



NEGOTIATING SALT

by Raymond L. Garthoff

The Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) have been a familiar feature of United States-Soviet relations for almost eight years. They are, in fact, the broadest, most extensive U.S.-Soviet negotiations ever undertaken and therefore offer some useful clues on how, and how not, to negotiate with the Russians.

First proposed more than a decade ago (by the United States in December 1966), postponed because of the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, the SALT negotiations finally opened in Helsinki in November 1969. The U.S. and Russian negotiators shuttled between Helsinki and Vienna and in 1972 settled in Geneva, where their discussions have continued, punctuated by occasional summit meetings.

The U.S. delegation, including advisers, interpreters, administrative staff, and Marine guards, has numbered up to 100 people—the equivalent of a major embassy staff, but costing to date something less than the price of one modern jet fighter. The Soviet delegation has been roughly similar in size and composition.

A presidential appointee heads the American negotiating team: 1969-73, Ambassador Gerard C. Smith, then director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency; 1973-76, U. Alexis Johnson, a veteran State Department diplomat; 1977, Paul C. Warnke, lawyer, former Defense Department official, and present director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. Also on hand are several senior delegates, representing important bureaucratic constituencies in the executive branch, including the Department of State, the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Arms Control and

Disarmament Agency, and sometimes the defense-scientific community.*

The Soviet delegation, which in eight years has exhibited far fewer changes in personnel, is basically similar in composition, except that there is greater military and military-industrial representation and no representation equivalent to that of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. It has been headed for all eight years by Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Semenov, who came to the talks with considerable negotiating experience, although not specifically with the United States or in arms control.

Serving with Semenov have been at least two three-star generals and two senior scientific representatives, including initially Colonel General (now Marshal and First Deputy Minister of Defense) Nikolai Ogarkov; Academician Alexander Shchukin, a radar specialist and renowned scientist, then in his 70s; and Peter Pleshakov, deputy minister (later minister) of the Ministry of Radio Industry.

As in all negotiations, in SALT I, time spent in preparation vastly exceeded that devoted to formal negotiating. Senior delegates on the American side usually met together five days a week, for two or three sessions of several hours each, to discuss draft presentation, tactics, and strategy.

The two delegations (usually with about 10 persons each) met for several hours twice a week for the first year or so; formal sessions were later held less often. They were held alternately in the American and Soviet Embassies. The host for the day would welcome his opposite number and invite him to make his presentation. The procedure was rigidly formal, with little time devoted to actual discussion. After each formal "plenary" meeting the delegations split into small groups to chat. These informal chats provided moderately useful opportunities for clarification and argumentation.

After each session in Helsinki or Vienna, the U.S. delegates would return to their offices in leased buildings, with secure, tap-proof conference rooms, Marine Guards, and secure communications, to talk over highlights of the plenary session and the informal meetings that followed. Cables to

*In the years leading to the 1972 SALT I Agreements, the first senior State Department delegate was the late Llewellyn Thompson, followed in 1970 by J. Graham Parsons, former U.S. ambassador to Laos and Sweden. The representative of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was Lieutenant General Royal B. Allison, an Air Force staff officer and former fighter pilot. Paul Nitze, onetime Secretary of the Navy and a man with broad experience in the Defense and State Departments, represented the Secretary of Defense. Harold Brown, now Secretary of Defense, then president of the California Institute of Technology and previously the Pentagon's director of Defense Research and Engineering and Secretary of the Air Force, represented the military-scientific establishment.

Washington were prepared and cleared, and informal talks were written up in MemCons (Memoranda of Conversation)—some 500 in the two and one-half years of SALT I.

Formal Soviet presentations, accounts of Ambassador Smith's meetings, and highlights of other conversations were sent to Washington by cable. MemCons were sent by diplomatic pouch for background use by the Washington SALT community, which numbered 50 or so government professionals. All cables from the SALT delegation had very restricted circulation within the Departments of State and Defense and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.

Formal meetings of the two delegations were an essential part of SALT I, but they were "on the record" and by themselves were not adequate for actual negotiating. The two delegations later experimented with smaller "mini-plenaries," with only a few senior members present. These sessions were usually held to discuss treaty specifics, such as restrictions on the numbers and locations of radars allowed in an antiballistic missile (ABM) system. Discussions at these mini-plenaries were exploratory and seldom evoked an authoritative official response or change of position from either side.

But important informal probings and exchanges between Soviet and American negotiators often took place over long luncheons and dinners preceding private meetings of the delegation chiefs. They were useful in scouting out possibilities, in underlining particular proposals or rejections, and in shading degrees of advocacy or opposition without changing formal positions.

Eventually such meetings became a principal channel for negotiating many of the most difficult provisions of the SALT I Agreements. They resolved such matters as radar controls, ABM levels, the key provision in Article I of the treaty in which both sides agreed to limit their ABM systems, and corollary restrictions on other radar systems (e.g., early warn-

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ing and air traffic control radars) that might be upgraded for ABM use.

Recourse to this informal mechanism proved highly useful in SALT I. Regrettably, it was not much used from 1973 through 1976 in SALT II—a reflection of Washington's view that the delegation should operate under a more limited negotiating mandate. I, personally, found these sessions the most fascinating part of the work. As the "point men," we entered first on new terrain or tried to find paths through well-known minefields. Minister Semenov called us "the wizards." Those Americans not participating sometimes used less flattering terms.

Two representatives from each side were usually present, both to ensure straight reporting and, in the case of the Americans at least, to protect the representatives from possible charges of exceeding their mandate. When I was alone, as was sometimes the case, or accompanied by a Russian-speaking colleague, we usually spoke Russian with the Soviets; otherwise we used English.

Partnerships of Interest

More formal working groups were set up in the summer of 1971 to work on ad hoc technical matters and, on a regular basis, to prepare joint drafts of the agreements—initially with many bracketed alternatives reflecting points of disagreement. These sessions were held alternately in the two embassies.

One of the peculiarities of prolonged international negotiations is that "transnational" or "transdelegation" partnerships of interest develop, whereas unanimity of views may be lacking within a delegation (or within the home offices of the delegation). For example, in the SALT negotiations, certain American and Russian negotiators wanted to ban "futuristic" types of ABM systems; others, on both sides, did not. Also, Paul Nitze felt strongly about controls on radar, while General Allison and the Joint Chiefs were less determined to press the issue. Nitze's exchanges with Soviet Academician Shchukin eventually led to Soviet acceptance of some significant restraints on radars. To my knowledge, there were no instances on either side of disloyalty to a delegation or its instructed position. But there were issues on which some delegates and advisers sought earnestly to persuade members of the other delegation, while their compatriots did not.

Back in Washington, a "Verification Panel" was established early in the negotiations to deal with the important

verification, or "policing," aspect of strategic arms control. Henry Kissinger, in his role as assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, rapidly converted the panel into the sole senior-level American group dealing with SALT, aside from the White House's National Security Council. (The Verification Panel held 12 to 15 meetings on SALT in 1971, in contrast to the Council's 2 or 3.) Its members included Kissinger, as chairman, the deputy secretaries of State and Defense, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, the director of the CIA, and a few others, including, for no apparent reason, Attorney General John Mitchell.

Secret "Back Channels"

At the same time, unbeknownst to the U.S. SALT delegation abroad, President Nixon in January 1971 began a "back-channel" correspondence on arms control with Prime Minister Aleksei Kosygin, supplemented by secret meetings of Kissinger and Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin in Washington. These meetings and exchanges continued until mid-May of that year. Both sides agreed to seek a separate ABM treaty as well as certain, not clearly defined, interim measures to limit offensive strategic weapons, rather than continuing to try for a single comprehensive treaty. Ambassador Smith (and Secretary of State William Rogers) were informed of this negotiating effort on May 19, only one day before release of the official announcement, although the American SALT delegation had heard from members of the Soviet delegation earlier in May that some special talks were taking place.

The back-channel was again employed by Kissinger in the spring of 1972 (by then the Kremlin principal was General-Secretary Leonid Brezhnev rather than Kosygin) and involved a secret trip to Moscow by Kissinger, accompanied by Ambassador Dobrynin.* Minister Semenov was recalled to Moscow for the occasion, but the American SALT delegation and even the American ambassador in Moscow, Jacob Beam, were unaware of the meetings until after they had ended. These back-channel meetings produced high-level endorsement for an ABM agreement worked out by the SALT delegations in April, as well as an interim agreement on offensive arms to include SLBMs (Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missiles), but

*This Brezhnev-Kissinger "mini-summit" marked the beginning of Kissinger's practice of relying only on Soviet interpreters—a practice he favored to prevent possible leakage to other American officials, and one adopted by President Nixon at summit meetings dealing with SALT but later abandoned by President Ford.

a number of other issues were left for the Nixon-Brezhnev summit negotiations in June 1972.

Kissinger relished the process of personal involvement. In many cases he served brilliantly, but in others he failed to recognize the role that professional diplomacy and diplomats could play and even came to resent, and perhaps be jealous of, the professionals who were effective. He therefore curtailed the role of the professionals and in the process spread himself too thin.

From his early success in mastering issues that came before the Verification Panel, Kissinger developed a conviction that he did not need the government bureaucracy. A small personal staff, he felt, could skim the cream off the ponderous interagency staff studies that he ordered to keep the bureaucracy occupied. In this way, he thought, he could learn all he needed to know about a subject.

Unfortunately, this was not always the case. On some occasions, his penchant for going it alone prevented him from getting needed advice, and U.S. interests suffered as a consequence. This happened, for example, in 1971, when Kissinger agreed with the Russians that the interim agreements on strategic offensive weapons need not include submarine missile fleets, thus permitting both sides to strengthen their SLBM forces. The agreement was to be in effect for a five-year period, but the United States, unlike the Russians would not benefit. Why? Evidently Kissinger was unaware that a follow-on navy ballistic missile submarine design was not yet ready, and U.S. submarine-building facilities were committed to work on other types of submarines.

Differing Approaches

During SALT I, in marked contrast to earlier post-World War II negotiations with the Russians, there was a remarkable absence of extraneous ideologizing and propaganda or, indeed, of irrelevant political discussion. Each side, of course, presented and justified its position in terms of its own rationales, but the talks stuck to business. Agreement with the Soviets was readily reached on maintaining secrecy during the negotiations. On the whole, confidentiality was strictly observed by both delegations. There were, however, a number of leaks to reporters in Washington, including some by Kissinger that were perhaps intended to prepare for public acceptance of the final agreement.

The United States and the Soviet Union took markedly

different approaches to SALT. As is often the case, the Russians sought "agreement in principle" prior to agreement on specifics, or even before disclosing their proposals. By contrast, the more pragmatic American approach was to offer a fairly complete, complex, and detailed package proposal. Arguments can be advanced for each technique, but the two are difficult to reconcile.

Essentially, the Russians' approach offered them greater flexibility; they would have the advantage when nailing down specifics after getting us committed to a general line. One principle they sought, unsuccessfully, to establish was the definition of a "strategic" weapon as one capable of striking the homeland of the other side. This would have meant that U.S. tactical aircraft in Europe were "strategic," but that Russian medium-range missiles and bombers aimed at Western Europe were not.*

Where the Russians wanted a general, "politically" significant accord, American negotiators favored specific measures that would add up to a "militarily" significant agreement. Such an accord would both enhance mutual deterrence and maintain "crisis stability" in the sense that promoting the invulnerability of strategic weapons (ICBMs, Polaris submarines) would discourage the precipitous launching of missiles by either side at the first sign of danger. At the same time, such measures would ease the fears of the American public about relative Soviet-U.S. strength by seeking equal overall limits on strategic delivery systems and limits on the numbers and size of Soviet intercontinental missiles.

Delegation Initiatives

American negotiators differed on whether it was advantageous to be first in advancing proposals. In practice, the United States did take the lead, not only because we were the initiating side but because of the complex of considerations noted above. I believe this was an advantage, because it is helpful to stake out the negotiating ground first and because, despite all our internal problems, we were generally more flexible and efficient in reaching an agreed negotiating position, whereas a proposal hammered out in Moscow might take months to revise.

*From the start, the Russians were suspicious of possible fishing expeditions by Americans seeking intelligence data—especially before they found the U.S. side rather forthright in presenting, and relying on, American intelligence information concerning Soviet military weapons and forces. Moreover, being in the weaker strategic military position (in their own eyes), the Soviets were reluctant to reveal their strategic worries by being the first to propose limitations on specific weaponry.

U.S.-SOVIET ARMS CONTROL AGREEMENTS: A CHRONOLOGY

- 1959 Dec** Antarctic Treaty: Agreement by the United States, the U.S.S.R., and 11 other nations to internationalize and demilitarize the Antarctic Continent. *Washington.*
- 1963 Jun** "Hot Line" Agreement: Establishing a direct communications link between the United States and the Soviet Union. *Geneva.*
- 1963 Aug** Partial Test Ban Treaty: Banning nuclear weapon tests in the atmosphere, in outer space, and under water. *Moscow.*
- 1967 Jan** Outer Space Treaty: Governing the activities of nations in the exploration and use of outer space, including the moon and other celestial bodies. *Washington, London, Moscow.*
- 1968 Jul** Non-Proliferation Treaty: Prohibiting the proliferation of nuclear weapons. *Washington, London, Moscow.*
- 1971 Feb** Seabed Treaty: Banning the emplacement of nuclear weapons on the ocean floor. *Washington, London, Moscow.*
- 1971 Sep** Nuclear Accidents Agreement: To reduce risk of accidental outbreak of nuclear war between the United States and the U.S.S.R. *Washington.*
- 1971 Sep** "Hot Line" Modernization Agreement. To improve the U.S.-U.S.S.R. communications link. *Washington.*
- 1972 Apr** Biological Weapons Convention: On the prohibition of the development, production, and stockpiling of bacteriological and toxin weapons. *Washington, London, Moscow.*
- 1972 May** SALT ABM Treaty: On the limitation of antiballistic missile systems. *Moscow.*
- 1972 May** SALT Interim Agreement: On the limitation of strategic offensive arms. *Moscow.*
- 1973 May** SALT ABM Protocol: Limiting the United States and the Soviet Union to one ABM deployment area each. *Moscow.*
- 1974 Jul** Threshold Test Ban Treaty: On the limitation of underground nuclear weapon tests. *Moscow.*
- 1974 Nov** Vladivostok Accord: On the limitation of strategic delivery vehicles and MIRVs. *Vladivostok.*

Some elements of our position were endorsed more strongly by U.S. military planners, others by arms control representatives. As a rule, the military had the last word on proposals that would impinge on existing or planned Pentagon programs, whereas the arms control representatives had the greater influence on proposals that would most severely affect Soviet programs. The same rule probably applied on the Soviet side as well, although the nonmilitary Russian delegates were clearly less well informed about their own military programs than their U.S. counterparts and less able to override purely military, as opposed to basic political, arguments.

The U.S. delegation operated on the basis of presidentially endorsed NSDMs (National Security Decision Memoranda) specifying in some detail American objectives and positions. The delegation was responsible for decisions on tactics, arguments and presentations of positions, and development of agreed texts.

Washington "Guidance"

One example of effective "transnational negotiation" concerned Article I of the 1972 ABM treaty, which contained the rationale for the very limited ABM deployment permitted. On November 19, 1971, the Soviet delegation introduced a new draft of a proposed Article I, calling on each side "not to deploy ABM systems for defense of the territory of the [entire] country." The American delegation, uninstructed on this point, reported the proposal to Washington and warned that the Soviet wording could be used by them to argue against specific limitations on radars and related ABM-system infrastructure. We did not request guidance.

Much negotiation over the next month led to Soviet agreement to continue working on other specific limitations and to go along with the revised language developed by American negotiators, which broadened and made more specific the agreement not to seek a basis for a territory-wide defense or to deploy ABM systems for defense of a particular region.

This language, which constitutes the final version of Article I, signed by President Nixon and Chairman Brezhnev in May 1972, was worked out entirely by the American delegation with no guidance from Washington at any stage. It was submitted to Washington as part of a revised joint draft text, but in this instance there was not sufficient disagreement among agencies in Washington to bring the matter to the

attention of Kissinger's Verification Panel or any other senior review group.

Since Article I is a basic provision, often cited by later commentators as fundamental, it is striking that at no time was guidance regarding it addressed to the delegation by Washington!

Perhaps the biggest problem for the American side in SALT has not been the Russians—tough negotiating partners that they are—but the absence of high-level consensus in Washington on American negotiating objectives and the burden of continually negotiating (and maneuvering) among various factions within the U.S. government.

Effective negotiation obviously suffers if decisions, once made, are regarded merely as tentative and reversible by important elements in our own government. Yet, this has frequently been the case with SALT. One man's "bargaining-chip" becomes another's vital interest; positions advanced for bargaining purposes with the other side become, instead, part of one's own final position. Nowhere more clearly than in SALT have differences within the American government so shaped and reshaped negotiating approaches and goals in ways that undercut and complicated a sound and effective negotiating strategy.

The lesson in all this is that negotiating with the Russians requires firm leadership, direction, and support from the President on down. Objectives must be clear and consistent. The integrity of the principal negotiating channel—the two SALT delegations—must be preserved despite the powerful temptation to skip between secret back-channels and official forums. The attraction of summit deadlines and other artificial time pressures linked to domestic political concerns must be vigorously resisted; they simply give additional leverage to Moscow.

Today there is a greater Soviet readiness to look for possible agreements on a broad range of issues. Compromise is no longer a taboo for Soviet negotiators. In part, this reflects increased Soviet sophistication. It also reflects growing self-confidence. To this extent, the growth of Soviet strength to a level of near equality with the United States has produced not greater intransigence but a more businesslike approach. Agreements on mutually advantageous strategic arms limitations are not easy to reach—but they are attainable.