

## ON THE OTHER HAND



SLEEK, DEADLY — A US Navy Tomahawk cruise missile nears target during a 1978 test in Utah.

# A defense of the SALT 2 treaty

Regrettably, Mr. George Will (Feb. 25) has decided to withhold from the SALT debate his very considerable talent for elucidation. Instead, he transmits to us the increasingly familiar catalog of half-truths and flawed analyses by which many hardliners are seeking to frighten Americans, defeat SALT and inaugurate a military buildup far beyond our needs.

Consider his main points. The 250 launchers that SALT 2 would require the Soviets to give up, while we abandon none, are dismissed as being old and of little value. In point of fact, these launchers would be a mix of SS-11 ICBMs, submarine-launched ballistic missiles and bombers, all of which are of a vintage comparable to corresponding US weapons and which constitute a formidable force in their own right. Moreover, if the earlier aggregate launcher limit of 2400 had not been reduced, 150 of these would have remained and been available for replacement with more modern and capable launchers.

The lower US throwweight results from different choices both sides made long ago and which were legitimized in the Interim Agreement "freeze" of 1972. A principal task of SALT 2 has been to remove this freeze so that an equal number of launchers are permitted for each side. If SALT continues, the throwweight gap will need to be addressed. Thus far it has not been a disadvantage for us. We can unilaterally redress it in large measure by replacing our existing IBMSs with the largest allowed under the terms of the treaty. Instead, the Administration is opting for the smaller — not the larger — version of the new MX ICBM because the maximum throwweight that would be allowed under SALT 2 is not needed. Thus

it is not evident that we should be alarmed by an excess Soviet capacity that we have no reason to match. Moreover, this excess throwweight is not the source of their potential ability to threaten our present Minuteman force. About 2000 highly accurate warheads will suffice for this at present. If we succeed in making part of our force invulnerable, no attainable number will make it vulnerable.

Perhaps the most underappreciated feature of SALT 2 is the agreement recently reported to limit the number of warheads per missile to the maximum number thus far tested on that type of missile. This reduces by more than half the number of weapons the Soviets could eventually have mounted on the ICBMs and by doing so makes protective measures such as multiple aim point systems (MAPS) for our own ICBMs possible. This constraint on reentry vehicles is vastly superior to whatever further reductions in MIRVed ICBMs could have conceivably been negotiated. Yet Mr. Will ignores all this and, in an exercise in doublespeak, equates this gain with the President's "failure to master the subject of SALT."

With regard to choosing the best system to protect some of our ICBMs, Mr. Will again chooses the cheap shot rather than the hard task of illuminating how extraordinarily difficult this problem is. The delay in choosing an alternate basing system is due to the flaws in all those studied and in the time required to analyze others. To urge blind haste in this decision, which will determine the effectiveness of our forces well beyond the turn of the century, is again a disservice.

The cruise missile also has another side. Within the "count the launchers" philosophy of the current stage of SALT,

long-range cruise missiles are restricted to deployment on heavy bombers in order to provide a means of verification. The Soviet interest in limiting the range of these cruise missiles below what the United States believes necessary for adequate penetration has now been abandoned in return for a reasonable upper limit on the average number carried per bomber. Since there is no range limit for these cruise missiles, range verification is not at issue.

The problem of how to control and verify cruise missiles has not been solved and clearly remains an urgent item on future SALT agendas where it can be dealt with in connection with other intermediate range systems, such as the Soviet SS-20 ballistic missile. The restriction to a 600 kilometer range, contained in the protocol with a duration of less than three years, will not affect any possible deployment plan. Hence, there has been no operationally significant concession here.

In light of the above, Mr. Will's three suggested amendments to a SALT 2 treaty are seen to be simply a part of what the agenda for SALT 3 should be: negotiations on intermediate range systems and the throwweight gap.

The greatest shortcoming of SALT 2 is that its gestation period has been so long as to diminish its relevance in view of continued technological progress. To ask that it should also deal with mainline SALT 3 issues risks prolonging gestation even more until a stillbirth is inevitable.

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