

ABSTRACT

Side Effects May Include Peace: Richard Nixon, the Soviet Union, and the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT)

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In today's climate, when each day seems to revisit conflicts of days gone by, particularly the Cold War, examination of the history of international relations is more important than ever. In my research, I analyzed the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) between the United States and the Soviet Union. Through a close reading of recently declassified government documents including memorandums, meeting minutes, and transcripts of conversations between the negotiating powers and within the Nixon administration, I found that US diplomacy at the time was marked by inter-administration competitiveness, ignorance of other cultures, and strategic pragmatism. In this thesis, I scrutinize the early events of the nuclear age which influenced SALT, and the three-year process of the talks, from the drafting of potential treaty options to lobbying for legislative approval. I ultimately argue that SALT was not a tool of peace, but a tool to enhance President Richard Nixon's domestic image, and to maintain the United States' defensive power.

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SIDE EFFECTS MAY INCLUDE PEACE: RICHARD NIXON, THE SOVIET UNION,
AND THE STRATEGIC ARMS LIMITATION TALKS (SALT)

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

On January 13, 2018, I and the rest of the news-reading population came across a headline: Hawaii had just been on alert for the imminent arrival of an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM). The message had been delivered to Hawaiian iPhone users in the very same text box commonly used to announce the various color alerts — amber, silver — that notified the state’s residents of abducted children and lost Alzheimer’s patients.¹ The color alerts, tragic as they are, are usually contained events, their ramifications limited to a select few. This notification applied to 1,427,538 people.²

Needless to say, Hawaii remains where it is, the victim of the human foolishness of one government employee with the ability to send out a text alert apparently “the errant employee actually was working with a drop-down menu on a computer program, from which the official chose the wrong item” and not, luckily, the victim of the human foolishness of one government employee with the ability to launch a nuclear weapon.³ Though a unique event for this century, it is not a unique event in nuclear history — in fact, something similar occurred only a few decades ago. According to Eric Schlosser, author of *Command and Control: Nuclear Weapons, the Damascus Accident, and the Illusion of Safety*, during John F. Kennedy’s presidency, “the BMEWS [Ballistic Missile Early Warning System] site at Thule [Greenland] . . . mistakenly identified the moon, slowly rising over Norway, as dozens of long-range missiles launched from Siberia.”⁴

These two events occurred over fifty years apart, in two places halfway around the world from each other, using different technology. Yet at their core, they are alike.

Much of the history of arms control and the nuclear age is like this — filled with events and people that are reminiscent of other events and other people. It can perhaps best be considered in terms of genetics. As a liberal arts student, I have a layman's acquaintance with such matters, but I have found DNA a useful metaphor for considering history. Just as I share DNA with my parents, grandparents and an extensive number of ancestors, so too do the presidents and advisors of the United States share and inherit from each other a variety of problems, strategies and mindsets which can be considered in much the same way as genes or traits. While I have my grandmother's nose, Richard Nixon had Eisenhower's budget problems. I inherited my mother's affinity for travel, and Gerard Smith, director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA), inherited from his predecessors at the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) problems with the military.

In history, as in genetics, these traits may not always express themselves to the same degree or in the same way. Some generations may show a specific trait that seems to fade in another. Humans breed with others, generating ever more diverse gene pools and possible genetic combinations, and nations interact with others, generating new scenarios with new factors. Neither history nor humanity clones itself.

In this thesis I examine a specific "generation" in the family tree of arms control and nuclear weapons. That generation — the Nixon administration — created the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks, held with the former Soviet Union. I aimed to identify and examine the key traits found during SALT in President Nixon and his advisors and situate the traits within the context of the presidential generations before them, and, to a limited degree after. In the process, I found that the Nixon generation's key traits were a

propensity to savage interpersonal relationships between president and advisors, conflicts between the visions of civilian and military advisors, and an abiding passion for public credit on the part of the president that defined the SALT process more than anything else. Far from being unique to the Nixon administration, many of those traits can be traced back to earlier U.S. presidencies and can even be seen manifested in the Soviet government as well.

I will argue for this opinion throughout the forthcoming five chapters, proceeding chronologically from chapter one, which discusses 1950s and 1960s arms control and historic events relevant to SALT, and then in the latter four chapters, continue on through the three-year SALT process itself.

Sources

The *Foreign Relations of the United States* series formed the basis of materials upon which I constructed this thesis. I selected as my primary source the nearly one-thousand-page volume on SALT, assembled with transcripts, memorandums, letters and meeting minutes, because of the proximity it offers to the event which occurred five decades ago. The government only declassified these sources eight years ago, and so they offer a truly new resource not yet mined to dust by scholars. These sources do, of course, carry limitations as much as any others. As an edited volume, the *Foreign Relations* collection naturally offers a certain tunnel-vision perspective of SALT, which excludes coverage of large related topics such as the Vietnam War. And confined as it is to documents related to the executive branch, Congressional influence on SALT is only seen through the decidedly biased perspectives of Nixon and his advisors.

Additionally, just as the squeaky wheel gets the grease, the voices which talked the most during the SALT process feature most heavily in this thesis. These voices belong specifically to President Nixon, Henry Kissinger, and Gerard Smith. However, as each of those men numbered among the most important figures of SALT, this proved a boon rather than a problem. And while it is true that these voices all came to me via a printed page rather than straight from the Nixon tapes themselves, I do not believe there was an overly great loss of tone — Nixon and his advisors may have been disingenuous when speaking, but rarely ambiguous.

As with any project, this thesis had boundaries, some imposed by necessity: as an undergraduate, I did not have years available to me in which to explore in depth every possible source and question related to SALT. Other boundaries I deliberately set: while there are other primary sources produced by the parties involved in the negotiations, specifically the memoirs of Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, I elected not to use those resources. Memoirs have an immediacy in voice, but not time, and designed as they are for immediate public consumption, rarely prioritize honesty and objectivity over self-promotion. I thus made the decision to utilize the *Foreign Relations* volume as my main point of access to the opinions of the president and his advisors.

For historical context on US-Soviet relations and the development of US nuclear-missile technology, I relied on three core sources — Melvyn P. Leffler's *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union and The Cold War*, Vladimir Zubok's *A Failed Empire: the Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* and Eric Schlosser's *Command and Control: Nuclear Weapons, the Damascus Accident and the Illusion of Safety*. Leffler's work is structured around "leaders" and "the role of human

agency.”⁵ Zubok’s work also has a similar emphasis. Because each scholar addressed a different side of the conflict — Leffler the American and Zubok the Soviet — based on a different set of sources, their work shows both sides of the coin and where problems and motives transcended sovereign borders. Both address the topic of arms control, though neither of them makes it the main focus of their work. Instead, arms control is examined in relation to the leaders — Eisenhower, Kennedy, Khrushchev, Brezhnev — with whom Zubok and Leffler are most preoccupied. I was thus able to situate myself within the historical period, and still engage with my primary sources independently and form opinions of my own, unbiased and uninfluenced by their opinions on SALT.

Zubok’s and Leffler’s respective takes on arms control merit a brief summary here I explore their scholarship in greater detail in the first chapter of this thesis. Leffler generally portrays the arms control efforts of American presidents as honorable if unavoidably pragmatic. Eisenhower, he argues, had significant budget-related incentives to work towards arms control.⁶ But, “the United States could not ban nuclear weapons” because they offered so much extra power; missiles, after all, formed an integral part of the containment fence built around the communists.⁷ Kennedy, meanwhile, Leffler suggests, grew most amenable to arms control only once he felt the Soviet Union had expended a large amount of its power and authority globally.⁸

Zubok, for his part, judged Soviet leaders rather more harshly than Leffler judged the Americans and the Soviets. While Leffler credited Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev with protecting his “utopia” from “nuclear annihilation,” Zubok describes Khrushchev as a man who “believe[d] . . . that missiles would dominate future warfare,” and partly ensured that by arming China with Soviet blueprints and “the complete know-how for

construction of atomic weapons.”⁹ Progress in arms control he attributes to the Cuban Missile Crisis and civilian scientists.¹⁰ His final opinion on Khrushchev is “his missile rattling left a profound impression in the U.S. political leadership” — and not the positive kind.¹¹ Zubok has substantially greater mercy for General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev. Though he offers a harsh and unflattering portrait of him personally, he lauds his efforts in arms control. That said, Zubok notes that the general secretary also had a need for good press, and SALT offered it.¹²

Finally, Eric Schlosser’s *Command and Control* functioned as the third leg of the secondary source stool which supports this thesis, offering information not just about the technology stored in the United States in ways frighteningly evocative of District 13, the underground community in *The Hunger Games*, but about the quarter of a century prior to SALT, specifically the period that saw the nuclear generations of Truman and Eisenhower. Those generations must be examined, at least briefly, before turning to their successors of the 1960s: Kennedy, Johnson, and most important for this thesis, Richard Nixon.

Ancestors from Both Sides of the Aisle: The Eisenhower and Truman Administrations

As Eric Schlosser put it, “despite having emerged from the conflict [the Second World War] with unprecedented economic and military power, the United States felt more vulnerable than at any other time in its history.”¹³ The United States, in building the atomic bomb, had built a house with no foundation. No infrastructure existed in 1945 to cope with all the questions and problems the bomb brought with it — everything that came after Nagasaki and Hiroshima, including SALT, represented an attempt to get a foundation under the house.

Like most important antagonists in any story, the Soviet Union entered the saga early on — Schlosser notes that “the issue of international control was complicated by another question: Should the secrets of the atomic bomb be given to the Soviet Union?”¹⁴ No, was the answer. Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, who would be a part of SALT over two decades later, “proposed that first the U.S. should destroy all of its nuclear weapons, and then an agreement should be reached on how to prevent other nations from obtaining them.”¹⁵ Of all the unresolved questions surrounding the bomb, the US answered one of them very quickly — the bomb’s likely next destination was the USSR.¹⁶

A major thread of this thesis is the civilian-military dynamic in SALT. This thread stretches all the way back to the Truman administration. According to Schlosser, “civilian control of the atomic bomb was . . . firmly established by law — but that did not prevent the military, almost immediately, from seeking to undermine it” and “the Joint Chiefs of Staff repeatedly asserted that the nation’s most powerful weapons should be kept in the custody of officers who might one day have to use them.”¹⁷ Brawling between branches cost them, but it did not take long for Atomic Energy Committee “[civilian] custody . . . [to] become a legal fiction.”¹⁸ Schlosser reports that “Eisenhower agreed to let high-ranking commanders decide whether to use nuclear weapons, during an emergency, when the president couldn’t be reached.”¹⁹ While this decision remained within the confines of the Oval Office, as even the legislative branch did not know of it, Schlosser argues that its suspicious secrecy aside, it was a logical “military tactic.”²⁰

The Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and the military during the Nixon administration very much resembled the iterations that came before them. Their

members ensured that the president never lacked for a military opinion, and, like his own predecessors, Nixon often catered to that opinion, to a degree that at times appeared submissive. What made Nixon's relationship with the military unique was that he indulged the military's wishes for his own political reasons, which will become evident in the latter sections of this thesis.

Finally, Schlosser makes one observation extremely pertinent to this thesis. He noted that "Truman's decision to develop a hydrogen bomb had great symbolic importance. . . . The perception of strength mattered as much as the reality. . . . That sort of logic would guide the nuclear arms race for the next forty years."²¹ SALT, and President Nixon's approach to it, testifies at times almost literally, in the very words of Nixon and his advisors, to the truth of Schlosser's statement. Whether SALT needed to stand as a symbol of President Nixon's superiority as a leader, or the United States Congress needed to fund more military spending as a symbol of the nation's power, which Nixon believed made SALT possible a classic diplomatic Catch-22, symbolism drove SALT, was a defining trait of the Nixon administration, and consequently dominates this thesis.

Before that topic can be explored however, one final subject must be addressed — much of this thesis dispenses with the more technological aspects of the SALT discussions because a diplomatic history demands more analysis of the interpersonal than the intercontinental, and for readability's sake my own sake mattered here as well — my ability to keep up with Kissinger, "considered one of America's leading authorities on nuclear strategy" is admittedly, limited.²² However, it would be inappropriate to simply ignore the missiles entirely, and treat them as mere ciphers, three and four letter acronyms that pop up at a rate of three or four times per page for over a hundred pages.

Therefore, I have included in this introduction a small explanation of what exactly made a missile in the Nixon era.

Nuts and Bolts: Nuclear missile technology

The American nuclear arsenal in the 1960s was as varied as a department store. From the tetchy high-end Titan to the undemanding Minuteman on land, to the Poseidon missiles and those on Polaris submarines in the sea, the United States had missiles for all occasions. All of these missiles also fell within the categories of ICBM and Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBM), which SALT sought to address.

ICBMs had started with satellites — Sputnik, to be exact. While number one “could do little more than circle the earth and transmit a radio signal,” number two had “rocket engines with enough thrust to lift . . . a nuclear warhead.”²³ From those two satellites, six generations of nuclear technology spawned. First came Atlas, which according to Schlosser “loomed as American’s great hope, its first ICBM.”²⁴

Then the Titan had its advent in the Kennedy administration and despite its claims to nuclear fame, had a short shelf life.²⁵ According to the National Park Service, which in an ironic twist of fate not only administers to the natural wonders of Yellowstone, but the US retired missile sites, “[t]he Titan was the largest ICBM ever deployed” and the second model “held a W53 warhead with. . . three times the explosive power of all the bombs used during World War Two.”²⁶ The Titan had severe problems functioning and had no great champions on either side of the aisle — the military axed the model during Johnson’s presidency, and Henry Kissinger, Nixon’s Assistant for National Security Affairs, only liked to use it as leverage in Soviet relations as it represented “a powerful threat to Moscow.”²⁷

In contrast to the Titan, Minuteman was a technological dream — like a child that can be safely parked in front of the television for hours, the “small, mass produced, and inexpensive” missile “could stand dormant and unmanned for . . . decades on end, needing only limited maintenance and upkeep.”²⁸ Nixon’s presidency had the II and III models, the latter of which arrived midway through SALT.²⁹ Unlike the Titan, the Minuteman is not a relic, but remains in action, tucked away in Montana, North Dakota and Wyoming.³⁰ Boeing has an entire webpage devoted to exalting Minuteman, and curious people can watch a terrifying video of the missile of it if they so choose.

Prior to Nixon’s presidency, President Kennedy had doubled the size of the United States’ Polaris arsenal.³¹ With sixteen missiles, “hidden beneath the seas, invulnerable to a surprise attack . . . they would be aimed at the Soviet Union’s major cities in order to deter an attack.”³² This “the cornerstone of the American arsenal” was perhaps the shakiest cornerstone possible — “perhaps 75% or more [of its warheads] wouldn’t detonate after being launched.”³³ Luckily for Nixon, he inherited a version of the Polaris warheads that did not suffer from these issues.³⁴

The technology of the late 1960s and early 1970s favored brutal efficiency. Much the way someone might put multiple marshmallows on a pronged stick in order to roast them more efficiently, the United States loaded up Minuteman and the Nixon-era Poseidon missiles which took their first dive in 1971, a mere year before the signing of SALT, with warheads. Schlosser reports that “Minuteman . . . carried three” and “the Poseidon could carry fourteen warheads.”³⁵ While the Poseidon represented another entry in a line of US submarines packing multiple missiles the Polaris had sixteen, Minuteman, however, “was the first U.S. Intercontinental Ballistic Missile . . . that could deliver Multiple

Independent Reentry Vehicles (MIRVs) to a target” allowing the US to “strike different targets miles away from each other.”³⁶ Schlosser notes that “adding more warheads to a single missile” helped the defense budget.³⁷

Finally, there was the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) system. I can think of no better summation of the system than that provided by the Comptroller General in 1974, shortly after SALT concluded:

The Safeguard ballistic missile defense system consists of two phased-array radar subsystems, two interceptor missiles subsystems, and a data processor. The Perimeter Acquisition radar will be used for early detection of incoming targets, and the Missile Site Radar will be used to track warheads at closer ranges and to launch and guide the defensive interceptors. The Spartan interceptor will be used for interceptions above the atmosphere and the Sprint interceptor will be used for closer range interceptions.³⁸

The Soviets, naturally, had their own missile and ABM technology, but I will not go into detail about it here — while of course, the qualities and capabilities of Soviet technology would have differed somewhat from that of the United States, at the end of the day, an ABM system and a ballistic missile are fundamentally the same regardless of where they are manufactured. Thus, I believe examining the American technology grants one enough information to appreciate the subject of SALT.

The Next Phase

In the course of this introduction, I have established the overall goals of this thesis — to examine the SALT process and argue for an interpretation of the proceedings as laden with interpersonal struggles, conflicting military and civilian perspectives, and an emphasis on creating a treaty that met the president’s goals for public relations. I have

discussed the Truman and Eisenhower administration, and the traits of those presidents and their decisions which have a bearing on SALT and President Nixon.

Now, in my first chapter, I will briefly examine a small number of events related both directly and indirectly to SALT—these events would surface throughout conversations between the president and his advisors, and prompt them to consider certain options, or make certain conclusions. An examination of these events will facilitate a more dimensional understanding of SALT. In the second chapter, I will examine the process of how the Nixon administration decided upon its plans and objectives for SALT. In the third chapter, I will look at the private negotiations of Henry Kissinger with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin and President Nixon's obsessive desire to extract public credit from SALT. In the fourth chapter, I will analyze Nixon's burgeoning concerns about criticism from his Republican compatriots and his submission to the pressure of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Department of Defense. And in the fifth and final chapter, I will analyze the dynamics of Nixon's relationship with his advisors, his personal endeavor to sell SALT to the US legislature and evaluate the final SALT ABM treaty and offensive agreement.

Endnotes

¹ Fred Barbash, "Hawaii missile mess: That was no 'wrong button.' Take a look." *The Washington Post*, January 16, 2018.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/.../that-was-no-wrong-button-in-hawaii-take-a-look/>

² United States Census Bureau, "Quick Facts Hawaii."

³ Barbash, "Hawaii."

⁴ Eric Schlosser, *Command and Control: Nuclear Weapons, the Damascus Accident, and the Illusion of Safety*, 1st edition New York: Penguin Press, 2013, 254.

⁵ Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* New York: Hill and Wang, 2007, 7-8.

⁶ Ibid., 113.

⁷ Ibid., 139.

⁸ Ibid., 184-5.

⁹ Ibid., 174; V. M. Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007, 127, 135.

¹⁰ Ibid., 151.

¹¹ Ibid., 153.

¹² Ibid., 224-5.

¹³ Schlosser, *Command and Control*, 74.

¹⁴ Ibid., 76.

¹⁵ Ibid., 79.

¹⁶ Ibid., 83.

¹⁷ Ibid., 78, 88.

¹⁸ Ibid., 126.

¹⁹ Ibid., 207.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 124-5.

²² Ibid., 353.

²³ Ibid., 175.

²⁴ Ibid., 222.

²⁵ Schlosser, *Command and Control*, 250, 266.

²⁶ “The Titan Missile,” U.S. National Park Service, accessed March 2, 2018, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/titan-icbm.htm>.

²⁷ Ibid., 222, 346, 350.

²⁸ Schlosser, *Command and Control*, 223; “The Minuteman Missile,” U.S. National Park Service, accessed March 2, 2018, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/minuteman-icbm.htm>.

²⁹ “The Minuteman II Missile,” U.S. National Park Service, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/minuteman-ii-missile.htm>, accessed March 2, 2018; “The Minuteman III Missile,” U.S. National Park Service, accessed March 2, 2018, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/minuteman-iii-missile.htm>.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Schlosser, *Command and Control*, 266, 201.

³² Ibid., 314.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 353.

³⁶ “The Minuteman III Missile.”

³⁷ Schlosser, *Command and Control*, 352.

³⁸ Comptroller General of the United States, *B-164250: Safeguard Ballistic Missile Defense Program* Washington D.C, N.P.: 1974, 4.

CHAPTER TWO

Historical Context

Government planning for SALT I began early in 1969, shortly after Richard Nixon took office as the 37th president of the United States. SALT represented not the advent of, but an entry in, a linear line of US-Soviet negotiations and agreements around arms technology. In the decade leading up to SALT, the United States and Soviet Union had agreed on the Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963 and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968. Significantly, however, both treaties dealt with nuclear technology as opposed to missile technology. SALT thus took a new tack and explored new territory in pursuing missile agreements. While the 1960s was undoubtedly the most fruitful decade in terms of US-Soviet relations, the 1950s also included a number of events of relevance to SALT — specifically achievements in technology development and US-Soviet diplomatic conflicts during the Eisenhower era.

In this chapter, I will examine all of these events, as well as other factors which influenced SALT either indirectly, as in the case of the war in Vietnam and the Cuban Missile Crisis, and most directly, the election of President Nixon into a nation of strong political and domestic forces: the legislature and the public.

I Spy with My Little Eye: Eisenhower, Khrushchev and Arms Technology

The Eisenhower years yielded little in terms of advancement of US-Soviet relations. Rather, it was a period in which both sides busied themselves creating and deploying all the technology they would argue about later. The US can claim the first atomic bomb,

but the Soviets can claim “the world’s first ICBM” — the R-7 of 1957.¹ The Soviets also created the required companion nuclear paraphernalia including “giant plants for mass production of strategic arms,” “launching pads and silos,” and even “secret cities.”² The US matched it with Vandenburg Air Force Base. According to Eric Schlosser, “Within a few years of it’s opening in 1957, the base had launch pads, silos, underground control centers, storage facilities, administrative buildings, and a population of about ten thousand.”³

By 1960, Eisenhower was on his way out, the only president between 1952 and 1972 to not have achieved some form of substantial diplomatic agreement with the Soviet Union on the subject of nuclear weapons or missiles. US-Soviet diplomacy had taken a hit six months earlier. When the Soviets captured a U-2 and “demanded a personal apology,” that was effectively that — according to Craig Nelson, “the then-underway US-USSR Paris summit collapsed, postponing détente.”⁴ Ironically, the U-2 flight had been to check up on the Soviets’ ICBMs.⁵ Even more ironically, the U-2 represented the least of Soviet concerns in this area — according to Craig Nelson, one satellite “covered a total of 1.5 million square miles of the Soviet Union, snapping clear photographs of 64 airfields, 26 SAM launchers and even the [Soviet] rocket pads.”⁶ Ultimately, five hundred Soviet and one hundred US “eyes in the sky” would keep tabs on each other’s nations.⁷ Very soon, the United States would see something it did not like at all. In Cuba. But that would be President Kennedy’s problem.

The Cuban Missile Crisis

The Kennedy administration up to this point in the thesis, has been largely dealt with within the context of the discussion of arms technology. However, the most significant

diplomatic missile-related event and the most significant US-Soviet agreement of the early 1960s occurred during Kennedy's presidency, and both merit their own sections within this chapter.

In the fall of 1962, President Kennedy received alarming information from the intelligence administration: Cuba, the newly Communist nation off the tip of Florida, had acquired Soviet Medium-Range Ballistic Missiles (MRBM).⁸ It was not the first time the island nation had troubled the president in the last two years. Mere months before, the president had risked his political legacy in an attempt to overthrow Castro by exporting an insurgency to Cuba in the form of "Cuban exiles . . . [who] were trained and armed by the CIA."⁹ It was not a success, and the men were "ripped apart" in what became known as the Bay of Pigs disaster.¹⁰

Unlike in the Bay of Pigs, however, events now compelled Kennedy to deal directly with Cuba's political backer and arms supplier — Premier Khrushchev of the Soviet Union. Both American historian Melvyn Leffler and Russian historian Vladislav Zubok agree that Khrushchev hoped to get a more amenable United States at the negotiating table by using nuclear power as a diplomatic stick. As Zubok put it: "brinkmanship spared Khrushchev the need to look for more complicated and nuanced approaches in foreign affairs."¹¹

Kennedy chose a two-pronged response to the developments. Publicly, he instituted a naval blockade against further shipments to Cuba by the Soviet Union, while Attorney General Robert Kennedy negotiated privately with the Soviet Ambassador.¹² The final deal was: "the Soviets would withdraw the missiles from Cuba in return for two U.S. concessions, a public pledge not to invade Cuba and a secret one to take the [US] missiles

out of Turkey.”¹³ The Soviets claimed the US missiles part of the “missile and airbases” collective that formed a tiny America on European soil were to them what the Soviet missiles in Cuba were to the US.¹⁴

And so it ended. Kennedy commissioned commemorative paperweights in the image of a calendar page flipped to October 1962, and the sun rose again on Moscow and Washington D.C.¹⁵ In the critically acclaimed television series *The West Wing*, the pilot episode closes with the president, after a busy day, asking “What’s next?” For Kennedy and Khrushchev, the answer to that question was: The Limited Test Ban Treaty (LTB).

The Limited Test Ban Treaty

In 1963, the US and USSR participated in a treaty event almost a decade in the making. In 1955, the United States, with its NATO and nuclear allies the United Kingdom, Canada and France, started to pursue a joint ban with the USSR to end nuclear tests.¹⁶ According to the State Department history: “prior to SALT, no arms control measure since World War II had enlisted so intensely the sustained interest of the international community.”¹⁷

For seven years, negotiations struggled over verification and “linkage” – linkage being a somewhat ambiguous term whose meaning depends on circumstance. It can mean the strategy of wholesale packaging diplomacy, with Deal X only occurring if Deal Y and Z also happen. Or it can mean the practice of holistically approaching diplomacy, aiming to consider “the prevailing political context” and limit hypocrisy and contradiction in inter-state relations as Nixon put it, “I do believe that crisis and confrontation in one place and real cooperation in another cannot long be sustained simultaneously”.¹⁸ In the case of the Limited Test Ban, linkage meant the former.

In verification, NATO wanted “a system of controls and inspections,” not “simple pledges.” The Soviet government, on the other hand, resisted the notion of international inspections, pointing out that nuclear testing was hardly a discreet affair. As logical as that may sound, “later tests showed[ed] that techniques . . . for distinguishing between explosions and earthquakes were less effective than had been believed.”¹⁹

While the Soviets eventually conceded the point on international controls, the negotiations were also tied up when the United States offered to “suspend tests for a year from the beginning of negotiations” but only if a host of other conditions related to inspections and “progress . . . on major arms-control measures” were met.²⁰ This did not go over well with the Soviets, though only a few years later, they would demand linkage themselves.²¹

Finally, though, the treaty became law, thanks to two new realities. First, the tests in question became unnecessary for the efficacy of the Soviet nuclear program, and second, everything became easily verifiable, because, as Craig Nelson points out, with new technology, specifically *sputniki* Russian for “satellites” little could be concealed.²² The indefinite ban, signed by the United States, Soviet Union and the United Kingdom, covered “atmosphere, underwater and outer space” testing the only thing still not verifiable, underground testing, was omitted.²³

Kennedy, incidentally, found resistors to the treaty in “several of his own chiefs of military service,” as well as France and West Germany.²⁴ Despite this, the treaty was ratified on October 7th, 1963, nine days short of the anniversary of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

According to Leffler, in Khrushchev's mind, the ban "was simply a beginning" for future US-Soviet relations. His aspirations had the whiff of normalcy to them: "freezing military budgets" and "more trade." But two months later, Kennedy died, and shortly after that, Khrushchev was ousted from office.²⁵

Vietnam

It would be false to say that the Vietnam war did anything positive for US diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. In his history of the Cold War, Melvyn Leffler depicts the Johnson-Vietnam era as a period ripe with opportunities that were, for myriad reasons, left to rot on the vine. According to Leffler, Lyndon Johnson failed to reconcile his personal beliefs about "peace and competitive coexistence" with demands by the electorate and the right wing of the government for an anticommunist president.²⁶ He surrounded himself with advisors who encouraged the view that "Vietnam was . . . a test case of US strength and credibility" and that "If only they could triumph in Vietnam . . . [they could] eventually win the Cold War."²⁷

The Soviets, meanwhile, had expressed a hope to continue the "tradition" set forth during the Second World War of positive joint relations. The government had, in fact, attempted "to dissuade Hanoi from starting the war against the South."²⁸ Unfortunately, when the US began to bomb Vietnam, it compelled the Soviet government to take public umbrage with Johnson's policies. China had recently made allegations to the Soviet government that implied the USSR's Communist credentials were somewhat dubious.²⁹ According to Leffler, Mao claimed "you are doing too little to support the revolutionary struggle of nations."³⁰

As much as these factors added new degrees of tension to the US-Soviet relationship, it did not prove a lasting obstruction to nuclear and arms control diplomacy. The achievements of the war years, most notably the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and SALT itself, prove that Vietnam did not dominate US-Soviet relations to the exclusion of all else. There are likely two reasons for this: commendable foresight by some of the interested parties Zubok gives particular credit to the efforts of Leonid Brezhnev and the simple fact that being two of the world's superpowers meant the United States and Soviet Union had to deal with each other no matter what.³¹ Regardless of which reason was the motivating factor, the US-Soviet relationship kept yielding results during the war. One of these results was the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

The NPT was the last notable nuclear-arms control agreement of the 1960s. It came to be in the final summer of Lyndon Johnson's presidency.

For years, "the doctrine of deterrence" had made such a treaty unnecessary. With only a handful of the world's most powerful nations in possession of nuclear weapons, the "mutually assured destruction" guarantee was, as the Office of the Historian says, a "strong incentive . . . to avoid starting a nuclear war."³² Overtime, however, the reality that new factors might be added to the nuclear equation especially those with "volatile border disputes" that might find themselves tempted to use the so-called nuclear option made formal diplomatic action necessary.³³

Additionally, Vladislav Zubok states that "the Kremlin leaders began to take more seriously the idea of arms control" post-Cuban Missile Crisis.³⁴ Indeed, Brezhnev, who succeeded Khrushchev, "deeply loathed brinkmanship," and would come to view the

pursuit of detente as a key part of achieving “domestic legitimacy” within the Soviet Union, partly to compensate for the fact that virtually no sectors in the USSR were thriving under his leadership, except for the military.³⁵

Finally, “the excessive cost” of maintaining a cutting edge nuclear arsenal was very real.³⁶ The NPT essentially capped the number of nuclear powers and, consequently, the number of states competing against each other. This ostensibly meant the states could take a break from nuclear spending without the fear of being outstripped in technology by any number of other countries.³⁷

A supremely important point, that perhaps has more bearing on this thesis than any other covered in this chapter, is that in 1968 the Soviet Union was in its third year of a weapons growth spurt. According to Leffler, “defense expenditures increased by more than a third” and the numbers of “strategic weapons” soared by more than a thousand.³⁸ Those very weapons, particularly ICBMs and SLBMs would shortly become the subject of the SALT treaty.

As a result, in 1968, the United States, USSR and Great Britain signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, committing themselves to “not . . . assist[ing] other states in obtaining or producing” nuclear weapons.³⁹ Over 50 non-nuclear states signed as well, disavowing their own rights to nuclear weapons insofar as any nation can possess such an inexplicit right.⁴⁰

The final topic that must be discussed before proceeding to the body of this thesis is the election of Richard Nixon. Most of the influences on SALT, as seen above, were impersonal in nature — treaties, wars, crises. Nixon, however, was the defining influence on SALT. Understanding his political experiences and the lessons he

internalized as a result allows us to see how they shaped his vision for and understanding of SALT.

Richard Nixon

The Richard Nixon found in the SALT documents was hyperaware of the fact that he was being watched and listened to at all times. Some of this intrusion came by choice — the tape recorders in the Oval Office, for instance. Some of it was simply a consequence of the period — the Soviet satellites flying so low over the United States that they could be seen from a backyard, and the four channels of broadcast news that aired every day.⁴¹

Nixon, television and the press were hitched together in a not always compatible troika. In 1960, when he debated John F. Kennedy, polls showed he lost the first debate — but only in the opinion of “television viewers,” to whom he had looked physically unwell. According to “radio audiences,” undistracted by his visage, he won.⁴² Additionally, the press panel in charge of running the debate did him no favors: as Ted Sorenson put it, the questioners fired off “questions . . . aimed at tripping a candidate or creating a headline instead of eliciting specific issues and information.”⁴³

Yet only eight years on, the press and television would aid Nixon in winning the presidency. In the summer of 1968, the Democratic National Convention began in Chicago. At the same time, so did massive left-wing demonstrations that disintegrated into a civilian versus police riot. The television channels covered both, which, according to David Farber “for Hubert Humphrey [the Democratic nominee for president] and the Democratic Party . . . was an unmitigated disaster.”⁴⁴ Nixon could not have asked for a better example of why the country needed his “Law-and-Order” leadership.⁴⁵ Even so, it

proved a rough race — he won only to “face a house and senate controlled by the opposition party.”⁴⁶

As president, Nixon would look to SALT as a weapon to combat negative press. In the course of negotiating the treaty, the Pentagon Papers, a 7,000 page “history of the U.S role in Indochina [Vietnam]” would be released, culminating in the Supreme Court case that allowed the “top secret” papers to be published by *The New York Times*.⁴⁷ The Kent State shootings occurred only a weekend after campus protests in response to Nixon’s expansion of the war front into Cambodia.⁴⁸ As Nixon bluntly put it to Henry Kissinger on April 23, 1971, the same day that “thousands of Vietnam veterans” flung their military medals on the Capitol steps: “this [SALT] is a bunch of shit . . . but . . . in terms of PR, we could use something like this.”⁴⁹ Nixon’s insistence that the credit for SALT be exclusively his would later prove a significant problem in his relationship with US SALT delegation head Gerard Smith.

However, SALT does not appear to have made quite the impression on the public that might have been expected or hoped for. The Gallup Poll, which collected volumes of information during the period 1969-1972 when the US negotiated SALT, never even polled a single question explicitly about SALT. In 1969, there *was* a recurrent question regarding “President Nixon’s ABM [anti-ballistic missile] proposal” — 69% had “heard or read about discussion on the ABM program,” but only 40% claimed an opinion.⁵⁰ However, this question vanished after that year and nothing like it ever appeared again. The poll *did* pose questions about military spending, the haircut tendencies of politically inclined males and “presidential popularity” Nixon’s approval ratings remained a consistent 50-60% throughout his tenure and Vietnam, which, the Gallop poll gives the

impression was the only nation of importance in the world from 1969-1972.⁵¹ Even today SALT remains somewhat obscure, though that may change thanks to the release of the declassified documents and recent developments in the relationship between the United States and the Russian Federation.

Regardless, President Nixon always had one eye on the outside world as he developed SALT, and the consequences of that were enormous.

Ramifications for SALT

During the SALT negotiations, Soviet Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Dobrynin said to Henry Kissinger, “he couldn’t recall . . . beginning a negotiation in which the two sides knew so little about one another.”⁵² The events that I have discussed in this chapter prove the ambassador’s statement to be mostly dramatic hyperbole. The 1960s was not a diplomatic desert for the Soviet Union and the United States. Indeed, Ambassador Dobrynin himself knew this—he was the man who Robert Kennedy met with during the Cuban Missile Crisis to discuss peaceful solutions.

To be sure, SALT was a new animal in many ways. The diplomatic successes of the previous decade, specifically the treaties, had been conducted multilaterally — SALT would be bilateral. The Soviets faced a Republican president that had “pillor[ied] Kennedy for pandering to Khrushchev” less than a decade earlier.⁵³ But after the Cuban Missile Crisis and two treaties, I argue that if the two sides truly knew nothing about each other by the time SALT negotiations began in 1969, it was not due to a lack of opportunity for understanding, but to deliberate obtuseness on the part of those involved. And there was certainly no shortage of that in the members of the Nixon administration.

Endnotes

¹ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 131.

² Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 132.

³ Schlosser, *Command and Control*, 220.

⁴ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 138; Craig Nelson, *Rocket Men: The Epic Story of the First Men on the Moon* New York: Viking, 2009, 136.

⁵ Nelson, *Rocket Men*, 135.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 138-9.

⁸ David Farber, *The Age of Great Dreams: America in the 1960s*, 1st edition New York: Hill and Wang, 1994, 40.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 36-7.

¹¹ Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 158; Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 129 & 143.

¹² Farber, *The Age of Great Dreams*, 42–43; Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 156.

¹³ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 148.

¹⁴ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 144 & 147.

¹⁵ The paperweight given to then Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson is on display at the LBJ Library in Austin, Texas.

¹⁶ “Limited Test Ban Treaty,” U.S. Department of State, accessed September 8, 2017, <http://www.state.gov/t/isn/4797.htm>.

¹⁷ “Limited Test Ban Treaty.”

¹⁸ Erin R. Mahan and Edward C. Keefer, eds., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, SALT I, 1969-1972.*, vol. XXXII, Foreign Relations of the United States Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2010, 1.

¹⁹ “Limited Test Ban Treaty.”

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 152; Nelson, *Rocket Men*, 138.

²³ “Limited Test Ban Treaty.”

²⁴ Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 188–89.

²⁵ Ibid., 187, 191-2, 200.

²⁶ Ibid., 202, 204-5, 210.

²⁷ Ibid., 231.

²⁸ Ibid., 215-216; Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 198.

²⁹ Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 226-7.

³⁰ Ibid., 226.

³¹ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 223.

³² “The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty NPT, 1968,” Office of the Historian, accessed September 11, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/npt>.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 151.

³⁵ Ibid., 203, 224-5.

³⁶ “The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.”

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 239.

³⁹ Lawrence D. Freedman, “Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons | International Agreement,” Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed September 11, 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Treaty-on-the-Non-proliferation-of-Nuclear-Weapons>.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Nelson, *Rocket Men*, 120.

⁴² Warren Perry, “50th Anniversary of the John F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon Debated Part 2,” accessed September 11, 2017, <http://npg.si.edu/blog/50th-anniversary-john-f-kennedy-and-richard-m-nixon-debates-part-2>.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Farber, *The Age of Great Dreams.*, 221-224.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 217 & 224.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 226.

⁴⁷ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, “The Pentagon Papers,” Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed September 9, 2017 <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pentagon-Papers>.

⁴⁸ Thomas R. Hensley and Jerry M. Lewis, “The May 4 Shootings at Kent State University: The Search for Historical Accuracy | Kent State University, accessed September 11, 2017, <http://www.kent.edu/may-4-historical-accuracy>.

⁴⁹ Mahan and Keefer, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, SALT I, 1969-1972*, document 150.

⁵⁰ George Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1959-71*, 1st ed., vol. 3 New York: Random House, 1972, 2190.

⁵¹ Ibid., 2181, 2210, 2224, 2244, 2265, 2290-1, 2307; George Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1972-1977*, vol. 1 Wilmington, Del: Scholarly Resources, 1978.

⁵² Mahan and Keefer, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, SALT I, 1969-1972*, document 64.

⁵³ Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 190.

CHAPTER THREE

SALT Plans

The beginning of any project, large or small, often has an element of the chaotic to it. There was definitely an element of this in the early days of SALT, which coincided with the early days of the Nixon presidency. Every office and branch of the administration had a voice, and templates for SALT existed in abundance. In such a state, it can be difficult to immediately identify the significant.

However, many themes and concerns arose during this period that had great importance to SALT, and in fact, many of the most important dynamics, problems and issues of the SALT process in 1969 permeated the talks all the way until their conclusion in 1972. Questions of Soviet motives, ACDA fears about a limited agreement, a military and civilian branch division of opinion, inherent problems in pursuing a National Command Authority (NCA) ABM system, and an overt emphasis on the symbolic over the substantive all appeared in the discussions and papers from 1969 and would continue to do some for the next three years. In this chapter, I will examine their first manifestations, as I prepare to trace them through the larger context of the negotiation process.

Blueprints A, B, C, D: Early thoughts about SALT

The Nixon administration never intended peace to be anything more than a side effect of SALT. This fact is evident in the earliest records of the talks. A May 1969 National Security Council (NSC) paper flatly questioned whether a treaty of substance was even

desirable — perhaps, the paper suggested, a “symbolic” one would suffice.¹ Barring that, any treaty’s objectives would be pragmatic. The paper’s authors did not suggest great concessions on the part of the United States. Rather, they laid out the facts of the strategic arms situation and suggested a strategy that closely resembled the practice of handicapping race horses. In terms of arms, there existed areas that the United States comfortably dominated, and others where it did not so much lag as simply not merit a mention. The goal of a treaty would be to handicap the Soviet Union by capping all the areas in which it led and prevent it from progressing further in the areas where it did not. Thus, the United States should pursue restrictions on ICBMs and MR/IRBMs the latter of which, Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missiles, the United States had 0 to the Soviet Union’s 700 while also “impos[ing] limits” on SLBMs where it was “well ahead.”² This strategic mindset would prevail in the Nixon administration for the duration of the SALT negotiations.

Additionally, the NSC and ACDA a new creation from the Limited Test Ban Treaty period offered five different treaty templates.³ The NSC suggested four of the five, which ranged from an ICBM freeze treaty to a ICBM/SLBM treaty, or a BM plus MIRV treaty, each template encompassing more limits, bans and restrictions than the last.⁴

The ACDA template, Stop Where We Are (SWWA) requires little explanation: its purpose was to put “a quantitative and qualitative freeze on all” weapons, from “launchers” to “radars” to “bombers.”⁵ Gerard Smith, ACDA director and SALT delegation chairman, touted SWWA as an efficient way to prevent an anticipated Soviet build up in its “strategic offensive missiles force . . . by about 45 percent.”⁶ Smith argued SWWA was easy to verify because in a total ban, ambiguity would be eliminated. Any

action would, necessarily, be an obvious violation this opinion was seconded by the Central Intelligence Agency.⁷ The financial numbers appeared more appealing than in any of the other templates — while the NSC suggested a \$1 billion per year savings, Smith’s preliminary numbers from SWWA more than quadrupled that to \$5 billion.⁸ Much of this savings came from the fact that a total ban meant there would be no new weapons to pour money into.⁹ Finally, with SWWA, the MAD guarantee would remain in place. Leaving the US and Soviet arsenals “as is” would mean the expected result of a strike would be “125 million fatalities in retaliation from a preemptive attack on the opponent.”¹⁰

Such a number is, in print, shocking. However, nowhere in US SALT records do any members of the Nixon administration express concern at the prospect of the elimination of 3% of the world’s population.¹¹ While this might be attributed to sheer callousness, I think part of the reason for this apparent indifference is that fundamentally, there existed real doubt as to whether a nuclear strike would ever occur. With the exemption of the Joint Chiefs, neither the president or any of his advisors ever espoused a world view that envisioned the Soviets and the United States one hair’s breadth from outright war. If one accepts the premise that the members of the Nixon administration did not foresee nuclear war in the immediate future, then the fact they did not pursue an at-any-cost peace through SALT becomes somewhat more understandable.

Gerard Smith’s stated goal for SALT was “a halt to the arms race.”¹² In addition to the financial and verification benefits stated above, Smith argued that any kind of limited treaty would “divert the arms race into the permitted channels,” essentially diverting the flood waters instead of damming them as both nations worked outside the treaty’s fine

print.¹³ This, unfortunately, would be proven a valid argument even before SALT was officially signed. Smith, though ostensibly endowed with authority as the US delegation chair, played for most of SALT a Cassandra role — ignored and disgraced.

These, then, were the earliest suggestions proffered for consideration to President Nixon and his administration. Throughout the second half of 1969, administration advisors would attempt, with only moderate success, to produce a US negotiation plan from the material in the five templates. For further exploration on that process, I now turn to the record of those months.

Wishes and Caveats – US SALT Preparations

To paraphrase Sun Tzu, knowing thy enemy is invaluable. However, within the Nixon administration, there was no universal agreement about how deeply that maxim should be held. On the one hand, some advisors, such as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Warren G. Nutter, argued for further development of US knowledge about Soviet motives. Others, such as Deputy Secretary of Defense David Packard argued that such knowledge was basically immaterial. The conflict over the matter occasionally devolved into unintentional hilarity — when the representative of the CIA asked apparently in all seriousness if too much print was devoted in the objectives analysis section of a paper to Soviet motives, Secretary Nutter wryly observed that the United States' motives were hardly unknown to the administration.¹⁴ In that particular instance, the matter was settled by Henry Kissinger, who said, “although it made no operative difference, it [further inquiry] would reflect a greater rigor in the analysis.”¹⁵ Kissinger's comment neatly summarizes the Nixon's administration perspective of SALT: much of it was little more than symbolic window-dressing.

Despite the minimalist approach the administration took towards its investigation of Soviet motives, the various agencies did proffer some ideas as to what the Soviets might want out of SALT. The NSC suggested that the USSR sought to “improve . . . its strategic position” and, as in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, minimize expenditures.¹⁶ Soviet achievements in the arms race had come at some cost to their budget. At the time of SALT, the “Soviet strategic forces took a bigger bite out of the Soviet economy than ours” no mean feat considering the US’s history of defense spending which gave rise to Eisenhower’s infamously named “military-industrial complex”.¹⁷ Aside from that, the NSC projected correctly that the “Soviets would prefer a lower limit on ABMs.”¹⁸ However, these musings were too broad to be of much use in plotting negotiation strategy. The conflict over how to address Soviet motives did not end here. From 1969-1972, the administration continued to struggle to settle on an approach towards the Soviets. Kissinger favored personal derision of the Soviet character in general, but Nixon shifted between concurring with his advisor and evangelizing for better analysis — a costly ambivalence that could not help but dull the United States’ negotiating edge.

One area in which the Nixon Administration did avail itself of its knowledge of the historical record was verification. This issue had, of course, been a centerpiece of the Limited Test Ban Treaty (LTB) negotiations, and so the administration’s discussion of verification was rooted in memory of the LTB, as well as the Eisenhower era disputes over the matter. John McCloy, ACDA General Advisory Committee chairman, recalled how the USSR “resisted [“an elaborate verification system] violently, considering it espionage,” which he attributed to “a general secretive disposition” on the part of the

Soviets — an unfortunately stereotypical kind of insight into the Soviet Union.

Additionally, McCloy expressed some dissatisfaction with the US position in the Limited Test Ban Treaty — he thought the US concessions had perhaps gone too far.¹⁹

McCloy's quibbles notwithstanding, general sentiment suggested that mandating on-site inspections in the SALT treaty was a desirable diplomatic dream.²⁰ Smith, who pointed out that the prospect of “billions of rubles” in savings from an arms deal might make the Soviets less resistant to on-site inspections, supported pursuing them, but with the caveat that they should not be made a deal breaking point within the treaty.²¹

However, there was concern about the flip side of making such demands. After all, reciprocity was implied — if the US wanted access to the bowels of the Soviet arms program, then it would have to be prepared to permit the Soviets access to its own.²² The Joint Chiefs of Staff, though, never ones to indulge in optimism expressed the belief that on site verification could work “without giv[ing] away the farm to the enemy” and ultimately on-site inspections would remain on the US wish list.²³

Another question that necessarily followed from the discussion on verification was what to do in the event of violations. Nutter noted the precedent in Vietnam — choose when to acknowledge or ignore violations as convenient.²⁴ It was also suggested that verification could be treated as if it was “analog[ous] with the [limited] test ban,” where protocol was “if an anomalous event occurred, we could ask the Soviets about it and say that we did not understand what they were doing.”²⁵

Verification was also entangled with individual weapons, especially MIRV, which provided “high confidence means of puncturing ABM defenses,” and which the United States was currently in the process of “flight testing.”²⁶ Smith argued that MIRV was

“70% of the issue,” without which, “agreement is meaningless.”²⁷ His comments in this regard, like those about a limited ban, turned out to be quite prophetic.

However, questions existed as to whether it would be possible to verify the non-use of MIRVs. The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) in particular harbored doubts, although, as the nature of defense is characterized by wariness, this is perhaps not as significant an objection as it might first appear.²⁸ The 1969 verification report is a stark example of the fundamental differences between the civilian and military branches of the administration and their views on SALT, highlighting the tempered faith of the civilian branches, and the ingrained skepticism of the military.²⁹ A good amount of the report consists simply of statements by the civilian branches about what is possible in verification, and subsequent statements by the defense branches that highlight their own beliefs that such estimates are much too high and positive.

This clash did not confine itself to the pre-negotiation period. The Vienna negotiations had barely gotten underway before an irate Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird wrote Kissinger a bristling memo stating how “deeply concerned” Gerard Smith’s behavior made him. He said that he “[had] received reports that the U.S. delegation is interpreting and molding Option C [the chosen US negotiating template] to fit preconceived notions which bear strong resemblance to the oft-expressed ACDA position.”³⁰ This problem was not unique to SALT. As noted in the introduction, there existed an early tradition of conflict between the military and civilians stretching back to the Joint Chiefs of Staff’s relationship with the AEC, and SALT would carry on this tradition in grand style — while Smith and ACDA’s influence plummeted, the military’s

rose exponentially as a result of President Nixon's fears of losing the political base that the JCS represented, a topic which I explore further in chapters four and five.

A notable absence in the above proceedings, is of course, the voice of the president himself, and it is to Nixon that I now turn. His early lack of involvement was deliberate — as Henry Kissinger stated near the beginning, “the mind boggles at the possible combinations of negotiating positions, and it was not fair to ask the president to make specific choices.”³¹ Kissinger approached SALT with a strategy wherein “the President decide[d] the scope of agreement he wishes, then the executive committee study could come up with realistic proposals.”³² Nixon became a much more active SALT player once those proposals were created.

In the last month prior to the opening of negotiations, the NSC had come up with seven possible negotiation templates for the president's approval. As the original templates had, they ran the gamut from limited to comprehensive. At minimum, the US should impose a freeze on the ICBM and MRBM launchers and restrict ABMs. At the maximum, they could seek to cap ICBMs and SLBM, MRBM and IRBM launchers, as well as require the systematic destruction of certain weapons down to an agreed level.³³ In addition to picking the template, the president also had to tell the delegation the role he wanted it to play — whether it be active: open and aggressive from the start, or reactive: responding to the Soviet delegation's disposition and inclinations.³⁴

Nixon wanted what he described as a “getting to know you” strategy, agreed upon with delegation head Gerard Smith. Nixon was inclined to play it close to the vest — even “Congress and the Allies” were to be left ignorant about US intentions.³⁵ He wanted a hybrid approach that was neither too nebulous nor too “concrete” and favored the

elaboration of the general themes of the seven NSC options, without yet offering any of their details.³⁶ Though he told Smith he had “no interest in either polemic exchanges or in the mere atmospherics of détente” and that he wished to be “serious,” he did so with a keen eye on the broader benefits of such a strategy for public relations. Any sincerity, he said in a conversation with Smith, was “more for US public opinion than for showing good faith to the Soviets.”³⁷

As to specifics, he personally preferred Option II, which was a SLBM and ICBM freeze, coupled with ABM limitations. This would guide the negotiations throughout SALT, and the treaty would address both criteria.³⁸ He dismissed Smith’s Stop Where We Are as a “gimmick,” early on, which he compared to “a ceasefire in VN [Vietnam],” though he also observed that “it could be used as propaganda” and indeed, it remained in circulation as an option throughout the SALT preparations.³⁹ Evidently, Nixon’s decisions were rooted in public-relations concerns from the onset.

On the matter of verification, he said “assume they [the Soviets] will cheat.”⁴⁰ In a rather ironic and foreshadowing addition, Nixon further noted that “there are no constraints on cheating for them, but we have budget limitations which prohibit our cheating.”⁴¹ Beyond that, he told Smith that he needed a level of verification that would satisfy the electorate, though he could accept a “margin of uncertainty” and said he was well aware he no longer lived in a time where absolutes were either obtainable or providable.⁴²

In contrast to Smith’s stated goal of ending the arms race entirely, Nixon wanted to preserve the defensive capacity of the United States and its NATO allies. Throughout the

negotiations, he would continuously harp on the fact that he did not intend to pass a second-rate country on to the next president.⁴³

These were the instructions that Gerard Smith took with him to Helsinki. The delegation did not go happily. Smith later complained that Helsinki “had many Soviet agents operating” there, and that “it was unfit for winter negotiations.”⁴⁴ Unfortunately, the administration failed utterly to address the issue in a constructive manner — Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin told Henry Kissinger that he had spoken to Secretary of State Packard, who said “to hell with ‘Sinki,’” a statement which Dobrynin observed “is not a diplomatic suggestion.”⁴⁵ And so, in November of 1969, Smith and his delegation arrived in Finland.

Context at Home and Abroad

Before proceeding to the substance of the 1969 Winter SALT negotiations, some of the external activity surrounding SALT deserves a brief mention. First, the spring had seen Senate hearings on the ABM plan of President Nixon the same plan that became a Gallop Poll question, as noted in chapter one. ABM was “to provide area defense against a relatively small nuclear attack by China and . . . the Soviet Union.” Despite Secretary of Defense Laird’s invocation of the “nuclear forces build up” of the USSR, the passage of the plan was not a foregone conclusion.⁴⁶ In fact, perhaps surprisingly, House Republicans proved an obstacle. They singled out MIRV as an issue and questioned whether the Soviet Union might not perceive it as something “necessitating . . . ABM deployment to reestablish deterrent balance.”⁴⁷ However, Nixon eventually got his plan, by what he called “a cliffhanging one-vote margin.”⁴⁸ Second, in October, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) broke the news of a new revelation — “a mobile missile

system with a range of 4,000 miles” was being tested in the Soviet Union.

Disconcertingly, the system was advanced enough for the CIA to estimate it was a project that was at least four years old.⁴⁹

Finally, it would not be amiss at this juncture to consider what precisely was occurring in the Soviet Union at the time of SALT. The United States was not the only nation in the world that experienced sometimes tumultuous change during the 1960s, and while the Soviet Union obviously did not experience the same domestic seizures as the United States, it had its own share of challenges. Vladislav Zubok states that “the Communist camp in Southeast Asia lay in ruins” after the military took over Indonesia and “300,000 Indonesian Communists” had been killed, while in Africa, the Soviets watched “the rout of the [Soviet backed] Arab states” in the Six Days War.⁵⁰ Balancing these events was one other: the Prague Spring. In the face of a growing liberal movement in Czechoslovakia, Brezhnev invaded the country. Despite this act of aggression, a US response was non-existent — there were simply no repercussions analogous to the kind of international sanctions that are often used today notably against nations such as the Russian Federation.⁵¹ According to Zubok, the fact that “Western leaders . . . favored business as usual after the invasion . . . indicated a political victory for the Soviet Union.”⁵² Amongst Soviet leadership, there were expressions of confidence that American hegemony was dead, and that NATO was no longer a factor for consideration when deciding the Soviet path.⁵³ Interestingly, though, historian Donald Raleigh records that “West European Communists sharply rebuked Kremlin leaders for the invasion of Czechoslovakia.”⁵⁴

Within the Kremlin, Leonid Brezhnev had recently “bec[o]me the uncontested head of the party apparatus.”⁵⁵ Generally agreed by historians to have been a man for whom “peace through strength” was a motto, Brezhnev is also credited with a desire for peace that went beyond the typical, and could be considered a dominating personality trait.⁵⁶

Zubok casts Brezhnev as the lynchpin of the detente period. As seen in the Nixon administration’s discussions in preparation for SALT, it was believed economic factors might push the Soviets towards compromise, but Zubok says “to imply that the . . . economic costs of the nuclear arms race, and . . . nuclear war were enough to compel statesmen to seek accommodation . . . would be the same as suggesting that the prospect of accidental death would be a sufficient reason to cancel Formula One or NASCAR races.”⁵⁷

He also suggests that Brezhnev’s glaringly martial behavior during the Prague Spring, though ethically questionable, provided Brezhnev the internal “credentials” he needed to dictate his own leadership strategy and policy of peace.⁵⁸ Though Zubok can, at times, seem to be overgenerous to Brezhnev, he tempers his praise with significant hedges. His description of “Brezhnev’s entourage” is succinct: “They were worthy counterparts of American hawks.”⁵⁹ And he makes no attempt to cast those who were inclined to détente as anything other than pragmatists — he cites Foreign Minister Gromyko, for instance, as saying “in conditions of detente it is easier to consolidate and broaden the positions of the Soviet Union in the world.”⁶⁰ Such a sentiment carries with it connotations of the Nixon administration’s own vision of why peaceful diplomacy was necessary.

Additionally, Donald Raleigh states that Brezhnev had his own designs on the United States — he wanted an inward facing America occupied “more on [its] domestic

problems” and had hopes that “Soviet proposals to limit offensive and defensive weapons, floated before the American elections, would deal a blow to extremists.”⁶¹ Presumably this means the goal was to make the hawkish policies of some American politicians seem unnecessary and thus, encourage American voters to support other candidates.

The problems of the Soviet Union and the United States in regards to SALT were not entirely disparate. Just as the Nixon administration had to contend with recalcitrant defense branches claiming ACDA-biased behavior on the part of the US SALT delegation, Brezhnev had to contend with military and civilian squabbles within the Soviet government: at one point “the obstructionist stand of the Ministry of Defense forced the top SALT negotiator . . . to turn to Brezhnev for assistance.”⁶² Zubok notes that “ultimately, the Soviet military command much in the same way as its U.S. counterpart wanted to retain complete freedom in the continuing arms race.”⁶³ His assertion that “Nixon’s intentions were the subject of guesses and strong suspicions in Moscow” also mirrors US sentiment in Washington.⁶⁴

Thus, we have an image of what exactly Gerard Smith and the US SALT delegation encountered upon their arrival in Helsinki — not necessarily the individual delegates, but the nature and vision of the leaders and the state that stood behind them. With this in place, we can move on to the events of the Winter 1969-Spring 1970 season of SALT.

Helsinki: Winter 1969

The Helsinki negotiations are barely deserving of the name. Lasting less than a month, they did little more than indicate that the Soviets’ strategy would be much like that of the US — to shackle the other in the races they were losing, and to get the other to

show their hand first. That said, the US delegation did have some useful data to relay back to the president. They noted ABM as an aspect of significance to the Soviets, and that while, “as expected,” the Soviet delegation thought “national means” of verification i.e. satellites “sufficient,” it had not entirely rejected other forms.⁶⁵ Smith also said he had been told by one of the Soviet delegation, that “diplomacy must start with “hints,”” which seems neither an auspicious nor practical method.⁶⁶

One point of interest highlighted by the events of this period is the connection between SALT and the NPT. At Helsinki, Smith specifically mentioned the NPT as a possible motivator for the Soviets’ participation in SALT, citing the NPT “obligations of Article VI” which compelled the signees to keep up the dialogue over nuclear weapons and attempt to solve the issues through negotiations.⁶⁷ At the start of SALT preparations, back in the early months of 1969, Secretary of State William P. Rogers had given just such a reason for the United States’ own involvement in the talks.⁶⁸ Whether Smith’s statement about Soviet motives is simply him projecting US sentiment onto the Soviet Union is, of course, impossible to know, but it is interesting to see how the NPT influenced SALT.

These revelations were the greatest contributions of Helsinki to SALT. I now turn to the winter-spring intermission between negotiations, which was an intermission only in that face-to-face discussions between the nations ceased. Within the Nixon administration, SALT remained very much ongoing.

Training Camp – US Strategy Planning

The winter of 1970 saw two events that were important to SALT. First, the Nixon administration returned to the drawing board to create a more coherent and refined

negotiating position, and Henry Kissinger began to lay the groundwork for private, personal negotiations between himself, President Nixon, and the Soviets.

The year had not started well for international relations. As Republican opponents of Nixon's strategic weapons policy had prophesied, the Soviets took the United States' ABM plans personally. Dobrynin expressed the USSR's displeasure to both SALT delegation head Gerard Smith, and Henry Kissinger, the latter of whom tried to explain away ABM as "as part of our regular budgetary cycle."⁶⁹

The United States honed its position into a plan with five facets— a cap on ICBM launchers that conveniently equaled the number currently in the possession of the United States, a freeze on "MR/IRBM launchers," limited warning on-site inspections, an MIRV ban, and either the self-explanatory "zero level ABM" or NCA-ABM, which stood for "defense of the National Command Authority Moscow and Washington."⁷⁰ The plan was on the ambitious side – Nixon wanted "to provide a more flexible far-reaching initial U.S. position," but he also observed at the time "that it may be necessary to fall back to the more restricted options as the negotiations get underway."⁷¹ This proved to be a wild understatement — only one of the five facets would actually be included in SALT. The inclusion of an NCA-ABM would very quickly be identified as a problem — Deputy Secretary of Defense Packard would state within months that it "isn't Congressionally tenable," yet by then the Soviets had latched onto it as one of the only aspects of the US package they found remotely interesting.⁷²

As the administration worked on its strategy, Dobrynin pushed Kissinger for a preview of what the United States would offer and stated that the Soviet Union was inclined to "a comprehensive agreement."⁷³ While Kissinger did not provide him details,

he did start laying the foundation of their private negotiating relationship. As early as February, he suggested “two channels — one for the formal negotiations, and one between him and me to deal with general principles” and in April he recorded that he had said to the ambassador, “the Vienna talks . . . [should] concentrate on comprehensive measures, while he and I would try to work out a limited agreement in the interval.”⁷⁴

These documents show how Kissinger and by extension Nixon all but lifted SALT from Gerard Smith and his delegation long before they even had a chance to prove themselves. Not only that, but this diplomatic hijacking was concealed from Smith and his colleagues — later on, Kissinger would enlist the Soviets in preventing them from gaining information about what he was working on with Dobrynin. Zubok observed that “Nixon and Kissinger . . . kept the State Department, the rest of the administration, and indeed the entire U.S. political establishment in the dark about their strategies” and cites later occasions when Kissinger “plea[d]” personally with Brezhnev “to keep some aspects of their talks as their personal secret.”⁷⁵

Such behavior is extremely difficult to reconcile with Nixon and Kissinger’s recorded opinions of the Soviets, which are universally negative— as seen in this chapter, Nixon had no qualms about expressing his lack of faith in the Soviet character, and Kissinger on at least one occasion referred to the Soviets as “gangsters.”⁷⁶ The advisor later said Brezhnev “represented a nation that had survived not by civilizing its conquerors but by outlasting them, a people suspended between Europe and Asia and not wholly of either, with a culture that had destroyed its traditions without yet entirely replacing them.”⁷⁷ Viewed from any angle, it does not reflect well on the Nixon administration — the

president and his advisor's behavior towards their own delegation and their diplomatic opponent reflects a distinct lack of integrity.

Nonetheless, from early 1970 on, SALT would be pieced together via these double headed negotiations, conducted by an increasingly fractious collection of American diplomats and politicians. How those negotiations preceded, against the backdrop of Nixon and Kissinger's credit-conscious strategy, and the gradual destruction of their working relationship with Gerard Smith, is the subject of my next chapter.

Endnotes

¹ Mahan and Keefer, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, SALT I, 1969-1972*, document 14.

² Ibid.

³ “Limited Test Ban Treaty.”

⁴ Mahan and Keefer, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, SALT I, 1969-1972*, Document 14.

⁵ Ibid., document 16.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., documents 16; 20; 32.

⁸ Ibid., document 14; 16.

⁹ Ibid., document 16.

¹⁰ Ibid., document 16.

¹¹ The population of the planet in 1969 was 3.6 billion. U.S. Census Bureau, Demographic Internet Staff “International Programs, World Population,” accessed October 23, 2017.
https://www.census.gov/population/international/data/worldpop/table_population.php

¹² Ibid., document 25.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid, document 17.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., document 14.

¹⁷ Ibid., document 25

¹⁸ Ibid, document 14.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., document 17.

- ²¹ Ibid., document 25.
- ²² Ibid., document 25.
- ²³ Ibid., document 25.
- ²⁴ Ibid., document 20.
- ²⁵ Ibid., document 25.
- ²⁶ Ibid., document 38; 14.
- ²⁷ Ibid., document 39.
- ²⁸ Ibid., document 27.
- ²⁹ Ibid., document 33.
- ³⁰ Ibid., document 70.
- ³¹ Ibid., document 17.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Ibid., document 37.
- ³⁴ Ibid., document 25.
- ³⁵ Ibid., document 22.
- ³⁶ Ibid., document 26.
- ³⁷ Ibid., document 22.
- ³⁸ Ibid., document 40.
- ³⁹ Ibid., document 19; 20.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² Ibid., document 26.
- ⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., document 15.

⁴⁵ Ibid., document 35

⁴⁶ Ibid., document 6, Editorial Note.

⁴⁷ Ibid., document 18, Editorial Note.

⁴⁸ Ibid., document 6, Editorial Note; Nixon, Richard M. *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978, quoted in Mahan and Keefer, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, SALT I, 1969-1972*, document 18, Editorial Note.

⁴⁹ Ibid., document 34.

⁵⁰ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 199-200.

⁵¹ Ibid., 207-8.

⁵² Ibid., 208.

⁵³ Ibid., 208-9.

⁵⁴ Donald J. Raleigh. ““Soviet” Man of Peace: Leonid Il’ich Brezhnev and His Diaries.” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 17, no. 4 2016: 856-7, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/635215>.

⁵⁵ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 204.

⁵⁶ Raleigh, ““Soviet” Man of Peace,” 843, 837; Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 225, 223.

⁵⁷ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 223.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 209.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 204-5.

⁶⁰ Dobrynin, Anatoly, *In Confidence: Moscow’s Ambassador to America’s Six Cold War Presidents 1962-1984* New York: Random House, 1995, 640, quoted in Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 206.

⁶¹ Raleigh, “Soviet Man of Peace,” 863.

⁶² Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 220.

⁶³ Ibid., 215.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 216.

⁶⁵ Ibid., document 42; 44.

⁶⁶ Ibid., document 44.

⁶⁷ Ibid., document 44; Ibid., footnote 1.

⁶⁸ Ibid., document 5.

⁶⁹ Ibid., document 51; 52

⁷⁰ Ibid., document 68.

⁷¹ Ibid., document 69.

⁷² Ibid., document 79; 77.

⁷³ Ibid., document 52,55.

⁷⁴ Ibid., document 52; 66.

⁷⁵ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 219.

⁷⁶ Document 161.

⁷⁷ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* Boston: Little, Brown, 1982, 1138, *The Years of Upheaval* Boston: Little, Brown, 1982, 231, quoted in Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 224.

CHAPTER FOUR

Relationships and Rhetoric

The 1970-1971 period of SALT proved exceptionally productive. In the space of thirteen months, the Soviet and US negotiators took the raw substance of SALT — templates, technology and possible combinations thereof — and transformed them into concrete entities, namely the foundations for a defensive treaty and an offensive agreement, covering ABMs and ICBMs. In the following chapter, I will examine this process, highlighting how issues such as the question of NCA ABM carried over from the early SALT period, as well as the dynamics of the newly-established Dobrynin-Kissinger negotiating relationship. Most significantly, I will analyze how President Nixon's personal vision of the talks, grounded in a lust for credit and good PR, guided his SALT decisions and ultimately compromised his relationship with US delegation chair Gerard Smith.

The Soviet Response to the US SALT Offer and American Reflections

The beginning of SALT was primarily an American show, with Smith's SALT delegation acting as the pursuer in the relationship. This state of affairs finally shifted in April of 1970, when the Soviets took the initiative and offered their deal. However, despite their increased participation, they appeared to be in no hurry to acquiesce to the United States' vision of SALT. While the Soviet offer did account for ICBM, ABM and MIRV, the offer particularly targeted NATO and US strongholds abroad. According to the offer as reported by Kissinger "any systems capable of striking the USSR . . .

[would] be returned to national territory, withdrawn beyond range, or destroyed.”¹

Further, “there would be . . . no transfer of them [weapons] to third countries,” and in a parting shot, “national means of verification” rather than on-site inspections would be the method for monitoring the treaty.²

Shortly thereafter, the Soviets “reject[ed] . . . [the US’s] two proposals as a basis for negotiation.”³ Aside from the offer, the Soviets favored an a la carte approach and offered ABM and “ICBMs, SLBMs and heavy bombers” as areas in which they would willingly negotiate — the first three the only issues, interestingly, that the final iteration of the SALT treaty and agreement dealt with.⁴ Additionally, the Soviets asked to “be “compensated” in other offensive . . . systems,” if the US wanted them to let go of the NATO issue.⁵

Those in the Nixon administration reacted in different ways. President Nixon, according to Smith “seemed to have no doubt in his mind that we should go for a limited agreement,” which totally contradicted his original position and Smith’s advice.⁶ Smith himself declared “no future in that [MIRV] subject,” while he also suggested that “from a PR point of view,” the appearance should be maintained “that follow-on talks will discuss MIRV” in yet another example of the internal and external duplicity that marked the US SALT process.⁷

Kissinger declared it “vague on details and one-sided in its terms,” “crude,” and “unsophisticated.”⁸ He noted the “many loopholes for the Soviets to continue their strategic build-up” and complained the stipulation against sharing weapons “would wreck our NATO arrangements.”⁹ It should not have come as a surprise to him — the entire NPT existed to prevent such weapons gifting. He admitted, though, that “perhaps

because of their internal preoccupation — [the Soviets] may not have really come to grips with the SALT issues,” which resulted in their production of such an unappealing treaty. Kissinger was not the only US advisor to theorize about how the Soviets were coping with SALT — as seen later in this chapter, Helmut Sonnenfeldt, of NSC Operations Europe, has his own suppositions about the state of the treaty process in the USSR, which were not far from the truth.¹⁰

In addition to NATO, the Soviet Union brought China into the SALT process. In July, one NSC advisor told Kissinger that, in an event that seems straight out of a James Bond film, “Semyonov [the Soviet delegation head] gave Smith (at a concert!) a paper expanding on Soviet views on “provocative attacks” that “is speaking of nothing less than a U.S.-Soviet agreement to . . . take joint retaliatory action against a Chinese attack.”¹¹ Needless to say, the Nixon administration was not desirous of doing any such thing. In a subsequent meeting with Kissinger, Dobrynin somewhat mitigated the effect of the proposal, stating that “[it] would not become a sticking point,” and “he was afraid too great significance was going to be read into it.”¹² The proposal would die slowly from this point on, but those in the administration, particularly Sonnenfeldt, declined to let it pass unremarked on. Instead, he suggested that China was “perhaps the real heart of the matter in SALT” and that “an alliance against China . . . may be the most important Soviet political initiative in years.”¹³ As noted in chapter one, Brezhnev not unlike Nixon wanted to use SALT to deal with his domestic issues. Clearly, global issues mattered to him as well.

At the same meeting that Dobrynin tried to minimize the China issue, he and Kissinger also saw the discussion of what would become a dominant theme of SALT, and

arguably, one of the main reasons that SALT took four years instead of two to complete: linkage. As noted in chapter one, linkage played a role in previous US-Soviet deals, notably the Limited Test Ban treaty. At the meeting with Dobrynin, Kissinger told the ambassador that the precedent would continue and “that it was not possible to separate the components of a SALT agreement—that it was necessary to have a limitation on offensive weapons together with a limitation on ABM’s[sic].”¹⁴ The Nixon administration never relinquished this demand and its attainment of this goal represents arguably the administration’s greatest achievement in regards to SALT from a strict winner-loser perspective that does not take into account the actual results of the limitations.

The new draft of SALT that Nixon sent Smith on July 9, 1970, was a far cry from the original of only three months earlier. The April draft’s MIRV, and on-site inspections had been thrown overboard like so much ballast. Instead of freezes, Nixon now wanted to “concentrat[e] on imposing numerical limits on the most important strategic weapons systems”: ICBM and SLBM launchers and bombers “would be limited.”¹⁵ NCA ABM or zero level ABM were both left open, and though Nixon refused to provide “any form of “compensation”” as a thank you to the Soviets for not insisting on their own linkage and going after “forward based aircraft,” he added that “If the Soviets raise the question of an exchange of statements or assurances with respect to systems excluded from the initial agreement, the Delegation is to seek further instructions.”¹⁶

Ten days later, NSC advisor Sonnenfeldt released a paper that deconstructed SALT and presented solid evidence to suggest a treaty could be little more than a Pyrrhic victory for the United States, not only in terms of actually controlling the arms race, but

in terms of its global power. Sonnenfeldt echoed Smith's warnings about the risk implicit in a "limited agreement": specifically, that it would do little but divert the issue. Sonnenfeldt observed that there were a multitude of areas in which "the Soviets could [work and thus become] fairly confident that they would never again be in a position of strategic inferiority."¹⁷ He also suggested that "with ABM constrained and US/Soviet parity confirmed both the British and the French will judge their own strategic forces as having acquired new justification."¹⁸ In addition to further weapons development, he forecasted "an Anglo-French force."¹⁹ He does not elaborate on the exact nature of this force, but it seems to have a nuclear arms aspect — he noted that "we might be confronted with requests for technical assistance" that SALT would compel the U.S. to deny.²⁰

Beyond the arms sector, how SALT would alter the US-NATO allies equation also concerned Sonnenfeldt. He could foresee NATO, long bound to the United States by the historical chains of the Second World War, slipping from the grasp of US authority. He expressed the belief that "leading European statesmen would be strongly motivated to use the umbrella of a SALT agreement to seek personal understandings with the Soviet Union."²¹ And in perhaps one of the most blatantly pragmatic observations from a collection that has no shortage of them, he observed "one of our principal problems . . . would be to manage the onrushing European detente in such a way that our concrete interests are not virtually swept aside."²²

As seen in many prior instances, specifically the discussions of verification and the reasons why both states pursued a treaty at all, the Non-Proliferation Treaty exerted a certain amount of influence on SALT and on the mindsets of its creators. That influence

is no less evident in Sonnenfeldt's paper, where he harkens back to the period of the NPT— the same period, incidentally, that saw the Prague Spring. Within the paper, Sonnenfeldt explains the US response to the Prague Spring as a direct consequence of the NPT. He implies that the Soviets used the NPT as a way of incentivizing the US to overlook events in Czechoslovakia, “lest the tentative detente be jeopardized.”²³ Sonnenfeldt feared that SALT could similarly “inhibit” US flexibility in international relations.²⁴

Historian Vladislav Zubok, of course, as seen in chapter two, argued the US's muted response to the Soviet suppression of the Prague Spring compromised US authority in the eyes of the Soviet government. Sonnenfeldt's description of the situation puts US behavior in slightly better light — taking into account his perspective, the US appears to have found itself in a catch-22 situation: either openly criticize Soviet behavior in Czechoslovakia and risk losing the NPT or stay quiet and keep the NPT but lose some of its intimidation based-power.

Sonnenfeldt devoted less paper to two other significant qualms about SALT — firstly, with SALT, the US “could no longer argue persuasively” against the “trade and technology exchanges,” which we know from Leffler was a desire of the Soviet Union since at least the post- Cuban Missile Crisis Khrushchev era and, according to Sonnenfeldt's evaluation of the situation, remained one — he thought that “if we choose to move in a direction of more open cooperation with the Soviet Union, we would, *of course* [my italics], find the Soviet leaders responsive.”²⁵

His last issue was simple and matter of fact: “None of the post war arms control agreements with the USSR have proved the turning point that their advocates hoped

for.”²⁶ This truth which was, admittedly, subjective, coupled with the many ways in which SALT could erode US power, would likely have made a treaty an extremely unappealing prospect to a man who wanted a real treaty. Nixon, however, did not need SALT, strictly speaking to be a real “turning point.” He just needed it to look like one.

At the end of July, Nixon sent his delegation the officially revised version of his wishes, which, as noted above, framed SALT within “numerical limits.”²⁷ The paper included two notable additions - a “supreme national interest clause” which functioned as a trap door out of the treaty, and a committee designed to address SALT-specific issues as they arose after the nations had signed the treaty the idea for this committee had been discussed within the Nixon administration for some time.²⁸ One thing Nixon chose to leave out was “research and development.” Within his new version of the treaty, the US only sought to stop the physical arms race. Nixon left open the option to essentially stockpile blueprints for the rainy day when US-Soviet relations fell apart.²⁹ The Joint Chiefs undoubtedly found comfort in this — in their own memo, which represented the high point of their anxieties about SALT, they said that “It is probable that, as the characteristics and potential of the Soviet force capabilities within the constraints of SALT option E become known, there will be a need for significant changes to US weapons programs in order to preserve the US as a viable society.”³⁰

Relations did not improve as the year progressed, and both sides had quibbles about the other. In October, Smith reported that “[Foreign Minister] Gromyko questioned whether making speeches in plenaries was the most effective way to negotiate, although he noted that great skill was being put into the preparation of speeches.”³¹ However, if the Nixon administration could be criticized for being overly loquacious, then the Soviets

could be criticized for being disingenuous. Gromyko, echoing Dobrynin's line, "said they would prefer a broader agreement," although having just received such an offer from the US, they picked out what they wanted from it the ABM and left the rest like an owl disgorging the bones of its dinner, a fact which did not escape the notice of Kissinger.³²

As he had earlier, Deputy Secretary of Defense Packard warned against the NCA/D.C ABM, citing "strong Congressional opposition."³³ However, in December he offered an idea that took root within the Nixon administration: he wanted "the flexibility to locate our [US] counterpart to the Moscow system [NCA] where it can best serve national security."³⁴ The administration would latch onto the idea and cling to it as doggedly as the Soviets held onto ABM.

The reason the US did so stems from the fact that this site already existed as a single facet of Nixon's mammoth ABM system, Safeguard.³⁵ The Nixon administration already knew that NCA's aforementioned lack of viability within the legislature posed issues, but an NCA-ABM plan brought up another issue as well: it would require the cessation of the "\$14.8 billion" Safeguard plan, which employed some "50,000-100,000 people," who had already partly built it.³⁶ In a unique example of relative agreement between Nixon's military and civilian advisors, Smith and the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) urged Safeguard's preservation. The OSD believed it provided valuable leverage for the US in SALT, and wanted to continue the program even if it eventually became one of the systems banned by a treaty.³⁷ Smith argued that it should keep going at "a moderate pace" — he urged against building to the point that the Soviets could assume the US had invested too much to feasibly abandon it.³⁸ Kissinger agreed, and offered his own solution — "stopping at existing sites."³⁹

The same month Rogers offered his site change suggestion, Sonnenfeldt released possibly the most creatively titled memorandum ever written within a bureaucracy: entitled “SALT: The Shaker is Running Out.” A commendable analyst among the members of the administration, Sonnenfeldt displayed broadmindedness in his approach to the diplomatic chessboard and showed a willingness to concede that in regards to “the general condition of our relations with the USSR. . . . An exceptionally strong element of poor communication and understanding [was] involved.”⁴⁰

That said, two years after SALT preparations had begun, he could only conclude that Soviet “propositions,” which harped on ABM and NATO defenses, “[were] patently unacceptable,” though if the propositions were “Bargaining tactic[s]” they were working — despite Nixon’s nominal dismissal of compensation for the Soviets, the administration was “engaged in a feckless exercise to find a “formula” to buy off the Soviet forward based aircraft proposal.”⁴¹ Smith offered an opinion compatible with this interpretation — he explained it as a potential tactic of relativity, designed “to make the negotiations on offensive weapons so unattractive that the separate ABM agreement, by comparison, would look good.”⁴²

Sonnenfeldt also correctly gathered that SALT posed its own problems within the Kremlin, observing that “the main Soviet leaders . . . have been virtually silent on SALT, as if the subject could not be addressed without precipitating political controversy.”⁴³ Zubok’s research, examined in chapter two, lends credence to Sonnenfeldt’s theory — the record suggests Brezhnev had to encourage firmly the military sector to cooperate.⁴⁴

Ultimately, the NSC advised Kissinger and by extension the president to essentially get out clean, and not be seduced by “enticing notions” suddenly being “dangl[ed].”⁴⁵ As

they bluntly put it in a December NSC memo — “if the Soviets really want to make a deal, they know our number.”⁴⁶ Nixon listened to his advisors.⁴⁷

On the surface, the April-December 1970 period of SALT seems somewhat disjointed. However, the fact that the resultant treaty was built upon precisely the aspects of strategic arms focused on during the period suggests that the Vienna negotiations were not quite as negative as they might originally appear.

*“You and I are going steady” - Kissinger and Dobrynin’s SALT*⁴⁸

1971 saw a key shift in the dynamics of the SALT negotiations. Though the negotiations continued in Vienna, the real work would henceforth be done in the capitals of the interested parties. For the next year, Washington D.C. would be the nexus of productivity, the place where Dobrynin and Kissinger would together create agreements, which they would then dispatch to their delegations abroad at their discretion for what amounted to some diplomatic editing. This control would continue all the way up to the summit, with the last decisions being made under the light of a midnight sun in Moscow.

In 1971, the plans of Dobrynin and Kissinger for private negotiations became a reality. Also as planned, Smith and his delegation were excluded. Shortly before Christmas in 1970, Kissinger told the Soviet ambassador “that [he] had to be sure Soviet diplomats would not speak to other Americans about the content of our conversations” and “special care should be taken that our channel would not be played back into any American net.”⁴⁹

Smith’s fall from grace had already begun a few weeks prior. In December, the CIA told the Nixon administration that Soviet strategic weapons appeared to be getting curtailed, though the NSC was not willing to respond with anything but “extreme

caution” to this revelation.⁵⁰ The administration passed on the news to the public, eliciting a slightly passive aggressive missive from the US delegation head, who was displeased that the change was made known “without any check on the delegation’s views on the wisdom of timing.”⁵¹ Reminding Kissinger that he had at his disposal “the SALT Delegation . . . [with] an accumulation of knowledge of Soviet perceptions of the overall US/USSR relationship,” Smith added that he “hope[d]” Kissinger “will . . . put [it] to good use.”⁵² Smith’s plea failed to move Kissinger or Nixon, who only grew more critical of Smith as time went on.

While it might be assumed that by essentially cutting out the middlemen Kissinger had simplified the negotiations, this turned out to be far from the truth. In fact, the record of the Kissinger-Dobrynin negotiations shows a profoundly repetitive process, marked by reiterations of the same issues time and again. A week after the new year, Kissinger offered Dobrynin the basic materials of the SALT agreement: “an ABM agreement . . . provided it was coupled with an undertaking that there would be a freeze on new starts of offensive land-based missiles.”⁵³ By the following month, he reported success — Dobrynin and the Soviets would take the deal, and “consider” letting the US keep its Safeguard sites.⁵⁴

The first US attempt at putting the deal into words hybridized the best hopes and worst fears of Nixon’s administration — to preserve Safeguard and justify or, from another perspective to salvage the expenditure, Nixon offered a Soviet NCA and US Safeguard ABM deal, with a freeze on “all new construction of land-based ICBM.”⁵⁵ Expanding further on the sentiments expressed in the research and development section of Option E namely, that it could occur, the offer said “each side would *of course* be at liberty to take

such steps with its own weapons programs as are not explicitly precluded by the agreement [my italics].”⁵⁶ This phrase represented no less than what Smith had warned against in SALT’s earliest meetings — that a limited agreement would be the proverbial band-aid over a bullet hole by simply rerouting the arms race.

Shortly thereafter, in mid-March, a somewhat ironic and puzzling event occurred. Kissinger reported to the president that Dobrynin met with Smith and “pressed Smith for the possibility of an ABM only agreement.”⁵⁷ Kissinger to the president called the Soviet ambassador a “son-of-a-bitch” and accused him of “feeling out whether Smith is willing to give more.”⁵⁸ The irony, of course, lies in the fact that after assiduously trying to cut Smith out from SALT, Kissinger perceived Dobrynin as trying to cut *him* out.

While Kissinger’s response could be construed as unnecessary suspicion, later events prevent this inference. This same issue would appear again during SALT: evidence would suggest that the Soviets leaked the Kissinger-Dobrynin talks to the US delegates, forcing the conclusion that Kissinger had in fact picked up on something real. Kissinger initially took it as a personal offense. This would not be true the second time around.

The trajectory of the US-Soviet relationship continued to rise and fall like a stock market trend line throughout the spring. The Soviets, uninterested in linkage as ever, offered ABM-NCA only with “discuss[ion] subsequently . . . of ‘freezing’ strategic offensive weapons.”⁵⁹ This hardly pleased Kissinger, who, when Dobrynin asked if he wanted to write the Soviet position himself, tartly replied he “had trouble enough drafting documents for the U.S. government; I could not draft them for the Soviet government as well.”⁶⁰ Six weeks later, on April 23, “Dobrynin . . . [brought] a draft reply to the proposal . . . which conceded most of our points except for the Safeguard/Moscow

arrangement.”⁶¹ The Soviet concession came not a moment too soon — Kissinger had recently expressed in a meeting the belief that the United States had reached “the absolute limit of what we can risk.”⁶²

Only a week later, though, the Soviet delegation dusted off the “the proposal we [the US] turned down” a NCA-ABM only agreement which put off the US’s much desired offensive agreement till post-Salt.⁶³ In a discussion with the president, Kissinger allowed that in this instance the Soviets’ actions might have a practical purpose unrelated to the US. As he put it, “they can’t turn around 180 degrees . . . without having made some bureaucratic record from which they can retreat.”⁶⁴

Less justifiable at least in Kissinger’s eyes was what happened next. Vladimir Semenov, Soviet Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Soviet delegation inexplicably began talking to Smith as if Nixon had made him party to the Kissinger-Dobrynin talks and “spelled out” its substance. Kissinger, furious, this time took the issue to Dobrynin, snapping at him in a telephone call that “we can only conclude . . . it was a deliberate attempt to mobilize his people against him or by-pass him [the president].”⁶⁵ In response, the Soviet ambassador backpedaled quickly, insisting “We are not children. . . . We know who is boss in the W[hite] H[ouse]” and promised to reprimand Semenov who “emphatically denie[d] he talked with Smith about it”.⁶⁶

Whether Kissinger’s accusations were true remains unclear. The fact that the Soviets had behaved this way before certainly makes it appear that Kissinger was not simply indulging in conspiracy theories. If he indeed interpreted events correctly, then it does not reflect well on the Soviets, who come off as somewhat lacking in perception. As Kissinger asked Dobrynin “What would Brezhnev think if he proposed to us through a

channel and we went to a subordinate official and made a reply?”⁶⁷ Perhaps the Soviets could excuse their behavior by claiming a miscalculation — Zubok says “Soviet leaders knew him [Nixon] only as a devout anti-Communist.”⁶⁸ However, that small piece of information would surely have been enough to warn them that attempts to undermine his authority would go over supremely poorly.

Finally, Kissinger’s outburst must be evaluated for sincerity — Nixon and Kissinger both understood well the value of a little fear mongering: one has to only consider Nixon’s oft used “second-rate US” soundbite for an example of this. Additionally, on at least one occasion, Kissinger discussed with Nixon his plans for how to act towards Dobrynin, which taints all Kissinger and Dobrynin’s discussions with a question as to how much of his interactions with and sentiments towards Dobrynin were spontaneous and honest.⁶⁹ There likely exists an element of both calculated bombast *and* sincerity in Kissinger’s reaction to the problem with Semenov. On the one hand, Kissinger probably wanted Dobrynin a little scared and a little more pliable. However, considering his private discussion with Nixon the first time Dobrynin himself tried to deal with Smith one-on-one, where Kissinger also expressed irritation, we can assume that generally speaking, Kissinger’s anger at Dobrynin was real, albeit slightly augmented for effect.

Kissinger’s accusations aside, SALT was at last unveiled on May 20, 1970 to “press comment. . . [that] was muted.”⁷⁰ In a memo that beautifully encapsulates SALT and the president who created it, Special Assistant Bob Houdek said:

“[Members of the administration] are concerned that the president is not getting enough credit for yesterday’s SALT announcement, and have asked . . . [Kissinger] . . . [to] meet with or make phone calls to several newsmen who did not Attend . . . [the] briefings.”⁷¹

To better understand why the members of the administration took such issue with how reporters received SALT and, to a degree, further explain Kissinger's demand that Dobrynin essentially pay Nixon homage, one must examine the mindset of their president, who for months leading up to this point had been articulating a vision of SALT that rested its success on its ability to bring him public glory.

Never Off the Record: Richard Nixon on SALT, Smith & the American public

In the beginning of this thesis, an investigation into the early SALT documents and the record of Soviet arms building exposed an important reason for SALT: the Nixon administration saw check only a few moves ahead. After years of production, the Soviet Union had made itself a true competitor to the United States in the arms sector, and not only that, looked close to surpassing it in certain areas.⁷² A treaty offered a way of putting off that most undesirable day.

However, Nixon's personal desire for SALT also drove the treaty forward in the US, just as Brezhnev's desire drove it forward in the Soviet Union. The record of the spring-summer of 1971 is laden with references to SALT's relationship to domestic politics and shows Nixon's overwhelming desire to attain credit for the treaty that he could then use as a balm to soothe US unrest.

In a discussion with his National Security Council early in Kissinger's private negotiations with Dobrynin, Nixon baldly noted "the pathetic idealism on arms control" and "it would be best to speak on it often. . . . We know that cosmetics have a lot to do with how people see this, regardless of substance."⁷³ It is brutal analysis, and Nixon's phrasing here presents some interesting implications: it suggests that his actions are indeed driven by the people, but also shifts the blame onto them for SALT's

shortcomings in substance. Only a decade later, Madonna would sing of how she lives in a material world and is, consequently, a material girl. From Nixon's perspective, he similarly acts only according to what the realities of the situation demand. These so called "cosmetics" matter and so he caters to them. His desire for credit then is not a consequence of the fact that he unscrupulously pursues accolades, but that credit simply must be taken or else it will go to people less deserving who do not have an election to win and a country in need of a leader.

A few weeks later, in a conversation with Kissinger, after the Soviets had tried again to break the linkage of ABM and offensive weapons at the public negotiations, he said "I'm not so sure the SALT thing is going to be all that important . . . It's basically what I'm placating the critics with."⁷⁴ Kissinger agreed that "it would defuse people. . . . and that would get us a few months. . . of quiet."⁷⁵ He also said that "whatever the SALT agreement is, it's a lot better than the nuclear test ban [the Limited Test Ban treaty]," which shows the importance of recent history: it could be used as a relative gauge of success. Nixon could at least comfort himself that he had done better than one of his Democrat predecessors.⁷⁶

In a meeting with his Chief of Staff H. R. Haldeman and Kissinger, where they plotted domestic political strategy, Nixon said that "any kind of agreement with the Soviet[s]. . . . We're having it for political reasons. . . . The American people are so peace-loving, they think agreements solve everything. . . . [And] if. . . the Soviet thing goes we're not going to let those bastards take credit for it. We've got to take credit anytime we turn around."⁷⁷ He also suggested the desirability of arranging that SALT be

announced “after the demonstrations,” thought the advisors told him that would not be possible.⁷⁸

In a separate meeting with George Shultz, the director of the Office of Management and Budget, Nixon said that “the effect of . . . [SALT] on this whole situation in this country could be great if we would have an . . . agreement between Russia and Nixon.”⁷⁹ His word choice in this instance is particularly fascinating — much as his way of describing the “cosmetics” of SALT implied a great deal about his view of the situation, so too does his juxtaposition of himself against Russia. Rather than imagining SALT as something between two nations, or even two governments, he sees it as an event occurring between himself alone and the Soviet Union. “Russia and Nixon” evokes the image of himself against the USSR, and SALT as his singular achievement, not the achievement of himself and an exceptionally large team of advisors. Indeed, the image elevates Nixon’s status — in it he embodies or even overshadows the United States itself.

Nixon’s banishment of Smith from the SALT process dovetails perfectly with this exclusive vision. Soon after Kissinger and Dobrynin started their talks, Kissinger said “what he [Smith] wants is a completely free hand, so that he gets credit for whatever is achieved.”⁸⁰ Nixon flatly stated “I want him out” and Kissinger accused Smith of being the reason they had failed to conclude a prior agreement — “Smith . . . said ‘it would be an election stunt.’”⁸¹ It is, of course, interesting that according to Kissinger, the administration actually passed up an opportunity to enhance the election chances for the party — none of Nixon’s past rhetoric suggests he would do such a thing. Regardless of whether Smith had designs upon credit, by virtue of his position he was a natural

candidate for credit, which did not fit well with Nixon's plot line for SALT, which made him the starring actor.

For Nixon, SALT mostly acted as a great story, which he wrote with Kissinger. Ambassador Edward Brynn notes, "[the documents] reinforce the view that Nixon and Kissinger sought to control SALT."⁸² They talked about how to tell the tale of SALT, and plotted out the script and the roles.⁸³ When Alexander M. Haig, Jr. a high-ranking officer in the U.S. Army who bore almost half-a-dozen titles during the Nixon Administration, including Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs and Army Vice Chief of Staff later expressed the opinion that the Soviets wanted to "keep you [Nixon] from getting the credit," Nixon defiantly responded "that won't happen. They don't know how much I control it."⁸⁴

Unfortunately for Nixon, his story failed to find readers, which greatly frustrated him. He complained about the fact that SALT flew under the domestic radar as evidenced by the Gallup Poll's omission of any questions regarding it, as noted in chapter one. He asked whether H.R. Haldeman had "looked over the press conferences recently" and pointed out that "in 6 months . . . we didn't have any questions on SALT. I had to drag it in."⁸⁵ He explained the issue as a problem of comprehension. SALT "confused the hell out of" people, the president said. "SALT is way over their heads. They haven't the slightest idea what SALT is. It's too goddamned complicated."⁸⁶ Though Nixon's opinion of the American people was quite low, as evidenced by some of his comments about their "pathetic idealism," I think in this matter he spoke the truth. SALT simply lacked the qualities of a good story — the subject matter was totally inaccessible:

ICBMs, SLBMs, MIRVs. None of it was familiar or easily explainable. In a sense then, Nixon failed to achieve one of his greatest priorities for SALT: to enhance his image.

He did desire other things from it, however. He agreed with Secretary of State Rogers that they wanted “the opportunity to develop all the things we would develop anyway And really stop the things we probably would stop anyway.”⁸⁷ And beyond that, he used SALT as a shield in dealing with the legislature. He hoped that a summit would obligate the members of the legislature to cooperate with him. As he put it, “you could take those bastards to task for undercutting the President when he’s about to do this.”⁸⁸ His success in handling the legislature is difficult to gauge without a detailed examination of the success of his policy in the House and Senate.

Nixon’s final opinion of SALT seems to be pragmatic, just like the rest of his administration’s opinion. A discussion with Kissinger and Haldeman, Nixon’s chief of staff, offers insight into how Nixon’s decidedly practical approach to SALT also manifested in his advisors’ understanding of the treaty. Haldeman bluntly queried Kissinger with “who won?”⁸⁹ The simple structure of the question reveals interesting things about how members of the administration viewed the process. Linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, in their work “Metaphors We Live By” discuss the use of metaphor in language and argue that much of our vocabulary reflects our understanding of certain ideas. For example, we use war metaphors to discuss arguments, portraying them as competitions with a winner or a loser.⁹⁰ Haldeman’s question betrays a similar conception of negotiations.

Kissinger using the same analogy, said “It was a draw.”⁹¹ However, he then said “they have yielded 98 percent. They’ve practically accepted our position on the SALT.”⁹² I

believe that a dual-level analysis clarifies this statement: from a micro-level perspective, the agreement seemed to favor the US, since it included, as Kissinger pointed out, most of the US's desires at the time. However, from a macro-perspective, it stands as a draw at best — what Kissinger got was a significant step down from what the US had first thought to pursue. Additionally, they knew that their agreement to NCA smelled of hypocrisy — “we just beat the bureaucracy silly to move from the Washington position to the Safeguard position,” Kissinger noted, “for us to suddenly reverse ourselves.”⁹³

Yet, as always, the allure of credit made the agreement palatable: Nixon said to Kissinger, “all this is a bunch of shit, as you know. It's not worth a damn. But the point is, in terms of our public relations, we can use something like this.”⁹⁴ Nixon at times tried to disguise this fact. He once told Haldeman that “I was deliberately downgrading [SALT] . . . because Haig and Al upgrade it far more . . . the SALT thing is enormously important,” implying his behavior stemmed more from strategy and a need for balance than personal reasons.⁹⁵ The extensive records which show his desire for SALT as a political tool definitively contradict this statement.

The flip side of a discussion of how SALT related to domestic politics inevitably leads to the question of how it related to international politics. Surely, a man like Nixon would be as concerned about SALT's effects beyond US borders, including the effect on his image — especially since his advisors, such as Sonnenfeldt, pointed out the negative consequences SALT might have on US global power. However, the international issues seem not to have greatly preoccupied him.

As for potential negative effects on his personal image, a letter from Robert Ellsworth, the US Representative to NATO, sent in April of 1971, implied that little grounds for

concern existed: in Ellsworth's letter, he stated that NATO did not object to a scaled down treaty — rather, “an ABM-only agreement . . . would give their Governments a useful peg upon to which to hang a slowdown in their offensive missilery development.”⁹⁶ Thus, based on this letter, it appears that an ABM agreement offered a chance to *improve* rather than damage Nixon's image in the eyes of his fellow Western leaders.

In the end, Nixon got what he wanted — SALT all to himself, with his advisors conceding their authority to him. Smith, when finally informed of the private negotiations, took the revelation of his exclusion quite well. He said “I thought the product was good,” though he hastened to distance himself from the “product” in question — “pointing out how loose the drafting was, I told Henry [Kissinger] I could take no responsibility for it,” a statement which seems to indicate that, his praise for the “product” aside, he sensed potential problems in it and wanted absolutely no credit for *them*.⁹⁷ Kissinger “said he knew he would be blamed if anything went wrong.”⁹⁸ Smith also reported that “Kissinger said that in backgrounding the press he would make no mention of his [own] participation in the process.”⁹⁹ This arrangement makes sense in light of Nixon's personality: he wanted credit, but not if it did not serve him. In that case, his advisors were more than welcome to it. A short time earlier, when talking to Dobrynin, Kissinger had told the ambassador that if the Soviets gave him “a big promotion, it will be because of my showing attention to your government.”¹⁰⁰ Dobrynin had replied “It's sometimes better not to have attention. . . . It's a little dangerous.”¹⁰¹ Clearly, the same statement applied to the Nixon White House.

Ultimately, many voices spoke in the US SALT discussions, and while Nixon's attempt to keep them mostly muted in the public sphere undoubtedly stands as an example of his self-centered desire for credit, it also can be interpreted as an unabashed acknowledgment of reality — namely, that Kissinger, Sonnenfeldt and all the other advisors served at his pleasure. Without his willing it, SALT would not have come about. And as SALT was measured against his standards, examined within his frame of reference, and ultimately accepted as fulfilling his goals, it is his voice that carries the most weight in consideration of the SALT process.

As seen in this chapter, it is in large part for and because of Americans, that Nixon pursued SALT, even though he found them unimpressive and considered them unable to grasp the realities and complexities of the political world. His estimation of the American character paired with his vision of SALT as a tool designed to enhance his domestic authority, explains why he prioritized the accouterments of the treaty over its actual substance and also offers a key to understanding the apparent disconnect between his rhetoric of strength and his continuous and easily given concessions in SALT.

From a strategic standpoint, SALT as devised by Henry Kissinger may look like a less-than-optimal substitute for a real treaty. But from the perspective of a prototypical American citizen as defined by Nixon, who takes comfort in the mere existence of treaties whatever the fine print may say and lacks the understanding of diplomatic and military minutia that would allow them to understand the fine print if they ever read it, SALT could be classified a resounding success. And that American's opinion is the one that mattered to Nixon. Thus, his concessions seem not a failure of leadership and

fortitude, but the concessions of a man who will agree to much should it help him reach his ultimate goal with more speed.

Nixon continued to espouse his rhetoric of PR and credit for the rest of SALT, but the next phase saw a subtle shift in his objectives, as he changed from simply attempting to placate the public at large, to trying to ensure the specific support of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defense, and the people they represented — his best allies in an election year. How this recalibration affected SALT will be the main subject of the next chapter.

Endnotes

¹ Mahan and Keefer, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, SALT I, 1969-1972*, document 72.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., document 77.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., document 80.

⁶ Ibid., document 84.

⁷ Ibid., document 85.

⁸ Ibid., document 72.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., document 91.

¹² Ibid., document 93.

¹³ Ibid., document 106.

¹⁴ Ibid., document 93.

¹⁵ Ibid., document 94.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., document 95.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Ibid., document 100.
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ Ibid., document 112.
- ³¹ Ibid., document 108.
- ³² Ibid.; Ibid., document 118.
- ³³ Ibid., document 115.
- ³⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁵ Ibid., document 126.
- ³⁶ Ibid., document 125; document 129.
- ³⁷ Ibid., document 125.
- ³⁸ Ibid., document 129.
- ³⁹ Ibid., document 126.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., document 116.
- ⁴¹ Ibid.
- ⁴² Ibid., document 116.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 220.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid., document 119.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., document 120.

⁴⁸ Ibid., document 143.

⁴⁹ Ibid., document 123.

⁵⁰ Ibid., document 121.

⁵¹ Ibid., document 122.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., document 124.

⁵⁴ Ibid. document 132.

⁵⁵ Ibid., document 134.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., document 139, footnote 2.

⁵⁸ Ibid., document 139.

⁵⁹ Ibid., document 140.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., document 149.

⁶² Ibid., document 148.

⁶³ Ibid., document 150; document 154.

⁶⁴ Ibid., document 154.

⁶⁵ Keefer, Edward Coltrin. *Soviet American-Relations: the Détente Years, 1969-1972* Washington D.C: State Department, Bureau of Public Affairs, Office of the Historian, 2007, document 151, quoted in Ibid., document 155, Editorial Note.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 216.

⁶⁹ Mahan and Keefer, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, SALT I, 1969-1972*, document 148.

⁷⁰ Memorandum, May 21, 1971, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, SALT talks Helsinki, Vol. XV, May 1-July 1971, National Archives, quoted in *Ibid.*, document 160, Editorial Note.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 205.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, document 133.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, document 141.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, document 148.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, document 133, Editorial Note.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Edward Brynn, preface to *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, SALT I, 1969-1972*, vol. XXXII, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, eds. Erin R. Mahan and Edward R. Keefer. Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 2010, iv.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, document 150.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, document 153.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, document 135.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, document 153.

⁸⁹ Ibid., document 150.

⁹⁰ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, “Metaphors We Live By” in *Language: Introductory Readings*, by Virginia Clark, et al. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980, 8-15.

⁹¹ Mahan and Keefer, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, SALT I, 1969-1972*, document 150.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., document 153, footnote 7.

⁹⁶ Ibid., document 145.

⁹⁷ “Memorandum of Conversation,” ACDA Files: FRC 383-97-0010, RG 383, Washington National Records Center, quoted in Ibid., document 157, footnote 6.

⁹⁸ Ibid., document 157.

⁹⁹ Ibid., document 157.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., document 155.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER FIVE

Military Influences

If the Nixon administration had hoped that it ushered in a new, efficient phase of SALT with the official announcement in May 1971, the forthcoming year would prove the administration's members deeply wrong. The twelve-month period prior to the Nixon-Brezhnev meeting in Moscow lacked the steady, deliberate atmosphere that might be expected of a concluding period in a project. Instead, a sense of confused irresolution permeated SALT, not simply in the details, which bedeviled the president and his advisors until the last possible moment, but in the basic premises of the treaty and agreement.

Old issues that had languished previously reappeared, including the question of Soviet motives. Smith and Nixon's relationship continued to struggle against the president's bias against his own advisor. And the Joint Chiefs and Office of the Secretary of Defense launched what amounted to a successful late-stage takeover of SALT. This last topic is the most important of all the occurrences during this period, as it not only reflects the continuation of the military tradition of grasping for control over nuclear-related policy in the U.S., but reveals a new aspect of President Nixon's mindset, and further explains his decisions in SALT.

Old Soldiers and New Missiles: Melvin Laird, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and SALT

When the NSC met on June 30, 1971, the defense arm of the US government came out of the gate strong and had no qualms about offering a vision of SALT that pushed the boundaries of what could be defined as a peaceful agreement.

Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, JCS chair, stated that his people wished for “an option permitting us and the Soviets to build 4 sites” along with NCA.¹ Smith pointed out the implicit logical fallacy, noting that this NCA Plus idea was opposed to the point as “a 400 percent increase in ABM [the potential result] . . . is not disarmament, it’s rearmament.”² The Joint Chiefs were also behind a late stage-addition in the US SALT paperwork: a “freeze” on SLBM launchers originally referred to as SSBMs – Sea-based Ballistic Missiles when the aim was to include missiles on “submarines or surface ships.”³ Mentioned in the June NSC meeting, this new clause stemmed from the fact that it “could reduce the possibility that the Soviets will soon have more SLBMs.”⁴

SLBMs would complicate a process that already had many pressing concerns. The Soviets did not want to address them, and Nixon himself professed to have no interest in doing so, but the JCS insisted that as “[it] is the fastest growing strategic system [of the USSR]. . . . Allowing SLBMs to be excluded would be militarily unsound.”⁵ The Chiefs had other issues with the text, too — they and OSD operated from the assumption that peace and agreements rarely last, and with that in mind, sought to eliminate any treaty rights that put R&D at risk.⁶

The branch, as a rule, focused intently on controlling as much of the future as possible. As Laird put it, “I am absolutely persuaded that any . . . agreement we enter must be specific, precise, and as free of loopholes as possible. We must assume . . .

ambiguous and weak provisions will be exploited.”⁷ In this vein, the defense sector not only tried to keep every exit door propped open for the US, they also tried to mandate Soviet behavior as much as possible — seeking clauses that would end SALT if the USSR tried to interpret “further offensive limitations” as something to be dealt with sometime in the next century.⁸ Of course, controlling the future is a difficult task, and unbeknownst to the Chiefs and OSD, their ability to cultivate it as they wished would be curtailed more quickly than they might have hoped or foreseen— by 1974, Nixon would be out of office, and Ford would fail to win his own term.

Secretary of Defense Laird, meanwhile, had other quibbles with the text. He insisted the freeze specified in the print would come too late. He warned “we face the prospect in the 1975-1977 period of seeing the U.S. advantage in total war heads on target eroded.” And in a phrase reminiscent of *Star Trek* which had been cancelled only a short time before, he said “That [the war heads] is the last frontier of U.S. advantage in the strategic nuclear field.”⁹

Defense grew only more concerned when Smith revived the “ABM ban” option for the Soviets.¹⁰ The idea floated around D.C. for a period of time, until defense had a meeting with the president to snuff it out permanently. In a military and defense only meeting on August 10th, Laird and the Joint Chiefs joined the president for a discussion on their opposition to various postulated forms of SALT. Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt Jr.’s opening remarks on SALT bear quoting at length:

“There’s nuclear standoff . . . and we hope it will continue into the future, preferably through a successful SALT, but if not, then through increased expenditures in strategic weaponry. But the standoff means that nuclear power is not a useful instrument; it’s just a necessary umbrella. And assuming the balance holds, the power which resolves issues will be appropriate conventional capability.”¹¹

There is a jarring quality to Zumwalt's statements — the idea that a “nuclear standoff” is the best-case scenario for the future is disconcerting. Second, the mention of “conventional forces” is provocative — while Zumwalt never defined the term presumably because everyone in the room knew what it was, “conventional forces” are boots on the ground — otherwise known as Zumwalt and every man under the command of himself and the other chiefs. Zumwalt essentially argued that MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction) had neutered the power of nuclear weapons. No one would risk using them, and so they offered the president a *weak* source of power. No one, he implied, would take a presidential threat to use nuclear force seriously. Those days had gone — “these forces [nuclear] were exclusively relevant in the ‘50s and ‘60s,” he said.¹² The president, Zumwalt believed, had “relevant power” in the military.¹³

This view of reality necessarily put the Joint Chiefs into an unexpected relationship to SALT. Even as they opposed much of the treaty on defensive principles, it also represented an opportunity for them to stay in the game. It is a strange notion, to imagine that a treaty that should optimally make the world a more peaceful place in fact would keep a generation of military men employed, but SALT from the beginning was full of contradictions.

However, as testified to by the conduct of the JCS and Defense Secretary Laird up to that point, the possibility that SALT might prove a boon to them did not in any way prevent them from taking a decidedly bearish approach to the nuclear missile market. They vehemently opposed what they considered dangerous displays of trust, and the total ABM ban drew their particular ire. Laird all but insisted that combining it with the

offensive agreement would be like disarming in front of an enemy still holding a loaded weapon.¹⁴

Finally, like the president, the Chiefs had their own concerns about the “cosmetics” of things. In a March 6, 1972 memo to Laird, of all people, they deviated from their well-worn melody regarding the dangers of restrictions on future systems and the offensive agreement to point out that “Superiority, equality, and inferiority have not only a military but also a political and psychological impact on US security interests. The US should never sign an agreement which places it in a position that other nations . . . could perceive as a position of US strategic inferiority.”¹⁵

How much of Laird and the Chiefs’ loudly proclaimed and reiterated opinions actually resonated with the rest of the Nixon administration is a question that must be considered. Those at the NSC seemed unimpressed by the verbal plumage on display. K. Wayne Smith, the soon-to-be director of NSC Program Analysis, wrote his boss, Kissinger on October 6th and said, “The real risks are not as great as Laird and Nitze [his deputy] argue,” and suggested a number of reasons why, most importantly “numerical superiority in FBS and bombers and our qualitative advantage.”¹⁶

For his part, Kissinger’s relationship with the president’s defense advisors tended to the less than harmonious. At the beginning of 1972, Kissinger told the president he had “got to get [Joint Chiefs Chair] Moorer positioned,” and that “Laird is playing . . . a crooked game . . . as always.”¹⁷ Only a few months later, he would muse about relieving Moorer of his post.¹⁸ Reviewing the JCS’s complaints about the offensive agreement, he said “They’re so insane.”¹⁹

Of course, the disharmony may also partly have stemmed from the Joint Chiefs' complete and utter willingness to inform the president when its members thought he was failing. While Kissinger assured Smith that he would personally hold himself responsible for anything that went wrong with his Dobrynin-SALT negotiations, the Chiefs went all out on record and bluntly stated as always their opinion. In a paper sent to Laird on the last day of July 1971, the Chiefs said "[we] are concerned by the rapidity with which the US negotiating position has steadily eroded relative to the Soviets."²⁰ Though it was a military to Defense paper, the Chiefs had no desire to keep it in house — the original was annotated with a note indicating that "[USAF Lt. Gen] Vogt asked that these views be made known to [the] White House."²¹

Nixon, for his part, was alert to the risk posed to his public image by this audacity. In a meeting with Haig and Smith, he forecasted an internal attack on SALT from what he deemed "the responsible Right" within which he grouped none other than "men like [Defense Secretary] Laird and [JCS chair] Admiral Moorer." He anticipated a microscopic level of scrutiny on SALT, and insisted "It's got to be solid, strong, and tough, so that we can . . . kick hell out of critics who are criticizing it for the wrong reason."²² He also noted that success or failure would have special relevance "in this kind of year" — 1972 was a presidential election year.²³ And while Nixon and Kissinger both admitted privately that they were prepared to lose SLBMs, and in fact neither wanted them in anyway though they neglected to say why, Kissinger told the president "I don't see how we can go against the [Joint] Chiefs of Staff."²⁴

Finally, there appears to have been an element of rueful admiration involved in the president's relationship with his defense advisors that was not present with others he

disagreed with — for example — Smith. Nixon, talking with Kissinger, said “You’ve got to hand it to old Laird. He knows the issues on SALT,” to which Kissinger replied: “He plays this politically, but he knows it.”²⁵ Nixon obviously perceived Laird as someone worth hearing out, and also a credible threat in a way Smith never could hope to be.

The president’s decision to concede to the will of the Joint Chiefs and the Secretary of Defense was not unique — as noted in the introduction, Eisenhower similarly bowed to the pressures of his defense advisors. However, while Eisenhower had the excuse of making his decisions for the of purpose military strategy, Nixon made the decision for the purpose of political strategy, which is considerably less justifiable, but nonetheless inline with his character as seen throughout the SALT process.

For the rest of SALT, the concept of “the responsible Right” loomed large, and in some ways displaced Nixon’s concerns about public opinion though in a sense, trying to win over the “responsible Right” was to win over public opinion — just a smaller portion of it, and the portion most likely to vote for him. In the coming weeks, Nixon would personally strategize about how to target the Right and then spearhead the promotion of SALT, assuming perhaps his most engaged role yet in the entire treaty process. Thus, the JCS and Department of Defense’s actions during the spring of 1972 proved influential not simply in a military sense, but in a much broader, political one as well.

Is that my cue? Nixon, Smith and summit strategy

The pre-summit season did not start terribly well for Smith. By early July, Sonnenfeldt had already complained to Kissinger that Smith had committed the sin of far too literally interpreting the US’s own SALT policy. Helmut Sonnenfeldt, referring to an

earlier document that seemed to offer options to the Soviets said: “it was made clear that we would not want to permit a real choice . . . [and it was] essentially [a] cosmetic formulation.”²⁶ One must have sympathy for the delegation head, who found himself getting criticized for taking the words on the page at face value. Clearly, he had learned little from his time sitting around the White House tables, where dissimulation was the name of the game.

Things only got worse as summer wore on, with an August letter from Smith indicating that he was once again feeling the brunt of inter-administration unhappiness with the extended detour that negotiations appeared to be taking after a period of productivity. He refused to shoulder the blame, insisting “this is not a fair estimate of the situation.”²⁷ Pointing his finger back at the White House, he argued that “*when we have guidance . . . the issues should quickly come to a head [my italics]*.”²⁸ In closing, he rather unsubtly threatened to quit, noting that “if he [the president] thinks I am being dilatory or obstinate, my usefulness to him would be over.”²⁹ Unbeknownst to him at the time, the president in fact found his apparent failures very useful in their own way. Nixon and Kissinger, comfortably out of earshot of Smith, continued to complain about him. Kissinger compared him to “a shyster lawyer,” but noted “the only reason this isn’t an unmitigated loss is because, actually, we don’t mind staging it so that you [Nixon] can sign it next year.”³⁰

The matter of when SALT would be finished absorbed a good amount of attention publicly and within the administration — Nixon and his advisors’ inability to make a definitive decision about it resulted in some diplomatic hiccups. However, the most favored though poorly executed strategy seems to have been to keep SALT incomplete

until the president could ride into Moscow and take the proverbial bouquet of roses and the credit and leave. Thus, Smith's perceived failures functioned as a convenient obstacle to stick in SALT's path, though the internal records, which document the painful agonizing over the possible ways to make the ABM treaty, show that the White House hardly lacked for real obstacles.

Throughout the fall, Nixon continued to lock Smith out of the White House. The delegate head blew a gasket when Nixon publicly confirmed that he might "talk about it [SALT] at the summit."³¹ Smith, on the phone with Kissinger, said he should have been informed and that the advisor had made promises to him to the effect that "if there was one [a summit] I would be advised."³² Kissinger simply swore at Smith and told him to "relax," to which Smith dryly replied "I am relaxed. I'm disgusted, but relaxed."³³ Only a week later, Nixon revived the double-headed negotiation process that kept Smith out of a significant amount of SALT, writing Brezhnev "If . . . there is opportunity for additional progress through private exchanges here in Washington I am, of course, prepared to undertake them."³⁴ As it turned out, such an opportunity did exist — but those exchanges would be held in Moscow.

End of year conclusions within the administration did not inspire confidence — and Smith had the misfortune of playing the messenger who had to present the laundry list of "unresolved [SALT] issues" that included everything but the kitchen sink. "ABM levels," "withdrawal provisions" and "form of the ABM agreement" were all cornerstone issues with no consensus on solutions.³⁵ And as always, Nixon had no qualms about putting the blame on everyone but himself. In a January 1972 meeting, he lamented "There isn't going to be any goddamn SALT . . . unless these people don't get a little bit

better.”³⁶ How he expected anyone to “get better” is a puzzlement, as he continued to deprive his own team of the vital oxygen of all diplomats: information. Yet he refused to change that pattern, under directions from Kissinger, who cited concerns that “he’ll [Smith] just leak it [info].” Both men remained convinced that Smith was out to deprive the president of his “credit,” so “then he’s the hero.”³⁷ Kissinger said “Whatever he’s got, we got it for him. He hasn’t advanced it one step.” Neither man would acknowledge that they had orchestrated events which had made Kissinger’s statement true. Instead, Nixon only lamented upon being told that Smith could not be relieved of his post: “That’s always the case. We can’t fire anybody.”³⁸ Nixon and Kissinger more than once used this excuse of portraying the president’s actions as circumscribed by events —or more usually, people — beyond his control. Later in this chapter and the subsequent one, we will see how he and Kissinger chalked up the US’s failure to investigate Soviet motives and their insistence on SLBM restrictions to the erroneous conclusions of others.

The president’s private comments aside, the New Year brought some diffusion to the tensions between Nixon and Smith, with Smith able to at last bring some victories if small to the White House, along with a notable element of humor. Only two days after the president and Kissinger maligned him, Smith delivered news that all the signs pointed to a US legislature amenable to SALT, and that it could possibly clear the Capital building by June.³⁹ A few months later, he successfully lobbied for dispensing with any explicit linkage between the ABM and the offensive weapons agreement, arguing that “The Soviets say this supplementary right [that should the offensive agreement not develop further, the US could leave the ABM treaty] is unnecessary.”⁴⁰ He expressed the opinion that the “supreme national interest” clause would suffice to cover the United

States in the event the offensive agreement fizzled into nothing.⁴¹ His advice, which contradicted that of the defense branch, prevailed in this rare case.⁴²

And finally, after suffering for so long from the consequences of Nixon's gamesmanship, Smith got in on strategy with the president. In a March meeting, when the president fretted over SALT criticism from "the responsible Right" Smith offered a way to head off the onslaught — "deliberately not reach . . . an agreement [till the summit]," so as to "face them with a fait accompli."⁴³ Nixon and Smith wanted to keep potential critics ignorant of SALT details as long as possible, so as to limit access to the fertilizer of criticism until to speak critically would appear in poor taste. This jived with Nixon's own previous discussions of how manipulating SALT could help him with the legislative branch — much earlier in the process, he had noted how, spun the right way, criticism of him could be construed as in poor taste.⁴⁴ Smith's suggestion appeared to please the president — it was likely the only time the delegation head ever heard "you're absolutely right," from his commander in chief.⁴⁵

The tone of the president and Smith's relationship shifted drastically in person. At this meeting, they had their only genuinely chummy moment of the negotiations as least so far as the records show when they indulged in an interchange about Soviet drinking habits. Smith reported that the Soviets were "drinking less," noting that "I think they found that was pretty counterproductive. . . . They don't force you to drink bottoms up."⁴⁶ To which the president replied that he would be doing no such thing.⁴⁷ This event stands not simply as an amusing anecdote, but coupled with the president's later interactions with Kissinger, which are explored in the next chapter, reveals an interesting aspect about Nixon's personality and how he interacted with his advisors.

The relative idyll ended quickly. A small storm of confusion ensued at the end of March when it got out that Nixon had indicated SALT might have to wait until the summit to be finished.⁴⁸ Smith contacted the White House to say he wanted the Soviets disabused of any notion that this was so — which ran totally counter to his own advice to the president about a delay in order to achieve a “*fait accompli*.” Encouraging the idea that delay *had* been the plan, Kissinger gave instructions that no one should disabuse the Soviets of the notion.⁴⁹

As the editors of the SALT *Foreign Relations* volume note, “[the] exchanges often show a dialogue of miscommunication, if not outright misunderstanding.”⁵⁰ The lack of consensus on US strategy and desires in the matter makes the Nixon White House seem little short of scatterbrained, though perhaps, at the time, after almost a year of Sisyphean negotiations, it is understandable.

Rewrites: Nixon rhetoric during SALT 1971-2

Throughout the period of spring 1971-1972, Nixon remained faithful to his stance upon SALT. He continually made statements reflecting a pragmatic view of SALT, and a vision of the process shared with much of his staff, which envisioned it as a kind of war-game. However, Nixon made one key shift in his rhetoric during this period, as he suddenly began espousing the benefits of knowing thine enemy. Despite the unexpectedness of this shift, Nixon integrated it into his rhetoric with no apparent awareness that it reeked of hypocrisy.

In the early days of the post-SALT announcement period, Nixon proclaimed in a meeting of his advisors that “I want to be very tough. . . . You should bargain as vigorously for positions you are willing to give up later as you do for positions you are

not willing to give up. Our public opinion expects something. You should drag on what they want until we get what we want. . . . The danger is that they can renege on the whole deal without the pressure of public opinion.”⁵¹ Again, the evidence shows how close the link between SALT and its potential effects on the electorate were to Nixon, although that link appears somewhat inexplicable when one considers the reality that the public seemed profoundly *disinterested* in SALT, a fact that Nixon not only knew, but pointed out himself. However, also as noted in this chapter, Nixon had concerns about “the responsible Right,” who represented a much better informed and attentive portion of the public, and so in that sense, his fears remained somewhat justified.

Also, around that time, the president began to espouse an unusual idea about the value of inquiry into one’s opponent’s motivations that previously had been found only in the lower levels of the administration. “We’ve got to look at the world from the way they [the Soviets] look at it,” he told Kissinger and Chief of Staff Haldeman. “Unless you know what the other guy wants, you just — you don’t know how to screw ‘em.”⁵² The perhaps unnecessarily graphic observation definitely had validity, as did Nixon’s subsequent observation that Secretary of State Rogers “[said] ‘Oh’. . . . ‘There’s no use to speculate about that sort of thing. The thing to do is really to negotiate.’”⁵³

As recorded in chapter two, in the summer of 1969, the matter of “to inquire or not to inquire” into the Soviet mindset had indeed come up, when Deputy Secretary of Defense Packard said just such a thing as Nixon accused Rogers of saying. The person in the meeting who *had* argued for the analytics Nixon now insisted on was Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Nutter, not Nixon who was absent. Nutter, incidentally, appears in the SALT records only four other times in the entire nine hundred

and eighty-four-page SALT *Foreign Relations* volume. He can be found on the attendance roster of only a single meeting after 1969 — on August 24, 1970.⁵⁴

Conversely, Kissinger, who in that 1969 meeting ordered a document on Soviet motives with the observation that “Although it made no operative difference, it [further inquiry] would reflect a greater rigor in the analysis,” remained active in SALT.⁵⁵

Thus, Nixon’s words of March 1972 paint an image of the past three years based on real facts delicately manipulated to present the president in a more flattering light and shift potential criticism onto his advisors. Nixon, while by no means an ignorant president, nor a poorly informed one — he had members of his staff such as Helmut Sonnenfeldt, who really did try to keep one eye looking over the Iron Curtain, and not just through the lens of a satellite — did not, despite his statement, try to push his administration with any real force towards mutual understanding. Not only does the lack of written evidence in this regard testify to this, but also the fact that some of Nixon’s closest advisors, particularly Kissinger, failed to pursue such an understanding. Considering Nixon’s personality, it is difficult to imagine that had Nixon given a directive to his staff about bettering their knowledge of the Soviets, that Kissinger and almost everyone else would have ignored it.

Thus, while Nixon attempted to lay the blame for the dearth of knowledge about the Soviets on his advisors’ doorstep as he had in other matters, as when he implied at the beginning of the new year that SALT’s problems stemmed from the failings of U.S. advisors and delegates it is clear that, the fault, to paraphrase Julius Caesar, lay entirely with the president and not the stars. A leader is ultimately responsible for directing his staff and modeling the behavior he wants from them.

Yet it seems that despite all his words, the problem of motives did not actually trouble him on a truly deep level — no evidence exists in the SALT records of the final pre-summit weeks to suggest that Nixon insisted on a substantial course correction in how the US dealt with the Soviets. Indeed, the behavior of American diplomats in Moscow suggests that they perpetuated their flagrant disregard of the Soviets as partners.

Insult to injury

On April 7, 1972, perhaps the most significant gaff of SALT came to light. The NSC reported that:

“Until the past few weeks, the intelligence community had unanimously informed us that the Soviets had accelerated Y-class submarine construction. . . which would have given them an advantage in modern subs and SLBMs. . . . *The intelligence estimates were wrong — significantly inflated.* . . . In fact, as the latest photography makes clear, the Soviets were in the midst of a *production slowdown.* . . . One result of all this is that we have confused the Soviets with our specific, but inflated figures. . . . *Most important our proposals to include SLBMs in the interim freeze have not been as attractive to the Soviets as we believed* [all italics in original].”⁵⁶

This meant, fundamentally, that the Joint Chiefs had been wrong when they made grand proclamations about what the dire consequences of Soviet SLBM would be, and President Nixon had been wrong when he gave into their demands. This new awareness could hardly have been reassuring.

Interestingly, this event had a precedent — in fact, something nearly identical had occurred only a decade earlier during the Kennedy administration. According to Eric Schlosser, “Within weeks of taking office, President Kennedy found out that the missile gap did not exist. . . . The CIA had estimated that the Soviet Union might have five hundred long-range ballistic missiles by the middle of 1961. . . . Aerial photographs, taken by U-2 spy planes. . . . Confirmed the existence of only four missile that could

reach the United States.”⁵⁷ He also notes that “Public knowledge of the fact would be inconvenient — and so the public wasn’t told.”⁵⁸ While the documents do not reference this incident, one has to wonder if the members of the Nixon administration knew of it. There was, of course, an entire presidency sandwiched between Kennedy’s and Nixon’s administrations that of Johnson and there is the possibility that Nixon had no more knowledge of it than the American public. If that was the case, then the incident simply stands as an example of the unfortunate ways in which a lack of transparency and communications between administrations hinders subsequent presidents. If the president knew of the incident, then by trusting in the CIA, he intentionally invested his faith in a sector of his administration who had recently proven themselves dangerously unreliable. Either way, the incident shows yet another connection between the administrations, another thread of DNA binding them together.

As Kissinger boarded his plane to Moscow, he left behind a Washington D.C. quite spent from the SALT negotiations. After three and a half years, Nixon and his advisors now had to grapple with the reality that only fragments of their original proposals remained viable, that the major issues of the ABM treaty and the offensive agreement could be agreed upon neither mutually with the Soviets nor internally in the administration, that they could hardly understand their strategy even when in the same room with each other, and that the loudest voice of the past year, which had succeeded in having its way with the president and his SALT policy — the defense branch — had been basing its arguments upon completely false data. For people who liked to negotiate from a position of strength, this could hardly have been comforting.

Moscow was guaranteed to be interesting.

Endnotes

¹ Ibid., document 170.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., document 171.

⁴ Ibid. document 170.

⁵ David C. Geyer, Nina D. Howland, Edward Keefer and Kent Sieg, eds. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972*, Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2006, Document 84, quoted in Ibid. document 252; Mahan and Keefer, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, SALT I, 1969–1972*, document 252, Editorial Note; Ibid., 247; Ibid., 234.

⁶ Ibid., document 176.

⁷ Ibid., document 181.

⁸ Ibid., document 216.

⁹ Ibid., document 174.

¹⁰ Ibid., document 177.

¹¹ Ibid., document 190.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., document 234.

¹⁶ Ibid., document 202.

¹⁷ Ibid. document 219.

¹⁸ Ibid., document 235.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., document 186.

²¹ Ibid., footnote 1.

²² Ibid., document 242.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., document 247.

²⁵ Ibid., document 235.

²⁶ Ibid., document 171; 173.

²⁷ Ibid., document 191.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., document 198.

³¹ David C. Geyer, Nina D. Howland, Edward Keefer and Kent Sieg, eds. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972*, Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2006, Document 2, quoted in Ibid. document 252; Mahan and Keefer, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, SALT I, 1969–1972*, quoted in document 203, Editor’s Note.

³² Mahan and Keefer, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, SALT I, 1969–1972*, document 204.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., document 205.

³⁵ Verification Panel Meeting SALT 12/23/71, December 23, 1971, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, NSC Files H-Files, National Archives, quoted in Ibid., document 218, Editor’s Note.

³⁶ Ibid., document 219.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., document 222.

⁴⁰ Ibid., document 238; 216.

⁴¹ Ibid., document 238.

⁴² Ibid., document 216.

⁴³ Ibid., document 242.

⁴⁴ Ibid., document 153.

⁴⁵ Ibid., document 242.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ U.S. National Archives and Records Administration. *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Richard M. Nixon, 1969-1972*. (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969-1972) 488-498, quoted in Ibid., document 248, footnote 2.

⁴⁹ Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Backchannel Files, National Archives quoted in Ibid., footnote 3.

⁵⁰ Brynn, Edward, preface to *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, SALT I, 1969-1972*, v.

⁵¹ Ibid., document 170.

⁵² Ibid., document 235.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., document 103.

⁵⁵ Ibid., document 17.

⁵⁶ Ibid., document 253.

⁵⁷ Schlosser, *Command and Control*, 269.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 270.

CHAPTER SIX

SALT at Home and Abroad

The final months of SALT, encompassing April - October 1972 had many unique aspects to it, not restricted to the summit itself. Firstly, this period saw conflict between Nixon and Kissinger. This singular event not only revealed a new side of their relationship, but also offered a key to better understanding the ever-shifting dynamics between the president and his other advisors. Secondly, while the “public” and “the responsible Right” had concerned Nixon for much of SALT, they had existed mostly as ideas, labels attached to groups that represented strategically important demographics and election blocs. Now, during the summer and fall of 1972, Nixon had a chance to formally pitch SALT to the actual people who made up those groups. His recorded interactions with senators and congresspeople allow us to see him in action and hear the actual arguments he used to package SALT for legislative consumption.

In this final chapter, I will examine these key events, and continue as before to trace the manifestations of the dominant traits of SALT — the unending pursuit and hoarding of credit, the US’s complicated evaluation of Soviet motives and the JCS and Department of Defense’s burgeoning influence. I will also, of course, look at the summit itself and how these traits showed up in it, and analyze the resultant treaty and agreement.

To Do List: Ignore President & Make Joint Decisions on SLBM, NATO & Timing in Moscow

As his plane circled over the Soviet Union, Kissinger not only carried with him knowledge of the state of affairs back home, but the specific wishes of the president.

In a pre-Moscow meeting, Nixon reiterated to Kissinger some of his well-worn concerns, as well as delivered some new opinions. First, he told his advisor that SLBM could be temporarily scrapped in order to push SALT forward. He expressed the point which had become almost a mantra that “we cannot have an arms agreement that looks as if we got took.”¹ Kissinger affirmed his desire to make SALT as PR friendly as possible, noting if “we can say we got . . . somewhat more than they [the Soviets] did on the ABM, it would help us domestically.”²

But Nixon did not seem content to stay with just his usual bullet points. Instead, he committed the same kind of about-face he had on the matter of Soviet motivations. The record documents the resistance of some administration members to NCA which started in the early months of the SALT process but never before had Nixon appeared to give it much attention. At this meeting, however, he was *adamant*, telling Kissinger to “Do the best you can not to add Washington. I think the idea of building a new system . . . is stupid.”³

Like his conversion to psychological analysis, Nixon’s sudden opposition seems like a logical opinion come far too late. Kissinger, for his part, did not seem to take the president’s new-found concerns too seriously. The Moscow negotiations do not show any great labor on his part to dispose of NCA. Perhaps he thought the president’s words reflected simply a desire to escape future accusations of failure to deal with NCA when faced with many valid warnings. As for SLBM, the Soviets saved him in this matter from having to raise a white flag.

It is important to note here that Kissinger’s trip was not a “SALT trip” per se. In fact, his trip targeted another major problem for the president, which caused Nixon great

international and domestic trouble precisely the kind, in fact, that he needed SALT to deal with: Vietnam. As noted in the introduction, due to the SALT-specific scope of the sources used, the war appears in this thesis only glancingly. The only occasion in which it comes clearly to the fore in the SALT records are during Kissinger's Moscow visit. Indeed, Nixon, in an exchange with Kissinger said "the Soviet summit . . . will be judged as a success or failure depending on whether we get some progress on Vietnam," and Haig reported "The President . . . concluded your hosts [the Soviets] may be hoping to trade flexibility on SALT for U.S. concessions on South Vietnam" which he had no intention of making "for illusory promises".⁴ Kissinger's Vietnam negotiations have no place in this thesis, but it is important to note that the SALT discussions were enveloped within them during his trip.

In Moscow, Kissinger and Brezhnev made what appeared to be immediate progress on SLBM. Within forty-eight hours of Kissinger's arrival, Brezhnev revealed himself to be amenable to SLBM and actually offered Kissinger a detailed Soviet vision of what such an agreement would look like. According to his proposal, the US and Soviet Union would enter into an unequal freeze:

"The US and their NATO allies should have . . . up to 50 modern submarines with the total number of ballistic missile launchers thereon of up to 800, including 41 submarines with 656 ballistic missile launchers thereon at the disposal of the United States. . . . [T]he Soviet Union could have 62 modern submarines with . . . no more than 950 [SLBMs]." Not only that, "If . . . US NATO allies increase the number of ballistic-missile carrying submarines to the excess of those operational or under construction, the Soviet Union reserves the right to the corresponding increase in submarines."⁵

The USSR's preoccupation with NATO is supremely evident in the above passage. Brezhnev made clear to Kissinger his dissatisfaction with the perpetual advance of NATO made manifest in "the U.S. military bases ringing the Soviet Union." And when

Sonnenfeldt assured him “We have no IRBM’s [with which to hit the Soviet Union],” Brezhnev replied, “It doesn’t make any difference what rocket you die from.”⁶ Eerily, President Kennedy had once said almost precisely the same thing — according to Eric Schlosser, during the Cuban Missile Crisis he had said “It doesn’t make any difference if you get blown up by an ICBM flying from the Soviet Union or one that was ninety miles away.”⁷ This preoccupation was not new — it had existed for all of SALT, appearing in the USSR’s earliest offers to the United States, when the Soviet Union demanded “compensation” for allowing the US to keep all of its “systems capable of striking the USSR” in Europe.⁸ Yet despite NATO’s omnipresence, it never developed into as high profile a topic as might have been expected not that it ever went away — the Soviets kept referring to it in SALT papers and Zubok in his scholarship traces its long history both before and after 1972, stating that “in late November 1974. . . . The Soviet guiding principle for the strategic talks [the SALT sequel] was equal levels of security with NATO.”⁹

Regardless of why, the Soviets and Kissinger dealt with the topic of NATO in much the same manner as they had in the earlier part of SALT — it was acknowledged and then passed over. Kissinger did not discount Brezhnev’s opinion about how to incorporate NATO into SALT, only saying “we have no right to tell the British and the French what to do,” which Brezhnev in turn did not dispute. They then abandoned the matter with a closing remark by Brezhnev that “further measure[s] of goodwill . . . would be in no way prejudicial to obligations each of us has to other countries” — presumably alluding to the many other countries roped into the Cold War, some voluntarily and some not.¹⁰

Brezhnev and Kissinger also dealt with the problem that had been buzzing around the White House for sometime — when to actually close the deal. The consensus was to “have reached [a] confidential agreement beforehand” and then ink the deal in Moscow with Nixon, in full view of the cameras.¹¹ The NSC later amended this plan slightly, saying “Some issues may be kept open for ostensible resolution in Moscow . . . the final outcome will be arranged by the time you [Nixon] arrive.”¹² The plans of both sides proved to be extremely over optimistic, and the negotiations in fact became a feverish eleventh-hour process. This in some way traced the pattern set by the Kissinger-Dobrynin D.C. negotiations of a year prior, when Kissinger had apparently resolved the major issues of SALT only for it to subsequently be revealed that he had merely scratched the surface of the problems.

But at the moment he left Moscow, Kissinger had other concerns — his president was unhappy. His time away had changed the nature of his interactions with the president for the worse, revealing previously unseen fault lines in their relationship. Kissinger needed to address them quickly, and he would — using the best weapon he had. Credit.

Fragile: Nixon’s Relationships with Kissinger & Smith

Throughout the SALT process, Nixon had savaged Smith’s character, blamed Secretary of State Rogers wrongfully for the US’s lack of insight in Soviet motives and complained about all his advisors’ collective failure to achieve greater success. Despite this, one person’s character and behavior had remained sacrosanct: Henry Kissinger. Over the course of three years, Nixon and Kissinger’s relationship had gone unmarred by hostility or disagreement, at least as it existed within the context of the SALT process. That however, changed for a brief and revealing moment during late April of 1972, when

Kissinger traveled to Moscow. The Kremlin visit presented the chance for some unusually testy exchanges with Kissinger, both through other parties, and later in person. The exchanges are most remarkable not only because of their character, but the circumstances under which they occurred.

During Kissinger's visit, a bizarre redux of the 1970 situation when Kissinger reamed out Dobrynin for Semenov's perceived "loose lips" to Smith about the private negotiations occurred. However, this time, instead of playing the part of the injured party, bringing the wrath of the White House to bear on Dobrynin, Kissinger received the scolding. Alexander Haig told Kissinger that Nixon "questioned your report that you have prevailed upon Gromyko to prevent Semenov from presenting [the] SALT proposal to Smith when facts are that Semenov did tell Smith of new Soviet position. . . . [Who] of course, told Rogers, who informed the President."¹³ The impression generated by this is more that of a high school social scene, full of young girls slipping from lunch table to lunch table whispering rumors about the new girl, than a presidential administration.

Kissinger, who was no stranger to encouraging Nixon's own self-flattering views of situations, abandoned that defense and pushed back. His tart response was "All I can say is that if this is [the] President's attitude, he had no business approving the Moscow trip."¹⁴ He then took the problem to Brezhnev himself, and in a more aggressive tone than he'd previously used, told the general secretary "you should tell your number two guy to keep quiet. . . . He and Garthoff think they are running the negotiations themselves."¹⁵

The conflict between president and advisor extended into Kissinger's homecoming—Haig's chronicle of the reunion between president and advisor conveys an atmosphere more common to the relationship between the president and *Smith*. He said "The

P[resident] was all primed to really whack Henry, but backed off when he actually got there.”¹⁶ Apparently the quarrel ended at this point, no doubt soothed by some pragmatic genuflecting on Kissinger’s part — he downplayed the importance of his own work, instead emphasizing that “Whether we would have gotten this SALT agreement without my trip is certainly a debatable question. . . . What is not debatable is the fact that this agreement was produced by your intervention. . . . *Thus you deserve personal credit for this breakthrough* [italics in original].”¹⁷

The incident reveals a new side to the Kissinger/Nixon relationship. Various factors have to be considered in evaluating these conflicts. First, the factor of pressure: SALT was important, even if more to PR purposes than anything else, and represented three years of labor on the part of the administration. In the final stage, it seems natural to assume all parties may have felt more stress than usual, causing their interactions to become sharper and less cordial.

I would like, however, to argue that another factor worked in the conflict between Nixon and Kissinger and had more to do with the nature of the president than the transient context. I argue that physical proximity between Nixon and his advisors determined in part, his interactions with them. Nixon treated best the people who sat in the same room with him. He criticized and judged, but only by way of or to third parties. For example, his unhappiness with Kissinger in Moscow came via Haig. And his extensive complaints about Smith he almost universally directed at Kissinger.

Additionally, as further evidence, we may refer back to the singular interaction with Smith and Nixon when they laughed over the topic of Soviet drinking habits. That moment of harmony occurred *in person*. All of Nixon’s worst feelings about Smith he

expressed when the delegation chair was not only absent from the White House, but often absent from the country

The president, it appears, had to be tended to like a hothouse flower, and reminded of his advisors' merits and how much they agreed with him, or else he would promptly abandon his good opinion of them. For him the reverse of the old adage was true — *proximity makes the heart grow fonder*.

Layover: April 24 - May 22, 1972

In the small timeframe that existed between Kissinger's arrival back in the United States and Nixon's own departure for Moscow, major recurring issues absorbed administrative dialogue. The first was credit and spin, the second was the effect of the election year and "the responsible Right" on SALT and the third was the infamous "Soviet motivations."

While for most of the SALT years, Nixon and his cohort had been absorbed with keeping Smith from appropriate credit for the treaty, they became preoccupied with other potential threats to the president's credit in the weeks leading up to the Moscow summit. In a meeting, Secretary of State Rogers urged Nixon to take measures to present negotiations as as much of a "Made in the US" project as possible. He advised the president to "work out a paper" and "so that we can say . . . that we didn't operate from Brezhnev's paper; we operated from ours. . . . I'd just like to have something we could label "President Nixon's"."¹⁸ The president acceded to the proposal, which stands as yet another example of the administrative effort to show Nixon as creator of SALT.¹⁹

Just as all roads led to Rome, even the apparently unrelated topic of SLBMs led to discussions of credit and public relations. In the same meeting, Kissinger discussed how

to word any announcements to disguise the potential weak points of SALT. He suggested that when announcing the freeze, to just omit the mathematical portion: “[W]e can express it,” he said, “in dates. . . . [W]e’ll never have to give the number.”²⁰ And upon the Secretary of State’s departure, Kissinger told Nixon “I think Smith and Rogers were going to surface this as their great contribution . . . now they’re put out that it’s in your channel,” once again casting Smith and company in the roles of the thieves in the bird house, poised to snatch the golden egg from under the goose.²¹

The NSC also offered its opinions on Soviet motives, though their conclusions echoed their earlier ones rather than offering anything new or novel. The NSC said that SALT “marks, in their [the Soviets’] view, a definitive achievement of equal status with the US” and reiterating Sonnenfeldt’s memos, argued that “*China*, was an underlying Soviet motive in the past negotiations [italics in original].”²² It brought the typical pragmatic perspective of the Nixon administration to Brezhnev’s further proposals for “a nuclear non-aggression treaty,” ascribing his interest to an intent to manipulate politics rather than genuine altruism. Primarily, the Council said, the members saw it as a way to “undermine NATO strategy,” and indirectly hint to China that use of nuclear weapons would not be tolerated — both of course, things anathema to US desires.²³

The NSC also, in a separate paper, brought up the intersection between SALT and the election year, offering thoughts on how the two might interact. The NSC advised the president to close fast. Not only did it fear that “opening the follow on discussions before ratification Could invite strong pressures for renegotiation,” there was always the matter of credit to consider. The NSC noted “it can be argued, of course, that “stretching-out” the process would allow ratification closer to election time and have

more impact on the election,” but nonetheless urged that a speedier closing would be the soundest course of action as “a long ratification process will invite critical debate and dim the luster of the agreements.”²⁴ Far better, it seemed, to put a bow on SALT and put it onto the president’s list of achievements rather than force him to stray from campaign sound bites and have a real conversation about his decisions.

Nixon, for his part, remained as concerned as ever about “a massive right-wing revolt on the SALT agreement.”²⁵ In a memorandum to Haig, he told him to “develop a team [including] . . . Moorer . . . and Laird . . . to pick off individual Senators and very important opinion makers who are on the right to try and mute their criticism.” He wanted Haig to tell any irate senators that two of the Right’s most trusted institutions — the DOD and the military — had put their stamps of approval on SALT. “The most important point to make,” he said, “is . . . the military totally supports what we are doing.”²⁶ Why did this matter so deeply to Nixon? Because, he said, “the hawks are our hard-core, and we must do everything we can to keep them from jumping ship.”

Nixon’s statements here further underscore how political considerations influenced his decision to give the JCS and Department of Defense near carte blanche with SALT policy. However, even as he flew off to Moscow, that very SALT policy remained too undefined for comfort.

White House to Red Fortress: Nixon’s trip to the Kremlin

Initial discussions had a perceptible element of tension. The Soviets did not appreciate Nixon’s suspicious nature — though the president never explicitly stated his negative presumptions about the Soviet character, Brezhnev’s interactions with the president clearly show that the general secretary was aware of them. “If we are trying to

trick one another, why do we need a piece of paper?" he asked. "The approach of "catching each other out" is quite inadmissible."²⁷

Moments of bonding almost always came because of a mutual frustration with a third party. When Kissinger tried to see at the last second if he could get submarines cut from the deal, not surprisingly the JCS said no.²⁸ There was a certain level of irony to this, since only a few days before, Nixon had boasted to Brezhnev "I realize the General Secretary has to sell his position to the military. We have a similar problem but I can control ours."²⁹ One of the Soviets consoled Kissinger by saying "I can assure you we are more criticized by our military than you are by yours."³⁰

And though the official line of the administration was to finish SALT pre-summit, even Nixonian willpower could not make that be. Instead, many of the first days of the talks were spent trying up a thousand loose threads, from the almost hilarious whether the word "significant" would be in a paragraph, to the more serious SLBMs.³¹ These discussions also tended to be less than congenial — the problem perhaps lay in the fact that Kissinger and Nixon had never dealt with details in such a hands-on way before. Since 1969 they had always brokered broad deals like the Kissinger-Dobrynin one and then sent Smith into the line of fire to deal with the literal and metaphorical nuts and bolts.

Also at this time, a disturbing if unsurprising fact came to light, which encapsulated — and represented the high point of — US arrogance in regards to understanding the Soviets. As has been seen from the very first chapter of this thesis, a dominant trait of the SALT process was the administration's blatant neglect to formulate consistent, incisive analysis of Soviet motives. Now, at the Kremlin, the administration's unpreparedness to

deal with the Soviets was publicly revealed. At a meeting, Dobrynin asked Kissinger for a version of a document in Russian. Kissinger exclaimed in answer perhaps he was overtired — for some inexplicable reason, the negotiations went past midnight: “I don’t have a Russian expert on my staff!”³² As appalling and mind-boggling as it is to imagine that any high-level political actor would travel all the way to Moscow to negotiate an *arms treaty* without a Russian expert, it nonetheless fits perfectly with prior administrative behavior.

Despite the administration’s embarrassing failure, on May 26, 1972, things suddenly fell into place, quite without warning and for no discernible reason. The parties declared all matters settled and made plans to stuff both delegations into the U.S. plane and dot the Is and cross the Ts that evening. Kissinger, never missing an opportunity, said, “If the plane is not big enough, we’ll leave Smith in Helsinki.”³³ He then apologized in advance for possibly insulting the United States’ new treaty partners, telling the Soviets “I have to ask your understanding. When I give this briefing, I have to give arguments . . . that will appeal to our conservatives, hard-headed and unsentimental.”³⁴ The Responsible Right may have been physically in D.C., but its apparition haunted SALT even in Moscow. Nixon himself would deal with its members back in Washington, pitching SALT personally.

The final ABM treaty included a NCA and an ICBM site, a JCS proposal which Secretary of Defense Laird had sent to Kissinger shortly before the latter departed for Moscow. It was, in fact, a recycled idea — Kissinger, upon seeing it had noted that “in January, the head of the Soviet Delegation indicated that [such] a proposal . . . would be most negotiable.”³⁵ The solution represented neither the original extreme wishes of the

JCS for four sites, nor the equally extreme wishes of Smith for none, nor even the wishes of the not insignificant number of administration members who believed NCA a totally useless and costly idea. In short, it represented a true compromise.

It included an agreement “not to develop, test, or deploy ABM systems . . . which are sea-based, air-based, space-based, or mobile land based.” This may appear to be a loss on the part of the JCS, the champions of Research and Development, but further review suggests otherwise. The text said the treaty “shall not apply to ABM . . . used for development or testing Each Party may have no more than a total of fifteen ABM launchers at test ranges.” Why one would have “test launchers” when testing is prohibited makes little sense. Two things are implied here — the wording suggests that *permanent* or *immobile* land-based systems are not banned from R&D, and second, the fact that both countries are permitted to retain all the gear required for testing suggests that each nation wanted to keep that option open.

In matters of honesty, the treaty generally maintained the status quo. “National technical means of verification,” *not* on-site inspections, would check on SALT. This represented a legitimate if small loss for the Nixon administration, which had aspired to on-site inspections. Apparently, the Soviets still preferred to be watched over by satellites instead of actual people. Nonetheless, “a Standing Consultative Commission” to attend to all SALT matters and “questions concerning compliance . . . unintended interference . . . [and] possible changes in the strategic situation” introduced an element of humanity. An early US idea, it had no clear negatives.

“Unlimited [in] duration,” the treaty did have a “supreme interests” clause with no explicit caveats, per Smith’s suggestion.³⁶

The offensive agreement provided an ostensible freeze on ICBMs and SLBM launchers, but the “protocol” that went along with it made that true only in part. In fact, SLBM numbers could grow by 254 for both parties, “as replacements for equal numbers of ballistic missile launchers of older types.”³⁷ Thus, the agreement put a diplomatic blessing on an increase in numbers and modernization, hardly a coup for either side from a peace-making perspective. But then, peace had always functioned as a happy possible though statistically unlikely side effect of SALT.

To reflect further on the value and achievement of the treaty and agreement, one may refer to the Nixon administration’s earliest offer to the Soviet Union, in 1970. First, there was the ICBM cap — the “freeze” of ICBM and SLBM launchers essentially met this goal. Second, there was an MIRV ban — this died out early, despite Smith’s concerns. Third, in addition to the ICBM, there was to have been a freeze on MRBMs and IRBMs — this did not happen. And lastly, the US wanted zero-level or NCA ABM — this of course, was later amended by the US itself to account for Safeguard.

Measured against the original plan, the treaty and offensive agreement look like a moderate success, if slightly cobbled together. Another measure of success, of course, is how it held up — that would be revealed relatively quickly, though not until Nixon had left office in 1974. I will address that matter in the conclusion.

The Mad Men of Washington D.C: Nixon sells SALT

The same day Nixon inked SALT, Haig called ACDA General Advisory Committee chairman John McCloy and boasted about “what we feel we have done”: “broken the moment of their on-going programs without any limitation on what we have in our developmental cooker.”³⁸ Though Haig appeared to be in a happy and self-satisfied

mood, it would be unwise to take his comments as that of an unbiased analyzer because the purpose of the call was anything but unbiased — Haig was calling to give McCloy his script. He wanted him “to be as supportive as you can” and tow the administrative line “talk[ing] about this being a great achievement . . . the viability of which can only be maintained through strength.”³⁹ Strength, Haig clearly spelled out, meant “our submarine program and our own B-1 bomber program,” both of which, incidentally, were budget items. This phone call represented in microcosm the entire Nixon administration pitch about SALT, which both flattered Nixon, and highlighted the need to bulk up defense’s allowance.

Nixon and Kissinger picked up where Haig left off upon their return, sketching out the concluding section of their version of the SALT story and then flinging wide the doors of the White House to host the people with the purse: Congress and the Senate.

Nixon told Kissinger to “say how we broke the impasse on . . . [T]hings on SALT.”

Kissinger agreed, naturally, but put it in the singular, displaying his characteristic difference to Nixon, allowing him to claim credit, merited or not. “That’s exactly what I was going to say,” he told the president. “How *you* broke the impasse [my italics].”⁴⁰ In a rather distressingly aggressive display, he also told the president that the “hawks” would have their wings clipped soon, ending any problems with “the responsible Right.” “I guarantee you,” he said, “I’ll work them over.”⁴¹ Tough bargaining was not new to the White House, but Kissinger’s words carry with them a hint of a threat, more of a Mafia style hit than a schoolyard dust-up to establish a hierarchy.

On June 7, Kissinger met with a host of men from the DOD, JCS, ACDA and State among others, where they discussed the assembly of what might best be described as an

anthology of SALT documents. They proved to be careful editors, not above editing in their own interests. Even Smith showed his D.C. side, advocating for somewhat incomplete transparency. He argued that “[t]he more we tell them [Congress], the more they will want to know, and I don’t think we should get into the technical details too deeply.”⁴² The Deputy Secretary of Defense suggested “bury[ing] . . . in the contents” the more diplomatically flammable details, like the Soviets’ attempt to get compensated for future NATO build-ups.⁴³

In this case, Kissinger proved an unusual champion of truth, though only because “[i]t is much better to be forthright and honest now than to have it leak out later and be accused of duplicity.”⁴⁴ This comment illustrates the dual nature of PR — on one level, it encourages liberal reframing of reality to manipulate the audience’s goodwill, while on the other, it also forces a certain amount of candidness because one of the audience’s desires is honesty.

A week later, President Nixon made his SALT pitch to a select group of Republican congressmen and senators. In it, he pitched the catchphrase of the decade shared by statesmen the world over, including Brezhnev: “peace through strength.” He insisted that SALT was “in the best interests of the country.”⁴⁵ He noted that “there’s no weapons system in the United States . . . not begun in the Eisenhower administration,” and hastened to point out that this could not be blamed on him as he had only inherited this state of affairs from President Johnson, along with the Resolute Desk. He personally wanted new weapons technology, not out of any martial desire but because he firmly believed no one would choose peace out of principle. “The Soviet’s . . . willingness to negotiate,” he said, “is directly related to America’s strength and its will to commit to its

strength.”⁴⁶ Describing the U.S. as “the only force in the world which can discourage aggression,” he said “if [it] . . . withdraws or reduces its ability to discourage that aggression . . . the chance for aggression and for wars increases. . . . A strong United States . . . is essential if people want peace.”⁴⁷ Nixon continued hammering his point home throughout the day and on both sides of the aisle. With Democrat senator Stennis of Mississippi, he talked about a “military procurement bill.” The president went over his wish list with Stennis, insisting that, as Kissinger put it, “we need . . . to have . . . something to bargain with in the second round [with the USSR].”⁴⁸

These arguments must be considered within their historical context. Only in this way can they be understood as more than the bombastic words of a salesman. When Nixon spoke to the senators and congressmen, only thirty-four years had passed since British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain had said “peace in our time” as he let Hitler roll across sovereign borders. Only twenty-seven had passed since a march on Berlin had ended the war in Europe, and the atomic bomb had ended the war with Japan. Put into contemporary perspective, the Second World War was as distant from 1972, when Nixon signed SALT, as 1990 is from today. The president and his audience witnessed the Second World War and some even the *First* World War as adults. They would have had little experience, or in regards to Chamberlain’s case good associations, with examples of peace that were not in some way militarily-enforced. Therefore, when examining why such a statement as “peace through strength” gained so much traction in the United States and abroad, it seems fair to grant that all parties operated from a frame of reference which prevented them from seeing the logic problems in it as clearly as do people who analyze it today.

A day later, Nixon, Kissinger and Secretary of State Rogers engaged in a revealing discussion about their thoughts on SALT. In it, they mutually bemoaned the NCA aspect of SALT, though as always, they found a way to avoid blame at least in their own minds. Kissinger described NCA as “a major mistake we made in this bloody negotiations. . . . And, we did it because the Joint Chiefs and Laird . . . guarentee[d] it would go through.”⁴⁹ Kissinger made sure to absolve the president and reassure him that he did not hold him personally responsible, saying “you were in no position to overrule the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and all your other advisors.”⁵⁰ Kissinger spouted utter nonsense, of course. The president acts as the *only* person who can overrule the military in his role as Commander in Chief. If he could not overrule it, the United States might as well have a military *junta*. Perhaps in acknowledgement of this underlying reality, Kissinger mused that, “[w]e should have just told the military to go to hell.”⁵¹ Nixon, for his part, said “I never did feel we out to build that,” though he made sure to note “the thing about it is to *say*, “well, of course, we should build them” [my italics].” And so, the Joint Chiefs, despite their ambitious and apparently successful bid to control SALT, found themselves in the same position as Nixon’s other advisors, the load-bearers of his and Kissinger’s dissatisfaction and blame. It is remarkable that throughout the entire collection of documents, Nixon never during any discussion ever accepted personal responsibility for mistakes made in SALT.

After June, the SALT records diminish greatly and conclude with documents from the fall of 1972, chronicling when SALT passed later than Smith had said it would when he reported the legislature could possibly manage a pre-summer recess ratification. The ABM treaty passed in August and the offensive agreement in September of 1972. In the

documents, the last words belong to Kissinger, engaging in an emblematic conversation with a senator who groused about the inconsistency of the administration over SALT. Kissinger gave a very long reply, culminating in the party line: “I believe the SALT agreement as negotiated was in the best interest of the United States.”⁵²

As has been seen throughout this thesis, Kissinger’s statement fails to acknowledge the real dynamics of SALT. A truly honest statement would be that while SALT served the US in the short-term by putting a cog in the wheel of the Soviet build-up, it also served the best interest of President Nixon, by offering another way in which to enhance public opinion of him and reinforce his relationship with the Republican party — the two pillars upon which all his power rested.

But for the last thirty-eight years, until the declassification of the SALT documents, those truths were reserved for the people in the Oval Office.

Endnotes

¹ Document 260.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Message from Richard Nixon to Henry Kissinger, April 23, 1972, Nixon Presidential Materials, White House Special Files, President's Personal Files, National Archives quoted in Ibid., document 264; Mahan and Keefer, *Foreign Relations*, Editor's Note, document 264; David C. Geyer, Nina D. Howland, Edward Keefer and Kent Sieg, eds. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–May 1972*, Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2006, Document 136, quoted in Mahan and Keefer, *Foreign Relations*, document 261, footnote 4.

⁵ Ibid., document 262.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Schlosser, *Command and Control*, 290.

⁸ Mahan and Keefer, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, document 72.

⁹ Ibid., document 274; Zubok, *Failed Empire* 243-4.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., document 278.

¹³ Sitto 39 from Haig to Kissinger, April 23, 1972, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Kissinger Office Files, National Archives, quoted in Ibid., document 264.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., document 265.

¹⁶ Haldeman, H.R. *The Haldeman Diaries, Inside the Nixon White House: The Complete Multimedia Edition* Santa Monica, CA: Sony, Electronic Publishing Co., 1994, 446-7 quoted in Ibid., document 267, Editor's Note.

¹⁷ David C. Geyer, Nina D. Howland, Edward Keefer and Kent Sieg, eds. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XIV, Soviet Union, October 1971–*

May 1972, Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2006, document 169, quoted in Ibid., document 267 Editor's Note.

¹⁸ Ibid., document 270.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., document 278.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., document 280.

²⁵ Ibid., document 286.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., document 295.

²⁸ Ibid., document 308.

²⁹ Ibid., document 296.

³⁰ Ibid., document 308.

³¹ Ibid, document 296; 303.

³² Ibid., document 308.

³³ Ibid., document 314.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., document 258.

³⁶ Ibid., document 316.

³⁷ Ibid., document 317; Ibid., document 318.

³⁸ Ibid., document 319.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., document 321.

⁴¹ Ibid., document 321.

⁴² Ibid., document 322.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., document 326.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., document 327.

⁴⁹ Ibid., document 328.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 343.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

SALT lasted in its summit form for all of two years. According to the *New York Times*, “In 1974, the treaty was amended to limit each nation to one ABM site.”¹ This of course, was Safeguard — no one was in any hurry to build the NCA ABM. However, the U.S. nixed Safeguard in 1976, due apparently to the fact that MIRV technology simply outgunned the ABM system’s defensive capabilities. Much as one person cannot catch all the plates falling from the sky at once, Safeguard would have been unable to cope with a numerically superior onslaught of warheads.² At the conclusion of the *Times* article, the reporter suggested that “[t]he epilogue for the Safeguard system perhaps was given by Representative George Mahon.”³ The article cites him as saying “The Safeguard system has not been effective, except perhaps from a cosmetic standpoint.”⁴ President Nixon could not have said it better himself.

Meanwhile, despite the ICBM/SLBM agreement, the problem of ballistic missiles only burgeoned. According to Zubok, “the Soviet military-industrial complex was also engaged in a feverish qualitative and quantitative race. It produced its own MIRVS [N]ew “Typhoon” class nuclear submarines and . . . [A] huge new ICBM [Satan] that could carry ten warheads.”⁵ Zubok’s statistics are even more damning: “During the decade after 1972, the Soviets produced 4,125 land-based and sea-launched ICBMs, while the United States produced 929.”⁶ The United States was outperformed at a rate of 3:1.

There exists a deep irony in this, of course. Gerard Smith, the black sheep and social outcast of the Nixon administration ended up being proven right in all categories. He got the zero-level ABM he had always wanted. His warnings that Multiple Independent Reentry Vehicles had to be included in a treaty or else it would be essentially worthless came true when Safeguard turned out to be incapable of coping with MIRV. And the “diverted” arms race he had warned against when the administration gave up on a comprehensive agreement became real with the Soviet Union’s increase in missile production. The military, which had been so definitive, so loud, and apparently so victorious in SALT policy, ended up with nothing. Well, not quite — the branches received the technological castoffs of the Safeguard system. According to the Comptroller General, the Navy received “Four diesel engines worth \$1.7 million.”⁷

Success?

In the face of the above facts, the question arises — did SALT achieve anything? On one hand, an argument exists that Nixon and Kissinger fought futilely, even wastefully for years, fighting in the negotiations for rights in the ABM treaty that they ultimately did not avail themselves of, and the ICBM/SLBM restrictions look like a meagre achievement when factoring in the Soviet Union’s definitive numerical crushing of the United States in missile production. Beyond that, Nixon’s personal, overarching goal of using SALT for good PR and credit seems to have gone mostly unfilled. As has been noted, Gallup polls reflect a public ignorance of SALT and an almost unchanging popularity rating for the president, and even during the process, the administration, which monitored SALT’s effects in this area, noted the results were underwhelming.

The way in which Nixon conducted SALT also merits criticism. He continually prioritized political gains, leading him to make decisions which subdued the voices of those who could have helped him. He elected to listen to his military advisors, who had clout with “the responsible Right” political bloc he so feared, and he treated his own delegation head Gerard Smith with a derision personally shameful and blatantly unprofessional. Few of the people with authority in his administration ever sought to progress past their unoriginal biases against Russo-Soviet culture. Kissinger may have claimed an excellent education and reputation, but his lack of preparedness in dealing with the Soviets, neglecting even to have a Russian specialist on his staff, shows him, at least within the SALT process, as lacking in basic common sense.

Kissinger wrote Nixon before Moscow, “*if the summit meeting takes place, you will be able to sign the most important arms control agreement ever concluded* [italics in original].”⁸ Of course, Nixon was hardly facing much competition in this area — up until fifteen years before, no such arms existed to control. Consequently, nothing like SALT had ever happened. However, that does earn Nixon some of his much yearned for credit — the first person to attempt anything, whether they achieve or fail, always merits a certain kind of admiration. That, I think, is ultimately the success that Nixon and his advisors can truly claim, though, as horrified as they would undoubtedly be to read this, it is a success they must share equally — and poetically justly — with the Soviet Union.

The US relationship with the Soviet Union throughout SALT hardly stands as an exemplary case of an international partnership. The US, for its part, was culturally clumsy and complicated the negotiation process so badly with the Kissinger and Smith negotiations that the Soviet Union became sandwiched between them, squeezed like a

child in a divorced family, bombarded with different opinions and warnings against sharing information with The Other Side. Nonetheless, both the Soviets and the Americans kept their composure enough to produce a treaty and an agreement, as unbelievably transient as they turned out to be. And that success did represent a positive contribution to the gene pool of US-Soviet diplomacy.

Flashback Friday: Evidence of SALT Today

While SALT may be officially archived history now, traces of it remain perceptible today. Some of the traits found in the Nixon administration have carried down through the generations, manifesting almost completely intact in certain cases. The current administration appears to have inherited from the Nixon administration a distinct way of speaking about military power and Russia.

The language of the *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America* echoes clearly the language used by President Nixon. The introduction states that, “Collectively, our force posture, alliance and partnership architecture, and Department modernization will provide the capabilities and agility required to prevail in conflict and *preserve peace through strength* [my italics].”⁹ Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis has taken the words straight from Nixon’s mouth and Brezhnev’s, for that matter.

Mattis seems unaware of the contradictions implicit in his statements. The document ostensibly sets out plans for a restructuring of the Department of Defense — he argues that “we are emerging from a period of strategic atrophy, aware that our competitive military edge has been eroding,” which seems a Nixonian statement if there ever was one —but the strategy is laid out in a text that seems all but pilfered verbatim from documents almost half a century old.¹⁰ In the “Strategic Approach” section, he echoes President

Nixon's June 1972 pitch to the legislature, wherein the president argued that "The Soviet's . . . willingness to negotiate is directly related to America's strength and its will to commit to its strength . . . [And] if [it] withdraws . . . its ability to discourage that aggression . . . the chance for aggression and for wars increases."¹¹ Mattis, for his part, argues "[t]he willingness of rivals to abandon aggression will depend on their perception of U.S. strength and the vitality of our alliances and partnerships."¹²

The stance Mattis articulates, "peace through strength" is the antithesis of modern. His arguments stand as a superb example of the generation-transcending quality of this kind of rhetoric. In the last forty years, the United States has concluded the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, and ostensibly, the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars. And yet, the way in which military and government leaders articulate and envision strategy has remained apparently unaltered. It begs the question, why are we developing strategy with building blocks made in the Cold War? The *National Strategy* suggests an answer — because we are in "an increasingly complex global security environment, characterized by . . . the re-emergence of long-term, strategic competition between nations."¹³ The last such competition, of course, was the Cold War.

Indeed, Mattis refers to the Russian Federation as if it were in behavior if not governmental structure interchangeable with the Soviet Union, describing its actions in a way that seems ripped from Leffler's or Zubok's descriptions of the Soviet Union's role in East Germany, Africa, Iran, or any of the Warsaw Pact nations during the 1960s and 1970s.

"Russia seeks veto authority over nations on its periphery in terms of their governmental, economic, and diplomatic decisions, to shatter the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and change European and Middle East security and

economic structures to its favor. . . . [W]hen coupled with its expanding and modernizing nuclear arsenal, the challenge is clear.”¹⁴

Now, I should make clear that I am not suggesting Secretary Mattis believes we are living in Cold War II. The *National Summary* is fourteen pages long, and covers other topics and concerns, and can in no way be considered an exclusively Russian-focused document. However, there are aspects of it which I have highlighted above, which prove that traits manifested in the Nixon administration remain dominant even today in the current administration, eight presidents later.

One final event deserves mention in this thesis. On October 17, 2012, the *Grand Forks Herald* reported that “[t]he federal government is soliciting online bids for an abandoned Cold War-era missile base in Nekoma, N.D.”¹⁵ Subsequently, “the old base was bought in 2012 for 500 thousand [dollars] by a Hutterite colony.”¹⁶ The Hutterites are “[A] communal Christian Anabaptist society. . . . [W]ell-known for manufacturing classroom furniture, wood toys and other products.”¹⁷ They flipped it, apparently at a profit, in 2017 to the Cavalier County Job Development Authority and “a private investor.”¹⁸ One report suggests that “The JDA has quite a few ideas and plans for the property,” including “rent[ing] or leas[ing] the two smaller bunkers to businesses in the area that may need or want a quiet, well-built building for a workspace or storage space.”¹⁹

Such was the fate of the Safeguard site, one of the last great symbols of SALT.

Endnotes

¹ John W. Finney, "Safeguard ABM System to Shut Down; \$5 Billion Spent in 6 Years Since Debate," *The New York Times*, Nov. 25, 1975, <https://www.nytimes.com/1975/11/25/archives/safeguard-abm-system-to-shut-down-5-billion-spent-in-6-years-since.html>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ V. M. Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007, 242.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Comptroller General of the United States, *B-164250: Safeguard Ballistic Missile Defense Program* Washington D.C: N.P, 1974, 6.

⁸ Mahan and Keefer, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, SALT I, 1969-1972*, document 267, Editor's Note.

⁹ United States Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington D.C, Department of Defense: 2018, 1. <https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Mahan and Keefer, *Foreign Relations Series*, document 326.

¹² Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, 5.

¹³ Ibid., 2.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Kevin Bonham, "Feds put Nekoma missile site up for sale," *Grand Forks Herald*, Oct. 17, 2012, <http://www.grandforksherald.com/content/feds-put-nekoma-missile-site-sale>.

¹⁶ "Cavalier Country Rising," *Prairie Public*, July 8, 2015. <http://www.prairiepublic.org/radio/dakota-datebook/page/7?post=62789>

¹⁷ “Hutterites,” UAB College of Arts and Sciences, Department of Anthropology, Accessed March 14, 2018. <https://cas.uab.edu/peacefulsocieties/societies/hutterites/>

¹⁸ Lisa Nowatzki, “Cavalier County JDA purchases Stanley R. Mickelsen site,” *Cavalier County Republican*, Sept. 14, 2017. <http://www.cavaliercountyextra.com/2017/09/14/cavalier-county-jda-purchases-stanley-r-mickelsen-site/>

¹⁹ Ibid.

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