any other discussions continue. While the Delegation probed for more information on Soviet SALT preferences, the Working Group would continue studies to clarify what sorts of radar restrictions would be needed for an ABM agreement, as well as conduct a large study into the survivability of US strategic forces under possible future levels of Soviet strategic forces deployment.

Establishing control over ABM-capable radars was especially important for the White House. Defense Department experts like Harold Brown were now claiming that if the United States could not achieve strict control over Soviet ABM-capable radar deployments, then a zero-ABM agreement might actually be to the United States’ advantage, to prevent the Soviets from deploying a massive ABM-capable radar network in preparation for a breakout towards an area defense capability. Smith jumped on this possibility, arguing that it provided further reason for ACDA’s preferred total ban on ABMs. The White House faced the possibility of another

132 Memo, Wayne Smith to Kissinger, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XIII Oct 70 – Dec 70 [1 of 3], Box 879, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
strange convergence of Defense and ACDA positions on ABM, similar to the one that had led to proposing NCA-only to the Soviets in the spring. Nixon and Kissinger had originally sought to reformulate major policy disputes in terms of technical verification and negotiability in order to deflect bureaucratic criticism for controversial decisions. Increasingly, bureaucratic operators like Smith were coming to realize that issues of verification and negotiability could be just as easily manipulated to support their own specific positions. As Helsinki approached, finding a verifiable and negotiable formula for ABM radar controls was one of the Verification Panel Working Group’s most pressing tasks.  

The Delegations returned to Helsinki on 3 November 1970 to begin the third round of SALT. In his memoirs, Smith recalled that SALT III in Helsinki was short but “stormy.” Per previous discussions in the Verification Panel, the US Delegation was instructed to await Soviet commentary on Option E, before offering any clarifications or modifications to the US position. On the specific issue of accidental/provocative war, if asked by the Soviets the Delegation was to respond that the US preferred to focus negotiations on technical means to reduce the chances of accidental war, and not make any specific political agreement concerning third parties’ actions. Unfortunately for the United States, the Soviets opened Helsinki without specific comment on the United States’ Option E proposal, except to insist that US FBS should be included in any comprehensive SALT agreement. Smith later recalled that Helsinki was an

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135 Smith, Doubletalk, 179.
137 Memo for Members of the NSC, 2 November 1970, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki), Vol. XIII Oct 70 – Dec 70 [1 of 3], Box 879, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
odd round of negotiations – the Soviets insisted on FBS inclusion, but refused to present their own formula for counting forward-based aircraft, instead waiting for the US to develop and present a proposal to resolve an issue that the Soviets themselves had raised! Smith concluded that the Soviets’ fanatical insistence on FBS inclusion was a negotiating tactic to convince the United States to move from a comprehensive SALT proposal to an ABM-only one.\textsuperscript{139}

While Soviet insistence on FBS stalled any further consideration of the merits of Option E, the Soviets were very eager to conclude some sort of limited SALT agreement, introducing a formal proposal for an ABM-only agreement. Semenov introduced a formal ABM-only proposal at Helsinki on 1 December 1970.\textsuperscript{140} Although for the moment everyone in the Administration agreed that an ABM-only agreement would not be in the United States’ interest, Smith suggested that the United States not flatly reject the Soviet proposal, to avoid a total negotiating impasse.\textsuperscript{141} The Backstopping Committee composed a formal response, saying that the US government would take the Soviet proposal under advisement for the time being, although it was doubtful that the US would agree to a separate defenses-only agreement.\textsuperscript{142} The language of the US response provoked some debate within the Committee: Defense was skeptical of its value, while JCS believed that the US should reject an ABM-only agreement entirely. In the end, Kissinger agreed with the Committee’s language, and the option of an ABM-only agreement was retained, though with a warning that the US believed that offensive and defensive forces were inextricably

\textsuperscript{139} Smith, \textit{Doubletalk}, 182-185, 187-188.
\textsuperscript{142} Memo, Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 4 December 1970, folder ABM-System Vol. VI, May 70 – 30 July 71 [2 of 2], Box 842, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
Given the differences between the US and Soviet positions, there was little chance of concluding an agreement at Helsinki. Sonnenfeldt recommended ending Helsinki as quickly as possible, and redoubling efforts at preparing a new position for presentation at a new round of SALT, after the Soviet Party Congress in the spring. Although the Soviets insistence on FBS inclusion made a comprehensive agreement like Option E unlikely, the Soviet offer of an ABM-only agreement opened the possibility of a formal agreement limiting strategic defenses tied to some sort of less formal restriction on offensive forces, perhaps in the form of a temporary freeze in ICBM construction. The shift to an ABM-only agreement also offered an opportunity for the Administration to reformulate its SALT position to an agreement that would allow the continued deployment of Safeguard, instead of limiting the US to an NCA-defense site that Congress would almost certainly not authorize. In fact, on 11 December 1970 Semenov indicated to Smith in a private conversation that the Soviets would be amenable to linking an ABM-only agreement to a less-formal freeze on ICBMs. An ABM-plus-freeze agreement seemed to be the most negotiable prospect going forward.

Before the Delegations could recess, the United States needed to make some response to the Soviets’ continued insistence on including FBS. The US Delegation had produced a possible compromise, in which a SALT agreement along the lines of Option E would be supplemented by

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143 Memo, Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 7 December 1970, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XIII Oct 70 – Dec 70 [1 of 3], Box 879, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
144 Memo, Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 4 December 1970, folder ABM-System Vol. VI, May 70 – 30 July 71 [2 of 2], Box 842, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
a vague promise to avoid new major deployments of FBS while the SALT agreement was in
effect, except in response to an increase in the Warsaw Pact threat. This compromise might
appease the Soviets, while still being vague enough to avoid offending US allies; otherwise,
proposing it would at least establish in the negotiating record that the United States had made a
good-faith effort, and that the SALT impasse was the result of Soviet intransigence.\textsuperscript{147} The
Delegation’s formulation was not popular within the government. Defense and JCS (including
Allison) worried that such a vague FBS formula would leave the United States and its allies
vulnerable to harassment by the Soviets over the normal patterns of overseas deployments.
ACDA and State also believed that any motion towards a compromise would only embolden the
Soviets to continue pushing for more, and that from a negotiating perspective the best approach
was to flatly refuse any reference to FBS.\textsuperscript{148} In his memoir, Smith recalls that the Delegation’s
FBS proposal caused “considerable division” within the government, and assigned Nixon the
responsibility for rejecting the Delegation’s formulation.\textsuperscript{149} While all decisions were ultimately
Nixon’s responsibility as President, the available evidence suggests that the Delegation’s FBS
formula was fairly widely rejected within the government, which no doubt eased Nixon’s
decision. As a result, the Delegation’s compromise language on FBS was tabled for the time
being, with the United States insisting that it would only consider FBS once effective controls
had been established on the central strategic systems.\textsuperscript{150}

In the last days of the Helsinki round, the Delegation raised one final issue for

\textsuperscript{147} Memo, Wayne Smith to Kissinger, folder Verification Panel Meeting 12/8/70, Box H-006,
NSC Files, Nixon Library.
\textsuperscript{148} Memcon, Verification Panel Meeting, 8 December 1970, folder SALT Backup 1970-71 [2 of
2], Box 886, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
\textsuperscript{149} Smith, Doubletalk, 185-186.
\textsuperscript{150} Memo from Kissinger, 12 December 1970, FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 120.
consideration by the government. On 14 December 1970, the Smith requested permission to discuss the issue of accidental/provocative attack with the Soviets. In an effort to focus Soviet attention on the US Option E proposal, the Delegation had originally been instructed to avoid mentioning the Soviets’ accidental/provocative war proposal, and only discuss it if the Soviets raised the issue first. By mid-December, the Helsinki round was nearly at an end, and the Soviets had not mentioned an accidental/provocative war agreement at all. Smith proposed that he be authorized to approach Semenov privately and explain that the United States would be interested in discussing the details of a technical agreement on limiting the chances of accidental war at some point in the next round of SALT in Vienna.\footnote{Telegram, US SALT Delegation to Secretary of State, 14 December 1970, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XIII Oct 70 – Dec 70 [1 of 3], Box 879, NSC Files, Nixon Library.} Kissinger approved Smith’s general approach, largely out of a hope that these negotiations would provide leverage over the Soviets in the central talks on limiting strategic arms.\footnote{Memo, Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 15 December 1970, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XIII Oct 70 – Dec 70 [1 of 3], Box 879, NSC Files, Nixon Library.}

**SALT IV – Vienna**

By January 1971, SALT negotiations had ground virtually to a halt. Although they had not specifically addressed the provisions of the United States’ Option E proposal, the Soviets had virtually rejected it by their continued insistence on including FBS in any comprehensive SALT agreement. At the same time, although the United States had promised to study the Soviet Union’s ABM-only proposal, many within the Administration had serious doubts about its desirability. The impasse in negotiations with the Soviets threatened to reopen many of the major divisions within the Administration, which might further derail SALT policy, especially if the Administration’s disputes over SALT negotiations spilled over into the public. As always,
the Administration’s SALT deliberations were tangled up in continued disputes over Safeguard ABM policy. The need to retain some solidarity within the government contributed to stalemate on SALT, as the Administration was wary of moving off of the Option E proposal to which all agencies basically agreed, even if the Soviets did not.\footnote{Memo, Wayne Smith and Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 12 January 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XIV 1 Jan 71 – April 71 [2 of 3], Box 880, NSC Files, Nixon Library.}

The possibility of a major public rupture on SALT was very real in early 1971. Many in the United States were impatient with the lack of progress in SALT negotiations. In mid-January 1971, Senator Muskie made a visit to Moscow, meeting with Kosygin and Gromyko to discuss US-Soviet relations. Muskie said that he hoped for the rapid conclusion of a broad SALT agreement; Kosygin and Gromyko agreed diplomatically that SALT was important.\footnote{Telegram from the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State, 18 January 1971, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XIII, Document 98.} Despite this public pressure for progress on SALT, for the time being Senators Muskie and McGovern also opposed an ABM-only SALT agreement.\footnote{Memo, Smith to Kissinger, 2 February 1971, folder ABM-System Vol VI, May 70 – 30 July 71 [1 of 2], Box 842, NSC Files, Nixon Library.} By the spring of 1971, even Senator Jackson was criticizing the Administration for not moving quickly enough on SALT, suggesting that the United States should seek some sort of temporary freeze with the Soviets while negotiations continued.\footnote{Memo, Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 29 March 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XIV 1 Jan 71 – April 71 [1 of 3], Box 880, NSC Files, Nixon Library.} The press was also becoming more critical of the Administration’s SALT policy: in January 1971, journalist Robert Kleiman urged Soviet embassy officials to accept a six-month moratorium on ABM, MIRV, and ICBM construction, similar to a recent proposal by the FAS. Soon after, Kleiman published an editorial in the \textit{New York Times}, citing both FAS and the GAC in support of his preferred policy. Nixon was displeased that his Administration was being
criticized for not pursuing policies – like a MIRV ban – that the Soviets also opposed.157

The public barbs at the Administration on SALT had little direct impact on policy, but they suggested that the possibility of a larger breakdown of SALT policy was very real, especially if public critics received support from within the Administration itself. The Vienna 1970 round of SALT was plagued by constant leaking from within the government, as various bits and pieces of the United States’ SALT policy slipped out into the limelight.158 As 1971 began, further leaks about the Administration’s SALT deliberations led to a raft of new articles, speculating about whether the United States would accept an ABM-only agreement along the lines proposed by the Soviets.159 In fact, both Defense and State were so concerned about how opponents might manipulate details on SALT negotiations that they insisted that Nixon cut most of the details on SALT from the President’s Annual Report on Foreign Policy.160 Ironically, an earlier draft of the President’s address containing the more objectionable comments on SALT was leaked to the Washington Post anyway, much to Nixon’s consternation.161 This leak was

157 Memo, Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 30 January 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XIV 1 Jan 71 – April 71 [2 of 3], Box 880, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
159 Letter, Smith to Mitchell, 13 January 1971, folder SALT Leaks [1 of 1], Box 886, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
160 Minutes of National Security Council Meeting, 11 February 1971, FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXXIV, Document 174; Memo, Baroody to Laird, folder Memos to Laird, 1969-72 (1), Box A79, Laird Files, Nixon Library. Unlike Rogers and Laird, Smith preferred that Nixon make a dramatic SALT-related announcement in his address, preferably along the lines that the US was now ready to negotiate a zero-ABM agreement with the Soviets (Letter, Smith to Kissinger, 11 February 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XIV 1 Jan 71 – April 71 [2 of 3], Box 880, NSC Files, Nixon Library). Rogers’ and Laird’s concerns ultimately prevailed.
soon followed by a major SALT expose by Joseph Kraft in the *New York Times*, which claimed that the Administration was in turmoil over SALT, and that the State Department and ACDA were increasingly in favor of an ABM-only SALT agreement along the lines of that posed by the Soviets in Helsinki.\(^{162}\)

Major leaks like these meant that Nixon felt increasingly besieged within his own government, worried that agencies on both sides of the SALT divide were willing to join the opposition at the slightest provocation, and unsure of how to stop them.\(^{163}\) Some later accounts characterized Nixon’s concerns about leaking as the result of a paranoid personality.\(^ {164}\) It is worth noting that Nixon’s concerns about leaking were shared by many within his government, including Smith, who was a constant voice for greater secrecy surrounding the details of SALT policy.\(^ {165}\) Nixon’s concerns that prominent members of his own government might be working against him were also not entirely unfounded. Unbeknownst to the White House, by late 1970 CJCS Moorer was secretly surveilling Nixon’s private messages via reports from a Navy radio specialist in the White House communications office.\(^ {166}\) Although in retrospect the


\(^{165}\) Memo, Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 3 June 1970, folder SALT Talks (Vienna) Vol. IX 5/10/70 – 6/12/70 [1 of 2], Box 877, NSC Files, Nixon Library; Letter, Smith to Mitchell, 13 January 1971, folder SALT Leaks [1 of 1], Box 886, NSC Files, Nixon Library. In his memoirs, Smith recalls his own penchant for secrecy surrounding SALT policy, but insists that he never kept any secrets from the White House (Smith, *Doubletalk*, 235-244).

\(^{166}\) “New Evidence Confirms Pentagon Stole and Leaked Top Secret Documents from Nixon White House,” accessed on 4 June 2017, [http://nixontapes.org/welander.html](http://nixontapes.org/welander.html). In 1972, the Air Force also attempted to gain inside information on the Nixon White House by recommending Colonel Brent Scowcroft as Nixon’s military adviser on the expectation that Scowcroft would serve as the Air Force’s inside man, though once in office Scowcroft was a faithful assistant to
Administration’s SALT negotiations were successful despite the leaking, it was not unreasonable for Nixon and Kissinger to be worried in early 1971 that some combination of public opposition and government leaking might destroy the Administration’s SALT chances.

Amidst these public divisions concerning SALT policy, planning was also underway for the Administration’s FY72 Safeguard proposal. There was a definite sense of repetition to the Administration’s FY72 Safeguard deliberations. As before, State and ACDA preferred to retain Safeguard at the previously-authorized level – in this case, only Minuteman-defense sites at Grand Forks, ND; Malmstrom, MT; and Whiteman, MO; with only R&D and advanced planning for further sites.\(^{167}\) As before, Defense believed that the United States should continue to build more ICBM defense sites to reduce the Soviet threat to Minuteman, and also seek authorization for an NCA-defense site for SALT bargaining leverage.\(^{168}\) Defense hoped that four or five Safeguard ICBM defense sites could ultimately serve as the basis for a larger and more distributed hard-site defense system at some point the future.\(^{169}\)

The choice for Safeguard FY72 would have profound consequences for SALT. The Verification Panel met several times in January to try to establish some coherence to US ABM policy. Following his experience lobbying for Safeguard the previous summer, Smith was determined to avoid further justification of Safeguard as a “bargaining chip,” arguing that further construction would not provide much negotiating leverage in SALT, especially if the FY72

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\(^{167}\) Letter, Smith to Kissinger, 22 December 1970, folder Verification Panel Meeting Safeguard 1/16/71, Box H-007, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.


proposal faced Congressional scrutiny as in previous years.\textsuperscript{170} Smith and the Delegation believed strongly that the United States should continue with its NCA-defense SALT proposal, which the Soviets had already agreed to in principle, even if the US did not intend to build an NCA-defense site of its own. Introducing a new ABM proposal would only further complicate negotiations and harden the SALT stalemate. Finally, Smith believed that halting further ABM deployments would also be good public diplomacy.\textsuperscript{171}

The Defense Department was no longer convinced that NCA-only was the best SALT program. In the spring of 1970, Defense had agreed to an NCA-only SALT agreement as part of a comprehensive program including strict limitations on Soviet offensive forces, largely due to Defense’s fear that Congress would not fund any ABM program. Over the summer of 1971, the Administration had some success in convincing Congress of the viability of Safeguard for ICBM defense. As such, Defense now preferred that the United States’ SALT policy be brought in line with its actual ABM deployments, by allowing the Soviets to finish their Moscow system, and the US to finish its Safeguard Minuteman defense system, as a stepping stone towards a more advanced hard-site defense capability. Defense claimed that the Soviets’ intransigence on limiting strategic offensive forces provided the perfect opportunity for the United States to take a harder line on its ABM policy.\textsuperscript{172} Kissinger ultimately delayed any final decision on SALT policy, saying that for the time being all the President needed was a decision on the FY72


\textsuperscript{171} Memo, Kissinger to Nixon, 26 January 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XIV Jan 71 – Apr 71 [2 of 3], Box 880, NSC Files, Nixon Library.

budget. Nixon ultimately decided to go with a sort of compromise position, proposing continued funding for three Safeguard Minuteman sites, as well as advanced preparation for a fourth Minuteman site and an NCA-defense site, to provide some flexibility in SALT bargaining.

With SALT IV scheduled to begin in Vienna in March 1971, the issue of how Safeguard related to the United States’ SALT position could not be delayed indefinitely. Within the government, a number of different approaches were being considered. Much of the work concerned how to formulate negotiable corollary constraints on ABM-capable radars, a necessity for any successful ABM agreement. The Verification Panel’s efforts resulted in some streamlining of the United States’ Option E ABM proposal, while largely retaining the same framework, allowing each side only ten ABM radars within 100km of their national capital, and placing strict restraints on the construction of other ABM-capable radars. Absent these sorts of controls, Defense, State, and ACDA all agreed that the United States would be better off with a zero-ABM agreement that allowed no ABM-capable radars, the better to prevent the Soviets from cheating. The Verification Panel was also studying a possible tacit ABM agreement with the Soviets, in which both sides would unilaterally declare their intention to construct no further ABM, using the nuclear testing freeze of the late 1950s as a possible model.

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176 Memo, Wayne Smith & Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 5 February 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XIV 1 Jan 71 – April 71 [2 of 3], Box 880, NSC Files, Nixon Library. Several prominent US scientists, including Paul Doty, also believed that some exchange of unilateral
While the Verification Panel worked on improving radar controls, the Defense Department was pushing hard to bring SALT policy in line with the Administration’s plans to deploy Minuteman defense ICBM. To advance its preferred ABM position, Defense worked with sympathetic strategic experts like Albert Wohlstetter to claim that even the United States’ Option E proposal would not provide sufficient defense against a massive disarming first strike by the Soviets on Minuteman. In response to these concerns, in February 1971 Kissinger ordered the Verification Panel Working Group to begin a new study on the future survivability of US strategic forces, and the possible responses that the United States could take to improve Minuteman survivability under different SALT options. ACDA continued to defend Option E’s viability, saying that it would limit Soviet SS-9 deployments sufficiently to reduce much damage to Minuteman, while allowing hardening of Minuteman silos and, if necessary, the replacement of ICBMs with SLBMs Defense’s efforts bore some fruit: by early March 1971, the NSC staff was convinced that the United States should table a new ABM proposal, which would allow the Soviets to retain their Moscow ABM site and the United States to complete its

declarations might provide the best way to generate forward movement on SALT (Memo, Wayne Smith & Sonnenfeld to Kissinger, 11 February 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XIV 1 Jan 71 – April 71 [2 of 3], Box 880, NSC Files, Nixon Library).


178 Memo, Kissinger to Mitchell et al, 7 February 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XIV 1 Jan 71 – April 71 [2 of 3], Box 880, NSC Files, Nixon Library.

179 Memo, Wayne Smith to Kissinger, 24 February 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XIV 1 Jan 71 – April 71 [2 of 3], Box 880, NSC Files, Nixon Library; Memo, Wayne Smith to Kissinger, 27 February 1971, folder Verification Panel Meeting SALT 3/2/71, Box H-007, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
three programmed Safeguard ICBM defense sites. Despite the obviously favorable asymmetry for the United States, Wayne Smith believed such a proposal might be negotiable given a stop-where-we-are logic, since the agreement would freeze ABM levels at those sites currently under construction. At the Verification Panel meeting on 2 March 1971, all three ABM options – zero ABM, NCA defense, and Safeguard-for-Moscow – received equal treatment. ACDA remained in favor of a complete ABM ban, claiming this would the easiest to verify, and would significantly simplify US targeting by removing any possible Soviet defense. JCS believed that NCA defense provided the most military utility, and that it would be the easiest to negotiate, since the Soviets had already agreed to it in principle. Defense was in favor of securing as many Safeguard sites as possible in SALT. The tenuous NCA-only compromise of the previous spring was dead and gone.

The debate about ABM in SALT was an important component of a much larger discussion of how the Administration should alter its Option E proposal for the upcoming Vienna round, to move negotiations forward. As in the fall, the Administration was cautious about abandoning its internally-agreed Option E position, and numerous minor modifications were under consideration, including reducing the total strategic force aggregate from 2,000 to 1,900 weapons, raising the sub-limit on large ICBMs from 250 to 300, adding some vague provision

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180 Memo, Wayne Smith to Kissinger, 28 February 1971, folder Verification Panel Meeting SALT 3/2/71, Box H-007, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
181 Memo, Davis to Kissinger, 4 March 1971, folder SALT Backup 1970-71 [2 of 2], Box 886, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
182 Memo, Smith to Kissinger, 4 March 1971, folder Verification Panel Meeting 3/2/71, Box H-007, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
183 Memo, Allison to Kissinger, 5 March 1971, folder Verification Panel Meeting SALT 3/2/71, Box H-007, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
184 Memo, Davis to Kissinger, 4 March 1971, folder SALT Backup 1970-71 [2 of 2], Box 886, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
promising not to deploy more FBS, or replacing the many contentious corollary constraints (on missile size, silo location, notification of deployment, etc.) with unilateral US declarations.\textsuperscript{185} Unfortunately, it was not clear that any of these modifications would be sufficient to break the central issue of disagreement: namely, the Soviet insistence on including US FBS in the strategic forces aggregate.\textsuperscript{186} Defense’s growing dissatisfaction with Option E further complicated matters, making it even harder for Nixon and Kissinger to find any sort of compromise.

The NSC met on 8 March 1971 to discuss how best to prepare for SALT IV in Vienna. Since negotiations were set to begin again the following week, the Delegation needed new instructions to break the negotiating deadlock and allow SALT to move forward. Smith and Rogers requested that the Delegation be given wide authority to negotiate a rapid agreement on SALT, probably along the lines of a zero-ABM treaty accompanied by an offensive freeze.\textsuperscript{187} Laird, Packard, and Moorer disagreed strongly. They worried that an ABM-only agreement would hand away the United States’ most important bargaining chip – Safeguard – without putting real controls on Soviet offensive forces. Instead, Defense and JCS believed that the increasing Soviet threat to Minuteman demanded a more comprehensive SALT solution, including heavier ABM defense of ICBM silos and strict controls on Soviet heavy ICBMs. Both sides were moving further away from the Option E proposal, but in radically different directions. Nixon concluded the meeting by promising to issue new instructions for the Delegation soon.


\textsuperscript{187} Letter, Smith to Nixon, 8 March 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XIV 1 Jan 71 – April 71 [1 of 3], Box 880, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
and reminding everyone of the need for the Administration to show solidarity on SALT, and avoid “public view of any differences.”

In the face of a potential bureaucratic collision over SALT policy, Nixon reverted to a familiar tactic: he delayed. Kissinger outlined the problem in an 8 March 1971 memo to Nixon. Defense was adamantly opposed to any less-formal agreement, preferring instead to modify the Option E instructions with an eye towards improving Minuteman survivability. On the other hand, ACDA preferred to abandon Option E entirely, striking out in new directions to break the deadlock, perhaps even including a less formal agreement. Choosing either option would alienate the other, with potentially dire consequences. Therefore, Kissinger recommended that the Delegation be instructed to present some basic modifications to Option E for the first four weeks of the Vienna round, including sounding out the Soviets on both zero-ABM and Safeguard-for-Moscow ABM proposals, without making a final commitment to either one. After four weeks or so, the Delegation could re-submit ideas for more substantial deviations from Option E for Nixon’s consideration. The resulting instructions would buy only a few weeks, but in the meantime perhaps more information from the Soviets would provide a solid rationale for choosing one or the other plan, such as an ABM agreement with an offensive freeze. Nixon codified these instructions on 11 March 1971, when he issued NSDM 102 to the Delegation, ordering them to continue presenting Option E modifications for the time being.

The US and Soviet Delegations reconvened to begin the fourth round of SALT

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negotiations in Vienna on 15 March 1971.\footnote{Report of the U.S. Delegation to the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks in Vienna,“ 14 June 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XV 1 May 71 – July 71 [1 of 3], Box 881, NSC Files, Nixon Library.} Within a few days, the Delegation was already convinced that the United States’ Option E proposal was totally non-negotiable, and requested new instructions to allow negotiations to proceed.\footnote{Memo, Wayne Smith to Kissinger, 17 March 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XIV 1 Jan 71 – April 71 [1 of 3], Box 880, NSC Files, Nixon Library.} For his part, Nixon was much more eager that the Delegation present the United States’ Safeguard-for-Moscow ABM proposal to the Soviets, which Nixon believed was essential to smoothing Safeguard’s passage through Congress.\footnote{Letter, Nixon to Rogers, 18 March 1971, FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 142.} Unsurprisingly, when Safeguard-for-Moscow was finally proposed, the Soviets rejected it, since the initial US proposal would allow the United States to build four Safeguard sites while leaving the Soviets with only their basic Moscow defense system.\footnote{Letter, Nixon to Rogers, 18 March 1971, FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 142, fn3.} The Soviets’ rejection of the proposal was facilitated by a comical instance of US hyper-secrecy: when the US Delegation returned to Vienna, they had not yet received permission to share with their Soviet counterparts even the very basic details of the United States’ Safeguard system, which was classified information. Within the government, it was not exactly clear who had the authority to release details of Safeguard directly to the Soviets. After several days of confused wrangling between the NSC, the AEC, and the Defense Department, Nixon finally intervened directly to give the Delegation permission to present the basic details of Safeguard interceptor and radar levels that the United States hoped to retain under a Safeguard-for-Moscow deal.\footnote{Memo, Wayne Smith & Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 6 May 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol, XV 1 May 71 – July 71 [2 of 3], Box 881, NSC Files, Nixon Library; Memo, Kissinger to Rogers & Laird, 8 May 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XV 1 May 71 – July 71 [2 of 3], Box 881, NSC Files, Nixon Library.} Despite this confusion, the Delegation believed that some Safeguard-for-Moscow agreement might be
possible if the United States was willing to reduce the number of Safeguard sites. The Soviets were confused by the fact that the United States now had three ABM options on the table: zero ABM, NCA-only ABM, and Safeguard-for-Moscow ABM. Until a single ABM option was selected and fleshed out in detail, negotiations could not proceed on this front. The problem of radar controls remained especially difficult, as the Verification Panel had still not discovered corollary constraints on ABM-capable radars that were both verifiable and negotiable with the Soviets, who insisted that only very limited radar restraints would be necessary.

While the stalemate on limiting strategic forces continued, some progress was made by the Delegations in negotiating the terms of an agreement to limit the chances of accidental nuclear war. The Soviets took the initiative early in the Vienna round, tabling a draft proposal of a possible accidental war agreement, which largely coincided with previous US proposals to limit the agreement to technical issues of communication, rather than larger political questions of joint cooperation against third parties. While both the Delegation and the government thought that the Soviet draft was still overly-broad, all agreed that it was a good basis to begin negotiations on specific issues. Progress on the terms of an accidental war agreement was surprisingly rapid. A “Special Group” was formed to reconcile the Soviet proposal to some US objections, especially to sanitize the agreement of all references to third parties. A separate technical group was also formed to discuss how to improve US-Soviet hotline communications, by switching them from their current cable-based system to a more secure direct satellite link.

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197 Memo, Wayne Smith & Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 19 March 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XIV 1 Jan 71 – April 71 [1 of 3], Box 880, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
The rapid progress on preventing accidental war provided a sharp counterpoint to the total impasse over strategic arms limitation.

While stalemate largely precluded a major rupture between Defense and ACDA over SALT policy, it also put the Administration under greater and greater pressure to accept the Soviet ABM-only proposal, to demonstrate *any* progress on SALT. By April 1971, many in the Senate had concluded that an ABM-only SALT agreement would be an effective first step in SALT. Aduzor Admiral Ellsworth also believed that ABM-only was beneficial from the NATO perspective, since it would entirely sidestep the politically-sensitive FBS issue while making it easier for the British and French deterrent forces to strike the Soviets independently in a crisis. The GAC also believed that an ABM-only agreement would be a good first step in SALT, going so far as to claim that the US should announce a unilateral freeze of all ABM construction in an effort to entice the Soviets to follow suit. On the other hand, the Defense Department still opposed a separate ABM agreement, which it believed would leave Minuteman vulnerable and decrease US security over the longer term. Even amongst those who hoped for a Safeguard-for-Moscow deal, there were divisions over how many Safeguard sites the United States should push for, with Defense favoring insistence on the four-for-one deal, and the NSC staff and

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Nixon Library. Smith recalls that the satellite datalink was especially desirable because the existing ground cable system was unreliable, having at one point been interrupted when the cable was cut by a Finnish farmer’s plow (Smith, *Doubletalk*, 281).

200 Memo, Farley to Kissinger, 6 April 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XIV 1 Jan 71 – April 71 [1 of 3], Box 880, NSC Files, Nixon Library.


202 Memo, Wayne Smith to Kissinger, 5 April 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XIV 1 Jan 71 – April 71 [1 of 3], Box 880, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
ACDA preferring to move to a 2-for-1 position.\textsuperscript{203} Faced with this basic division, the
Administration opted for further delay, deciding that the Delegation’s original instructions would
stand until early May, when Smith would return to Washington for further consultation.\textsuperscript{204} By
that point, the negotiations in Vienna had been entirely overtaken by the landmark SALT deal
reached through the secret backchannel negotiations between Kissinger and Dobrynin.

\textsuperscript{203} Conversation, Nixon, Kissinger, \& Haldeman, 17 April 1971, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII,
Document 148, fn3; Memo, Wayne Smith to Kissinger, 14 April 1971, folder Verification Panel
Meeting SALT 4/16/71, Box H-007, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library; Memo, Wayne
Smith to Kissinger, 15 April 1971, folder Verification Panel Meeting SALT 4/16/71, Box H-007,
NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.

\textsuperscript{204} Conversation, Nixon \& Shultz, 9 April 1971, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 146,
fn2.
CHAPTER 6 – The 20 May Agreement

On 20 May 1971, Nixon announced a major breakthrough in SALT negotiations. Working secretly behind the scenes with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin, Kissinger had negotiated a solution to the ongoing SALT deadlock in Vienna. On the face of it, the deal was a simple one: the United States would accept an ABM-only SALT agreement, as proposed by the Soviets, leaving comprehensive restrictions on offensive forces for a later round of negotiations. In return, the Soviets would agree to an interim freeze on the construction of strategic offensive forces, while the follow-on comprehensive agreement was negotiated. The Delegations of both countries were ordered to redouble their efforts towards concluding SALT agreements along these lines as soon as possible.

On the surface, the 20 May deal seemed straightforward. The United States accepted an ABM-only agreement in first round of SALT, as the Soviets had requested. In exchange, the Soviets agreed to temporary limits on offensive forces, which would not include US forward-based systems. In very rough terms, the United States would surrender its planned Safeguard deployment, in exchange for a Soviet promise to cease deployment of offensive missiles, establishing a rough numerical parity in both offensive and defensive launchers. In practice, the 20 May 1971 Agreement proved to be much more complicated. Negotiations stalled again over how to interpret the Agreement’s provisions: what level of ABM would be allowed? What forces would be included in the interim freeze? Would the terms of the freeze be negotiated prior to the ABM agreement entering into force, or after? Continued divisions within the Nixon Administration between the Cambridge and Philadelphia approaches would further complicate the solution of these pressing questions. For the remainder of 1971, SALT negotiations would remain bogged down in the various details of implementing the 20 May Agreement.
The 20 May Agreement has provoked more controversy in retrospective accounts of SALT than any other topic. The negotiations between Kissinger and Dobrynin were conducted with the utmost secrecy, excluding (by design) virtually everyone within the US government. The difficulties implementing the agreement have since led to accusations against both Kissinger and the SALT Delegation of inability and incompetence in negotiating SALT. The reality of the 20 May Agreement is somewhat more complicated than these previous accounts have indicated. While Kissinger’s secret negotiations resulted in a flawed agreement, it is doubtful whether a better outcome could have been achieved through the normal SALT process, given the severe dysfunction caused by the Administration’s divided views on arms control policy. While proponents of the Cambridge Approach increasingly clamored for an ABM-only agreement with the Soviets, advocates of the Philadelphia Approach in Defense and JCS strongly opposed moving towards an ABM-only agreement, even one linked to an interim freeze on offensive forces. Nixon and Kissinger were convinced that an interim freeze agreement tied to continued spending on qualitative weapons improvements could advance the competitive strategies logic of the Philadelphia Approach; however, they also had good reason to believe that leaders in Defense and JCS would collaborate with conservatives in Congress and the public to undermine any ABM-only compromise with the Soviets, potentially ending SALT’s prospects. The utmost secrecy of backchannel negotiations proved vital in overcoming this potential political roadblock, allowing an imperfect compromise with the Soviets that nonetheless allowed SALT negotiations to move forward.

**Backchannel**

Nixon had been engaged in secret communications with the Soviet leadership since the early days of his Administration. Dobrynin had met with Nixon and Kissinger on 17 February
1969 to deliver a confidential note from the Soviet leadership on various topics in US-Soviet relations, and to assure Nixon of the Soviets’ desire to work with him. In a follow-up to this meeting, Kissinger and Dobrynin agreed to meet periodically to discuss issues of mutual concern, and to provide a confidential channel for direct communications between Nixon and the Soviet leadership.\(^1\) At least initially, few substantive negotiations were conducted via the Kissinger-Dobrynin backchannel.\(^2\) SALT was an occasional topic of conversation, with both Kissinger and Dobrynin seeking to clarify certain parts of the proposals made by the Delegations in the front channel.\(^3\) Over the summer of 1970, Dobrynin had first presented the idea of an ABM-only SALT agreement in a backchannel meeting with Kissinger, a proposal which Kissinger shared confidentially with Smith and the Delegation. On 9 July 1970, Kissinger replied to Dobrynin via the backchannel that the United States would not be accepting an ABM-only SALT agreement, and gave Dobrynin a preview of the Option E proposal that would soon be introduced in Vienna.\(^4\) Aside from this brief business, most of Kissinger and Dobrynin’s 1970 discussions were focused on a series of crises in US-Soviet relations, including the Soviet delivery of weapons to Nasser’s Egypt in early 1970, and the Soviet deployment of submarines

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\(^2\) Moss, *Nixon’s Back Channel to Moscow*, 60-77.


to Cienfuegos, Cuba, in late 1970.5

By late 1970, Nixon’s attempt to organize a 1971 summit with the Soviet leaders led to more serious discussions of SALT in the Kissinger-Dobrynin backchannel. On 16 November 1970, Kissinger and Dobrynin agreed to work out confidentially the agenda of a future US-Soviet leadership summit, before any announcement of the summit occurred. One possible topic for discussion was SALT, which was currently at an impasse in Helsinki.6 Although no SALT details had been discussed, Kissinger and Dobrynin’s arrangement quickly leaked into the front channel. On 15 December 1970, Semenov indicated to Smith that given the negotiating impasse “higher authorities” would be taking the initiative on SALT. Smith reported this conversation to Kissinger, and warned Kissinger that it would be dangerous to exclude the Delegation from any substantive negotiations on SALT.7 Semenov made a similar comment in another conversation a few days later.8 Kissinger sent Smith a quick response, indicating that there were no other lines of SALT negotiation.9 This was technically true – Kissinger and Dobrynin had not yet begun discussing the details of SALT – but this was little comfort to Smith when the details of the private negotiations were later revealed.10 Kissinger’s intention to exclude Smith was confirmed in his 22 December 1970 meeting with Dobrynin, in which he told the Soviet Ambassador of Semenov’s comments, and asked that the Soviets refrain from involving Smith or the US

5 Moss, *Nixon’s Back Channel to Moscow*, 48-60.
8 Telegram, Smith to Kissinger, 17 December 1970, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XIII Oct 70 – Dec 70 [1 of 3], Box 879, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
Delegation in any SALT discussions conducted via the backchannel.\textsuperscript{11}

By January 1971, with the third round of SALT having just concluded in Helsinki without any progress, Nixon and Kissinger were ready to break the SALT impasse via direct backchannel negotiations with the Soviets. Domestic opposition to the Administration’s strategic program remained intense, and Nixon was concerned that absent substantial progress on SALT the Administration would not prevail in a third year’s debate on Safeguard.\textsuperscript{12} The backchannel SALT effort had two components. First, the United States would offer the Soviets a compromise on SALT, agreeing to an ABM-only agreement, if the Soviets would commit to a future SALT agreement on offensive forces, and agree to freeze the deployment of new offensive forces in the meantime. This compromise would give the Soviets their desired ABM-only agreement, while placing some limits on offensive forces and side-stepping the FBS issue. Second, Nixon and Kissinger would reintroduce “linkage” to SALT negotiations, but in reverse. Discussions for a possible US-Soviet summit had convinced Nixon that the Soviets placed a high priority on concluding a four-power agreement on rights and responsibilities in Berlin, as a precursor to a more comprehensive German settlement. In exchange for agreeing to progress on Berlin, the United States would now expect some Soviet progress on SALT. Given the extreme political sensitivity of the issues involved, Nixon decided that the linked negotiations on SALT and Berlin would best be accomplished via the confidential Kissinger-Dobrynin backchannel.\textsuperscript{13}

Nixon and Kissinger’s ABM-only/interim freeze SALT bargain had numerous antecedents in the Administration’s SALT deliberations. The idea of an interim freeze on

\textsuperscript{12} Henry Kissinger, \textit{The White House Years} (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1979), 798-805.
\textsuperscript{13} Moss, \textit{Nixon’s Back Channel to Moscow}, 77-84.
offensive forces to allow further negotiations was fundamentally similar to ACDA’s 1969 proposal for a Stop Where We Are agreement, to set the stage for more detailed negotiations at a later time.\(^{14}\) In the summer of 1970, when it became apparent that the Soviets would not accept the United States’ Options C and D proposals, Smith once again raised the possibility of a more limited agreement freezing ABM and offensive force deployments as one way to sidestep Soviet insistence on the FBS issue.\(^{15}\) The idea of a more limited freeze-type SALT agreement appealed to some in Defense and the NSC staff, but ultimately Nixon decided to pursue the Option E proposal.\(^{16}\) Despite this, ACDA continued to research the possibility of some sort of interim freeze as a way to break the ongoing SALT impasse, producing a more comprehensive study of freeze options in October 1970.\(^{17}\)

There was evidence that the Soviets were thinking along similar lines. Toward the end of the third round of SALT in Helsinki, Semenov had hinted to Smith that an ABM-only agreement might be accompanied by some sort of “understanding” on offensive forces.\(^{18}\) Kissinger ordered the Delegation to reject Semenov’s initiative.\(^{19}\) State INR ultimately concluded that the Soviet proposal was primarily for propagandistic purposes, and that the Soviets would continue trying


to entice the United States to accept an ABM-only agreement in exchange for some vague promise on limiting SS-9 deployments. The Soviets’ prior indication of interest made an ABM-only/interim freeze proposal a promising one for Nixon’s backchannel initiative. The idea of resolving the negotiating impasse with a temporary offensive freeze was also an extension of the Administration’s internal politics of delay, avoiding a serious and intractable dispute (whether or not to include FBS) by putting it off further into the future, while focusing on more limited consensus in the near term. The ABM-only/interim freeze proposal was a natural one for Nixon and Kissinger to select for their first direct foray into SALT negotiations.

On 9 January 1971, Kissinger presented Dobrynin with a new and very general SALT proposal, offering to accept an ABM-only agreement if the Soviets would agree in principle to freeze offensive force deployments while a follow-on offensive force agreement was negotiated. Kissinger suggested that Nixon and Kosygin could exchange letters to this effect at some point in February, prior to the beginning of SALT IV in Vienna in March. On the basis of this agreement, the Delegations could then work out the details of both the ABM Treaty and the interim freeze. Dobrynin asked a few questions, including whether or not the US would want SLBM included in the freeze. Kissinger replied that the US would accept either SLBM inclusion or rejection, and preferred to leave that issue for later negotiations. Dobrynin agreed to take Nixon’s proposal with him to Moscow, and would return soon with a response. Kissinger and Dobrynin spoke again on 23 January 1971, when Dobrynin had further questions for clarification. Kissinger replied that the United States would permit modernization under the

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freeze, but that FBS could not be included. On the issue of ABM, Kissinger said that the United States now preferred some Safeguard-for-Moscow ABM arrangement, but that for the purposes of the backchannel agreement there was no need to specify a particular ABM deployment modality, as long as both sides agreed in principle to negotiate towards an ABM-only SALT agreement.  

Nixon and Kissinger had originally hoped that the backchannel agreement-in-principle would be concluded quickly, providing an easy win on SALT to stave off domestic opponents while providing clearer guidance for the US Delegation at SALT IV in Vienna. The Soviet leadership took its time in considering the proposal, much to Nixon and Kissinger’s dismay.  

On 4 February 1971, Dobrynin indicated that the Soviets were ready to begin negotiations on the basis that Kissinger had previously described. In a 10 February 1971 meeting, Dobrynin spelled out the Soviets’ terms: a formal ABM-only agreement, ideally tying the United States to NCA-only defense. In exchange, the Soviets would agree to continue negotiations towards an offensive forces agreement at some point in the future. The Soviets would also agree to a temporary quantitative freeze; they preferred that this freeze only cover land-based systems, but were willing to discuss sea-based ones if the United States insisted. For his part, Kissinger was non-committal, saying that the US could go either way on the issue. In order to formalize such a deal, Kissinger suggested that Nixon and the Soviets could exchange letters, which would provide a written basis for future negotiations.  

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presented Dobrynin with a draft letter, calling for an ABM-only agreement on a three-for-one Safeguard-for-Moscow basis, as well as a freeze for missile construction beginning on 1 April 1971. The letter did not mention SLBM. Dobrynin agreed to forward the details to Moscow for consideration.25 Once again, Nixon and Kissinger were left waiting impatiently for some Soviet response.

Negotiations on SALT in the spring of 1971 were complicated by ongoing political developments within the Soviet Union. The 24th Communist Party of the Soviet Union Congress met in Moscow in April 1971, reordering of the Soviet political scene; Brezhnev emerged preeminent amongst the Soviet leadership, as a number of his allies advanced into key positions within the Politburo and foreign policy apparatus.26 Kremlinologists within the Administration believed that the SALT impasse in the winter of 1970-71 might be traced to the Soviet government treading water prior to the outcome of this Congress.27 Preparations for the Party Congress meant that Soviet response time to Nixon and Kissinger’s SALT initiative was even slower than it usually would have been.28 While waiting for a response from Moscow, Dobrynin continued poking around the US government, looking for further movement on SALT. On 10 March 1971, Dobrynin met with Smith, immediately prior to his return to Vienna for SALT IV. Dobrynin asked whether the United States would be willing to accept an ABM-only agreement,

which Smith denied.\textsuperscript{29} Kissinger was livid that Dobrynin was fishing for a better deal than was being offered via the backchannel negotiations. Despite this frustration, Nixon and Kissinger remained confident that some progress could still be made via confidential negotiations on SALT.\textsuperscript{30}

Unfortunately, the backchannel would not produce a workable SALT agreement prior to the Delegations’ return to Vienna. On 12 March 1971, Dobrynin met with Kissinger to provide a new letter from the Soviets in response to Nixon’s 22 February draft. The new Soviet draft retained the ABM-only agreement, but promised only to try to conclude an offensive forces freeze, and even then only when the ABM-only agreement had been concluded. Kissinger rejected the Soviet letter out of hand. Dobrynin suggested that the United States compose a new letter, this time incorporating provisions from both the US and Soviet drafts. Specifically, Dobrynin preferred that the agreement not include a specific ABM modality or freeze date, leaving these details to be worked out by the Delegations.\textsuperscript{31} The text of the Soviet letter did seem to contain one major concession: the Soviets agreed to limit “strategic offensive launchers,” rather than ICBMs specifically, language which could be interpreted to mean that SLBMs were included in the freeze. In a summary memo to Nixon, Kissinger noted this concession, but downplayed its importance, saying that the most important point was to secure limitations on Soviet heavy ICBM deployments.\textsuperscript{32} Working with only Haig and Sonnenfeldt, Kissinger set to

\textsuperscript{29} Moss, \textit{Nixon’s Back Channel to Moscow}, 90.
\textsuperscript{32} Memo, Kissinger to Nixon, 21 March 1971, folder SALT – Exchange of Notes Dr. Kissinger, 1 July, 1970 – 1 May 1972, Box 77, Kissinger Office Files, Nixon Library.
work drafting a new response to the Soviet counter-proposal.\textsuperscript{33}

Kissinger and Dobrynin hammered out new compromise language in a series of meetings on 15 and 16 March 1971. Most of the outstanding divisive details were excised, in favor of a relatively generic agreement-in-principle, which specified neither ABM deployment modality nor a date for the beginning of the freeze.\textsuperscript{34} For the United States, the most important point was that the freeze on strategic offensive forces be negotiated and concluded \textit{simultaneously} with the ABM agreement, not after it. Kissinger insisted repeatedly that the United States would only accept an ABM-only agreement if it were accompanied at the same time by a freeze on offensive force deployment.\textsuperscript{35} Once again, Dobrynin agreed to take the new offer to the Soviet leadership.

The Kissinger-Dobrynin discussions in mid-March 1971 touched on one of the most controversial subjects in the SALT backchannel negotiations – the inclusion (or lack thereof) of SLBM in the 20 May 1971 Agreement. Both Smith and Garthoff later claimed that Kissinger simply forgot to include SLBM in the freeze, which ultimately led to the unequal SLBM aggregates in the 1972 SALT Interim Agreement.\textsuperscript{36} Kissinger explained the confusion on SLBM inclusion in his own memoirs, claiming that the 15 March 1971 text provided for SLBM inclusion should the United States wish to pursue it.\textsuperscript{37} Kissinger also noted that the 20 May 1971 agreement had a level of built-in ambiguity on SLBM inclusion, since the United States was still

\textsuperscript{33} Letter, Haig to Kissinger, 12 March 1971, folder Dobrynin Kissinger 1971 (Vol. 4) [Part 1], Box 490, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
\textsuperscript{34} Memo, Kissinger to Nixon, 21 March 1971, folder SALT – Exchange of Notes Dr. Kissinger, 1 July, 1970 – 1 May 1972, Box 77, Kissinger Office Files, Nixon Library.
\textsuperscript{37} Kissinger, \textit{The White House Years}, 820-822.
considering whether to deploy more Polaris-type SSBNs, or whether to defer further SSBN construction and accelerate the more advanced Undersea Long-Range Missile System (ULMS) program, which even on the most optimistic schedule would not be ready for deployment until the late 1970s. If the US wanted to construct more Polaris SSBN in the near future, then clearly it would not want SLBMs included in the freeze; if, on the other hand, SSBN construction was to be deferred until the late 1970s, then including SLBM in the freeze would be in the United States’ interests. Since the final decision had not yet been made, Kissinger’s backchannel negotiations were intended to maximize flexibility, by keeping open the option of SLBM inclusion in the freeze without predetermining it.38 Garthoff denies Kissinger’s assertion that there was serious consideration of deploying more Polaris-type boats, claiming instead that Kissinger was trying to cover up his basic mistake in excluding SLBM from his discussions with Dobrynin.39

The specific details of Kissinger and Dobrynin’s exchanges on SLBM are difficult to reconstruct, given the sparse nature of the documentation surrounding their meetings. We have only Kissinger and Dobrynin’s accounts of what occurred in these private, one-on-one meetings, supplemented by memos and recordings of conversations that occurred before and after their meetings.40 A few points can be clarified. First, there was a major study underway in the US government in the spring of 1971 concerning the future survivability of US strategic nuclear forces, which included extensive discussions on SLBM survivability and the option of relocating some of the United States’ strategic deterrent power from land-based silos to new SSBNs.41

40 Moss, *Nixon’s Back Channel to Moscow*, 7-8.
Defense Department study of possible future SLBM deployments continued well into early 1972, when it was finally decided to forgo further Polaris construction in favor of accelerated ULMS. As chair of both the Verification Panel and the DPRC, Kissinger was well aware of these studies; it is therefore not implausible that his approach to SLBM in his negotiations with Dobrynin might have been guided by a desire to delay final decision of whether or not SLBM would be included in the freeze. After all, delaying major decisions until a more propitious time had become one of the Administration’s favored tools for dealing with SALT issues within the government. Kissinger’s approach to SLBM may have been little more than an effort to extend this compromise-by-delay from the Administration’s internal SALT negotiations to its external ones.

On the other hand, there is evidence that Nixon and Kissinger were attempting something more devious in their approach to SLBM in the backchannel negotiations, trying to trick the Soviets into accepting SLBM inclusion without confronting them directly. Nixon’s 22 February 1971 draft letter had made no mention of SLBMs, asking specifically that “all construction of


land-based ICBM launchers would cease” under the interim freeze. The Soviet response on 12 March 1971 agreed instead to a freeze on all “offensive strategic missile launchers,” which Kissinger believed suggested a Soviet acceptance that SLBM could be included in the freeze. Of course, the language was still ambiguous – SLBM were not explicitly mentioned one way or another – but Kissinger happily pocketed the perceived concession and incorporated the broader Soviet language on SLBM into the joint 16 March 1971 letter draft worked out with Dobrynin. Strangely, Kissinger’s talking points for his 15 March 1971 meeting with Dobrynin noted the importance of the Soviets’ broader language, but also discouraged Kissinger from clarifying the issue with Dobrynin: “Freeze now applies to all offensive weapons DO NOT MENTION.” Although Dobrynin did not write about SLBM in his report on the 15 March 1971 meeting, his 16 March 1971 report included a parenthetical note that Kissinger had said that the freeze applied only to land-based weapons: “The word ‘freeze,’ Kissinger once again explained, affects land-based weapons, but they are willing, as they have said before, to extend this to both sea-based weapons and aircraft.” Despite this supposed assurance, in his 21 March 1971 report on SALT to Nixon, Kissinger reiterated that the Soviets had conceded the point that SLBM could be

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43 Letter, Nixon to Brezhnev, 17 February 1971, folder SALT [2 of 2], Box 78, NSC Files HAK Office Files, Nixon Library.
44 Letter, Nixon to Brezhnev, folder SALT [2 of 2], Box 78, NSC Files HAK Office Files, Nixon Library.
45 Dobrynin ended up preferring “offensive strategic weapons” to “offensive strategic missile launchers,” but the principle remained the same (Letter, Nixon to Brezhnev, 16 March 1971, folder SALT [2 of 2], Box 78, NSC Files HAK Office Files, Nixon Library).
46 “Differences from previous,” folder Dobrynin Kissinger 1971 (Vol. 4) [Part 1], Box 490, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
47 Oddly, Kissinger’s account of the meeting does not mention SLBM at all – though whether this is due to an omission at the time of composition, or later sanitizing (as Garthoff and others have claimed) is not at all clear. For Kissinger and Dobrynin’s accounts of the meetings, see US-Soviet Relations, 310-313. For claims of sanitizing the negotiating record, see Garthoff, Détente and Confrontation, 180fn79.
included in the freeze, if the United States so desired.\textsuperscript{48}

Given Kissinger’s talking points for the 15 March 1971 meeting to avoid confronting Dobrynin about SLBM inclusion, it is difficult to escape the impression that Nixon and Kissinger were trying to trick the Soviets into including SLBM in the freeze agreement. If this is the case, then it was a truly momentous negotiating blunder, since absent clear consensus on what the 20 May 1971 agreement said about SLBM there was no mechanism to compel the Soviets to accept Nixon and Kissinger’s interpretation of the text. Given their suspicion of the Soviets, one would have expected Nixon and Kissinger to be more thorough in nailing down key positions like SLBM inclusion. Blurring the issues had admittedly helped Nixon and Kissinger stave off a meltdown within the government over SALT objectives, but this sort of sleight-of-hand was unlikely to succeed with the Soviets. Instead, the intentionally-vague provision for SLBM proved to be one of the greatest hurdles in actually implementing the 20 May Agreement.\textsuperscript{49}

On 16 March 1971, however, the disputes about SLBM in SALT still lay in the future. For the time being, Nixon and Kissinger were stuck waiting yet again for a long-delayed Soviet response. Hoping to entice the Soviets, on 17 March 1971 Nixon authorized Kissinger to speak with Dobrynin on the details of the ongoing Four Power Talks over Berlin, with Dobrynin presenting a draft of a possible agreement, which Kissinger promised would receive detailed study.\textsuperscript{50} While Nixon and Kissinger awaited the Soviet response, the Kremlinologists were predicting improved future prospects for SALT. The 24\textsuperscript{th} Party Congress met during the first week of April 1971, and resulted in a noticeable increase in the prominence of Leonid Brezhnev

\textsuperscript{50} \textit{FRUS 1969-76}, Vol. XII, Editorial Note 144; Moss, \textit{Nixon’s Back Channel to Moscow}, 93-94.
within the Communist Party. Brezhnev himself had moved to distance himself from the Soviet military and associate himself with a “peace program” that would include more serious Soviet efforts to conclude a SALT agreement.\(^{51}\) Returning from Moscow, Dobrynin confirmed both Brezhnev’s increased prominence and his interest in SALT to Kissinger.\(^{52}\) Although negotiations in Vienna remained stalled, the backchannel appeared on the verge of a major breakthrough.

Two major issues remained before the backchannel SALT agreement could be announced. First, the United States continued to insist that the ABM agreement and the interim freeze of offensive forces should be negotiated and concluded simultaneously. As early as 26 March 1971, the Soviets were ready in principle for an ABM-only agreement and an offensive forces freeze, but they continued to insist that the details of the freeze only be discussed after the ABM agreement had been concluded.\(^{53}\) Kissinger in response provided Dobrynin with an “oral note” amending the 16 March 1971 letter, indicating that the United States would only accept an ABM agreement if it were negotiated and concluded simultaneously with an offensive forces freeze.\(^{54}\) When Dobrynin returned from the 24th Party Congress on 23 April 1971, he brought


with him a new, slightly edited letter draft, which agreed in principle that the details of the offensive freeze could be discussed at the same time as the ABM agreement. The Soviets’ 23 April draft re-opened a second issue on ABM deployments by insisting that both sides commit immediately to NCA-only ABM, a position that Kissinger had previously rejected. Kissinger was especially disappointed in this second revision, which was a step backwards away from a viable agreement, and which Dobrynin insisted would require several more weeks of consultation in Moscow to change. At the same time, the language of the Soviets’ 23 April draft was imprecise when it came to the relationship of the freeze to the ABM agreement: the United States wanted the two agreements concluded simultaneously, not just negotiated simultaneously. Once again, Dobrynin sent a revised letter draft back to Moscow for consultation, though with the protestation that Nixon and Kissinger were making SALT much more complicated than it needed to be, and that the Soviet leadership was becoming wearied by the needless back-and-forth. Both sides apparently found the final few yards of negotiations a grueling experience.

It was at this point that the backchannel negotiations collided head-on with the SALT Delegation in a truly spectacular way. On 4 May 1971, after nearly two months of stalled negotiations, Semenov approached Smith in Vienna with a new SALT proposal, suggesting that

the Soviets would accept a temporary freeze on ICBM construction if the United States would agree to a formal agreement limiting ABM. Smith immediately reported this proposal to Washington with great excitement, noting only the oddity that Semenov had repeatedly insisted that the proposal was originally Smith’s idea, despite Smith’s having never heard of it. Garthoff had a long conversation the next day with two members of the Soviet Delegation on the possible technical details of such an agreement, which the Soviets insisted would freeze ICBM deployments at some point after an ABM agreement had been concluded, though on the sequencing point Garthoff’s Soviet interlocutors seemed somewhat vague. On 9 May 1971, Smith and Semenov discussed the possibility of an ABM agreement/ICBM freeze extensively on a day trip to Carinthia. Smith’s report caused tremendous excitement and consternation within the government, with various agencies jumping on the opportunity to respond to a new Soviet SALT proposal after so many months of zero progress. The Semenov proposal even received its own Verification Panel meeting on 15 May 1971, a surreal experience for Kissinger who was the only participant aware that a similar agreement was already about to be concluded via the backchannel.

Kissinger was immediately recalled from his working vacation to confront Dobrynin

59 Telegram, US SALT Delegation to Secretary of State, 6 May 1971, folder SALT [3 of 4], Box 78, HAK Office Files, Nixon Library.
60 Memo, US SALT Delegation to Secretary of State, 7 May 1971, folder SALT [3 of 4], Box 78, HAK Office Files, Nixon Library.
61 Letter, Smith to Kissinger, 13 May 1971, folder SALT [3 of 4], Box 78, HAK Office Files, Nixon Library.
62 Memo, Cline to Rogers, 10 May 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XV 1 May 71 – July 71 [2 of 3], Box 881, NSC Files, Nixon Library; Memo, Sonnenfeldt & Wayne Smith to Kissinger, 10 May 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XV 1 May 71 – July 71 [2 of 3], Box 881, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
about this serious breach of confidentiality. On 11 May 1971, Kissinger had several long, accusatory conversations with Dobrynin, berating the Soviet Ambassador for his country’s attempt to play the two channels against each other to gain leverage over Nixon. Dobrynin flatly denied that Semenov had made such a proposal, and claimed that Smith must have been making the entire thing up, a claim which Kissinger rejected. Per the Administration’s new linkage concept, Nixon’s frustrations on SALT were translated into a slowdown on Berlin negotiations. Kissinger’s explosion clearly unnerved Dobrynin, who in his report to Moscow on the incident blamed the anger on Nixon and Kissinger’s vanity and desire for personal credit. The next day Dobrynin presented a new letter draft that conceded the United States’ demands on ABM, committing both parties simply to negotiate an ABM agreement, but not to any specific mode of ABM deployment. Kissinger still insisted that the language on sequencing needed to be improved, to make it clear that the ABM agreement and freeze would be negotiated and concluded simultaneously. Semenov’s revelation of the Soviet proposal to Smith had altered the Administration’s timeline: Smith was due to return to Vienna within a week, and Nixon was eager to announce the backchannel agreement before Smith left Washington. Dobrynin continued to insist that any change in the language of the letter would require weeks more work by the entire Soviet government. Ultimately, Kissinger accepted the letter draft as it was, but produced a short separate memo clarifying the simultaneity of the freeze, which would be exchanged at the same time as the letter. On the evening of 13 May 1971, Dobrynin agreed to deliver the memo to Moscow, with the aim of announcing the backchannel agreement by 20 May

66 Moss, Nixon’s Back Channel to Moscow, 98-100.
1971. The arrangement left Nixon and Kissinger in some suspense, wondering whether they should cancel the announcement if the Soviets did not agree to the new language on sequencing the agreements. Ultimately, Nixon decided to go forward with the announcement, even though the Soviets had not yet responded to the Administration’s memo concerning simultaneity of negotiations.

In his memoirs, Smith recalls that Kissinger bungled the issue of simultaneity. Kissinger was so eager to get an agreement that he did not want the issue of simultaneity re-reviewed by the Politburo, and so left the issue without proper resolution. The above negotiating record indicates that the truth is more complicated than this. Smith’s recollection is basically correct that the final version of the 20 May Agreement contained imprecise language concerning the order of negotiations, whether the ABM agreement and freeze would be discussed simultaneously, or sequentially. The record of negotiations demonstrates that the Soviets were repeatedly informed by Kissinger that the United States expected the negotiations to be conducted simultaneously, as indicated in both the oral note provided to Dobrynin on 22 March 1971, as well as the Kissinger-Dobrynin memo of 13 May 1971. To the extent that Kissinger made a mistake in negotiations on the sequencing issue, it was in trusting Dobrynin’s assurances that the order of negotiations would not be an impediment to the swift conclusion of a SALT

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70 Smith, Doubletalk, 231-233.
agreement.

Without better records from the Soviet side, it is difficult to assess how the Soviets interpreted Kissinger’s statements, and whether their subsequent insistence on concluding the ABM agreement first was the result of misunderstanding or manipulation. Dobrynin’s correspondence with Moscow clearly indicated that the Soviets were aware of the divisions between Nixon and his government on SALT, and were looking for ways to use those divisions to their advantage.\textsuperscript{72} Dobrynin later maintained that Semenov leaked the backchannel proposals to Smith in early May 1971 on his own initiative, and had been disciplined by Gromyko for his indiscretion,\textsuperscript{73} but Semenov’s introduction of the backchannel material into the main negotiations in Vienna served to further poison relations between Nixon and his government. Semenov’s repeated insistence that his front channel proposal had first been offered by Smith was an especially odd feature of their talks.\textsuperscript{74} Perhaps Semenov was trying to distance himself from a proposal that he had no real authorization to make, to convince Gromyko that Semenov had not exceeded his orders. Alternatively, Semenov’s insistence that Smith was issuing a new SALT proposal without orders may have been an effort to sow further distrust between Smith and the White House. Intentionally or not, Semenov’s proposal touched an effective pressure point in the Administration’s SALT deliberations, and helped push Nixon and Kissinger into concluding the 20 May Agreement absent a final assurance on the sequencing question. As will be seen, the Soviets would use this ambiguity in order to stall SALT further in the coming year.

The ironic conclusion is that Kissinger’s great mistake on the question of sequencing

\textsuperscript{72} Moss, \textit{Nixon’s Back Channel to Moscow}, 87-88.
\textsuperscript{73} Moss, \textit{Nixon’s Back Channel to Moscow}, 100.
\textsuperscript{74} Telegram, US SALT Delegation to Secretary of State, 6 May 1971, folder SALT [3 of 4], Box 78, HAK Office Files, Nixon Library; Letter, Smith to Kissinger, 13 May 1971, folder SALT [3 of 4], Box 78, HAK Office Files, Nixon Library.
SALT negotiations was that he was too trusting of Soviet intentions. As 20 May approached, Kissinger urged Nixon to go forward with announcing the deal, arguing that the negotiating record clearly demonstrated the United States’ commitment to simultaneous negotiations. Kissinger also claimed that the Soviets would not torpedo SALT negotiations over a few words, and that in any event the United States’ efforts on Berlin and China provided sufficient leverage to keep the Soviets in line.\textsuperscript{75} Therefore, while later Soviet claims that the backchannel negotiations supported concluding the ABM agreement first were patently false, the ultimate responsibility for creating this vulnerability to Soviet manipulation must still lie with Nixon and Kissinger.

Reassured that their negotiations had borne worthwhile results, Nixon and Kissinger briefed key members of the Administration on the content of the backchannel SALT agreement on 19 May 1971, only one day before the agreement was publicly announced. At the eleventh hour, Nixon became concerned that announcing the agreement might cause the very rupture that its secret negotiation had been intended to avoid.\textsuperscript{76} As it turned out, the announcement went quite well. Smith and Rogers were dismayed that they had been kept out of the loop, and were critical of the letter’s imprecise language. Their initial reaction was that the substance of the agreement was good, and that it would be a major step forward for SALT.\textsuperscript{77} Laird concurred that the agreement was basically a good one, but wondered whether its emphasis on limiting ABM would


undermine the Administration’s efforts to win further funding for Safeguard in FY72. The Delegation gave the agreement a generally positive review, given that a comprehensive SALT agreement was clearly not in the offing and that getting the Soviets to agree to link ICBM restrictions to ABM without FBS was a major breakthrough in negotiations. Despite this display of solidarity, the Delegation’s trust in Nixon and Kissinger would never quite recover.

Was such extreme secrecy necessary to achieve such an important breakthrough? Smith and Garthoff came to believe that the answer was a definitive no. Both argued that the extreme secrecy had isolated Kissinger from necessary expert advice and resulted in a flawed agreement that ultimately put the United States behind in strategic weapons. Kissinger defended his conduct on the basis of expediency: such a radical breakthrough could only be achieved by excluding the vast majority of the US government, which otherwise would have ground to a halt over the question of whether to accept an ABM-only agreement at all. Smith and Garthoff disputed Kissinger’s explanation, claiming that in essence the 20 May 1971 agreement was not all that different from Semenov’s December 1970 proposal for an ABM-only agreement linked to some form of ICBM freeze. Rather, Smith and Garthoff believed that the intense secrecy was a result of Nixon and Kissinger’s desire for sole credit, which resulted in the US Delegation receiving months of intentionally non-negotiable orders (including the four-for-one Safeguard-for-Moscow proposal) with the expressed intent of stalling the front channel, in order to allow

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80 Smith, *Doubletalk*, 235.
Nixon and Kissinger to ride in at the last moment as the saviors of arms limitation.\(^83\)

Ultimately, the question of whether the backchannel negotiations produced a better or worse SALT agreement than what could have been achieved via the front channel will continue to defy definitive answer. Much depends on the Soviet side of the negotiations – what the Soviets were willing to offer on SALT, at what time, to whom, and in exchange for what, all bear directly on this question.\(^84\) It seems reasonable to suggest that some of the errors noted above in SLBM and sequencing negotiations might have been alleviated had there been more expert opinion available to review the draft agreement. There is also strong evidence that the use of secret backchannel negotiations served a role in feeding Nixon and Kissinger’s desire for control over and credit for SALT, especially Kissinger’s desire to exclude Rogers from negotiations with the Soviets and Nixon’s concern with ensuring that he received credit for the SALT breakthrough.\(^85\) Smith and Garthoff were quite correct that Nixon appreciated the backchannel and its high drama as a tool to win as much domestic political credit on SALT as possible.

Nixon and Kissinger’s ambitions notwithstanding, the preponderance of evidence seems to bear out Kissinger’s contention that extreme secrecy was necessary to produce the breakthrough on SALT. First, Smith and Garthoff’s claim that the 20 May 1971 Agreement contained nothing new beyond what Semenov had suggested in December 1970 is incorrect.

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\(^84\) For his part, Dobrynin credits his backchannel negotiations with Kissinger as an important tool in the achievements of the 1972 Moscow Summit; see Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow’s Ambassador to America’s Six Cold War Presidents (1962-1986)* (New York: Random House, 1995), 214.

Semenov’s December 1970 proposal was a vague suggestion that an ABM-only agreement might be linked to some sort of offensive freeze. Many in the government – including State INR, JCS, and the NSC staff – were skeptical that Semenov’s proposal was genuine, suspecting instead that it was bait to draw the United States into an ABM-only agreement with only a cosmetic arrangement on offensive forces.\textsuperscript{86} In retrospect, it was easier to recognize that Semenov was signaling an invitation to negotiation, as the US Delegation believed at the time, but the widespread suspicion indicates exactly how vague the Soviet commitment was.\textsuperscript{87} As Nixon and Kissinger would learn, the real devil lay in the details – what level of ABM deployment would be allowed? What sorts of offensive forces would be included in the freeze? In what order would the agreements be negotiated? Semenov’s December 1970 proposal answered none of these questions; Nixon and Kissinger discovered some of them through hard bargaining with the Soviets, though even then most would be left for future negotiations. Although it was not a final SALT agreement, the 20 May 1971 deal nonetheless represented a major breakthrough.

Perhaps more importantly, there is good reason to doubt whether an agreement along the lines of 20 May 1971 could have been negotiated through the usual SALT bureaucratic process, especially given the sharp disagreements between Defense and ACDA over the purpose of arms control negotiations. The idea of exploring an ABM-only agreement with the Soviets provoked strong feelings within the US government. In the face of Semenov’s ABM-only proposal at SALT III, ACDA preferred to keep open the option of an ABM-only agreement, while Defense

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{87} Memo, Farley to Nixon, 24 December 1970, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XIII Oct 70 – Dec 70 [1 of 3], Box 879, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
\end{itemize}
believed it should be rejected out of hand.\textsuperscript{88} ACDA and CIA argued that an apparent slowdown in Soviet SS-9 deployment indicated that the Soviets were serious about tacit limitations on offensive forces, as a complement to a more formal agreement limiting ABM; Defense insisted that the slowdown was merely the end of one cycle of Soviet deployment, which would soon begin again.\textsuperscript{89} Defense was convinced that the Soviet threat to Minuteman necessitated both strict controls on Soviet offensive forces, as well as the ability to deploy extensive hard-site ABM defenses of Minuteman. Defense worried that an ABM-only agreement would not only fail to control Soviet offensive forces, but would also leave the United States tied to an NCA-defense ABM system that Congress would never approve. Even as the fourth round of SALT in Vienna approached, Defense and JCS remained opposed to considering an ABM-only agreement, which it believed would benefit the Soviets disproportionately.\textsuperscript{90} These differing positions on how to advance SALT made it very difficult for the Administration to move forward from its August 1970 Option E proposal, even as all agencies came to realize that Option E was

\textsuperscript{88} Memo, Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 7 December 1970, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XIII Oct 70 – Dec 70 [1 of 3], Box 879, NSC Files, Nixon Library; Memo, Davis to Kissinger, 4 March 1971, folder SALT Backup 1970-71 [2 of 2], Box 886, NSC Files, Nixon Library.


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non-negotiable.\footnote{Memo, Wayne Smith & Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 12 January 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XIV 1 Jan 71 – April 71 [2 of 3], Box 880, NSC Files, Nixon Library.} Nixon and Kissinger did not invent this division, nor is there any evidence that they fostered it intentionally to stall the front channel negotiations, as Garthoff claims.\footnote{Memo, Kissinger to Nixon, folder NSC Meeting SALT 3/8/71, Box H-031, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library; see also, Hyland, \textit{Mortal Rivals}, 47-48.}

Attempting to bypass the government’s major divisions on SALT had drawbacks, as Nixon and Kissinger were to discover, but given the divisions within the Administration it is highly unlikely that any other approach would have resulted in a superior outcome.

As in previous policy debates, the Administration’s greatest difficulties occurred when the divisions within the government were replicated outside the government, especially in Congress. By April 1971, a number of Congressional proponents of the Cambridge approach to arms control, including Senators Muskie, Case, and Pell, were calling on the Administration to accept the Soviets’ ABM-only proposal as a first step towards a more comprehensive SALT settlement.\footnote{Memo, Farley to Kissinger, 6 April 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XIV, 1 Jan 71 – April 71 [1 of 3], Box 880, NSC Files, Nixon Library.} Public supporters of an ABM-only proposal gained in strength due to leaked accounts that arms control experts in State and ACDA were also supporting an ABM-only agreement.\footnote{Moss, \textit{Nixon’s Back Channel to Moscow}, 89-90.} At the same time, a number of conservative Senators including Jackson, Tower, Byrd, and Thurmond remained opposed to an ABM-only agreement, which they believed would undermine US security.\footnote{Conversation Among Nixon, Kissinger, & Haldeman, 23 April 1971, FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 150; Telcon, Kissinger & Jackson, 20 May 1971, FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XIII, Document 226; Memo, Lehman to Kissinger, 30 June 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XV 1 May 71 – July 71 [1 of 3], Box 881, NSC Files, Nixon Library; Memo, Lofton to Lyn, 7 June 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XVI Aug. 71 [1 of 1], Box 881, NSC Files, Nixon Library; Memo, Haig to Huntsman, 3 July 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XV 1 May 71 – July 71 [1 of 3], Box 881, NSC Files, Nixon Library.} Conservative opponents of the Administration’s SALT policies were
almost certainly given secret assistance by sympathetic members of the Defense Department. In fact, the single largest leak of confidential SALT information occurred in July 1971, when William Beecher published in the *New York Times* a detailed account of the United States’ negotiating position for the upcoming SALT V round in Helsinki, including not only opening statements but also possible fallback positions for later in the talks, causing serious harm to the Administration’s negotiating strategy.\(^{96}\) The NSC staff quickly concluded that the leak had come from the Pentagon, and an investigation concluded that Dr. William Van Cleave had conversed with Beecher for almost an hour three days before the story broke. Van Cleave was already retiring from the Defense Department, and there was no way to prove beyond reasonable doubt what he and Beecher had discussed during their meeting, so the matter was let drop.\(^{97}\) Whatever the source of the leak, its overall impact on policy was relatively minimal. If such a leak had occurred *during* the sensitive negotiations in which the United States accepted an ABM-only agreement, the results could have been disastrous for SALT.

For the most part, the secrecy surrounding the 20 May 1971 agreement was predicated not by the need to win Soviet assent to an ABM-only agreement, but rather by the need to present US conservatives with a *fait accompli* on SALT, something that neither Smith nor Garthoff seemed to appreciate. Nixon and Kissinger were meddling directly in negotiations that touched on the very purpose of arms control, in ways that made their own conservative allies profoundly uncomfortable. Too early a revelation of their ABM-only position would open them


up to criticism from the Right that they were selling out the Philadelphia Approach to arms control and handing the Soviets a major strategic advantage over the United States. At the same time, Nixon and Kissinger also needed to fend off pressures from public advocates of the Cambridge Approach that the United States immediately adopt an ABM-only agreement, on the basis that symmetrical restrictions would improve the security of both countries. The sensitivity of the political issues involved made secrecy a reasonable precaution, at a level that clearly would not have been possible had the government or even the Delegation been consulted. While Kissinger’s recollections of the backchannel negotiations gloss over several major tactical errors, it is likely that he was correct in his assessment that, under the political conditions that prevailed in early 1971, a major breakthrough on SALT required extreme secrecy.

Although as noted the 20 May 1971 Agreement received a lukewarm welcome from some US conservatives, on the whole it was greeted as a major breakthrough in SALT, opening the way towards some sort of progress after nearly a year of stalemated discussions. Nixon and Kosgyin made a joint announcement of their exchange of letters on the afternoon of 20 May 1971, committing their respective Delegations to conclude a SALT agreement along the lines specified. Response from Congress was generally positive, while the White House worked hard to put out the story of how Nixon had saved SALT through his no-nonsense direct bargaining with the Soviets.98 Per their linkage concept, Nixon’s success in SALT also paved the way for

further progress in Berlin negotiations, which were given the green-light to advance. From a public relations perspective, the 20 May Agreement appeared to have been a major success.

The implementation of the 20 May Agreement quickly ran into difficulties when the US and Soviet Delegations returned for the final week of SALT IV. The Soviet Delegation claimed that a completed draft of the ABM Treaty would be necessary prior to discussing the details of the interim offensive freeze, while the US Delegation insisted that the negotiations should happen concurrently. Furthermore, the Soviet Delegation was now claiming that the 20 May Agreement “implicitly” indicated that the ABM Treaty could not include zero-level ABM, and must be “equal” between the two sides in terms of ABM sites, which would rule out the Administration’s preferred Safeguard-for-Moscow proposal. Smith worried that if Semenov attempted to write these differences into the concluding communique for SALT IV, that he would be required to publicly contradict the Soviets, which would cast a pallor over the entire negotiations going forward. Fittingly, Kissinger contacted Dobrynin to head off such a possibility; the two agreed to order their Delegations not to mention anything about the implementation of the 20 May Agreement in the final communique. Although a public spat was avoided, the incident was hardly an auspicious start to the negotiations on implementing the new agreement. Although the 20 May Agreement represented a major break in the previous SALT deadlock, it had intentionally avoided a number of important and controversial issues.

100 To Nixon’s chagrin, the SALT breakthrough could not overshadow the continued bad news from Vietnam; see, Rick Perlstein, Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America (New York: Scribner, 2008), 551-568.
Working out these differences would be considerably harder than Nixon and Kissinger had imagined.

SALT was not the only area of disappointment – Nixon’s hopes for a 1971 summit meeting were coming to naught. As late as 25 May 1971, Kissinger had been confident that rapid progress on SALT, on Berlin, and on trade would entice the Soviets into a summit meeting by the early fall of 1971. Nixon was growing increasingly uneasy by the Soviets’ reticence to set a date for the summit, which by this point was theoretically only a few months away.104 As such, Kissinger agreed to present Dobrynin with an ultimatum: if the Soviets were unwilling to announce a date for a September 1971 summit, then Nixon would not be visiting the Soviet Union that year. At that point, Nixon could announce his pending visit to China, and put the Soviets on the back foot, a plan which Nixon approved.105 Delaying the summit would probably mean that the accidental war and Berlin agreements would be ready too soon, but more durable topics like Vietnam and SALT would still be available for discussion.106 In his 8 June 1971 conversation with Dobrynin, Kissinger delivered the ultimatum: Nixon would need an announcement of the summit by the end of June, or it would not happen that year. Dobrynin claimed that the Soviets wanted the Berlin agreement concluded before announcing the summit, but Kissinger rejected this effort at linkage, saying that if Nixon had not heard back by the end of the month, then he would know where the Soviets stood on the issue.107

Safeguard, Again

By 1971, the Administration’s Defense budgetary process had become routine, following the precedents set by the previous years. Unfortunately, that routine was one of tremendous controversy and intrigue, which meant that the Defense budget, and Safeguard in particular, remained a constant source of anxiety. In fact, Nixon’s efforts to systematize the process and promote long-term planning had the unintended side-effect of stretching out the Administration’s Defense budgetary woes into a year-round phenomenon. The DPRC began work on the FY73 defense budget as early as November 1970, with the usual litany of complaints from Defense and JCS that the programmed budgetary level would leave the United States vulnerable and unable to meet its commitments around the world.\(^{108}\) Laird seemed readier to accept that the Defense budget would remain tightly controlled for the foreseeable future, and therefore sought to modify Defense programming along lines favored by Nixon and Kissinger: some reduction of general-purpose capability, to be offset by increased allied contributions under the Nixon Doctrine, tied to heavy investment in long-term strategic nuclear competition with the Soviet Union.\(^{109}\) Laird saw this program as tied to his own longer-term goal to transition the US military towards an all-volunteer manpower concept.\(^{110}\) Laird described his military strategic approach as the “Strategy of Realistic Deterrence,” which was laid out in detail in the March 1971 Defense Posture Statement to Congress.\(^{111}\)


\(^{110}\) Memo, Baroody to Laird, 17 February 1971, folder TOP DOD Objectives for Calendar Years 1971 and 1972, Box A96, Laird Papers, Ford Library.

Unfortunately, Laird’s new strategic guidance still called for more money than OMB believed was available, given the government’s worsening fiscal situation.\textsuperscript{112} US economic productivity was stagnating, while Western Europe and Japan surged ahead, creating a worsening balance of payments problem that threatened confidence in the dollar. As a result, even as tax revenues declined, it became harder for the United States to borrow to cover its public spending.\textsuperscript{113} The Administration was therefore under pressure to demonstrate economy in the Defense budget, especially in the face of Congressional proposals to reduce Defense expenditure by nearly $7 billion below Nixon’s already reduced budget.\textsuperscript{114} Congress’s efforts at steep defense cuts were aimed primarily at the Administration’s policy in Vietnam. Criticism of the Administration’s handling of Vietnam only increased in the aftermath of Operation Lam Son 719 in February and March 1971. US-backed South Vietnamese forces launched a major offensive into neighboring Laos, clashing with North Vietnamese forces defending the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The operation was meant to demonstrate the progress of Vietnamization, by proving


that the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) could successfully defeat North Vietnamese forces with only limited US assistance. The result was a disaster, as the South Vietnamese offensive ground to a halt just over the border with heavy losses, having failed to reach its primary targets.\textsuperscript{115} Congressional opponents to the war claimed that Lam Son 719 demonstrated that the war was hopeless, and sought to starve the war of funding as a means of bringing about an earlier withdraw of US forces.\textsuperscript{116}

In the face of these political and economic limitations, the Administration struggled to build a budget compromise that would please both hawks and doves. By August 1971, however, Defense, JCS, and OMB had reached a total impasse, with OMB insisting on a lower budgetary figure than Defense believed was appropriate, and JCS objecting to Defense’s efforts to reduce general-purpose forces.\textsuperscript{117} Laird ultimately offered Nixon and Kissinger a poison pill: Defense agreed that it could limit itself to a budget of $79.6 billion, but only by making steep cuts in general-purpose forces, as well as some reductions in strategic nuclear forces.\textsuperscript{118} Nixon was not pleased with Laird’s tactics, which seemed a step back from the Secretary’s previous

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commitment to bolster US strategic nuclear forces while achieving savings from general-purpose forces. Nixon was especially incensed by JCS’s continued insistence on spending money on next-generation air defenses, claiming that these provided the United States with no advantages over the Soviets. Rather, Nixon and Kissinger preferred that more money go to R&D on advanced strategic weapons like ULMS, improved Minutemen, and advanced ABM. In the end, Nixon chose a compromise budgetary level, somewhere between the Defense and OMB positions, insisting that cost savings should come out of strategic air defenses, as well as a quicker draw-down of forces in Vietnam.

Nixon and Kissinger’s troubles with Laird were even more pronounced during the debate over Safeguard FY72. As in the previous year, the White House and the Defense Department coordinated closely to support Nixon’s Safeguard policy. Unlike the previous year, the rationale for Safeguard was explicitly refocused on Minuteman defense and SALT leverage from the very beginning. Nixon’s FY72 Safeguard proposal was designed to appeal directly to these two rationales, requesting further funding for Minuteman defense, as well as authorization for advanced construction on an NCA-defense site for bargaining purposes. Defense was worried that its previous tactics for supporting Safeguard would no longer be as effective. Congress and the public had been very thoroughly educated on ABM issues, reducing Defense’s ability to use technical and intelligence assessments to gain advantage over Safeguard opponents. Similarly, the lines in Congress were basically drawn on ABM, with much less room for maneuver or

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121 Memo, Kissinger to Laird, 9 February 1971, folder ABM-System Vol. VI. May 70 – 30 July 71 [1 of 2], Box 842, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
persuasion. Increasingly, Defense believed that SALT bargaining power was the single most convincing argument for ABM deployments, and recommended that the Administration adjust its Safeguard pitch accordingly.\textsuperscript{123} As in previous years, the Defense Department worked hard to provide aid to supportive members of Congress and the press. The focus on SALT meant that, at least initially, some opponents of Safeguard expanded their criticism to include the Administration’s SALT policy, arguing that concluding an ABM-only agreement with the Soviets would be preferable to deploying further Safeguard sites.\textsuperscript{124} This opposition tactic ultimately backfired, as the perceived success of the 20 May 1971 SALT Agreement seemed to bolster Nixon’s case for Safeguard as a bargaining chip.\textsuperscript{125}

Excluding Laird from the deliberations leading up to the 20 May 1971 Agreement came with costs for Nixon’s defense policy, as well. Laird and his staff were incensed by Laird’s lack of input on important policy issues, and resolved to take a more active role in the creation of national security policy.\textsuperscript{126} Congressional opposition to Safeguard remained strong despite the 20 May 1971 Agreement, and Defense was especially concerned that Safeguard deployments continue to defend Minuteman, to provide a robust basis for a future hard-site defense system. In early August 1971, Laird covertly brokered a Safeguard deal on his own initiative. The compromise was officially sponsored by Senator Stennis, but the details had been worked out previously by Robert Moot, the Defense Department Comptroller, and Ed Braswell, the Chief of

\textsuperscript{123} Memo, Pursley to Haig, 17 April 1971, folder ABM-System Vol. VI, May 70 – 30 July 71 [1 of 2], Box 842, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
\textsuperscript{124} Memo, Friedheim to Haig, 7 May 1971, folder ABM-System Vol. VI, May 70 – 30 July 71 [1 of 2], Box 842, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
\textsuperscript{125} Memo, Friedheim to Haig, 9 June 1971, folder ABM-System Vol. VI May 70 – 30 July 71 [1 of 2], Box 842, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
\textsuperscript{126} Memo, Baroody to Laird, 22 July 1971, folder Baroody, William J. – Recommendations to Laird on His Future as Secretary, 1971, Box A56, Laird Papers, Ford Library.
Staff for Stennis’s Armed Services Committee. The Safeguard compromise cut funding for building a Washington defense ABM site, in order to ensure that funding remained for construction of two ICBM defense facilities, a major reduction from Nixon’s original four ICBM defense plus one NCA defense proposal. The June 1971 Beecher leak and the Safeguard “compromise” were clear indicators of Defense’s displeasure at being excluded from SALT deliberations, and sent a clear signal to Nixon and Kissinger that the Administration’s strategic weapons and arms control policy would not survive Congressional and public scrutiny without Defense’s active support. The possibility of opposition by the Defense Department was certainly on Nixon and Kissinger’s minds as SALT negotiations continued over the summer of 1971.

**Implementing 20 May**

The 20 May Agreement was rightly hailed by many at the time as a major breakthrough on SALT, but it was far from a finished SALT Treaty. From the United States’ perspective, 20 May resolved one major problem – it convinced the Soviets to drop FBS as a precondition for a SALT agreement on offensive forces, albeit in an interim arrangement. In doing so, it made an ABM-only SALT agreement acceptable (if only barely) to US foreign policy hawks. Beyond that single leap forward, numerous other issues remained to be worked out, both with the Soviets and within the government. On the ABM Treaty, the Administration still sought to win Soviet acceptance of some sort of Safeguard-for-Moscow agreement. Additionally, the ABM Treaty would need to include corollary constraints on radar construction. One new development was the idea that radars at allowed ABM sites might be limited to “Modern ABM Radar Complexes,”

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or MARCs, small 3km-diameter areas in which each side could deploy as many ABM-capable radars as it wanted. By limiting each ABM site to two or three MARCs’ worth of radar arrays, the definitional issues surrounding ABM radars would be significantly reduced.\footnote{Smith, \textit{Doubletalk}, 310-313; Memo, Wayne Smith to Kissinger, 25 June 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XV 1 May 71 – July 71 [1 of 3], Box 881, NSC Files, Nixon Library.} The Verification Panel had previously discussed numerous ways to control Soviet radars, but had run into serious definitional issues. The Administration had previously sought to limit each side to a discrete number of ABM-associated radars per ABM site. The Defense Department especially was concerned that the Soviets might deploy some sort of large, multi-array radar structure and try to claim that it was a single “radar” under the agreement. Defense’s solution had been to try to define strictly what an allowed “radar” was in terms of component parts, but all such formulations were expected to be non-negotiable with the Soviets, who barely agreed that radar restrictions were necessary at all. The virtue of the MARC concept was that it could limit Soviet radar deployments without requiring strict definitions of what constituted a “radar,” since each side was free to deploy as many radars as it wanted of whatever configuration, as long as they remained within the MARCs. This would ease verification, and also introduce a built-in vulnerability, since a small number of discrete MARCs would make for easy aim-points in the event of a major nuclear exchange. Smith’s memoir contains an excellent discussion of ABM radar issues.\footnote{Smith, \textit{Doubletalk}, 301-318.} In addition to MARCs for allowed ABM sites, the United States also hoped to limit ABM-capable radars not deployed for ABM purposes, known by the awkward acronym Other Large Phased Array Radars (OLPARs).\footnote{Memo, Wood to the Verification Panel Working Group, 25 June 1971, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 168.}

On the offensive forces freeze, the Administration hoped to place limits on both large
ICBMs and SLBMs, in addition to a basic freeze on ICBM numbers, though it was generally agreed that if necessary the United States could fall back to an ICBM-only agreement.\(^{132}\)

Verifying the large ICBM freeze would also require corollary constraints on silo size and silo relocation, to ensure that the Soviets did not replace smaller weapons with newer, larger ones. Finally, the Administration also hoped to ban the deployment of land-mobile ICBMs.\(^{133}\) On 2 July 1971, the Delegation received NSDM 117, instructing them to seek an agreement at SALT V in Helsinki along these lines.\(^{134}\)

Despite hopes that the 20 May Agreement would lead to progress on SALT, once the Delegations returned to Helsinki talks quickly stalled again over the question of sequencing. Smith had received a preview of this dispute at SALT IV at the end of May. The Soviet Delegation insisted that the ABM Agreement needed to be negotiated \textit{before} any discussion of the terms of the offensive freeze, even if the two agreements would be concluded at the same time. The US Delegation instead maintained that discussions should take place simultaneously, which would allow the Delegations to trade off issues in the offensive and defensive agreements.\(^{135}\) Dobrynin had warned Kissinger that this might be an obstacle when the Delegations met again, and suggested that the easiest solution would be for the US Delegation to discuss ABM initially, at least for the first few weeks at Helsinki.\(^{136}\) As a result, ABM remained


\(^{135}\) Smith, \textit{Doubletalk}, 250-252.

the focus of discussion at SALT V.

Earlier in the year, the White House had feared that moving away from the Option E compromise proposal would re-open numerous bureaucratic disputes on SALT policy and destabilize the Administration’s chances for a SALT agreement. As the negotiations in Helsinki once again reached a deadlock, divisions within the US government rose to the fore. The NSDM 117 instructions pleased virtually no one in the government, with minor squabbles over SLBM levels and radar constraints. The most serious differences covered what sort of ABM proposal the United States should make to the Soviets. Given Congress’s resistance to deploying a Washington Safeguard site, Nixon and Kissinger believed that it was time to move away from the United States’ original NCA-only SALT proposal. Instead, the White House favored a Safeguard-for-Moscow proposal, which would be more in line with the Safeguard system that Congress was willing to fund. Defense also favored Safeguard-for-Moscow, especially at a three-for-one level. JCS was less willing to give up on NCA-defense entirely, and instead advocated a four-for-four ABM deal, in which each side would get one NCA-defense site and three ICBM-defense sites. State and ACDA believed that the Soviets would not accept the Defense proposal, which was unequal, and that the JCS proposal would allow for far too many ABM radars, which was unverifiable. Instead, Smith increasingly advocated that the most beneficial and negotiable position would be zero ABM. Although NSDM 117 reaffirmed the three-for-one Safeguard-for-Moscow instructions, Smith also received permission to raise the

question of zero ABM with Semenov. Semenov replied that the Soviets would be happy to listen to any proposal the United States would like to make. 139 Given Semenov’s seeming receptivity, the Delegation began assembling a draft for a zero-ABM treaty, based on the zero ABM provisions contained in the previous year’s Option E proposal. 140

Although ACDA supported it, the idea of a zero-ABM agreement did not please everyone within the Administration. In Doubletalk, Smith recalls that US ABM policy was guided primarily by vague Congressional and bargaining questions, rather than the strategic utility of the ABM systems in question. 141 Smith was undoubtedly correct about the importance of Congress and bargaining in the Administration’s ABM deliberations, but he gave short shrift to the experiential and defense industrial aspects of ABM that seem to have motivated the Defense Department, in particular. Defense and JCS believed that zero-ABM would not be to the United States’ strategic advantage, since it would prevent the United States from gaining relevant experience operating ABM systems and impede future deployments, should they become necessary. Furthermore, there was concern that moving towards a zero-ABM agreement might undercut the Administration’s current Safeguard proposal in Congress, and alienate pro-Safeguard Senators like Jackson. Kissinger believed that a zero-ABM agreement would be more difficult to negotiate with the Soviets, especially coming immediately after the United States introduced its Safeguard-for-Moscow proposal. 142 The evidence was mixed. Although Semenov’s comments indicated that the Soviets might consider a zero-ABM agreement, several

141 Smith, Doubletalk, 267.
military representatives on the Soviet Delegation had made comments that the Soviets would prefer not to dismantle their existing Moscow ABM system, though whether these comments applied only to the United States’ Safeguard-for-Moscow proposal or indicated a broader unwillingness to consider zero ABM was unclear. In private, Dobrynin continued to press Kissinger to accept an NCA-only ABM agreement, though he admitted that the Soviets were still willing to consider zero ABM if that were the United States’ preference. Although negotiating any ABM agreement would be difficult, ACDA believed that a zero-ABM agreement would be at least as negotiable, if not more so, than the United States’ three-for-one Safeguard-for-Moscow proposal, which the Soviets disliked intensely for its inequality.

Absent better sources from the Soviet side, it is difficult to say whether zero ABM would have been negotiable or not. What can be concluded is that both Defense and JCS were opposed to giving up ABM entirely. Defense was only willing to consider a total ABM ban if the Soviets were willing to accept serious reductions in offensive forces, effectively reverting back to its April 1970 Option D proposal. Defense’s proposal was too far for JCS, which believed that ABM deployments were an area of US advantage that should not be neutralized under any circumstances. The Verification Panel took up the issue on 9 August 1971, and agreed that the Working Group would prepare a paper on zero ABM for Nixon’s consideration. Nixon confronted Laird and Moorer during a military briefing the next day, asking whether zero ABM

143 Garthoff, Détente and Confrontation, 171-174.
145 Memo, Farley to Kissinger, 10 August 1971, folder Verification Panel Meeting SALT 8/9/71, Box H-009, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
147 Memo, Moorer to Laird, 6 August 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XVI Aug. 71 [1 of 1], Box 881, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
might be better for the United States’ security. Laird agreed with Safeguard critics that a two-site Safeguard program would provide little military benefit in and of itself, but maintained that the United States should retain at least some level of ABM capability as a basis for future expansion, should SALT fail. Based on these conversations, the NSC examined the possibility of a zero-ABM agreement on 11 August 1971, including the Delegation’s zero-ABM proposal, Defense’s modified Option D proposal, and the existing Safeguard-for-Moscow proposal. Given the desire of the White House, Defense, and JCS for some level of Safeguard, the result was a forgone conclusion. The next day, Nixon issued NSDM 127, ordering the Delegation to stick to the Safeguard-for-Moscow proposal, and not introduce a zero-ABM position. In a private letter to Smith, Nixon explained his decision in terms of negotiability, worrying that further changes to the United States’ ABM proposal might cause the Soviets to back out of the 20 May Agreement entirely and insist once again on an ABM-only agreement.

Although Nixon ultimately sided with Defense and JCS in rejecting a zero-ABM agreement, he did agree to the Delegation’s request that the ABM agreement ban deployment of future “exotic” ABM technologies, including direct-energy weapons like lasers. Smith believed that allowing the deployment of exotic ABM technologies would only serve to further spur the arms race, rather than curtailing it by banning all destabilizing ABM systems.

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150 Memo, Kissinger to Nixon, folder Verification Panel Meeting SALT 8/9/71, Box H-009, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
particular question, Defense agreed with Smith – both Laird and Nitze believed it would be in the interest of the United States to ban the deployment of exotic ABM technologies, as long as research and development were still allowed. This would allow the United States to continue working on new advanced ABM concepts, which could then be deployed in the future if the Soviets cheated on their arms control commitments or sought to gain some sort of other strategic advantage.\footnote{Memo, Laird to Kissinger, 12 July 1971, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 174, fn1; Memo, Laird to Kissinger, 20 July 1971, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 181.} JCS was left alone in opposing restrictions on exotic ABM, claiming that no arms control agreement could effectively define and limit technologies that did not yet even exist.\footnote{Memo, Moorer to Kissinger, 20 July 1971, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 182.} Kissinger ultimately came down on the side of Defense and ACDA that banning the deployment of exotic ABM systems was the best course of action.\footnote{Memo, Wayne Smith & Hyland to Kissinger, 11 August 1971, folder Verification Panel Meeting SALT 8/9/71, Box H-009, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.} NSDM 127 included instructions that any ABM agreement should ban the deployment of all ABM-capable devices, fulfilling Smith’s request.\footnote{National Security Decision Memorandum 127, 12 August 1971, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 192.} Nixon’s decision to ban exotic ABM technologies, but not to adopt the Delegation’s suggested zero-ABM proposal, is indicative of the level of influence that the Defense Department could exercise over SALT policy, especially while Congress’s annual Safeguard debate was in session.

Progress on SALT remained glacial, as the Soviets refused to discuss offensive force limitations, insisting that the details of the ABM agreement be determined first. The United States presented a full draft SALT agreement to the Soviets on 27 July 1971, including a three-for-one Safeguard-for-Moscow ABM Treaty and an offensive freeze on ICBM and SLBM
beginning on 31 July 1971.\footnote{\textit{Telegram from SALT Delegation to the Department of State, 26 July 1971, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 183.}} Although the Soviets responded to the United States’ ABM proposal, they refused to comment on the details of the freeze. Kissinger and Dobrynin discussed the sequencing issue on 30 July 1971, with Kissinger suggesting that if the Soviets did not agree to discuss the offensive forces freeze, then SALT negotiations might grind to a total standstill once again. Dobrynin said that he could not speak for the Soviet government in this regard, but that he would forward Kissinger’s concerns to Moscow.\footnote{\textit{Telcon, Kissinger & Dobrynin, 30 July 1971, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XIII, Document 305.}} Once the Soviet Delegation did begin discussing offensive force limitations in early September 1971, they continued to insist that including SLBM in the interim freeze was inconsistent with the terms of the 20 May Agreement, which according to the Soviets only covered ICBMs. The delay was also making Defense nervous, as each passing week meant more Soviet SLBMs under construction that would probably not be included in any final freeze agreement.\footnote{\textit{Memo, Sonnenfeldt & Wayne Smith to Kissinger, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. 17 Sep-Dec 71 [2 of 2], Box 882, NSC Files, Nixon Library; \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 195.}} The NSC staff was much less concerned about SLBM inclusion, arguing that given their inaccuracy Soviet SLBMs did not have the ability to contribute to a Soviet first-strike against Minuteman, and that the advantage of including SLBM in the freeze was primarily political and diplomatic.\footnote{\textit{Memo, Wayne Smith & Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 10 September 1971, folder Verification Panel Meeting SALT 9/15/71, Box H-009, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.}} Furthermore, the NSC staff believed that even an offensive freeze that gave the Soviets a minor numerical superiority in offensive forces would be better than the unconstrained growth of Soviet offensive forces into the 1970s.\footnote{\textit{Memo, Wayne Smith to Kissinger, 17 September 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. 17 Sep-Dec [1 of 2] Box 882, NSC Files, Nixon Library.}} Despite Laird’s request that the Delegation break off talks if the Soviets refused to
discuss offensive freeze details, Nixon ultimately opted to allow the Helsinki round to run its course, with a warning to the Soviets that the United States would expect to discuss the offensive freeze details first thing at SALT VI in Vienna.\textsuperscript{164}

Instead of discussing offensive forces, the remainder of SALT V in Helsinki focused on a constantly-changing series of ABM proposals from both the US and Soviet Delegations. On the US side, the Delegation opened the round by suggesting a three-for-one Safeguard-for-Moscow proposal, though couched in language that technically allowed each side to choose whether it wanted three ICBM defense sites or one NCA defense site.\textsuperscript{165} The language about choice proved controversial, because while the NSC staff and Defense Department believed the new language would improve the proposal’s negotiability, they also worried that the Soviets might actually choose to build three ICBM defense sites, if not immediately then perhaps at some point in the future.\textsuperscript{166} Eventually, Nixon ordered the Delegation to include language in the proposal that each side would choose its deployment configuration at the beginning of the agreement – the United States would choose ICBM defense, and presumably the Soviets would choose to retain their Moscow system.\textsuperscript{167} The gradual erosion of the US ABM position towards equality of ABM sites ultimately made this a non-issue.

At Smith’s insistence, as detailed above, the Delegation also suggested the possibility of


a zero-ABM proposal, only to have Nixon decide not to offer this as an option.\textsuperscript{168} When it became clear that the Soviets would not accept a three-for-one ABM proposal, the Delegation followed its instructions and fell back to a two-for-one Safeguard-for-Moscow proposal, which the Soviets also rejected as unequal.\textsuperscript{169} By the end of SALT V in September, the Delegation was advocating that the United States go one step further, and offer a two-for-one Safeguard-for-Moscow deal, but with equal numbers of interceptors for each side – the Soviets would get 100 interceptors at Moscow, and the US would get 50 at each of its two Safeguard sites.\textsuperscript{170} The White House and Defense were critical of the Delegation’s handling of the issue, claiming that Smith fell back too quickly, rather than holding out for concessions from the Soviets.\textsuperscript{171} While we lack the Soviet sources to readily assess this accusation, given the final two-for-two deal settled in 1972 Smith’s conclusion that the Soviets would not accept an unequal ABM arrangement seems reasonably justified.\textsuperscript{172}

In the meantime, the Soviet ABM position was evolving, as well. At least initially, the Soviets insisted that NCA defense was the only ABM configuration consistent with the 20 May Agreement terms.\textsuperscript{173} By August, the Soviets suggested that each side could build two ABM sites defending cities, which the US rejected as inconsistent with its currently-programmed Safeguard

\textsuperscript{169} Smith, \textit{Doubletalk}, 266; Memo, Smith to Nixon, 28 September 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vo. 17 Sep-Dec 71 [1 of 2], Box 882, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
\textsuperscript{170} Memcon, Brown and Kissinger, 30 August 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vo. 17 Sep-Dec 71 [2 of 2], Box 882, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
In late August, the Soviets introduced another more complicated proposal. Each country would get to build one NCA-defense site. Additionally, the United States would then be allowed to complete a single Safeguard site, while the Soviets would be allowed to defend an equal number of ICBMs. Since Soviet ICBM fields were smaller than those of the United States, equal ICBM coverage would probably require the Soviets to deploy two separate ICBM defense ABM sites. In effect this would mean three Soviet ABM sites to the United States two, which the US Delegation also rejected. By the time SALT V ended in September, the Delegation was convinced that the most viable ABM compromise would be a two-for-two ABM deal of some kind. Defense and JCS insisted that the Administration not move from its two-for-one ABM proposal until the Soviets had agreed to discuss offensive limitations.

Aside from the number of ABM sites, radar controls also remained a controversial issue. The US Delegation scored a major victory in August when the Soviets finally agreed that SAM upgrades might be an issue of concern under an ABM agreement, and that some corollary constraints on SAM capabilities would be necessary to allow effective verification. The Delegations ultimately agreed to language prohibiting each side from testing SAMs or early warning radars in an ABM mode. The US Delegation continued to press the Soviets for more corollary restraints on radars, arguing that ABM radars should be limited to a few small MARC deployment zones, and that each side should limit the power of its OLPARs to reassure the other.

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176 Memcon, Brown and Kissinger, 30 August 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vo. 17 Sep-Dec 71 [2 of 2], Box 882, NSC Files, Nixon Library; Memo, Wayne Smith and Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 10 September 1971, folder Verification Panel Meeting SALT 9/15/71, Box H-009, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
that they had no ABM capability, positions which the Soviets continued to oppose.\textsuperscript{177}

By the end of the Helsinki round, the Soviets were sufficiently frustrated that they delivered a note to the US Delegation accusing the United States of breaking its 20 May pledge to seek an equitable ABM agreement.\textsuperscript{178} Nixon responded with a note via the backchannel, writing that the Kissinger-Dobrynin negotiating record clearly demonstrated that the United States preferred a Safeguard-for-Moscow deal, and that furthermore the 20 May Agreement allowed the discussion of SLBMs, which the Soviets still refused to do. Nixon concluded that solutions to SALT could be found “not so much in legalistic interpretations but in a spirit of goodwill based on the importance of the objective.”\textsuperscript{179} The ambiguities of the 20 May negotiating record would continue to dog Nixon and Kissinger right up to the last second of SALT in Moscow.

Despite the continued struggles over the terms of arms limitation, progress being made rapidly on other fronts. By the beginning of SALT V in July 1971, the Accidental War and Hotline Agreements were mostly completed to the satisfaction of both the United States and the Soviet Union. The details of the agreements had in fact been completed at SALT IV in Vienna in early 1971.\textsuperscript{180} By the beginning of SALT V in July 1971, there was only one major outstanding issue. The Soviets preferred that the Accidental War Agreement contain an “accession clause,” which would provide the terms for third parties to ultimately join the

\textsuperscript{177} Memo, Smith to Nixon, 28 September 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vo. 17 Sep-Dec 71 [1 of 2], Box 882, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
agreement. The United States preferred that the Accidental War agreement not contain any reference to third parties, remembering the Soviets’ attempts to include an anti-China “provocative war” agreement the previous summer.\textsuperscript{181} The United States ultimately rejected the inclusion of an accession clause, and the Soviets did not insist.\textsuperscript{182} The Delegation’s instructions for SALT V indicated that the United States still preferred to link progress on the Accidental War Agreement to limitations on offensive and defensive strategic weapons, though Nixon was considering a separate Accidental War agreement.\textsuperscript{183}

Around the same time, Nixon and Kissinger had given up on a 1971 summit with the Soviets, and had decided to move forward with their China plan. The Soviets had been stringing Nixon and Kissinger along on a summit meeting for quite some time. In April 1971, Dobrynin had told Kissinger that the Soviets would only set a date for a summit once the Berlin Agreement was concluded, a clear Soviet attempt at a “linkage” policy.\textsuperscript{184} On 8 June 1971, Kissinger responded to Dobrynin with an ultimatum – either the Soviets would agree to set a date for a summit by the end of the month, or the United States would push the summit back into 1972.\textsuperscript{185} When the Soviets tried to delay further, Nixon and Kissinger played their trump card: they announced that Nixon would be visiting Beijing in early 1972, \textit{before} he would visit Moscow.\textsuperscript{186}

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\item 182 Memo, Hyland to Kissinger, 13 August 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XVI Aug. 71 [1 of 1], Box 881, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
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In order to soften the blow of Nixon’s China announcement, Nixon agreed to conclude the SALT accidental war agreement early. When Smith heard of Kissinger’s visit to China and Nixon’s plans for a Beijing summit, he sent Kissinger a message suggesting a separate accidental war agreement on 16 July 1971.\(^\text{187}\) The NSC staff approved of this plan, both to signal to the Soviets continued US interest in SALT, and to provide a SALT success for domestic political consumption.\(^\text{188}\) Kissinger proposed such a deal to Dobrynin later that month.\(^\text{189}\) In early August, Nixon ordered the Delegation to suggest a separate accidental war agreement to the Soviets in Helsinki.\(^\text{190}\) The Soviets accepted, and the Administration began considering when to conclude the agreement for domestic political advantage.\(^\text{191}\) Ambassador Parsons of the US SALT Delegation briefed the NATO leadership in early September, while the White House and ACDA coordinated testimony for Congress soon after.\(^\text{192}\) The White House announced the Accidental War Agreement on 24 September 1971. The next week, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko visited Washington and signed the Agreement with Rogers.\(^\text{193}\)

Nixon’s China announcement also set the stage for the conclusion of the negotiations over the future of Berlin. Throughout 1971, Kissinger had sought to use Soviet interest in a

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\(^{189}\) Smith was kept informed of this particular backchannel initiative (Backchannel Message, Smith to Kissinger, 16 July 1971, *FRUS* 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 179, fn3).

\(^{190}\) Memo, Kissinger to Irwin, 4 August 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XVI Aug. 71 [1 of 1], Box 881, NSC Files, Nixon Library.


\(^{192}\) Memo, Hyland to Kissinger, 12 August 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vol. XVI Aug. 71 [1 of 1], Box 881, NSC Files, Nixon Library.

Berlin Agreement as leverage to gain concessions on SALT, with some success in the lead-up to the 20 May 1971 Agreement.194 Nixon’s rapprochement with China now provided far more bargaining leverage over the Soviets than any notional agreement on Berlin. To emphasize their continued commitment to cooperation with the Soviets, Nixon and Kissinger agreed in July 1971 to move forward with the Four-Power Berlin Agreement, whose details by that point had largely been decided.195 The United States, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and France concluded the Four-Power Agreement on Berlin on 3 September 1971, resolving the final remnant of Allied occupation of Germany and paving the way for normalization of relations between East and West Germany.196 With major summits approaching, Nixon and Kissinger would play the Soviets and the Chinese against each other as their main source of bargaining leverage.

Gromyko’s September 1971 visit to Washington also provided an opportunity for the United States and the Soviet Union to finalize the details of a US-Soviet summit. Nixon’s Beijing trip seems to have created a greater sense of urgency in Moscow about setting a summit date. By the end of August, the Soviets were ready to announce Nixon’s visit to the Soviet Union beginning on 22 May 1972, a plan which was finalized by Gromyko and Nixon in their late September meeting.197 On 12 October 1971, Nixon held a press conference in which he announced that he would be visiting the Soviet Union in May 1972. Nixon indicated that he

194 Moss, *Nixon’s Backchannel to Moscow*, 77-94.
hoped a major SALT agreement would be ready for discussion and conclusion.\textsuperscript{198} Although Nixon was proud that the White House had been able to negotiate successfully a major summit with the Soviet leadership, others within the government were less pleased.\textsuperscript{199} Smith especially was incensed at being excluded from such a major negotiation for a second time within six months. Smith was concerned that Nixon would expect the Delegation to delay SALT negotiations, so that Nixon could conclude a SALT agreement personally in Moscow. Although Kissinger assured Smith that this was not the case,\textsuperscript{200} in private Nixon and Kissinger were thinking very much along those lines. Nixon was looking forward towards the 1972 elections, and hoped that personally concluding SALT in Moscow would improve his electoral chances.\textsuperscript{201}

Smith’s concern that Nixon and Kissinger would stall SALT negotiations to increase Nixon’s domestic political advantage proved to be overstated. In fact, in the remaining months of SALT the opposite concern would quickly predominate. Rather than artificially delaying arms control progress, negotiators on both sides struggled to ensure that SALT was ready in time for the summit, ultimately with great success.

\textsuperscript{198} \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Editorial Note 203.
\textsuperscript{200} Telcon, Kissinger & Smith, 12 October 1971, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 204. This exchange was particularly heated. Kissinger: “Oh Jesus Christ, relax. For Christ’s sake! Read what the President said-” Smith: “I am relaxed. I’m disgusted, but relaxed… it makes me look like a fool with Semenov going around saying that I don’t know about the discussions for a summit.”
CHAPTER 7 – Final Compromises

With Nixon scheduled to visit Moscow in late May, the search for a workable SALT agreement in the early months of 1972 became even more frantic. By this point, many of the most divisive issues existed at the level of US-Soviet negotiations. Implementing the 20 May 1971 Agreement remained a difficult process. The Soviets insisted on equality in ABM sites, while the United States maintained that it deserved extra ABM sites as compensation for the Soviets’ numerical superiority in offensive forces under the freeze. Furthermore, the United States still believed that SLBMs should be included in the freeze, while the Soviets claimed that the 20 May Agreement had not included SLBM. In addition to these primary issues, the United States and the Soviet Union remained divided over what sorts of corollary constraints were necessary to verify the nascent ABM Treaty and the Interim Agreement. The United States especially desired restrictions on modifying ICBM silos, to prevent covert replacement of smaller ICBMs with newer, larger ones, and deploying large phased array radars, to prevent either side from creating a “virtual” ABM shield while stockpiling interceptors in secret. For their part, the Soviets maintained that since both sides were negotiating in good faith, these sorts of corollary restrictions were not necessary to verify compliance with the agreements, which would flow naturally from the enlightened self-interest of each country.

Although the US-Soviet level of negotiations gained in importance in the final months, the second-tier disputes between the Cambridge and Philadelphia Approaches retained their salience. Favoring a more expansive ABM deployment, Defense and JCS insisted that the United States receive more ABM sites than the Soviets, while also demanding that SLBM be included in the freeze agreement. By comparison, proponents of the Cambridge Approach were far readier to accept equality in ABM deployment, as well as to push forward with an interim
freeze even without SLBM inclusion. Breaking this final impasse required the full effort of the Administration at all levels. Faced with the dual-level dilemma, Nixon and Kissinger once again retreated into secret backchannel negotiations, emerging with a second fait accompli to bypass the government’s disagreements heading into the summit. The basic contours of the deal were simple: the United States would accept equality in ABM sites, and the Soviets would agree to include SLBM in the freeze. The details of implementing that compromise would prove far more divisive. The resulting backchannel agreement would set the basic terms for the negotiations at the Moscow summit.

SALT VI – Vienna

In the fall of 1971, a SALT agreement with the Soviets still seemed relatively distant. The sequencing issue was the largest obstacle – the Soviets had yet to engage the US Delegation in serious discussion on the interim freeze of offensive forces, which lagged far behind the progress made on drafting the ABM Treaty. Substantially, two major disputes remained. First, the Soviets insisted that SLBM could not be included in the freeze, while the United States maintained that whether or not SLBM were included should be part of the discussion. Second, the Soviets claimed that any ABM agreement would have to provide for “equal security;” in practice, this meant that the Soviets rejected the United States’ two-for-one Safeguard-for-Moscow proposal, though their most recent proposal had in fact been three-for-two ABM sites in the Soviets’ favor.¹ This dispute actually represented significant progress from the previous fall, when the US and Soviet Delegations had agreed on virtually nothing; now, only this pair of substantive issues remained to be ironed out.

¹ Memo, Smith to Nixon, 28 September 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vo. 17 Sep-Dec 71 [1 of 2], Box 882, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
Although SALT V in Helsinki had resolved very little, the outlines of a high-level bargain on SALT were emerging. The Soviet Union wanted equality in ABM sites; the United States wanted a more comprehensive freeze, with effective restrictions on heavy ICBMs, and perhaps also on SLBMs. The most obvious solution would be to trade one for the other: the United States could agree to equal ABM sites, if the Soviets agreed to include SLBM in the freeze.\footnote{Memo, Wayne Smith to Kissinger, 6 October 1971, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Volume XXXII, SALT I, 1969-1972, ed. Erin Mahan (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 202 (hereafter \textit{FRUS}, with appropriate year, volume, and number).} By November 1971, the NSC staff, JCS, and ACDA had all concluded that such bargain was the most likely outcome of further negotiations with the Soviets.\footnote{Memo, Wayne Smith & Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 27 October 1971, folder Verification Panel Meeting SALT 11/3/71, Box H-009, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library; Memo, Von Ins to the Verification Panel Working Group, 16 October 1971, folder Verification Panel Meeting SALT 11/3/71, Box H-009, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library; Memo, Keeny to the Verification Panel Working Group, 27 October 1971, folder Verification Panel Meeting SALT 11/3/71, Box H-009, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.} Defense was an outlier in this regard, since it opposed a simple ABM bargain and preferred a more complex arrangement that would allow hard-site defense.\footnote{Memo, Wayne Smith & Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 30 October 1971, folder Verification Panel Meeting SALT 11/3/71, Box H-009, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.} In the months leading up to Helsinki, Defense’s insistence on a complex ABM agreement would be Nixon and Kissinger’s single largest SALT challenge.

Even as the Administration was coming to terms with the contours of the upcoming SALT agreements, significant differences remained over the specifics of implementation. Defense and JCS were suspicious that the Soviets were dragging out negotiations in order to cram more ICBMs and SLBMs into the offensive freeze promised on 20 May 1971. Defense believed that too long a delay in concluding the freeze would allow the Soviets to construct a viable threat to Minuteman, especially since the freeze would not prevent the Soviets from deploying MIRV and other accuracy improvements on their existing missiles. By October,
Laird, Nitze, and Moorer were arguing that Nixon should consider backing out of the 20 May Agreement entirely, and seeking stricter controls over Soviet offensive forces. Defense also worried that any asymmetries included in the interim freeze would ultimately be extended permanently in the follow-up offensive forces agreement, which would mean giving the Soviets a sizeable numerical advantage in perpetuity.\(^5\) Kissinger and the NSC staff continued to defend the 20 May freeze, even at marginally higher levels of Soviet offensive force deployment. Asymmetric constraints would be better than allowing the Soviets to deploy as many weapons as they wanted, especially since there was virtually zero chance of the United States deploying more ICBM or SLBM of its own in the coming years.\(^6\) In fact, Nixon believed that the interim freeze would work in the United States’ favor, since it would refocus competition from sheer numbers of weapons, an area where the Soviets had an advantage, into qualitative improvements of existing weapons, an area where the United States had an advantage, a position with which Laird and JCS agreed.\(^7\) Kissinger also believed that a marginal Soviet advantage in SLBM levels would be offset by the United States’ advantages in operational experience, basing, and geography.\(^8\) Even if it allowed the Soviets some advantage in pure numbers, the freeze could still work to the United States’ advantage under the logic of the Philadelphia Approach.

There was also division on the question of SLBM inclusion. Defense insisted that SLBM


needed to be included in the freeze, but not in a way that would slow or prevent the deployment of ULMS later in the decade.\textsuperscript{9} The NSC staff agreed that it was desirable to include SLBM in the freeze, though primarily as a political and diplomatic issue to avoid the appearance of US disadvantage. The NSC staff also saw SLBM inclusion as a possible lever to gain Soviet concessions on other, more important, topics. For example, Wayne Smith believed that it might be in the United States’ interest to exclude SLBM from the freeze agreement, if it meant getting stricter controls over Soviet ICBMs.\textsuperscript{10} ACDA agreed with the NSC staff, saying that the US should continue pushing for SLBM inclusion, but should be willing to put SLBM off until the second phase of SALT if it meant getting effective controls over heavy ICBM or ABM radars.\textsuperscript{11} Smith believed that one alternative would be to freeze SLBM via some informal agreement, rather than as part of the formal interim freeze.\textsuperscript{12} Given the mistrust that existed between the White House and ACDA, the NSC staff was intensely suspicious of Smith’s SLBM preferences, despite the fact that his ideas were fundamentally similar to their own.\textsuperscript{13}

On ABM, the largest remaining issue was how to reach a compromise between the US and Soviet proposals. The Soviets had proposed either NCA-only defense, or a three-for-two ABM agreement in the Soviets’ favor. The United States had a number of possible

\textsuperscript{12} Letter, Smith to Kissinger, 5 November 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vo. 17 Sep-Dec 71 [1 of 2], Box 882, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
\textsuperscript{13} Memo, Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 10 November 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vo. 17 Sep-Dec 71 [1 of 2], Box 882, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
countermoves. The most obvious was to modify the existing US two-for-one Safeguard-for-Moscow proposal to allow equal interceptors for both sides – the Soviets would receive 100 interceptors for the defense of Moscow, while each US Safeguard site would get 50 interceptors. Another option was that the United States could suggest a one-for-one ABM agreement, in which the Soviets would keep their Moscow system, and the US would keep its Minuteman defense site at Grand Forks; ACDA favored this approach, which would reduce ABM to the lowest-possible levels.\(^\text{14}\) Defense was still trying to include explicit mention of its future hard-site defense ABM program in the agreement, producing a complicated draft that would agree to the Soviet three-for-two ABM proposal, but only if the Soviets agreed to defer the deployment of their two ICBM defense sites, and only if the agreement allowed the United States to deploy a thick hard-site defense system.\(^\text{15}\) Aside from the Defense proposal, which the NSC staff believed to be non-negotiable, the number of possible ABM configurations was still substantial.\(^\text{16}\)

In addition to the number of ABM sites allowed, radar controls remained a pressing issue. The US government was now committed to its Modern ABM Radar Complex (MARC) proposal, which would allow the unlimited deployment of ABM radars within a few small, 3km-diameter areas. Going into Vienna, State believed that the United States should be ready to increase the number of allowed MARCs, in an effort to win Soviet assent to the concept. Defense believed


that it was important to hold firm on only two MARCs, at least until the Soviets had conceded on other corollary constraints, especially controls over other large phased array radars (OLPARs). JCS continued to believe that radar controls were non-negotiable, and argued that the US should be willing to simplify its radar control provisions in exchange for stricter controls on offensive weapons. ACDA was actually closer to the Defense position on radar controls, if possible holding the Soviets to only 2 MARCs, since ACDA still hoped that at some point in the future SALT might lead to a zero-ABM agreement.

Disagreements over the desired outcome of SALT were further complicated by divisions over the most effective bargaining position. Even amongst agencies that agreed that the United States should trade equality in ABM for maximum concessions on Soviet offensive forces, there were differing opinions about how to proceed. Should the United States fall back on ABM first, in an effort to entice the Soviets into compromise on offensive forces? Or should the Delegation be instructed to hold firm on ABM until the Soviets offered a compromise proposal? After all, the Soviets had not yet agreed to discuss offensive force limitation at the same time as defensive limitations. If the United States conceded too early on ABM, the Soviets might pocket the concession without any offer of their own. In general, Defense favored taking a harder line in negotiations, and ACDA agreed that the United States should stand firm on its current ABM and SLBM proposals. Rogers and Smith also suggested that the United States might make a high-level appeal to the Soviets to break the impasse through some sort of bargain. Laird preferred

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that any higher-level initiative be held off until the United States had announced its Defense budget, to put further pressure on the Soviets concerning SLBM levels.\textsuperscript{20} Given the general agreement on holding firm, the Delegation’s NSDM 140 instructions for SALT VI changed very little from its previous SALT V instructions. The Delegation was ordered to insist on the 27 July 1971 terms offered by the United States: 2-for-1 Safeguard-for-Moscow ABM, and an interim freeze including SLBM. In the meantime, the Delegation was to focus on narrowing specific textual differences between the US and Soviet draft ABM agreements, especially on radar issues, leaving the final allowed deployment configuration blank if the Soviets would not accept Safeguard-for-Moscow.\textsuperscript{21} Laird was unhappy with these instructions, which did not include provisions for Defense’s desired hard-site SALT proposal. Given that Defense was the only agency in favor of this proposal, Kissinger rejected Laird’s request to modify the Delegation’s instructions.\textsuperscript{22}

On 15 November 1971, the Delegations reconvened in Vienna for SALT VI.\textsuperscript{23} The US Delegation carried out its instructions, insisting that the Soviets provide a formal response to the United States’ 27 July 1971 freeze proposal.\textsuperscript{24} At least initially, the policy of holding firm seemed to be succeeding. The Soviets were willing to make important concessions: Semenov agreed that the Soviets would not replace light ICBMs with heavy ICBMs, though the Soviet

\textsuperscript{22} Memo, Wayne Smith & Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 19 November 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vo. 17 Sep-Dec 71 [1 of 2], Box 882, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
\textsuperscript{24} Memo, Kissinger to Nixon, 29 November 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vo. 17 Sep-Dec 71 [1 of 2], Box 882, NSC Files, Nixon Library; Paul Nitze, \textit{From Hiroshima to Glasnost: At the Center of Decision, A Memoir} (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1989), 316-318.
Delegation insisted that no corollary constraints on missile or silo size would be necessary to verify this provision. Later in the round, the Soviet Delegation also agreed to accept the United States’ MARC proposal for controlling ABM radars at NCA defense locations, though the Soviets preferred that each side be allowed six or eight MARCs, instead of the two or four that the United States had proposed. These were major gains for the United States, but the Delegation’s stonewalling would only work for so long before new instructions would be required on actual bargaining. Smith believed that one possible concession would be to offer the SLBM freeze in terms of individual SLBM launchers, rather than freezing missile submarine construction entirely; this would allow for construction and replacement of submarines under the freeze, as long as the number of SLBMs remained constant. Updating the Delegation’s instructions proved to be difficult, as Defense opposed virtually any fallback on ABM issues until the Soviets had agreed to specific limitations on their offensive forces, not just vague promises. For the time being, Kissinger told Smith that he would receive new instructions after the holiday break, which would allow Smith to return to Washington to participate directly in formulating the instructions.

Given the differences between agencies concerning how best to negotiate the final SALT

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27 Memo, Odeen & Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 9 December 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vo. 17 Sep-Dec 71 [1 of 2], Box 882, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
28 Memo, Wayne Smith & Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 27 November 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vo. 17 Sep-Dec 71 [1 of 2], Box 882, NSC Files, Nixon Library; Memo, Laird to Kissinger, 14 December 1971, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) Vo. 17 Sep-Dec 71 [1 of 2]. Box 882, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
agreement, Kissinger set the Verification Panel into motion once again to produce some sort of compromise. K. Wayne Smith had retired from the NSC staff around the time SALT VI began, and his duties as chair of the Verification Panel Working Group had been taken over by Philip Odeen. The Verification Panel quickly approved the Delegation’s suggestion to substitute SLBM levels for SSBN construction in the US freeze proposal. More controversial was the question of the final form of the SALT agreement. Nixon preferred that the ABM agreement take the form of a formal treaty, while the interim freeze on offensive forces would be a less formal executive agreement. Most agencies agreed that the Delegation should be allowed to present this formulation to the Soviets, but Laird insisted that if the ABM agreement were a treaty, it would need to include special language allowing the United States to withdraw from the treaty should a comprehensive offensive forces agreement not be concluded within a reasonable amount of time. In fact, the United States’ 27 July 1971 proposal had contained language concerning a formal withdraw process, to which the Soviets had objected; the text was one of the topics of discussion during SALT VI at Vienna. Dropping the formal withdrawal clause had been one option under consideration as a fallback position on ABM, perhaps in exchange for Soviet concessions on ABM radar limitations. Now, Laird was insisting that the Administration put its foot down on the withdrawal clause, as the price of agreeing to an ABM Treaty. Given the fact that a Treaty would require Senatorial approval, Laird’s objections could not be taken lightly. Odeen and Sonnenfeldt recommended that Kissinger delay the issue until Smith could return to Washington for discussion, which Kissinger did. With less than six months before the Moscow summit, delay remained the Administration’s default position on controversial SALT

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issues.

Given the lack of Soviet concessions in the first half of SALT VI, by the time Smith returned to Washington for consultation on SALT the issues differed very little from those at play prior to SALT VI a month earlier. The Delegation’s instructions allowed for further investigation of Soviet views on limiting large ICBMs, and the Delegates had already been granted maximum latitude to search for a workable compromise on controlling ABM radars. A few issues remained unresolved within the government. On ABM, the Delegation still preferred retreating to one-for-one ABM to gain concessions on the offensive freeze, while Defense still insisted that the Soviets be presented with its byzantine hard-site defense proposal, with its several deferrals and numerous specific radar and interceptor component constraints. Meanwhile, on offensive forces, the question of SLBM inclusion remained open, with Defense insisting that SLBM be included in the freeze, while other agencies were willing to consider dropping it for concessions on other issues.\(^{31}\) Nixon was immensely frustrated by these continuing divisions, especially on the question of ABM, where he believed both Smith and Laird were working to undermine him.\(^{32}\) Given the divisions and Nixon’s unwillingness to override either Smith or Laird, the Delegations’ supplementary instructions were minimal: Smith was authorized to modify the United States’ SLBM freeze proposal to include SLBM themselves, without preventing construction of further SSBNs.\(^{33}\) The United States’ final ABM position remained undetermined. Smith returned to Vienna convinced that the United States


would need to modify its two-for-one Safeguard-for-Moscow proposal to an equal-interceptors version by the end of SALT VI, perhaps leading to a final two-for-two ABM proposal.\(^\text{34}\) Meanwhile, Laird and the Defense Department continued to pressure the White House to propose the hard-site SALT ABM proposal to the Soviets.\(^\text{35}\) These divisions within the government made it very difficult for Nixon to take a measured approach to negotiations and sequence the presentation of US proposals for bargaining purposes.

Nixon’s efforts to mediate the continued bureaucratic divisions over SALT policy were further complicated in late 1971 by his focus on other pressing issues. The previous summer, Nixon had announced his intention to visit the mainland People’s Republic of China (PRC) in early 1972. In the fall of 1971, however, Nixon became increasingly worried that his China plans would be derailed by the escalating conflict in South Asia between India and Pakistan, which boiled over into open war in December. The war touched directly on US-Chinese relations: the Chinese saw a resurgent India as a potential threat to their security, and Pakistan was as an important go-between for US-PRC talks.\(^\text{36}\) Given the perceived importance of relations with the Chinese, Nixon and Kissinger took a hands-off approach to the ongoing war, placing only moderate sanctions on the West Pakistani government even as it engaged in a campaign of mass murder against the Bangladeshi inhabitants of East Pakistan. The war ended quickly when India cut off West Pakistani access to the newly-independent Bangladesh.\(^\text{37}\)

preparations for the 1972 Beijing Summit drew Nixon’s attention away from the ongoing SALT dialogue, even as the Administration was seeking to conclude its final SALT compromises.

The war in South Asia also provided the context for an especially awkward long-distance interaction between Nixon and Smith, when Nixon sought to include Smith in a signaling exercise to the Soviets. On 13 December 1971, Smith received an urgent telegram from Nixon ordering him to present “a cool and somewhat more reserved attitude” towards the Soviets, as a means of signaling US displeasure over what Nixon perceived to be Soviet meddling in Indian politics. This was Nixon’s dramatic side at work – the President clearly hoped that Smith would put on a show for the Soviets, and tailor his emotional state in an effort to send a subtle message to the Soviets to back off in South Asia. In a good-faith effort to carry out these instructions, at the next SALT meeting Smith verbally informed Semenov that the United States was displeased with Soviet activity in South Asia, and reported his conversation back to Washington. Having imagined a more subtle signal, Nixon was dismayed and “alarmed” at Smith’s direct approach, which Nixon feared might actually delay SALT at a crucial moment. Although a minor incident in the overall SALT picture, Nixon and Smith’s miscommunication on the South Asian crisis is indicative of the deeper personality clash that drove much of their animosity: Nixon’s wilily, dramatic tendencies conflicted with Smith’s genteel, straightforward manner. Such deep and mutual incomprehension made formulating an effective SALT policy all the more difficult.

Divisions within the government prompted a return to backchannel SALT discussions

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between Kissinger and Dobrynin, but these also showed little sign of progress. On 18 November 1971, soon after SALT VI began, Kissinger and Dobrynin had a long discussion on the continued differences between the US and Soviet SALT proposals. Dobrynin suggested a two-for-two ABM agreement, without SLBM in the freeze. Kissinger replied that the United States would not accept this proposal, and that it considered Safeguard-for-Moscow ABM necessary to offset the Soviets’ advantage in offensive forces.³⁹ Kissinger and Dobrynin’s meeting on 21 January 1972 resulted in a similar restatement of principles, with Kissinger insisting that the Soviets consider the Safeguard-for-Moscow proposal, while Dobrynin suggested that the United States drop SLBM from the interim freeze agreement.⁴⁰ Unlike the previous year’s backchannel negotiations, at this phase Smith and Rogers were kept in the loop concerning Kissinger’s conversations with Dobrynin.⁴¹ Smith believed that Dobrynin’s willingness to even discuss SLBM indicated that the Soviets were still looking for some sort of deal on the issue.⁴² In early 1972, tedious restatement of principle was not the sole province of the Delegation in Vienna.

Feeling foolish repeating themselves over and over again, the US SALT Delegation continued to press for new instructions.⁴³ Smith was still keen to explore a two-for-one ABM deal with equal interceptors. On 6 January 1972, Smith also suggested that the United States alter its SLBM freeze proposal to allow one-way replacement of old ICBMs by new SLBMs.

One-way freedom-to-mix would allow the Soviets to continue with their Y-class construction program even once the freeze began, but only by dismantling their older ICBMs, thus providing the US with some compensation for the larger Soviet SLBM force. At least initially, Smith raised these issues with Kissinger directly, to see whether they would be of interest to the White House. Nixon was open to the idea of exploring equal interceptors and one-way freedom-to-mix on a noncommittal basis, but Kissinger asked Smith to present these two points via the formal bureaucratic machinery for agency comment. Smith’s equal interceptors proposal ended up caught up with yet another attempt by Defense to have its hard-site ABM proposal written into SALT. To complicate matters further, in late January JCS abandoned its previous preferred ABM position and sided with Defense’s hard-site proposal. Unlike Smith, Nitze did not wait for further instructions – instead, he presented most of the components of Defense’s hard-site proposal to the Soviets informally. Smith’s one-way freedom-to-mix proposal also ran into some trouble, as JCS believed this would establish unequal aggregates, with the Soviets receiving 2,310 launchers to the United States’ 1,710. Smith believed that the inequalities would be manageable from a PR standpoint, since they were only part of a temporary freeze, not a long-

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45 Memo, Odeen & Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 6 January 1972, folder SALT Talks (Helinski) (sic) Vol. 17 Jan-Apr 1972 [2 of 3], Box 882, NSC Files, Nixon Library.

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term solution, a position with which the NSC staff agreed.\textsuperscript{49}

Given the Defense and JCS dissents, Smith’s request for instructions could not be handled directly by the Backstopping Committee, so Kissinger ordered the Verification Panel Working Group to prepare some compromise position.\textsuperscript{50} The White House’s continued squabbles with Defense meant that the Delegation received no new instructions for SALT VI, and instead concluded the round in early February, with the intention of resuming talks in early March.\textsuperscript{51} Despite some important progress at SALT VI, the Administration appeared to be falling back into old patterns of dispute and delay. With the summit approaching, SALT was running out of time. Nixon faced difficult decisions on SALT policy in the very near future.

\textbf{Retaining an Edge}

Preparations for SALT at the Moscow summit did not interfere with the Administration’s preparation of the FY73 Defense budget. Early preparations for the FY73 defense budget had begun in October 1971, an extension of the ongoing debates about the FY72 budgetary level. Defense had been pressuring the White House to adopt a higher budgetary level, including Laird speaking publicly about the need for an $80 billion Defense budget. Nixon remained angry that the Defense Department was unwilling to find cost savings in general-purpose forces. Nixon and Kissinger preferred that the FY73 Defense budget focus instead on strategic modernization, especially expanding and improving the United States’ SLBM forces, either through deploying

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{49} Memo, Sonnenfeldt & Odeen to Kissinger, 17 January 1972, folder SALT Talks (Helinski) (sic) Vol. 17 Jan-Apr 1972 [2 of 3], Box 882, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
\textsuperscript{50} Memo, Sonnenfeldt & Odeen to Kissinger, 17 January 1972, folder SALT Talks (Helinski) (sic) Vol. 17 Jan-Apr 1972 [2 of 3], Box 882, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
\end{flushright}
more Polaris-type submarines or accelerating the ULMS program. Laird had also concluded that accelerating ULMS was the best policy, and took steps to ensure that ULMS would receive favorable attention in the final draft of the FY73 budget.

On 15 February 1972, Laird issued his FY1973 Defense Budget and FY1973-1977 Defense Program to Congress, calling once again for a “Strategy of Realistic Deterrence.” The proposal contained a large increase in research and development funding for the next generation of strategic nuclear weaponry. Laird wrote, “In order to avoid that unacceptable danger [of Soviet superiority], it is absolutely essential that we maintain technological superiority. The one billion dollar increase in the FY1973 R&D Budget over that which Congress gave us last year is aimed at maintaining that superiority… second place in the technological race is simply not good enough.” The additional billion dollars would be spent on faster development of ULMS and B-1, as well as further R&D on Defense’s preferred hard site defense ABM program.

In his budgetary request, Laird appears to have once again exceeded his instructions, since Nixon was still considering whether to fund accelerate ULMS research, or build more Polaris-type boats. By committing the President to ULMS, Laird had significantly overstepped his authority. Once Laird’s accelerated ULMS program was announced to Congress, it was too late for Nixon to walk it back. Kissinger instead ordered the DPRC to begin studying options for ULMS acceleration, for inclusion in the Administration’s budgetary testimony that summer.

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The decision to accelerate ULMS development would have a profound impact on SALT. Although Defense had consistently pushed for SLBM inclusion in the freeze, many others in the Administration had wondered whether the United States might ultimately fall back to a freeze on ICBM only, especially if the Soviets were accommodating on the United States’ ABM proposal. Laird’s decision to go public with a plan for accelerating ULMS set off a chain reaction through the Administration’s SALT policy. Accelerating ULMS meant that there would not be funding to deploy more Polaris-type boats in the near future. Since ULMS would not be ready for deployment until the very end of the 1970s, at the earliest, Nixon and Kissinger would insist on SLBM in the freeze, to head off further Soviet SLBM deployments while the United States geared up for ULMS production. Most in the Administration believed that the price of including SLBM in the freeze would be equality in ABM deployments, probably on a two-for-two site basis. More than anything else, the ULMS decision broke the final deadlock on SALT, pushing Nixon and Kissinger towards an equal ABM deal as the price for SLBM inclusion, despite Defense’s resistance.

**SALT VII – Helsinki**

With the Moscow summit approaching, the time had come for a final bargain to complete the process begun with the 20 May 1971 Agreement. By early 1972, with Nixon publicly committed to rapid progress on ULMS, the White House had a good idea of the sort of SALT bargain it wanted. The United States would accept a two-for-two ABM agreement. In exchange, the Soviets would agree to include SLBM in the freeze. A number of more detailed issues

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58 Memo, Odeen & Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 6 March 1972, folder Verification Panel Meeting – SALT 3/8/71 [1 of 2], Box H-010, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
remained to be worked out, especially corollary constraints on radars and large ICBM construction, but an ABM-for-SLBM bargain would settle the remaining principle disputes concerning what was to be limited in the agreement.

Unfortunately, the Administration’s continued dysfunction on SALT meant that achieving this bargain would be difficult. The most serious issue for Nixon and Kissinger heading into SALT VII was to convince the Defense Department to move away from its hard-site SALT proposal. Laird and Nitze had been pushing to have some sort of hard-site defense ABM written into SALT, believing that a large, short-range ABM system was the best way to ensure Minuteman’s survivability. Kissinger had attempted to stall consideration of Defense’s proposal, linking it to Smith’s equal-interceptors proposal and delaying consideration until after SALT VI concluded. 59 As the Moscow summit approached, Defense was becoming increasingly aggressive in its SALT advocacy. Although he lacked new instructions, Nitze had already presented most of the components of Defense’s hard-site defense proposal to the Soviets during SALT VI, as part of the discussion of secondary ABM issues. 60 On the basis of his private consultations, Nitze concluded that the Soviets would at least be willing to hear Defense’s hard-site proposal. The NSC staff was more skeptical. Given his limited instructions, Nitze had not mentioned to the Soviets that the Defense proposal would allow approximately 1,000 short-range interceptors, nor had Nitze discussed the strict qualitative controls over interceptor and radar technology that Defense believed were necessary to verify. The Soviets had opposed high levels of interceptors and strict qualitative controls in the past. Beyond its negotiability, hard-site’s

60 Memo, Odeen & Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 4 February 1972, folder SALT Talks (Helinski) (sic) Vol. 17 Jan-Apr 1972 [2 of 3], Box 882, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
military utility was also dubious. The Verification Panel’s technical analysis suggested that even if the United States deployed Defense’s proposed hard-site defense program, it would only save an additional hundred Minuteman from a Soviet first strike, and that assumed that the Soviets did not deploy further offensive forces to overwhelm the defense system.\textsuperscript{61} This analysis ultimately provided Nixon with some technical rationale for rejecting hard-site deployment. Defense was not so easily swayed, and Laird continued to insist that hard-site defense should at least be presented to the Soviets, to see whether or not they would consider it. On the other side, State and ACDA believed that hard-site defense was entirely non-negotiable, and that introducing it so soon before the summit would confuse the Soviets reduce the chances of an agreement.\textsuperscript{62} On ABM policy, at least, the White House, State, and ACDA were increasingly on the same page.\textsuperscript{63}

Despite siding with State and ACDA on ABM issues, Nixon and Kissinger remained skeptical of State and ACDA’s commitment to freezing SLBM. This was a particularly sensitive issue, since Defense and JCS absolutely insisted that SLBM be included in the freeze, and on very strict terms.\textsuperscript{64} For the time being, State and ACDA also supported including SLBM in the freeze, though they were more willing to consider fallback SLBM positions, including a later SLBM freeze date (to allow the Soviets a few more submarines) or two-way freedom-to-mix between ICBMs and SLBMs.\textsuperscript{65} More so than Defense or JCS, Nixon and Kissinger believed they had some room to bargain on SLBMs, since the US Navy’s superior operational practice and

\textsuperscript{61} Memo, Odeen & Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, folder Verification Panel Meeting – SALT 2/9/72 [1 of 2], Box H-010, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
\textsuperscript{62} Memo, Odeen & Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 6 March 1972, folder Verification Panel Meeting – SALT 3/8/72 [1 of 2], Box H-010, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
\textsuperscript{64} Memo, Moorer to Laird, 6 March 1972, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 234.
forward basing meant that the Soviets would require between 60 and 70 Y-class submarines to match the on-station performance of the United States’ 41 Polaris-type boats.\textsuperscript{66} The White House also expected that as the Moscow Summit approached, the consensus over SLBM inclusion would break down.\textsuperscript{67} In private conversation with Nixon, both Smith and Rogers indicated a willingness to exclude SLBM from the agreement, rather than let SALT fail entirely, a position quite different from Defense and JCS’s insistence that SLBM be included at all costs.\textsuperscript{68} Ironically, Nixon himself appears to have questioned whether SLBM inclusion was all that important, though Kissinger assured him that it was, if only to ward off conservative opposition.\textsuperscript{69} Despite the surface consensus on SLBM inclusion, Nixon and Kissinger had good reason to wonder whether the Administration’s position might crack under hard bargaining.

Nixon met with the NSC principals on 17 March 1972 to discuss outstanding SALT issues, virtually none of which had been resolved by the Verification Panel’s studies and discussion earlier that month. At the meeting, Defense and ACDA clashed repeatedly over how the US Delegation should open SALT VII in Helsinki. Laird and Nitze argued that the Delegation should at least present Defense’s hard-site proposal, while Smith claimed this was entirely non-negotiable with the Soviets. Smith believed that the best ABM deal was a one-for-one Safeguard-for-Moscow arrangement, but at this point was primarily concerned with making

\textsuperscript{66} Memo, Odeen to Kissinger, 9 March 1972, folder SALT Talks (Helinski) (sic) Vol. 17 Jan-Apr 1972 [1 of 3], Box 882, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
\textsuperscript{67} Memo, Odeen to Kissinger, 11 March 1972, folder Verification Panel Meeting – SALT 3/15/72, Box H-011, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
sure that Laird’s hard-site scheme did not bog down the Delegation’s instructions. For the time being, there was greater consensus on the SLBM issue. Kissinger worried that absent an agreement the Soviets might build upwards of 70 Y-class boats by the end of the decade, an assessment with which both Laird and Smith agreed. Rogers and Laird also concurred that a SALT agreement that did not include SLBM would face serious skepticism from Congress, since conservative Senators were looking to Nixon to extract as many restrictions on offensive forces from the Soviets as possible. Although it was no doubt comforting to see such consensus on an important issue like SLBM inclusion, the meeting did little to resolve Defense and ACDA’s differences over ABM policy.

With so little time left, Nixon was increasingly concerned that the divisions within the government might destroy SALT’s chances at the last second. Nixon remained afraid that overruling Laird or Moorer would cause them to take their opposition public to conservative Senators like John Tower and journalists like William Buckley. At the same time, Nixon worried that giving too much negotiating authority to State or ACDA would lead the US Delegation to move too quickly and to provoke the very battle with Defense and JCS that Nixon and Kissinger had sought to avoid. Given the positive response that the 20 May 1971 Agreement had received on the left, Nixon was reassured that virtually any SALT agreement would be supported by proponents of the Cambridge Approach as a stabilizing influence on superpower relations. Nixon did not believe he could count on the support of Philadelphia Approach advocates on the right, who would scrutinize any agreement closely to determine

whether it was to the United States’ advantage or not.\textsuperscript{73} Nixon felt trapped between the Soviets, on the one hand, and US conservatives, on the other. The key, as always, was to find some agreement that was acceptable to both parties, while also avoiding any public indication of the differing motives. In a meeting with Nixon on 21 March 1972, Smith actually suggested that Nixon make a private appeal on SLBM inclusion directly to the Soviet leadership, as one way to head off possible conservative criticism of the SALT agreement.\textsuperscript{74} Unbeknownst to Smith, Nixon had already authorized such an initiative.

Fearing the consequences of a last-minute interagency dispute on SALT policy, Nixon and Kissinger had decided early in 1972 that the final major SALT bargain would take place under conditions of extreme secrecy, via backchannel negotiations. The Soviets were not stupid, and were well aware that the acceleration of the ULMS program raised the stakes for SLBM inclusion, freezing Soviet SLBM construction while the US prepared to leap ahead in SLBM technology. Dobrynin said as much in meetings with Kissinger on 15 February and 1 March 1972, claiming that the Soviets could not reasonably consider an SLBM freeze while the United States remained so obviously interested in advanced SLBM technology. In response, Kissinger dangled the possibility of an ABM-for-SLBM bargain in these meetings.\textsuperscript{75} On 9 March 1972, Kissinger made his move, suggesting a new SLBM proposal to Dobrynin that would allow the Soviets to replace their old ICBMs with newer SLBMs, thus allowing the Soviets to continue

their Y-class construction program in a limited way during the freeze.\textsuperscript{76} On 17 March, Kissinger told Dobrynin that Nixon was considering a two-for-two ABM deal, but only if the Soviets agreed to include SLBM. Dobrynin’s record of the meeting indicates that Kissinger offered to slip the SLBM freeze date back to 31 July 1972, which Kissinger estimated would allow the Soviets to construct approximately 47-48 Y-class boats. Dobrynin also reported Kissinger’s suggestion that Soviet SLBM levels could be further increased by decommissioning older ICBMs, perhaps allowing the Soviets upwards of 55 Y-class boats.\textsuperscript{77} Hoping to avoid a fatal confrontation within the government, Kissinger once again assured Smith that there was no backchannel negotiation going on.\textsuperscript{78} As in the previous year, the Soviets were not quick in responding to Nixon’s backchannel SALT initiative. On 30 March 1972, Nixon received a private letter from Brezhnev, saying only that the Soviets had received Nixon’s SLBM proposal and were considering it.\textsuperscript{79}

The Soviets were slow in responding to Kissinger’s backchannel initiative, so Nixon decided to put the ABM-for-SLBM proposal into the front channel negotiations, as well. On 23 March 1972, Nixon issued NSDM 158, containing instructions for the US SALT Delegation for SALT VII in Helsinki. The Delegation was authorized to link explicitly the ABM and SLBM questions, offering to accept a two-for-two ABM agreement if the Soviets would agree to include SLBM in the freeze. If, after three weeks, the Soviets had still not accepted SLBM inclusion, Nixon would review the issue once again. In the meantime, the Delegation was instructed to


\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Soviet-American Relations}, 615-627.

\textsuperscript{78} Memo, Sonnenfeldt & Odeen to Kissinger, 25 March 1972, folder SALT Talks (Helsinki) (sic) Vol. 17 Jan-Apr 1972 [1 of 3], Box 882, NSC Files, Nixon Library.

focus its efforts on a number of corollary issues.\textsuperscript{80}

Aside from the big questions of ABM and SLBM, there remained a number of important details concerning modernization and verification under the interim freeze. For example, the Delegation was instructed to insist that mobile ICBMs be banned under the terms of the interim freeze, since verifying the number of mobile ICBMs deployed was very difficult. Furthermore, the Delegation was to press for an explicit definition of what constituted a “heavy” ICBM. At the previous round, the Soviets had agreed that under the terms of the freeze they would not replace “light” ICBMs with “heavy” ICBMs. Without definitions for these missile categories, the Administration worried that the Soviets would deploy missiles of any size they desired, and claim that they were “light” missiles. To further verify the restrictions on heavy ICBM deployment, the Delegation was also ordered to insist that the Soviets promise not to increase the size of their missile silos – silo reconstruction was more readily visible via satellite reconnaissance than the actual contents of the silo itself.\textsuperscript{81}

Corollary constraints on radar controls for the ABM agreement also remained an important topic at SALT VII. The Soviets had agreed in principle to the United States’ MARC concept, but further negotiations were necessary to determine how many MARCs each ABM site would receive. The Delegation was also instructed to insist on some level of control over OLPAR deployments outside of agreed-upon MARCs. Finally, the Delegation was to press the Soviets for a special withdrawal provision in the ABM agreement, stating that if an offensive forces agreement were not concluded within the next five years, the United States would

\textsuperscript{80} National Security Decision Memorandum 158, 23 March 1972, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 243

withdraw from the ABM Treaty.\textsuperscript{82}

In issuing these instructions to the Delegation, Nixon was taking a serious risk of alienating the Defense Department, demonstrated by Tucker’s analysis of NSDM 158. The NSDM 158 instructions contained no reference to the hard-site defense ABM that Defense had preferred. On the other hand, the NSDM instructions were not quite as bad as Tucker had feared. Nixon still insisted that SLBM be included in the agreement, which was a major objective of Defense and JCS. Furthermore, Tucker was encouraged by Nixon’s desire to link the ABM Treaty closely to the future offensive forces agreement, either through text within the Treaty itself or through some sort of agreed interpretation. As a result, Tucker recommended that Laird avoid rocking the boat, for the time being. If Nixon later decided to fall back on SLBM, Tucker believed that there would still be time for Laird to take action. In the meantime, Tucker suggested that Defense begin serious consideration of how to begin the second phase of SALT.\textsuperscript{83} Tucker’s analysis of NSDM 158 suggests that Nixon and Kissinger’s concerns about Defense’s loyalty on SALT may have been overstated. At the end of the day, Nixon’s overriding Defense’s ABM preferences did not lead to an immediate public rupture. On the other hand, Tucker’s benign advice to Laird was still contingent on Nixon’s behavior, especially his including SLBM in the interim freeze. Defense’s loyalty to Nixon on SALT remained conditional.

Despite the United States’ insistence, the Soviets were slow to take up the issue of SLBM limitations at SALT VII. On 30 March 1972, Smith reported that the Soviets continued to insist that an ABM and ICBM agreement would be “sufficient,” though Semenov had refused to comment on whether this meant a total rejection of SLBM inclusion or not. Smith was


optimistic that this change in language indicated that the Soviets were preparing to accept SLBM inclusion.\textsuperscript{84} Despite playing coy on SLBM, Semenov seemed very interested to hear the details of the United States’ new ABM position.\textsuperscript{85} After receiving authorization from Kissinger, Smith presented the United States’ 2-for-2 ABM proposal and SLBM freeze to Semenov in a private meeting on 6 April 1972.\textsuperscript{86} Semenov remained unenthusiastic about the SLBM proposal, claiming that the Soviets still believed an ICBM-only freeze to be “sufficient.” Smith was confused by the Soviets’ intransigence on the issue, and increasingly convinced that the Soviets would not accept SLBM inclusion in the first phase of SALT.\textsuperscript{87}

While the SLBM issue remained stalled, Kissinger ordered Smith to continue presenting the details of the United States’ two-for-two ABM proposal to Semenov, in hopes that moving closer to conclusion on ABM agreement would entice the Soviets into accepting SLBM in the freeze. Smith presented the details of the proposal to Semenov beginning on 10 April 1971.\textsuperscript{88} The United States’ new two-for-two ABM deal would still allow asymmetric deployments, with the Soviets receiving one NCA defense site and one ICBM defense site, while the United States was allowed two ICBM defense sites.\textsuperscript{89} With Kissinger’s permission, Smith also sounded out Semenov on the possibility of a two-for-two symmetrical ABM agreement, in which each side

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{84} Backchannel Message, Smith to Kissinger, 30 March 1972, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 246.
\item \textsuperscript{85} Backchannel Message, Smith to Kissinger, 4 April 1972, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 251.
\item \textsuperscript{87} Backchannel Message, Smith to Kissinger, 8 April 1972, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 254.
\item \textsuperscript{88} Telcon, Kissinger & Smith, 10 April 1972, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 255.
\item \textsuperscript{89} Telegram from the Department of State to the SALT Delegation, 10 April 1972, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 256.
\end{itemize}
would receive one NCA defense site and one ICBM defense site.\textsuperscript{90} Having concluded that hard-site defense was well and dead, Laird also shifted positions in mid-April, claiming to favor a two-for-two symmetrical ABM agreement, since Defense believed that an NCA-defense site would have greater military utility than a second Safeguard site.\textsuperscript{91} For one final time, Defense and ACDA came together in a strange convergence on ABM. Nixon was furious, but ultimately unwilling to override both Laird and Smith on a major SALT issue.\textsuperscript{92} The Soviets also showed much more interest in the two-for-two symmetrical proposal, so the White House ordered Delegation should adopt that as the official US proposal.\textsuperscript{93}

With the siting issue largely resolved, negotiations on ABM were making rapid progress. In early April the Soviet Delegation had recognized the need for some control over OLPARs. The Soviets agreed that each side would limit the power-aperture ratio of any phased array radars deployed outside of designated MARCs. Since ABM tasks required high-power radars, this agreement would effectively prevent the deployment of a virtual ABM radar network, since lower-powered radars could not be quickly re-tasked for ABM missions. The exact allowed level remained a point of contention, but Soviet agreement in principle was a major gain.\textsuperscript{94} The US Delegation also discovered a compromise on ABM siting that would meet Soviet demands for “equal security.” The Soviets had previously insisted that they be allowed two ICBM

\textsuperscript{93} Memo, Odeen to Kissinger, 23 April 1972, folder SALT Talks (Helinski) (sic) Vol. 17 Jan-Apr 1972 [1 of 3], Box 882, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
defense sites to the United States’ one, since Soviet ICBM fields were approximately half as large as those of the United States. Of course, the United States was resistant to the idea of giving the Soviets an advantage in ABM sites. The US Delegation believed that the issue could be resolved if the geographic footprint of an “ICBM defense site” were doubled from 70km to 150km. The larger footprint would allow the Soviets to deploy a single “ICBM defense site” that would actually cover two of their adjacent ICBM facilities. By mid-April, the only major outstanding ABM issues were the number of MARCs that each side would be allowed, and whether ICBM defense sites would employ the MARC concept, or more specific radar restrictions. The Defense Department also periodically pushed to revisit the question of whether MARCs should be accompanied by some qualitative controls on ABM radars, especially as the Soviets pushed to be allowed more and more MARCs for their ABM sites. The MARC compromise did not fit with Defense’s desire to build a hard-site defense ABM system, which would require radars to be dispersed over a large area, not concentrated in a few predetermined sites. For a while in early May, the Soviets also preferred basic numerical and qualitative limits on radars, but eventually came to accept MARCs as sufficient for NCA defense. Much like the US Defense Department, however, the Soviets continued to insist that radars for ICBM defense would have to be more widely distributed to provide the necessary coverage of dispersed missile silos. Given the Nixon Administration’s commitment to the MARC framework, the final radar compromise remained elusive.

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95 Telegram, US SALT Delegation to Secretary of State, 14 April 1972, folder SALT Briefing Book 4/15/72 Carter, Box H-011, NSC Institutional Files, Nixon Library.
While progress on the ABM agreement was rapid, the SLBM issue remained stalled. After being rebuffed by Semenov, Smith had concluded that the Soviets were unlikely to accept SLBM inclusion. By mid-April, the Delegation was recommending that the Administration begin studying the contours of a SALT agreement absent SLBM. The NSC staff was reaching similar conclusions, believing that Nixon and Kissinger should begin preparing the ground for a first phase agreement without SLBM, by extracting a promise from the Soviets to discuss SLBM immediately in SALT’s second phase. On 16 April 1972, as Kissinger was preparing to depart for Moscow for last-minute summit preparations, Nixon said that he would accept a SALT agreement absent SLBM, if that were the price of concluding the agreement at Moscow. Kissinger remained concerned that SALT absent SLBM would face strong domestic opposition, especially from Moorer, but Nixon was convinced that he could make it work, if there were no other way. Kissinger departed for Moscow with instructions to seek SLBM inclusion if possible, but to compromise if necessary.

On 21 April 1972, Kissinger arrived in Moscow for a secret meeting with the Soviet leadership on the agenda for the upcoming summit. Kissinger and Brezhnev spent a good deal of time discussing the ongoing conflict in Vietnam, and how it would relate to Nixon and Brezhnev’s summit discussions. On the second day, Kissinger and Brezhnev’s conversation turned to SALT. Brezhnev offered what he characterized as two major concessions on SALT.

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First, Brezhnev agreed in principle to a two-for-two symmetrical ABM agreement, along the lines of that suggested by Smith in Helsinki. Second, Brezhnev agreed to include SLBM in the interim freeze agreement. Under the Brezhnev SLBM proposal, the United States would receive 41 SSBN and 656 SLBM under the freeze, while the Soviets would receive 62 SSBN and 950 SLBM, after dismantling their older ICBM. Brezhnev’s proposal claimed that the Soviet advantage in SLBM numbers was meant as compensation for European nuclear weapons. Kissinger rejected the idea of giving the Soviets compensation for allied nuclear forces, but agreed that the general outline of the proposal was probably acceptable. Kissinger said he would check back with Washington, and then order the US Delegation to introduce such a proposal in Helsinki, which the Soviet Delegation could then accept.  

The Kissinger–Brezhnev deal concluded the final major deadlock on SALT policy and paved the way for the conclusion of SALT at the Moscow summit.

As with the 20 May 1971 Agreement, Kissinger’s backchannel breakthrough in Moscow would face serious difficulties in implementation, beginning with Nixon himself. Waiting for Kissinger’s return from Moscow, Nixon became increasingly nervous about how the private SALT bargain would be received by the rest of the government, as well as concerned that Kissinger was not pushing Brezhnev hard enough on Vietnam. Nixon also appeared to be confused by reports arriving simultaneously from Kissinger in Moscow and Smith in Helsinki, fearing that Smith would gain the credit that Nixon desired for the final SLBM breakthrough. Kissinger emerged from his meetings with Brezhnev convinced that he had saved the Nixon-
Brezhnev summit from collapse in the face of Vietnam and SALT pressures.\textsuperscript{106} Haig warned Kissinger that Nixon was in a foul mood, and increasingly worried that Kissinger himself was trying to steal credit for SALT.\textsuperscript{107} Nixon and Kissinger shared a tense meeting on 24 April 1972 at Camp David, by the end of which Nixon was in a much better mood and ready to move forward with announcing the backchannel SALT breakthrough.\textsuperscript{108}

The Brezhnev SLBM deal also provoked disagreements within the Administration more broadly. Defense and JCS generally supported the new SLBM policy, relieved that SLBM was to be included in the agreement at all. State and ACDA were more skeptical of Brezhnev’s terms, since the new agreement would give the Soviets a large numerical advantage in terms of SLBM.\textsuperscript{109} Smith and Rogers attempted to re-draft the Brezhnev terms into a “Nixon proposal” on SLBM more favorable to the United States, which would replace the specific unequal numerical limits for a more generic freeze date, while allowing both sides to replace ICBMs with SLBMs under the freeze. In theory, Smith’s proposed agreement would allow the Soviets to deploy the same number of SLBMs as the Brezhnev terms, but would make the specific numerical disparity less clear, since the United States would also retain the right to deploy new SLBMs, if it chose.\textsuperscript{110} The White House defended the Brezhnev terms, claiming that any change in the formula would cause the negotiations to break down.\textsuperscript{111} Furthermore, the White House claimed that since the Soviets would have to dismantle all of their older ICBMs in order to reach the 950

\textsuperscript{108} \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Editorial Note 267.
\textsuperscript{109} Smith, \textit{Doubletalk}, 372-378.
\textsuperscript{110} Memo, Odeen to Kissinger, 28 April 1972, folder SALT Talks (Helinski) (sic) Vol. 17 Jan-Apr 1972 [1 of 3], Box 882, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
\textsuperscript{111} \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XIV, Editorial Note 174.
SLBM limit, in reality the Soviet advantage in SSBNs was closer to 50 to 41, which was acceptable given the United States’ major advantages in SSBN operations and time-on-station.\footnote{Memo, Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 28 April 1972, folder SALT Talks (Helinski) (sic) Vol. 17 Jan-Apr 1972 [1 of 3], Box 882, NSC Files, Nixon Library.} Given the fact that the Soviets were building SLBM and the United States was not, Nixon was eager to accept any SLBM limitation the Soviets offered, rather than risk a Soviet rejection of a counterproposal. Nixon was apoplectic at what he perceived to be a betrayal by Smith and Rogers, who had previously favored an SLBM deal similar to that proposed by Brezhnev, but now argued that the United States should continue pushing the Soviets for more. Kissinger claimed that Rogers’ opposition was driven by his ignorance of the issues, ignoring the fact that Kissinger himself had often argued to keep Rogers in the dark about SALT policy\footnote{Conversation Among Nixon et al, 1 May 1972, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 270.} Trust within the Administration was at all all-time low.

The Brezhnev SLBM proposal is a point of considerable controversy in the memoir accounts of SALT. Smith and Garthoff believed that the numbers contained in the Brezhnev proposal had likely originated in Kissinger’s backchannel discussions with Dobrynin. Smith noted that the 62 boat/950 SLBM figure was eerily similar to the most recent NIE on Soviet Strategic Attack Forces, introduced in the fall of 1971.\footnote{Smith, \textit{Doubletalk}, 372.} Garthoff went further, claiming that Kissinger presented the specific 62/950 formula to Dobrynin during their 9 March 1972 meeting.\footnote{Raymond Garthoff, \textit{Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan}, Revised Edition (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1994), 183-184, esp. fn85. As Garthoff notes, Kissinger’s memoirs also allude to the idea that the 62/950 figure was originally Kissinger’s idea (Henry Kissinger, \textit{The White House Years}, New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1979, 1149). The evidence from Kissinger and Dobrynin’s conversations suggests otherwise.} The existing negotiating record suggests that the specific numbers contained within

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\footnote{Memo, Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 28 April 1972, folder SALT Talks (Helinski) (sic) Vol. 17 Jan-Apr 1972 [1 of 3], Box 882, NSC Files, Nixon Library.}
\footnote{Smith, \textit{Doubletalk}, 372.}
the Brezhnev SLBM proposal were, in fact, Soviet in origin. As noted above, on 9 March 1972 Kissinger reported discussing SLBM with Dobrynin only in the most general of terms; Dobrynin’s report for that meeting contained no mention of SALT at all.\textsuperscript{116} On 17 March 1972, Dobrynin reported a more in-depth conversation on SLBM levels with Kissinger, but the numbers reported by Dobrynin do not match those contained in the later Brezhnev proposal.\textsuperscript{117} The origin of the Brezhnev figure is therefore confusing. Negotiations leading up to the Moscow summit indicated that the Soviet interpretation of the Brezhnev terms was that they would begin the freeze with 48 modern Y-class boats carrying 768 SLBM, after which they would dismantle 182 of their older ICBMs to reach the 950 SLBM limit.\textsuperscript{118} Kissinger’s contribution to this Soviet calculation appears to have been limited to his suggestion at the 17 March 1972 meeting with Dobrynin that the Soviets could start with 48 SLBM under the terms of the freeze. In fact, at the 17 March 1972 meeting Dobrynin recorded that Kissinger suggested that if the Soviets replaced all of their older ICBMs, they would receive a total of 55 SSBNs during the freeze.\textsuperscript{119} This number was different from the 62 boat upper limit presented by Brezhnev in Moscow.

Unfortunately, Kissinger’s 17 March proposal had been based on faulty intelligence of Soviet SLBM levels, which had overestimated the number of Y-class boats that the Soviets had in service. As a result, Kissinger had estimated that the Soviets would receive 48 boats at the start of the freeze, when in fact this figure was higher than the actual number of Soviet SSBNs that

\textsuperscript{116} Soviet-American Relations, 605-611.
\textsuperscript{117} Soviet-American Relations, 615-627.
\textsuperscript{118} Memo, Haig to Kissinger, 20 May 1972, folder President’s Moscow, Iran, Poland, Austria Trips May-June 1972 TOHAK (File No. 1) The Situation Room [Part 3], Box 479, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
\textsuperscript{119} Soviet-American Relations, 623.
would be operational and under construction when the freeze began.\textsuperscript{120} Although this misestimate accounts for the Soviets’ later insistence on beginning the freeze with 48 boats, it does not explain where Brezhnev’s numbers came from. Given the intense secrecy that surrounded their negotiations, we cannot entirely exclude the possibility that Kissinger passed a more detailed SLBM proposal to Dobrynin at some point during their March 1972 discussions, but no documentary evidence exists for such a proposal. In the end, the similarity of the Soviet 62/950 SLBM figure to previous US intelligence estimates appears to have been a coincidence. The Soviets would ultimately compromise with the United States on the meaning of the 48 boat figure during negotiations with Kissinger at the Moscow summit. Although Kissinger might have done more to clarify the meaning of the Soviet proposal when he first received it, the confusion over SLBM was ultimately the result of the Soviets’ willingness to rely on faulty US intelligence estimates to establish SALT levels, rather than disclose their own force levels to the United States in negotiations.

Smith and Garthoff also accused Kissinger of manipulating intelligence estimates to make the Brezhnev proposal look more appealing. While NIE 11-8-71 on Soviet strategic attack forces had described the Brezhnev terms as the high end of possible future Soviet SLBM deployments, by late April 1972 the NSC staff was claiming that the 950 SLBM level lay squarely in the middle of projected future Soviet SLBM deployments, with the high end estimate closer to 1,170 SLBM.\textsuperscript{121} As with the claim that Kissinger created Brezhnev’s 950 SLBM figure, there is no direct documentation to support the claim that Kissinger intentionally doctored intelligence estimates. It is true that Nixon and Kissinger quickly began defending Brezhnev’s

\textsuperscript{121} Smith, \textit{Doubletalk}, 373; Garthoff, \textit{Détente and Confrontation}, 185-186.
950 SLBM figure as being less than the total possible Soviet SLBM deployment.\textsuperscript{122} US estimates of future Soviet Y-class deployments had been in flux for several years, with the upper estimate rising from 50 boats in 1968 to 60 boats in 1970.\textsuperscript{123} Suggesting that the Soviets might build upwards of 70-80 boats in the coming decade was not so far outside the realm of possibility as Kissinger’s critics have claimed, even if it was unlikely.\textsuperscript{124} Whatever the analytical merit of the new estimate, its timing was almost certainly driven by a desire to justify the value of the Brezhnev SBLM deal for the United States. Behind the question of intelligence estimates lies a deeper and more difficult dispute about whether the Brezhnev SBLM deal was a good one for the United States, or not. This larger question awaits better access to Soviet SALT sources.

These later SALT debates within the Administration were generally overshadowed by much more violent disputes occurring on the other side of the world. On 30 March 1972, the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) began a major spring offensive against South Vietnam.\textsuperscript{125} Although looking to distance himself from the ongoing conflict, Nixon worried that attending the Moscow summit without first taking some military response would make it appear that the United States was abandoning South Vietnam.\textsuperscript{126} On 15 April 1972, the United States military

\textsuperscript{122} Memo, Kissinger to Nixon, 1 May 1972, folder SALT Talks (Helenski) (sic) Vol. 18 May-Aug 1972 [2 of 3], Box 883, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
\textsuperscript{124} During Congressional SALT testimony over the summer of 1972, the White House would defend the higher SBLM figure not as an official “estimate,” which would rely on some evaluation of Soviet intentions, but rather as a description of the outermost possible limit of Soviet behavior (Memo, Odeen & Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 11 July 1972, folder SALT Talks (Helenski [sic] Vol. 18 May-Aug. 1972 [1 of 3], Box 883, NSC Files, Nixon Library).
\textsuperscript{125} FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XIV, Editorial Note 73.
\textsuperscript{126} FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XIV, Editorial Note 89.
began a major bombardment of the Hanoi-Haiphong area in response to the NVA invasion.\textsuperscript{127} The Soviets protested the bombing campaign, but not as forcefully as some in the US government had expected. For the time being, it seemed, the Soviets were willing to proceed with the Moscow summit, even as the United States bombed North Vietnam.\textsuperscript{128} On 1 May 1972, Nixon received a letter from Brezhnev threatening to cancel the summit of the United States further escalated its military activity against North Vietnam.\textsuperscript{129} The possibility of cancellation was sufficiently real that the White House drafted a “Contingency Statement” criticizing the Soviets for imperiling so many important negotiations, as well as aiding in North Vietnamese aggression.\textsuperscript{130} As the US Delegation returned to Helsinki to work out the final terms of the Brezhnev SLBM deal for conclusion at the Moscow summit, it remained an open question whether the summit would happen at all.

\textsuperscript{130} “Contingency Statement if Soviet Cancel or Postpone the Summit Meeting,” folder President’s Moscow Trip May [1972] [part 2], Box 475, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
CHAPTER 8 – Moscow and Back

By the time Nixon departed for Moscow in late May 1972, most of the details of the SALT Agreements had been resolved, with only a few minor points remaining to be concluded. The United States and the Soviet Union would accept numerical equality in ABM deployments. Both superpowers would also temporarily refrain from building more strategic offensive missiles, an agreement which granted the Soviets a sizeable numerical advantage in launchers. The Soviets would further limit their deployment of large ICBMs, agreeing not to replace older, smaller ICBMs with newer, larger ones during the freeze period. Especially important to US hawks were those things not constrained under the agreement: MIRV, bombers, and tactical aircraft, all areas of US advantage. Although a few points remained to be worked out at the summit, in general the 1972 SALT Agreements provided a good framework on which to build future arms control negotiations.

Since the SALT Delegations remained in Helsinki, the summit itself was a needlessly confusing affair, a clear example of how not to conduct arms control negotiations. Nixon and Brezhnev quickly ran into difficulties when they attempted to conclude personally an agreement limiting the allowed dimensions of intercontinental missiles and silos. The more detailed negotiations between Kissinger and Gromyko concerning SLBM inclusion and corollary missile constraints were further complicated by the need to re-route all secure communications between Moscow and Helsinki through Washington, a frustrating situation for all parties that fed the personal animosity existing between Kissinger and the SALT Delegates. Despite these difficulties, though, the Administration returned with a workable SALT agreement along the 20 May 1971 lines.

The second SALT test came over the summer of 1972, when the Moscow SALT
Agreements were submitted for Congressional approval. Given the deep differences between proponents of the Cambridge and Philadelphia approaches, the passage of SALT through Congress was by no means assured, since Nixon and Kissinger could not definitively state what the purpose of the new agreements was without alienating half of the foreign policy community. Having balanced competing views of SALT within the government for years, Nixon and Kissinger now deployed their process of arms control compromise more broadly, seeking to appeal separately to advocates of the Cambridge and Philadelphia approaches to build a tenuous pro-SALT coalition. In many ways, the agreements were an easier sell to proponents of the Cambridge Approach, who readily approved of the steep limitation on ABM and the limitations on large Soviet ICBMs. Philadelphia Approach advocates were more skeptical, decrying the Soviets’ numerical superiority in missiles under the Interim Agreement. Despite this opposition, Nixon was ultimately successful in winning approval for the agreements, largely by putting off major disagreements into SALT’s second phase. To proponents of the Cambridge Approach, the Administration dangled the possibility of a second, zero-ABM agreement in the coming years; to proponents of the Philadelphia Approach, Nixon promised a tougher offensive forces treaty that would eliminate the Soviets’ numerical advantage. The multiple rationales and delayed promises proved effective in the summer of 1972, though they also increased the possibility of future recrimination. In the end, Nixon’s original precedents in managing SALT policy proved difficult to escape.

SALT VII Continues

On 1 May 1972, Nixon issued NSDM 164, modifying the Delegation’s SALT VII instructions. NSDM 164 ordered the Delegation to prepare a two-for-two symmetrical ABM agreement, with MARCs and OLPAR restrictions, as well as an interim freeze containing the
Brezhnev SLBM terms. The instructions provoked an immediate row over how best to link the ABM Treaty to the future negotiation of a permanent offensive forces agreement. Laird had insisted on strengthening the language in the ABM Treaty, such that the Soviets were aware that if no offensive forces agreement was concluded within the next five years, the United States would automatically withdraw from the ABM Treaty. The Delegation unanimously opposed making such a statement to the Soviets, fearing that if the United States began issuing unilateral statements on the purpose of the agreements, it might provoke the Soviets into issuing statements of their own on FBS or British nuclear forces. The NSC staff believed that this issue was best delayed until the summit itself. The negotiations had only weeks remaining, yet delay remained a key tactic for smoothing out bureaucratic disagreement.

The scuffle over the NSDM 164 instructions paled in comparison to the growing confusion in Helsinki over how to implement the Brezhnev SLBM terms. By the middle of May, Dobryin and Semenov were telling Kissinger and Smith that the Soviets would begin the freeze with 48 Y-class boats; the Soviets would replace old ICBMs to reach the 950 SLBM limit, and then (so they claimed) be able to exceed the 950 SLBM limit by replacing their older G- and H-class boats. The US Delegation insisted instead that the Soviets would begin the freeze with 41 Y-class boats, carrying approximately 640 SLBM, which was the number of Y-class boats that

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the CIA now claimed the Soviets had. The Soviets also had 100 SLBM on older G- and H-class boats, which meant that the Soviets would start with a total of 740 SLBM in the freeze. Beyond that, the Soviets would have to retire all of their 209 older SS-7 and SS-8 ICBMs to reach the final 950 SLBM total. Semenov rejected the US Delegation’s interpretation as inconsistent with Brezhnev’s original proposal, claiming that the Soviets had been promised 48 Y-class boats at the start of the freeze. In fact, 48 boats is what Kissinger erroneously offered the Soviets in his 17 March 1972 backchannel meeting with Dobrynin on SALT. Kissinger claimed at the time not to know the origin of the 48 boat number, rather than admitting that the number had originated in his discussions with Dobrynin. Rather than allow the Soviets a free ride on SLBM, Smith recommended that Nixon fall back to an ICBM-only freeze, perhaps with a tacit agreement on SLBM production. To top it off, the Soviet Delegation also introduced a unilateral statement claiming that their advantage in SLBM numbers was meant as compensation for the British and French nuclear forces, a position which the US Delegation vehemently rejected.

The US Delegation originally sought to bypass the 48-boat dispute by suggesting that the Soviets drop all reference to the starting number of SSBN in the agreement. Instead, the agreement would allow the Soviets to build up to the agreed 62/950 level by replacing old missiles for every new boat beyond those “currently operational and under construction” at the

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5 Telegram, US Delegation to Secretary of State, 17 May 1972, folder SALT Briefing Book May 18, 1972 Dr. Kissinger [Part 1], Box 483, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
9 “Unilateral Statements by Each Side,” folder President’s Moscow, Iran, Poland, Austria Trips May-June 1972 TOHAK (File No. 1) [Part 1], Box 479, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
start of the freeze. US intelligence estimates concluded that the Soviets had approximately 41 Y-
class SSBN operational and under construction, rather than the 48 to which the Soviets claimed
they had been promised, so the new proposal was effectively a restatement of the previous US
proposal, in less explicit terms. The issue became even more confused when the Soviets
insisted that the 48-boat figure was the number of Soviet SSBN currently operational and under
construction. This raised the question of whether the Soviets were using a different definition of
“operational or under construction.” Submarines were usually constructed in factories in
segments before final assembly on a slipway. Because monitoring factory progress using remote
reconnaissance was virtually impossible, US intelligence agencies usually began counting a new
SSBN as “under construction” when the Soviets began assembling its components at a shipyard.
Of course, the Soviets knew how many SSBN components they were constructing in factories, so
perhaps their insistence on the 48 boat figure was linked to the number of submarine parts, rather
than the number of boats under assembly. In any event, absent a clear definition on what it
meant for a submarine to be “under construction,” this attempt to replace the 48-boat figure was
unlikely to succeed. By late May 1972, State was convinced that the United States should
attempt to shift SLBM from the formal interim agreement to some sort of informal exchange of
unilateral declarations. SLBM would be the most complicated SALT issue discussed at the
summit.

10 Backchannel Message, Smith to Kissinger, 20 May 1972, FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXXII,
Document 287.
11 Memo, Haig to Kissinger, 20 May 1972, folder President’s Moscow, Iran, Poland, Austria
Trips May-June 1972 TOHAK (File No. 1) The Situation Room [Part 3], Box 479, NSC Files,
Nixon Library.
12 Memo, Johnson to Rogers, 23 May 1972, folder President’s Moscow, Iran, Poland, Austria
Trips May-June 1972 TOHAK (File No. 1) The Situation Room [Part 2], Box 479, NSC Files,
Nixon Library.
Despite the impasse on SLBM levels, the final several weeks of SALT VII prior to the Moscow summit were especially productive, with numerous Soviet concessions on corollary issues. The biggest breakthroughs came in the issue of radar controls for the ABM agreement. The Defense Department, and especially Nitze, continued to insist that ICBM defense should rely instead on strict qualitative controls over ABM radars, in an effort to revive some aspects of its hard-site ABM proposal. Others on the Delegation, especially Harold Brown, continued to defend the MARC concept for ICBM defense, arguing that qualitative restraints on specific radars would be non-negotiable, and leave the United States more vulnerable to Soviet cheating. The White House agreed with Brown on this issue, and ordered the Delegation to continue pressing the Soviets to accept MARCs for both NCA defense and ICBM defense. The Soviets continued to resist the application of MARCs to the ICBM defense site, which strengthened Nitze’s hand within the Delegation. Smith ultimately requested permission from Washington to propose separate ABM radar limitations for ICBM defense, which would involve limiting each side to only two high-powered ABM radars per ICBM defense site, along with up to eighteen smaller, less powerful radars. The Soviets quickly accepted this proposal.

With the ABM radar issue settled, the OLPARs question was also quickly resolved. On 22 April 1972, the Soviet Delegation had tentatively agreed to restraints on the power level of OLPARs to 3 million watts per meter squared, a relatively low figure, but soon recanted their

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acceptance. After tremendous pressure from the US Delegation, the Soviets proposed in mid-May that neither side deploy OLPARs with a power-aperture ratio of 10 million watts per meter squared, much higher than the US Delegation thought acceptable. On 17 May 1972, Nixon ordered the US Delegation to continue pressing for OLPARs restrictions along the lines of the earlier US proposal, but to prepare a unilateral statement on OLPARs deployments should the Soviets refuse to compromise. Defense was especially loathe to surrender controls on OLPARs, and advised Nixon to hold firm on the issue until the summit. Despite this, Smith was given the authority to fall back to a unilateral statement on OLPARs if necessary. At the last minute, Semenov agreed to meet the Delegation’s demand for limiting OLPARs to a power-aperture ratio of 3 million watts per meter squared.

In addition to controls over radars, the final weeks of SALT VII saw several breakthroughs on key secondary issues in the SLBM freeze. The first was a question of symmetry in terms of replacement rights. The US SLBM interpretation of 16 May 1972 had insisted that the United States would also retain the right to decommission its older Titan II ICBMS in exchange for newer SLBMS under the freeze, even though the United States had no intention of exercising this right. Although a cosmetic arrangement, Smith believed its

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20 Telegram, US Delegation to SecState, 22 May 1972, folder President’s Moscow, Iran, Poland, Austria Trips May-June 1972 TOHAK (File No. 1) [Part 1], Box 479, NSC Files, Nixon Library; Paul Nitze, From Hiroshima to Glasnost: At the Center of Decision, A Memoir (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1989), 320-321.
inclusion was important, especially to assure Congress that the SLBM freeze was not a blatantly pro-Soviet deal, despite the Soviets’ advantage in SLBM numbers. Smith recommended that Nixon provide Brezhnev with a private guarantee not to exercise this right, if the Soviets would allow it in the agreement.\textsuperscript{22} The Soviet Delegation in Helsinki indicated that such a promise by Nixon would be an acceptable compromise.\textsuperscript{23} It was a small concession by the Soviets, but a relatively important one for US domestic consumption.

One larger SLBM issue that was successfully concluded prior to the summit was the question of how the interim agreement would handle the timing of replacing older missiles with newer SLBMS. Would the Soviets be expected to dismantle their older missiles before beginning construction of a newer SSBN? Could they wait until the new boat had entered service to begin the dismantling process? At least initially, the Soviets were unclear on which they preferred.\textsuperscript{24} Eventually, Semenov claimed that the Soviets preferred to begin decommissioning when a new SSBN was commissioned and entered service; the United States maintained that the Soviets should begin decommissioning when a new SSBN was launched, but before it was tested and commissioned.\textsuperscript{25} Nixon and Kissinger also wanted dismantling procedures that would not impede the United States from starting work on building ULMS in the final year of the freeze, if the program proceeded as planned.\textsuperscript{26} Eventually, the Soviets agreed to

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Backchannel Message, Smith to Kissinger, 19 May 1972, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 283.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Backchannel Message, Smith to Kissinger, 19 May 1972, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 283.
  \item \textsuperscript{25} Telegram, Haig to Kissinger, 20 May 1972, folder President’s Moscow, Iran, Poland, Austria Trips May-June 1972 TOHAK (File No. 1) [Part 1], Box 479, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
  \item \textsuperscript{26} Backchannel Message from Kissinger to Smith, 21 May 1972, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 288.
\end{itemize}
a US proposal that dismantling would need to occur “at the beginning of sea trials of the replacement submarine.” The exact meaning of this framework would come under some scrutiny in the aftermath of the Moscow summit, but for the time being it concluded an important verification issue, enabling the United States’ freedom-to-mix proposal.

The Summit

As a result of this successful last-minute bargaining, when Nixon departed for Moscow the terms of the SALT agreements were largely completed, with only a few issues remaining to be concluded. Three of the remaining issues were very minor. First, the United States continued to insist that mobile ICBMs be banned, while the Soviets preferred that they be allowed. Second, the United States preferred that the ABM Treaty specify that the two ABM sites could not be within 1,500 km of each other, while the Soviets refused to comment. Both of these issues would be easy to conclude, and would take up very little time in the Moscow negotiations.

The third “minor” issue ended up being much more complicated. The United States wanted some definition of “light” versus “heavy” ICBMs included, as well as corollary constraints on silo size, while the Soviets preferred to leave the issue vague. The United States had previously insisted that the Soviets agree that any missile larger than 70 cubic meters in

27 Telegram, US Delegation to SecState, 22 May 1972, folder President’s Moscow, Iran, Poland, Austria Trips May-June 1972 TOHAK (File No. 1) [Part 1], Box 479, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
28 Memo, Odeen & Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 16 May 1972, folder SALT Talks (Helenski) (sic) Vol. 18 May-Aug. 1972 [2 of 3], Box 883, NSC Files, Nixon Library; Telegram, Haig to Kissinger, 20 May 1972, folder President’s Moscow, Iran, Poland, Austria Trips May-June 1972 TOHAK (File No. 1) [Part 1], Box 479, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
29 Paper Prepared by the National Security Council Staff, undated, FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 278; Telegram, Haig to Kissinger, 20 May 1972, folder President’s Moscow, Iran, Poland, Austria Trips May-June 1972 TOHAK (File No. 1) [Part 1], Box 479, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
volume, roughly the size of the Soviet SS-11 missile, would be counted as a “heavy” ICBM. In the lead up to the summit, one possible compromise was that the Soviets would be allowed to deploy light ICBMs up to 10% greater in volume than the SS-11, potentially allowing some wiggle room for future modification and improvement.\(^{31}\) The Soviets refused to include any definition in the agreement, saying that their previous promise not to build more heavy missiles was sufficient.\(^{32}\) The US Delegation made one final attempt, suggesting to the Soviets that a heavy ICBM might be defined loosely as any missile whose volume was “significantly greater” than existing light missiles.\(^{33}\) The Soviets remained opposed to a definition on missile size.\(^{34}\) Given the Soviets’ lack of interest in a definition, Smith believed that the United States would have to fall back to a unilateral statement on missile size and silo modification.\(^{35}\) Kissinger instructed Smith to hold firm on the issue at least until the summit began, but to keep the unilateral statement ready in case it was needed.\(^{36}\) On 22 May 1972, Semenov agreed that the Soviets could accept a guarantee that there would be no significant increase in silo dimensions.\(^{37}\) Although establishing corollary constraints on ICBM size was an important point for verification, Nixon and Kissinger arrived at Moscow ready to fall back on a unilateral statement


\(^{32}\) Telegram, Haig to Kissinger, 20 May 1972, folder President’s Moscow, Iran, Poland, Austria Trips May-June 1972 TOHAK (File No. 1) [Part 1], Box 479, NSC Files, Nixon Library.


\(^{37}\) Telegram, US Delegation to SecState, 22 May 1972, folder President’s Moscow, Iran, Poland, Austria Trips May-June 1972 TOHAK (File No. 1) [Part 1], Box 479, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
by the US Delegation, if necessary. Attempts to negotiate on this point in Moscow would result in some rather pointless drama between Kissinger and the Delegation.

As Nixon and Kissinger departed for Moscow, the single largest remaining dispute concerned the level of SLBM in the agreement. Both sides had agreed in principle that the Soviets would be allowed a total of 62 SSBN and 950 SLBM via replacement of older missiles. The Soviets continued to insist that they would begin the freeze with 48 Y-class boats, as Kissinger had promised them in his March 1972 negotiations with Dobrynin. The largest problem with the Soviet proposal was that gave the Soviets a free ride on their older H- and G-class SSBNs. The US understanding of the 62/950 Brezhnev figure was that the Soviets would have to dismantle all of their older ICBMs and older SLBMs in order to reach this number. At Moscow, Kissinger would begin by insisting that H- and G-class boats counted in the beginning terms of the freeze. Given the marginal military utility and low mechanical reliability of the old Soviet SSBNs, the NSC staff had also formulated a fallback option: Kissinger could exclude G-class boats from the freeze, as long as the Soviets agreed not to modernize their G-class boats with newer missiles. A possible bargain seemed at hand, but the issue remained muddled by the Soviets’ lack of clarity on the terms of their own SLBM proposal. The question of SLBM would be the most confusing and dramatic SALT issue in Moscow.

Although almost all of the major issues had been worked out with the Soviets, SALT remained in danger of failing during the Moscow summit. For starters, up until the last minute it was not clear that the summit would proceed at all. In response to continued fighting in Vietnam, the United States intensified its bombardment of the North as May progressed. Nixon

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38 Memo, Haig to Kissinger, 20 May 1972, folder President’s Moscow, Iran, Poland, Austria Trips May-June 1972 TOHAK (File No. 1) The Situation Room [Part 3], Box 479, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
remained concerned that the Soviets would cancel the summit entirely – a repeat of sorts of the United States’ 1968 summit cancellation, which had torpedoed the Johnson Administration’s SALT efforts. By the spring of 1972, however, the Soviet leadership were deeply committed to SALT. Brezhnev needed a tangible symbol of success to advance his “peace program” and détente. Events in Vietnam did not overshadow this core Soviet objective, so despite the increased tensions the summit, and SALT, proceeded.39

Even as Nixon flew to Moscow, however, SALT was not a done deal. The Administration had spent years managing public opinion on SALT through intense secrecy, seeking to prevent a major clash between proponents of the Cambridge and Philadelphia Approaches over which approach should drive SALT policy. Although discussions in Moscow would also be veiled in secrecy, the moment of truth was approaching: soon, Nixon and Kissinger would need to present their SALT bargain to Congress, and hope that it could stand the scrutiny of both sides. To that end, Nixon set in motion plans to ensure that the Administration’s final SALT agreement would be received well by proponents of both Approaches. While he was in Moscow, Nixon left Haig instructions to manage conservative expectations and reactions to the progress of SALT. Haig was to work closely with Moorer, Laird, and Deputy Secretary of Defense Rush in consulting with Senators Goldwater, Tower, Jackson, and others on the ongoing process.40 Haig was also to keep in contact with prominent conservative intellectuals like Teller,


to ensure that the Administration was laying the groundwork for broad conservative support for the agreement. Nixon instructed Haig to ensure that prominent conservatives understood the logic of the Administration’s bargaining position, and how the upcoming SALT agreement would be to the United States’ advantage.\textsuperscript{41}

Haig quickly set to work trying to wrangle the Administration’s various conservative constituents. Senators Stennis, Tower, and Goldwater all agreed to support Nixon’s SALT proposal, though all three doubted whether the Administration’s request to accelerate the ULMS and B-1 would pass in the Senate. Senator Jackson was less committal. Jackson’s arms control staffer, Richard Perle, claimed that Jackson would want to attach reservations to any arms control agreement that gave the Soviets a numerical advantage. Haig also provided advanced briefings to key conservative intellectuals, including Wohlstetter, Kahn, Brennan, Kinter, and Foster. Haig recommended that Kissinger try to cast the final SALT agreement in terms of the Philadelphia Approach – although the Soviets would receive a basic numerical advantage, they would be unable to extend this numerical lead further, and the agreement would allow the United States to pursue advanced qualitative improvements like ULMS and B-1.\textsuperscript{42} Nixon’s efforts to justify SALT to the public would be complicated by the need to present the agreement in terms of a publicly-acceptable Cambridge Approach, while at the same time privately assuring conservatives that the agreement would promote US advantage per the Philadelphia Approach. An agreement that fit only one of these approaches ran a high risk of being blocked by Congress. Finding a way to justify the agreement along both of these lines would be the single largest challenge faced by the Administration at and after Moscow.

\textsuperscript{42} Telegram, Haig to Kissinger, 22 May 1972, folder President’s Moscow, Iran, Poland, Austria Trips May-June 1972 TOHAK (File No. 1) [Part 1], Box 479, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
Nixon arrived in Moscow on 22 May 1972. While Nixon and Kissinger engaged in direct negotiations with Brezhnev and Gromyko, the US and Soviet SALT Delegations were ordered to remain in Helsinki, to continue detailed negotiations on specific issues. This organizational decision would cause a great deal of difficulty during the Moscow summit negotiations, as Nixon and Kissinger could only communicate with the Delegation by relaying messages via Washington, a cumbersome procedure. In *The White House Years*, Kissinger admitted that leaving the Delegation in Helsinki was a serious mistake. The result would be a great deal of frustration and acrimony, conveyed in the major memoir accounts.

Nixon and Brezhnev quickly set to work negotiating SALT, agreeing to leave most of the details to Kissinger and Gromyko, and to focus on the larger political issues involved. The land-mobile ICBM issue was resolved most quickly. Nixon raised the issue briefly in conversation with Brezhnev on 23 May 1972, but quickly agreed to refer the issues back to the Delegations in Helsinki, in favor of focusing on more important issues. Nixon’s decision effectively ceded any chance of freezing land-mobile ICBMs in the agreement. The Soviet Delegation in Helsinki continued to resist freezing land-mobiles, and in the end the US Delegation introduced a unilateral statement that the United States hoped the Soviets would avoid deploying land-mobile ICBMs during the freeze period. The distance between ABM sites

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43 David Reynolds provides a good overview of the 1972 summit and the variety of different topics that were discussed. On SALT specifically, Reynolds relies heavily on Garthoff’s account (David Reynolds, *Summits: Six Meetings That Shaped the Twentieth Century*, New York: Basic Books, 2007, 223-282).
47 Memo, Haig to Kissinger, 24 May 1972, folder President’s Moscow, Iran, Poland, Austria Trips May-June 1972 TOHAK (File No. 1) The Situation Room [Part 2], Box 479, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
was also concluded with little difficulty. On the morning of 23 May 1972, Brezhnev offered to accept the United States’ formulation to separate the ABM sites by at least 1,500 km.\footnote{Memcon, Brezhnev, Nixon, \textit{et al.}, 23 May 1972, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 295.} Later that afternoon, Brezhnev claimed that he now preferred the sites to be separated by 1,200 km, though Kissinger still believed that Brezhnev would ultimately agree to the 1,500 km figure.\footnote{Memcon, Nixon, Brezhnev, \textit{et al.}, 23 May 1972, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 296; Backchannel Message, Kissinger to Smith, 24 May 1972, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 297.} On 25 May 1972, Gromyko and Leonid Smirnov presented Kissinger with a compromise figure of 1,300 km, claiming that it had originally been introduced by the US Delegation. In an effort to win Soviet acceptance on the United States’ SLBM terms, Kissinger agreed to the 1,300 km figure, ordering the Delegation to accept the figure when the Soviets presented it in Helsinki.\footnote{Memcon, Gromyko, Kissinger, \textit{et al.}, 25 May 1972, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Documents 303; Backchannel Message, Kissinger to Smith, 25 May 1972, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 304.} This final minor point concluded the negotiations on the ABM Treaty. As previously agreed, Nixon and Brezhnev also exchanged a brief note on US ICBM replacement, in which Nixon promised not to dismantle the United States’ older Titan II missiles during the freeze, despite the fact that the Interim Agreement allowed the United States to do so.\footnote{Letter, Nixon to Brezhnev, 28 May 1972, folder Mr. Kissinger’s Conversations in Moscow [1 of 4], Box 73, NSC Files, HAK Office Files, Nixon Library.}

Other aspects of SALT at Moscow were much more difficult. Especially confusing was the question of size limits on ICBMs, whose resolution played out in a comedy of errors. As with the ABM distance question, the ICBM size question was complicated by Brezhnev’s tendency to make several different proposals in rapid succession. On 23 May 1972, Brezhnev suggested that the Soviets would be ready to accept a promise of “no increase” in silo size, as opposed to the “no significant increase” in silo size currently tabled by the Soviet Delegation in
Garthoff later speculated that Nixon and Kissinger had misunderstood Brezhnev’s proposal on silo size, though the negotiating record seems to support the contention that Brezhnev at least began by offering “no increase” in silo dimensions, even though this was totally at odds with the Soviets’ previous position.\(^53\)

When pressed on the question of missile size, Brezhnev was less sure, and claimed that the issue should be put off for discussion in Helsinki. Nixon and Kissinger would not let the issue go, and proposed that “significant” increase in missile size be defined as an increase of 10-15\%. As Garthoff recalled in his memoir, this was the first time that the United States had offered the 10-15\% definition to the Soviets. The US Delegation had had some preliminary discussions with the Soviets at SALT VII about percentile restrictions, and had offered a flat 10\% figure earlier in SALT VII, but had ultimately deferred the issue to Kissinger in Moscow.\(^54\) Kissinger’s recollection that the 10-15\% figure had been previously proposed to and rejected by the Soviets is in error.\(^55\) Brezhnev claimed he would need to consult with his colleagues before making any commitment.\(^56\)

Haig was confused by Kissinger’s initial report of Nixon and Brezhnev’s SALT discussion, which claimed that Brezhnev had agreed to no increase in missile size, rather than silo size.\(^57\) More problematic, Nixon and Kissinger’s proposal that each side be restricted to a 10-15\% increase in missile size would have prevented the United States from deploying Minuteman

\(^{53}\) Garthoff, Détente and Confrontation, 194.
\(^{54}\) Garthoff, Détente and Confrontation, 192-193, esp. fn 102.
\(^{55}\) Kissinger, The White House Years, 1219.
\(^{57}\) Memo, Haig to Kissinger, 23 May 1972, folder President’s Moscow, Iran, Poland, Austria Trips May-June 1972 TOHAK (File No. 1) The Situation Room [Part 2], Box 479, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
III, which was 25% larger than the Minuteman I it was intended to replace – the proper formulation would have been to limit each side to a missile 10-15% greater than the largest missile in either country’s inventory (namely, the SS-11). Smith and the US Delegation in Helsinki quickly realized this error, and made several panicked attempts to contact Kissinger and tell him to withdraw the proposal.58 Ironically, Smith and the Delegation expended significant effort trying to prevent Nixon and Kissinger from inadvertently accepting a virtual MIRV ban, a position that Smith had previously supported.59 Smith’s efforts were ultimately for naught, as the Soviets quickly rescinded Brezhnev’s offers.60 Kissinger concluded that the Soviets would not budge on the question of missile size, and ordered Smith to prepare to issue a unilateral statement. Kissinger remained hopeful that the Soviets might agree to no increases in silo size, as Brezhnev had initially proposed.61 Gromyko and Smirnov now insisted that the Soviets preferred the “no significant increase” language already under discussion in Helsinki. Frustrated, Kissinger suggested that perhaps the Soviets would accept defining “significant” increase in silo size as greater than 10-15%.62 Gromyko was originally skeptical of any definition, but on the morning of 26 May 1972 suddenly announced that the Soviets could accept the definition of silo size that Kissinger proposed.63 As a result, the Interim Freeze would contain an agreed definition

59 Smith, Doubletalk, 413-417.
of silo size, and a unilateral US declaration on missile size.

Although ICBM definitions were confusing for Kissinger and the Delegation, the most difficult negotiation in Moscow concerned the terms of the SLBM freeze. In his opening SALT discussions with Nixon and Kissinger, Brezhnev indicated no willingness to negotiate on the issue. Brezhnev insisted that the Soviets had been promised 48 boats at the beginning of the freeze, and he insisted that that was what they would get. When Nixon and Kissinger suggested that the Soviets’ H- and G-class boats should be included in the 48 boat limit, Brezhnev claimed that these older boats were of limited military utility, and did not need to be controlled via SALT. In fact, Brezhnev spent most of his SALT meeting with Nixon going on about the threat posed by the United States’ ULMS program, though by the end of the conversation Kissinger believed that Brezhnev was at least reassured that ULMS was not scheduled for immediate deployment.\(^{64}\) In their early negotiations with Kissinger, both Gromyko and Smirnov also insisted that the Soviets be given 48 Y-class boats as the starting point for the freeze.\(^{65}\)

As the Soviets stonewalled on the SLBM question, Kissinger was searching for some bargaining room to conclude an agreement, by excluding Soviet G-class boats from the freeze if the Soviets agreed to include their H-class boats. The news from Washington was not promising. Laird, Rush, and Moorer were all opposed to any compromise on the current SLBM position, which would already give the Soviets a large advantage in terms of total SLBM


levels.\textsuperscript{66} Kissinger conveyed this difficulty directly to the Soviets in Moscow, reading them messages from Laird and Moorer that any further compromise on SLBM would cause SALT to fail in Congress. The Soviets responded that they had their own difficulties with their military officials, and felt that they too had little bargaining room on the SLBM question.\textsuperscript{67}

Despite the risk of conservative opposition, on 25 May 1972 Kissinger moved towards a final SLBM compromise with the Soviets. Kissinger told Gromyko that the United States would be willing to give the Soviets 48 boats at the start of the freeze, as long as this 48 boat number included the Soviets’ 6 H-class boats. The Soviets’ G-class boats would not be counted in the freeze, as long as the Soviets agreed not to modernize them in any way during the freeze period.\textsuperscript{68} Kissinger’s SLBM bargain was a long shot. Laird, Rush, and Moorer were all opposed to dropping G-class boats from the freeze, but they were also all strongly opposed to dropping SLBM from the freeze.\textsuperscript{69} Smith initially said he believed G-class exclusion would be an acceptable compromise, but after consulting with other members of the Delegation he reversed his position, saying that excluding the G-class boats would create the impression in the United States that the Soviets were being given a free ride.\textsuperscript{70} Smith claimed that a bad SLBM deal was

\textsuperscript{66} Memo, Laird to Nixon, 24 May 1972, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76 , Vol. XXXII, Document 299; Memo, Haig to Kissinger, 24 May 1972, folder President’s Moscow, Iran, Poland, Austria Trips May-June 1972 TOHAK (File No. 1) The Situation Room [Part 2], Box 479, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
\textsuperscript{70} Backchannel Message, Smith to Haig, 25 May 1972, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 309; Smith, Doubletalk, 420-430. Kissinger believed that Smith’s change of opinion was driven by Smith’s personal animosity at being excluded from Moscow (Kissinger, \textit{The White House Years}, 1240). Smith maintained that his advice on SLBM was driven only by his desire to give Nixon the best possible advice on arms control (Smith, Doubletalk 418-420). Although Smith
worse than no SBLM deal at all. Kissinger remained convinced that the G-class boats had marginal military utility, and that their exclusion was a small price to pay for freezing Soviet progress on SLBM. Writing from Washington, Haig said that he believed the compromise would be a difficult sell to conservatives, but not an impossible one. Defense and JCS’s insistence on SLBM inclusion meant that some form of compromise was necessary. Excluding the G-class boats was the most viable compromise between the Defense Department and Soviet positions on the SLBM issue.

The G-class compromise would be controversial in Washington, but Kissinger still needed to convince the Soviets to agree. Kissinger, Gromyko, and Smirnov discussed the possibility late into the evening on 25 May 1972. At least initially, Gromyko insisted that the original Brezhnev SLBM terms did not include G- or H-class boats in the 48 boat total. Kissinger had engaged Gromyko and Smirnov in an extended debate on the issue, once again outlining his inability to exclude H-class boats from the freeze, given conservative opposition in the United States. After an extended back and forth, Smirnov suddenly announced that the dispute had been a miscommunication all along. Contrary to all of the Soviets’ previous statements, Smirnov now insisted that the Soviets had always intended that the H-class boats be counted in the 48 boat figure. Kissinger pushed further, arguing that the Soviets would also need to promise not to upgrade their G-class boats during the freeze period. Gromyko and Smirnov was unhappy at being excluded from Moscow, he was far from alone in his initial opposition to the G-class compromise. There is no reason to believe that Smith’s opposition to the G-class compromise was any less genuine than that of Laird or Moorer.

claimed that this restriction was not necessary, since the Soviets had no intention of upgrading their G-class boats; Kissinger retorted that if this were true, then the Soviets would have no problem promising this in the agreement. The negotiations having run late, Gromyko claimed he would have to consult with his colleagues, and would get back to Kissinger within the next couple days. The next morning, Gromyko suddenly announced that the Soviets accepted Kissinger’s terms on SLBM. Kissinger immediately reported to Nixon, warning him of the possible domestic political consequences of this compromise. With no further time for delay, Nixon was finally prepared to run a risk on SALT—he authorized the compromise. With this final compromise, the first phase of SALT was ready for conclusion. In fact, the formal wording of this final compromise would have to be worked out in Helsinki, at a break-neck pace due to the impending signing deadline. Ultimately, Garthoff and Kishilov formulated an agreed language in a quick meeting on the afternoon of 25 May 1972.

The final conclusion of SALT Phase I in Moscow was made awkward by the suddenness of the Soviets’ final concessions. Late in the evening on 25 May 1972, Gromyko had informed Kissinger that the Soviets would require a few more days to consider SALT issues, and that Brezhnev would prefer to speak with Nixon again on SALT before any final decision was made. On the morning of 26 May 1972, Gromyko announced not only that the Soviets accepted the SLBM compromise, but also that Brezhnev wanted to formally sign the agreement with Nixon

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76 Kissinger, The White House Years, 1232-1233.
77 Nitze, From Hiroshima to Glasnost, 321-323.
that evening. 78 Kissinger contacted the US SALT Delegation in Helsinki, ordering them to draft the final agreement and board an airplane for Moscow immediately. 79 The rapidity of the Delegation’s summoning resulted in an unfortunate miscommunication when the US delegates arrived in Moscow. Smith, Nitze, and Allison were mistakenly directed to the Kremlin, and spent several hours in confused wandering before making their way to the US Embassy for the announcement of the agreement. 80

The evening of SALT’s conclusion was marred by a final confrontation between Smith and Kissinger. Stressed and frustrated, Smith accused Kissinger of intentionally diverting the Delegation in an effort to have the announcement all to himself. Smith joined Kissinger for a brief press conference prior to the signing ceremony, though Kissinger handled the longer press conference following the signing ceremony by himself. 81 In his memoir, Kissinger maintained that the US delegates’ poor treatment in Moscow was not the result of any intentional slight on his part, but rather a product of the Soviets’ insistence on rapid conclusion of SALT, and the lack of time to make appropriate accommodation for the delegates’ travel. 82 Since Kissinger was given less than 12 hours’ notice of SALT’s conclusion, it is likely that the mishandling of the US SALT delegates was in fact the result of poor organization by their Soviet hosts, rather than a deliberate power play by Kissinger. Smith’s feelings on the issue were indicative of the level of mistrust and frustration that Nixon and Kissinger’s SALT policy process had engendered within the government.

80 Smith, Doubletalk, 434-440.
81 Smith, Doubletalk, 434-439.
82 Kissinger, The White House Years, 1240-1245.
The conclusion of the first round of SALT was nonetheless an occasion of great fanfare. Despite the miscommunication, Nixon and Brezhnev signed the ABM Treaty and the Interim Agreement on Offensive Forces that evening, with several of the US and Soviet Delegates in attendance, as planned.\textsuperscript{83} After nearly four years of negotiation, both within the US government and between the United States and the Soviet Union, the first phase of SALT negotiations with the Soviets had been successfully concluded.

**The Return**

Concluding SALT with the Soviets was a major achievement, but Nixon and Kissinger’s real SALT test still lay ahead. For four years, Nixon and Kissinger had structured the US SALT policy process in an effort to avoid a serious public debate about the purpose of arms control, for fear that SALT would not pass Congressional and public scrutiny. With the agreements concluded in Moscow, the time for secrecy had passed – the Administration would now have to explain its SALT policy to the US public. The continued skepticism of SALT by many US conservatives made it all the more important that the Administration retain solidarity in the face of public criticism. Nixon and Kissinger had spent years laying the groundwork for this final debate. In the end, this legacy of obfuscation and delay would prove impossible to escape.

Preparation for Congressional presentation of SALT had begun prior to Nixon departure for Moscow. Kissinger recommended that SALT negotiations take a long recess over the summer while the Administration focused on getting the phase one agreements ratified by

Kissinger had also begun briefing key Congressmen on the general contours of the agreement prior to departing for Moscow, emphasizing that despite the agreement’s asymmetries it was good for the United States’ security, since it would freeze Soviet offensive programs while leaving US programs like ULMS and B-1 open.85

The lobbying effort continued while Nixon and Kissinger were in Moscow, with Haig whipping various Administration and Congressional groups into supporting the agreements. This involved a delicate balancing act, as SALT had to be justified to different groups with different rationales. To proponents of the Cambridge Approach like the GAC, Haig provided two justifications for the Agreements. First, the Agreements limited destabilizing weapons technologies like heavy ICBMs and ABM. Second, the agreement would allow the United States to pursue advanced technologies like ULMS and B-1, as leverage for the phase two negotiations on limiting of offensive forces.86 To proponents of the Philadelphia Approach, Haig justified the agreement in terms of the relative advantage the United States would enjoy by limiting Soviet offensive forces while allowing the US to pursue advanced technologies like ULMS and B-1 for their own sake.87 Haig also provided press backgrounds to key conservative journalists, organizing these briefings through the NSC to avoid any distortion from Defense or ACDA experts, as well as drafting pro-SALT articles for conservative outlets like the American Legion.

The “bargaining chip” logic that had served the Administration so well in its Safeguard lobbying was redeployed to support the SALT agreements themselves, as well as the supplemental strategic programs that would accompany them. The Administration’s tools of “bargaining chip” logic and intentional delay were adapted from the previous internal debates and applied to Congress and the public at large. In form, the 1972 Interim Agreement was the ultimate expression of Nixon and Kissinger’s policy of delay – by putting off the conclusion of an offensive forces agreement into the future, and the hard choices on the configuration of US offensive forces that such an agreement would entail, Nixon and Kissinger could credibly claim that they were serving both the Cambridge and Philadelphia Approaches at the same time.

Of course, the bargaining chip logic had its limits, as the Administration’s ABM efforts demonstrated. The ABM Treaty allowed each side one ICBM defense site and one NCA defense site. The Defense Department had hoped that the explicit authorization of NCA defense in the ABM Treaty might convince some in Congress to support the construction of a Washington, DC, defense site, to retain equality with the Soviets and thus bargaining power in future negotiations. Congressional opposition to deploying an ABM site around Washington, DC, remained strong. Few people in the Washington, DC, area wanted ABM facilities located in their neighborhoods. Furthermore, many in Congress worried about the political wisdom of deploying a single population defense site around the Capitol, while leaving their constituents undefended. Laird still believed that an NCA-defense site might be viable, but Nixon, Kissinger, and Rogers all

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88 Memo, Haig to Kissinger, 31 May 1972, folder SALT Misc. (Post Summit) (Sept.69-June 72) [2 of 2], Box 887, NSC Files, Nixon Library; Memo, McDonald to Haig, 15 June 1972, folder SALT Talks (Helenski [sic] Vol. 18 May-Aug. 1972 [1 of 3], Box 883, NSC Files, Nixon Library.

concluded early on that NCA-defense would not pass Congress, even as part of a SALT agreement.90 Nixon opted to focus the Administration’s efforts on funding for offensive weapons like ULMS and B-1, while relegating ABM funding to R&D.91 The United States’ ABM program would remain limited to the single site at Grand Forks.92

One major vulnerability in the Administration’s SALT lobbying effort was the continued confusion within the Administration over the terms of the Interim Agreement itself. Kissinger had negotiated the final SLBM terms in private meetings with Gromyko and Smirnov in Moscow, with virtually no input from the Delegation or the remainder of the government. When the US Delegation returned to Washington with the text of the Interim Agreement, questions quickly arose over exactly what submarines would be included in the freeze, and at what point. Privately to Haig, Kissinger admitted that there might be some loopholes in the specifics of the SLBM freeze, but maintained that the Interim Agreement was still the best that the United States could have achieved, given the Soviets’ active ICBM and SLBM programs.93

92 Grand Forks was declared operational in 1975, but remained so for only a year, before it was dismantled. The Soviets retained their Galosh ABM system surrounding Moscow. Both the United States and the Soviet Union continued research on advanced ABM concepts for the remainder of the Cold War. See: David Yost, Soviet Ballistic Missile Defense and the Western Alliance (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 29-69.
93 Memo, Haig to Kissinger, 29 May 1972, folder SALT Misc. (Post Summit) (Sept.69-June 72) [2 of 2], Box 887, NSC Files, Nixon Library; Telegram, Kissinger to Haig, 30 May 1972, folder SALT Misc. (Post Summit) (Sept.69-June 72) [2 of 2], Box 887, NSC Files, Nixon Library;
Defense tried to maintain that the wording of the Interim Agreement would actually include G-class boats in the freeze, but Kissinger quickly headed this off as inconsistent with the negotiating record in Moscow. Nitze was especially unhappy that the Soviets seemed to be getting a free ride on their G-class boats, but most of the Administration agreed with Kissinger that the G-class had virtually no military value, and that the Soviets were likely to dismantle them in the coming years regardless of their status in SALT. In Kissinger’s conversations with Dobrynin, there was also some brief confusion over whether the Soviets could replace their G-class boats with newer submarines to exceed the 62/950 limit in the freeze, despite the fact that the Soviets had agreed in Moscow that any modernization of the G-class boats would be contained within the 62/950 limit. The Soviets appear to have been confused on the issue, and quickly agreed to accept the US position that G-class could not be replaced.

There was more confusion surrounding the dismantlement procedures. Prior to the summit, the US Delegation had agreed with the Soviets that dismantling of older missiles would

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Memo, Haig to Kissinger, 30 May 1972, folder SALT Misc. (Post Summit) (Sept.69-June 72) [2 of 2], Box 887, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
have to occur when the first post-freeze submarine entered sea trials. At that point, the US Delegation had assumed that the Soviets’ G-class boats would be counted in the freeze total, and that therefore the Soviets would have to begin replacement as soon as the first Y-class boat constructed after the freeze agreement began its sea trials. Kissinger’s decision to exclude the G-class boats from the Soviet submarine total meant that, technically, the Soviets would be allowed to construct several more Y-class boats before they began replacement. The Administration agreed that it would be best to insist that the Soviets begin replacing older missiles as soon as possible, and that their “free” Y-class boats occur at the end of the Interim Freeze rather than at the beginning. Kissinger contacted Dobrynin to confirm that the Soviets would accept this interpretation. The Soviets seemed to agree with the Administration’s desired interpretation, agreeing to begin dismantling sooner rather than later, though remaining somewhat vague about when exactly that would be. Having won Soviet agreement in principle, the specific issue of implementation was left for future discussion.

On his return to Washington, Nixon immediately took a personal hand in lobbying for SALT’s passage. The main focus of the Administration’s lobbying campaign was that the Agreements had successfully limited Soviet strategic deployments, without any serious

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98 Telegram, US Delegation to SecState, 22 May 1972, folder President’s Moscow, Iran, Poland, Austria Trips May-June 1972 TOHAK (File No. 1) [Part 1], Box 479, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
concessions from the United States SALT had been a difficult negotiation because the Soviets had begun it with active ICBM and SLBM construction, while the United States had not. In the meantime, Congress had hamstrung the Administration by denying it ABM funding. The end result was an agreement that put limits on Soviet ABM, ICBM, and SLBM deployments, while allowing the United States to continue its active MIRV, ULMS, and B-1 programs. This pitch emphasized the serious limits on the arms race (per the Cambridge Approach), while also pointing out the relative advantages gained by the United States (per the Philadelphia Approach).

In Détente and Confrontation, Garthoff recalls that Nixon and Kissinger significantly oversold the merits of the Interim Forces agreement, especially, which created inflated expectations of the constraints on Soviet offensive forces. Over the longer term, Garthoff believed that these heightened expectations damaged SALT’s prospects, especially when the Soviets began deploying their first generation of MIRV’ed ICBMs. Garthoff’s recollection of the longer-term consequences may well be correct, although it extends beyond the scope of this account. Nixon and Kissinger’s efforts in the summer of 1972 were directed towards securing Congressional approval of the Moscow agreements, which was by no means certain given the deep divisions between the Philadelphia and Cambridge Approaches. Though their actions may have had negative consequences over the longer term, they were nonetheless successful in their

103 “SALT Briefing Points,” 2 June 1972, folder SALT Announcement State Department May 20, 1971 [2 of 3], Box 78, HAK Office Files, Nixon Library; Conversation Among Nixon and Members of the Republican Congressional Leadership, 13 June 1972, FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 326; The Nixon Tapes, 579-584. Nixon also warned Congressional leaders to be wary of expert testimony from government agencies other than the NSC staff; Nixon described the various agencies as having a “schizophrenic attitude” towards arms control (Conversation Among Nixon and Members of the Republican Congressional Leadership, 13 June 1972, FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 326).
104 Garthoff, Détente and Confrontation, 196-197.
immediate objective.

As part of its lobbying effort, the White House reached out to conservative intellectuals in an attempt to bolster the SALT Agreements’ Philadelphia Approach credentials. While Nixon and Kissinger were still in Moscow, Haig was already reaching out to important Philadelphia Approach proponents like Herman Kahn, Richard Foster, Edward Teller, Donald Brennan, and William Kintner, to explain the agreement to them and win their support for it.\textsuperscript{105} A number of Philadelphia Approach proponents were ready to support the agreements, especially if they were accompanied by a strong effort to retain the United States’ lead in advanced strategic weaponry. Kintner produced a long confidential memo analyzing the SALT Agreements from the perspectives of both the Cambridge and Philadelphia Approaches, concluding that the Agreements could meet both criteria.\textsuperscript{106} Haig’s briefings backfired when Donald Brennan used them as the basis for a very public criticism of the Administration’s SALT policy. In his article “When the SALT Hit the Fan,” Brennan criticized the Administration for conceding both ABM and strategic offensive superiority to the Soviets.\textsuperscript{107} Brennan’s early criticism of SALT would become the basis for much conservative greater opposition to arms limitation as the 1970s wore on.\textsuperscript{108} As Congress convened to consider the SALT Agreements, the Administration remained

\textsuperscript{105} Telegram, Haig to Kissinger, 22 May 1972, folder President’s Moscow, Iran, Poland, Austria Trips May-June 1972 TOHAK (File No. 1) [Part 1], Box 479, NSC Files, Nixon Library; Memo, Haig to Kissinger, 24 May 1972, folder President’s Moscow, Iran, Poland, Austria Trips May-June 1972 TOHAK (File No. 1) The Situation Room [Part 2], Box 479, NSC Files, Nixon Library; Memo, Kissinger to Nixon, 10 July 1972, folder SALT Talks (Helenski [sic] Vol. 18 May-Aug. 1972 [1 of 3], Box 883, NSC Files, Nixon Library.

\textsuperscript{106} Memo, Richardson to Baroody, 4 June 1972, folder SALT (4), Box A90, Laird Papers, Ford Library.


\textsuperscript{108} Wohlstetter would also quickly turn against the Administration’s SALT policy (Wohlstetter, “Is There a Strategic Arms Race?” \textit{Foreign Policy} 15 (Summer 1974), 3-20); see also, Alan
nervous that conservative proponents of the Philadelphia Approach might still reject the Agreements as inconsistent with US national security.

Given the threat that US conservatives would oppose the SALT Agreements, Nixon and Kissinger had little choice but to take certain aspects of the Philadelphia Approach public, to stave off criticism that the recent Moscow agreements were somehow bad for US security. In doing so, they ran some risk, for the Soviet leadership was watching the US ratification debate with great interest. Focusing too heavily on the advantages won for the United States in the Moscow agreements might provoke the Soviets themselves, potentially threatening any future arms control negotiation. As the public debate over SALT entered high gear, Nixon wrote privately to Brezhnev, seeking to reassure the Soviet leader not to be alarmed by the coming public controversy. The full Soviet reaction is difficult to gauge, but Brezhnev was sufficiently mollified to avoid any major SALT statements during the ratification process.

In an effort to win support for the agreement, Nixon also considered announcing the existence of the United States’ satellite reconnaissance program. The fact of satellite reconnaissance had remained classified since the early 1960s, though in Washington it was largely an open secret. In presenting SALT to Congress, the Administration debated whether announcing the existence of the satellite reconnaissance program would improve SALT’s chances. Most agencies favored some form of announcement, probably a low-key mention in some Congressional testimony that “national means of verification” would involve satellite reconnaissance. Ultimately, the White House decided not to make the announcement, believing


that the testimony as it stood would already be provocative to the Soviets, and fearing that trumpeting the US satellite reconnaissance program would be more than the Soviets would accept. For the time being, the United States’ satellite program would remain a non-secret.

Congress began considering the SALT agreements in mid-June 1972. Passage was in no way assured. Several members of Congress were disappointed that the SALT agreements did not seem to save the United States much money in strategic weapons procurement. At the same time, Senator Jackson was emerging as the foremost conservative critic of the SALT agreements, claiming that Nixon had surrendered strategic superiority to the Soviets. In an effort to speak to these differing Congressional constituencies, Nixon tailored the testimony of key Administration officials, tasking Laird to speak to the agreements’ relatively advantages, and Rogers to speak to their stabilizing influence. Within the Administration, discussing Congressional testimony in terms of audience appeal also helped dampen the differences between Laird and Rogers over the actual purpose of SALT. Nevertheless, pleasing both of

116 For example, when Nixon met with Rogers on 19 June 1972 to prepare for Rogers’ SALT testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Nixon was able to distance himself somewhat from Laird’s hawkish testimony to the Armed Services Committee by arguing that...
these constituencies proved tremendously difficult, especially when Laird announced to Congress that he only supported the SALT agreements in the context of increased funding for ULMS. Linking SALT so closely to future armaments was necessary to reassure proponents of the Philadelphia Approach, but it complicated efforts to win support from proponents of the Cambridge Approach, who were interested in ending the arms race, not redirecting it. Despite Laird’s statements, Jackson continued to criticize the agreements, pointing out every inconsistency on SLBM levels, ICBM silo size, and G-class inclusion.

True to form, Nixon’s solution was to push off Jackson’s concerns into the second phase of SALT. Nixon’s advisers were recommending this approach early in the Congressional debate, before Jackson had even begun his main attack. Fearing that the Administration would be caught between proponents of the Cambridge and Philadelphia Approaches, the best solution was to remind opponents that the Moscow SALT agreements were only the first phase of a much longer negotiating process, offering the possibility that any specific disagreements with the Moscow SALT agreements could be resolved in later negotiations. Given the limited duration of the Interim Agreement and the Soviet commitment to continue negotiating in the future, proponents of both the Cambridge and the Philadelphia Approaches could believe that they would ultimately get what they wanted, so long as the Moscow agreements were ratified now, and the

Laird’s testimony was aimed at a specific audience, for a specific effect (The Nixon Tapes, 589-596). Nixon and Kissinger worked hard over the summer of 1972 to convince proponents on both sides that they supported their particular interpretation of SALT.

118 Memo, Colson to Haig, 20 June 1972, FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 331. This final example of “bargaining chip” logic did win public support for future strategic weapons programs from skeptics like Smith (Nitze, Hiroshima to Glasnost, 332).
Administration received sufficient bargaining leverage from ULMS and B-1.\textsuperscript{120} Despite his harsh criticism of the Moscow agreements, Jackson ultimately took the Administration’s bait, and agreed to write his objections into an amendment aimed at shaping the second phase of SALT negotiations, rather than opposing the Moscow agreements outright. Jackson’s amendment demanded that the second phase of SALT be conducted on the principle of equal strategic force aggregates, and be structured to ensure the survivability of Minuteman against a Soviet first strike.\textsuperscript{121} Additionally, Jackson’s amendment called on the Administration to continue pursuing modernization and improvement of strategic forces as allowed under the Moscow agreements, to improve the United States’ bargaining power in phase two.\textsuperscript{122} Although Nixon refused to support Jackson’s amendment explicitly, the White House adopted a studied position of neutrality on the issue, allowing the amendment to go forward as the price for successful SALT ratification.\textsuperscript{123} With Jackson’s support, the Administration was also able to secure its funding request to accelerate the ULMS and B-1 programs.\textsuperscript{124}

The Jackson Amendment was highly unpopular with both the Soviets and the US SALT Delegation. Dobrynin spoke to Kissinger about Jackson’s efforts on 4 August 1972, after the Amendment had been introduced. The Soviet leadership was especially unhappy with what it saw as an effort by Nixon to preempt the second phase of SALT via Congressional fiat.

\textsuperscript{121} Weisman, \textit{Prince of Darkness}, 32-34.
\textsuperscript{123} Memcon, Kissinger & Dobrynin, 4 August 1972, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 337.
\textsuperscript{124} Memo, Korologos to Nixon, 3 July 1972, folder ABM-System Vol. VII, Aug 71-, Box 842, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
Kissinger brushed aside Dobrynin’s concerns, saying that there was little Nixon could do to prevent Jackson from taking this stand.\textsuperscript{125} Smith and other members of the Delegation also saw the Amendment as a personal affront to their competence, and Nixon’s “neutrality” towards it as a final betrayal.\textsuperscript{126} In the end, Jackson’s amendment was a fitting coda for the Administration’s SALT process. A disruptive debate over the purpose of SALT had been averted, in favor of the promise of vague negotiations in the future. In the meantime, the United States and the Soviet Union had taken the first step on a much longer road of strategic arms limitation.

With all of the major disagreements safely put off into the future, the conclusion of the Moscow SALT agreements was easily achieved. On 3 August 1972, the Senate ratified the ABM Treaty.\textsuperscript{127} Securing Congressional approval for the Interim Agreement took somewhat longer, with both House and Senate authorizing the agreement on 30 September 1972.\textsuperscript{128} With the agreements approved in the United States, the Supreme Soviet also ratified the agreements after a perfunctory “debate” in mid-August.\textsuperscript{129} On 3 October 1972, the Moscow agreements officially entered into force, as Nixon and Podgorny exchanged letters of notification concerning their ratification. Nixon hailed the agreements as a first important step in limiting the arms race and reducing the danger of nuclear war.\textsuperscript{130} As Nixon no doubt suspected, the Administration’s future arms control policy faced many serious challenges. For the time being, in an era of

\textsuperscript{125} Memcon, Kissinger & Dobrynin, 4 August 1972, \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Document 337.
\textsuperscript{126} Smith, \textit{Doubletalk}, 442-443.
\textsuperscript{128} Memo, Timmons to Nixon, 25 September 1972, folder SALT Talks (Helenski [sic] Ending Sept. – Oct. 1972 [1 of 1], Box 883, NSC Files, Nixon Library; \textit{FRUS} XXXII, SALT I, Editorial Note 342.
\textsuperscript{129} Memo, Sonnenfeldt to Kissinger, 24 August 1972, folder SALT Talks (Helenski [sic] Vol. 18 May-Aug. 1972 [1 of 3], Box 883, NSC Files, Nixon Library.
\textsuperscript{130} \textit{FRUS} 1969-76, Vol. XXXII, Editorial Note 342.
tremendous political polarization, Nixon had made superpower arms limitation a reality.
CONCLUSION

The story of SALT in the Nixon Administration can best be understood in the context of the competing schools of thought on the purpose of arms control, which for analytical purposes are called the Cambridge and Philadelphia Approaches. By the late 1960s, the United States foreign policy community was deeply divided over whether arms control negotiations ought to seek mutual stability or competitive nuclear advantage. The Nixon Administration’s greatest success in SALT was to find an arms limitation agreement that could please both of the US arms limitation constituencies, as well as the Soviets. The key to the Administration’s SALT success was to formulate very specific arms control agreements that everyone within the government and Congress could more or less support. At least initially, the 1972 ABM Treaty and Interim Agreement on Offensive Forces enjoyed surprising bipartisan support, with both hawks and doves viewing the agreements as accomplishing their particular (and often contradictory) arms control objectives. Nixon’s SALT success set a puzzling precedent for Cold War arms control, which would be most successful politically when its ultimate meaning was least clear.

Long after Nixon had departed from Washington, US arms control policy would continue to embody the multiple purposes with which the Nixon Administration had imbued it. The success and failure of future arms control agreements rested largely on the ability of later presidents to match the delicate balancing of arms control purposes that Nixon and Kissinger had pioneered. SALT II failed because many in Congress and the public became convinced that it would place the United States at a competitive disadvantage. By comparison, the Reagan Administration’s INF and START successes rested on Reagan’s ability to blend Congressional and public support for both competition and stability. None of these agreements had an intrinsic
meaning or purpose – rather, their meaning was constructed through the political debates of the various Presidential Administrations and their various interlocutors. Furthermore, the conclusion of these agreements was not the end of the constructive process, as the meaning of these agreements continued to be interpreted and reinterpreted throughout the remainder of the Cold War and beyond. For example, while the 1972 ABM Treaty was originally a tool of both assured destruction and competitive strategies, by the 1980s the Treaty was embraced by some proponents of nuclear disarmament as a landmark agreement virtually eliminating an entire class of strategic nuclear weapons.\(^1\) We should not assume that international agreements on highly-technical subjects such as arms limitation have purposes or meanings intrinsic to the agreements themselves. Rather, the meaning of such agreements is constantly being constructed and reconstructed through a dynamic political process. Indeed, the longevity of the 1972 ABM Treaty can be best understood in terms of its tremendous flexibility, even as the political and strategic circumstances varied widely. Overall, the flexibility of meaning behind Cold War arms control should give us pause in assessing the meaning of contemporary efforts at arms control.

Despite the importance of these deep and abiding differences over arms control’s purpose, previous works on SALT have largely failed to examine this key aspect of the Nixon Administration’s SALT policy. In many ways, the key addition to previous accounts is the inclusion of the Philadelphia Approach: while many previous accounts of SALT have discussed possible Cambridge Approach motives, none have seriously considered the ways in which the

Nixon Administration sought to use SALT as a tool to gain competitive advantage over the Soviets. There are a number of reasons for this absence. The most detailed and widely-read memoir accounts of SALT were produced by proponents of the Cambridge Approach, Gerard Smith and Raymond Garthoff, whose roles on the SALT Delegation provided them with plentiful detail but little high-level access to White House deliberations. Nixon, Kissinger, Laird, and others also had powerful motives to conceal their support of the Philadelphia Approach, which would be nonnegotiable with the Soviets and unacceptable to a majority in the US Senate. They shrouded their deliberations in secrecy, and in public they would often pay lip-service to the Cambridge Approach to win support for their preferred policy positions. Finally, the results of SALT I point away from an obvious competitive strategies approach, especially the large numerical advantage in launchers accorded to the Soviets under the 1972 Interim Offensive Forces agreement. This outcome displeased many proponents of the Philadelphia Approach, but Nixon and Kissinger defended it as a necessary expedient that at least established the principle of numerical limits while leaving the United States free to continue pursuing qualitative improvements on accuracy and MIRV. As a result of the confusion and obfuscation, most accounts until now have treated SALT negotiations almost entirely as a function of the Cambridge Approach to arms control. The availability of formerly-classified high level archival sources now allows a fuller reconstruction of the motives behind SALT, both the Cambridge and Philadelphia Approaches.

The constructed and contested nature of arms control’s purpose means that a domestic political approach is necessary to explain arms control results in SALT. Success in US arms control policy was driven less by the inherent quality of the theories and motives themselves, and
more by the domestic political power that each theory’s proponents could wield. That President Nixon preferred the Philadelphia Approach meant that SALT policy would be driven largely by the competitive strategies logic. Cambridge Approach proponents like Rogers, Smith, and McCloy enjoyed considerable support in Congress and the press, which meant that Nixon could not afford to discount their ideas, even if he disagreed with them. Similarly, Laird’s dedication to the Philadelphia Approach and strong ties to Congressional conservatives limited Nixon’s ability to compromise on arms control issues. When it came to deciding between these competing SALT motives, the content of their preferred theories was rarely decisive. In fact, the Nixon Administration generally avoided discussing the deeper purpose of arms control. Neither party ever conceded that the other was right. Instead, each side pulled as hard as it could for its preferred position, pocketed what concessions it could get, and learned to live with the remaining inconsistencies.

Domestic politics also explains much of Nixon and Kissinger’s SALT policy process. Many of the most puzzling incidents in SALT, including the extended delay in beginning talks, the endlessly iterated SALT options, the abstruse technical debates, the periodic secret back-channel negotiations, and the frantic final days at the Moscow summit, can only be explained fully in domestic and international political terms, as Nixon and Kissinger felt their way forward to a compromise that all US as well as Soviet parties could accept. The resulting SALT process was messy, and Nixon and Kissinger made numerous mistakes along the way. It is also important to remember that the outcome was not foreordained – given the deep political polarization within the United States, and the sharply contrasting approaches to arms control within the US government, finding a solution that would please the Soviets while passing the
Senate was not a foregone conclusion. In the end, the Administration produced a series of successful arms control agreements, which would shape US foreign policy for the remainder of the Cold War and beyond.

Finally, domestic politics can help us explain, at least in part, SALT outcomes. The Nixon Administration’s SALT negotiating position was most easily derived when both the Cambridge and Philadelphia Approaches could agree on a common position, though usually for very different reasons. The clearest example was the limitation of large ICBMs, like the Soviet SS-9. Proponents of the Cambridge Approach wanted to limit large ICBMs because they believed them to be destabilizing first strike weapons; proponents of the Philadelphia Approach wanted to limit large ICBMs because the Soviets were deploying them, and the United States was not. As a result, the Nixon Administration agreed from the beginning that the United States would seek a strict sub-limit on large ICBMs, a sub-limit enshrined in the 1972 Interim Agreement. Similarly, by the spring of 1970 many proponents of both the Cambridge and Philadelphia Approaches supported strict limits on ABM deployments, the former to avoid a destabilizing weapons technology, the latter because Congress would not fund Safeguard. As a result, the Nixon Administration entered negotiations in the spring of 1970 proposing strict limitations on ABM deployments, while allowing full R&D on future ABM concepts, a proposal which at the time pleased both parties.

On the other hand, when an arms control proposal was only favored by one approach or the other, it was far less likely to be enshrined in the agreement. The most obvious example was the non-inclusion of MIRV, an issue that at the time Nixon and Kissinger worked hard to frame as a technical verification issue, but which below the surface revealed deep divisions between
proponents of the Cambridge and Philadelphia Approaches. Previous accounts have generally focused on the Cambridge Approach logic, arguing that Nixon missed a major opportunity to ban MIRV, but failed to do so out of ignorance or apathy. In fact, Nixon and Kissinger generally agreed with Defense and JCS that MIRV was and would likely remain an area of US advantage, and so worked to exclude MIRV from SALT negotiations. Non-inclusion of MIRV was not necessarily a failure of arms control, writ large; rather, proponents of the Philadelphia Approach believed that the entire point of arms control was to leave perceived areas of US advantage, like MIRV, unconstrained. The wisdom of this policy extends beyond the scope of this account, but at the very least Nixon and Kissinger’s approach to MIRV in SALT was not driven by apathy or ignorance, but rather by an intentional calculation aimed at maximizing US competitive advantage. With the government split between the Cambridge and Philadelphia Approaches, MIRV restrictions were ultimately left on the cutting room floor, with only a single abortive proposal in April 1970.

Division within the government was not always to the advantage of the Philadelphia Approach, as the case of the ABM Treaty shows. Although in the spring of 1970 Defense generally agreed with State and ACDA that the United States should strictly limit ABM in SALT, the successes in funding Safeguard over the summer of 1970 convinced Laird and others at Defense that Congress might actually fund a thick ABM system around US missile silos. For the better part of two years, Defense advocated a new draft of the ABM Treaty, which would allow the United States to deploy a thousand short-range interceptors around Minuteman fields, ideally while still limiting the Soviets to their existing Moscow system. State and ACDA strongly opposed Defense’s new ideas for ABM limitation, which they feared would undermine
strategic stability by allowing continued arms racing in deploying new missile interceptors. Perhaps more importantly, State and ACDA believed, and Nixon and Kissinger agreed, that Defense’s ABM Treaty draft was non-negotiable with the Soviets, especially after the United States had already proposed and the Soviets had already accepted a symmetrical, low-level ABM agreement. As a result, Defense’s notional ABM Treaty was shot down by Nixon and never even presented to the Soviets. As with MIRV, divisions within the Administration over the purpose of arms control undermined a possible SALT approach, resulting in an equal-numbers ABM Treaty that was more readily accepted by Cambridge Approach proponents.

The 1972 SALT agreements, and the continuing arms limitation process they engendered, transformed the Cold War relationship between the superpowers. For the remainder of the Cold War, the ongoing arms control dialogue would be an important barometer of superpower relations. The ultimate meaning of this arms control policy would remain contentious. The breakdown of SALT negotiations in the late 1970s and the deployment of a new generation of nuclear weapons by the Carter and Reagan Administrations were viewed by many as a betrayal of the Cambridge Approach, which aimed to prevent the deployment of further advanced missile technologies. From the perspective of the Philadelphia Approach, however, the maturation and deployment of nuclear weapons systems like Trident, M-X, Pershing II, and cruise missiles represented in many ways a culmination of SALT, rather than a failure. From this perspective, SALT effectively halted further Soviet quantitative strategic missile deployments in the 1970s, buying time for the United States to roll out its next generation of qualitative strategic nuclear improvements. Over the years, SALT’s legacy was therefore decidedly mixed.

Nixon and Kissinger also set an enduring precedent for negotiating arms control
agreements that could please multiple constituencies. Although it proved difficult to bridge the differences between the Philadelphia and Cambridge Approaches, both could claim the 1972 ABM Treaty and Interim Offensive Forces Agreement as their own. The renewed arms control efforts of the second half of the 1980s would exhibit a similar division of purpose, entwining cooperation and competition into a second set of landmark agreements. The Nixon Administration’s success in SALT should give us hope that deep political polarization need not impede the creation of effective foreign policy in our own time.
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