

'Conflicting American objectives for SALT' from the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (23 September 1974)

Caption: On 23 September 1974, the German daily newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung considers the true purpose of negotiations between the US and the USSR on disarmament and condemns the risk to the world posed by nuclear weapons.

Source: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. Zeitung für Deutschland. Hrsg. Eick, Jürgen; Welter, Erich; Fack, Fritz Ullrich; Deschamps, Bruno; Fest, Joachim; Reißmüller, Johann Georg. 23.09.1974, Nr. 220. Frankfurt/Main: FAZ Verlag GmbH. "Amerikanische Zielkonflikte bei SALT", auteur:Gillesen, Günther , p. 1.

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Conflicting American objectives for SALT

By Günther Gillessen

The policy of détente pursued by the US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, has, for the time being, come up against some obstacles. Except for some initial moves, Moscow has not responded to Mr Kissinger's invitation to take part in a global policy 'peace structure', whether in connection with Indo-China and the Middle East or with the negotiations on nuclear arms (SALT), force reductions in Europe (MBFR) and the Conference on European Security. Henry Kissinger's policy of détente assumes a partner who, as the policy is implemented, will continue to change and will realise that it is to both parties' long-term benefit to pursue mutual advantage. The Secretary of Defence, James Schlesinger, on the other hand, advises taking the partner in détente as it is now and therefore making sure that a balance of give and take is guaranteed at every step.

The argument turns mainly on the aims and methods of the SALT II negotiations that resumed in the last few days in Geneva after a six-month break. Paul Nitze's resignation from the US SALT delegation in June had already pointed to the extent of the tensions. Soon afterwards, the Nixon–Brezhnev negotiations in Moscow at the beginning of June were to show which US SALT positions had been abandoned in order to prevent a deadlock in negotiations.

Essentially, the debate now comes down to three issues. The number of strategic missile defence systems in both countries, already limited to two installations two years ago, has now been reduced to one installation per country. The Soviet Union uses its installation to protect Moscow while the American system is shielding a Minuteman position in North Dakota. From a security policy point of view, the benefit lies in the fact that both countries have placed large parts of their national substance at the mercy of the other superpower's offensive weapons, thereby proving that they have no intention of waging a preventive war.

Richard Nixon, however, had to make a heavy concession for this. Washington was prevailed upon to give up its intention of redressing the balance established by the interim 1972 SALT I Agreement on offensive nuclear arms by means of a second, long-term, agreement. Instead, the objective is again only another temporary agreement, for a period of ten years in this case, one which will neither hold back the arms race nor hamper the Soviet attempt to first achieve parity with the Americans on the way to nuclear superiority.

With skill and persistence, the Soviet Union is successfully eluding the American wish for a comprehensive limitation of their drive to acquire nuclear arms. It is trying to negotiate in such a way as to convert, either now or later, 'asymmetries' in the capabilities of the two nuclear potentials into 'parity' in areas in which the Americans currently have an edge (target precision, multiple warheads, forward tactical weapons systems) or might in future gain superiority ('Trident' submarine cruiser, B1 bomber) — all this, however, without sacrificing its own trump cards, above all the considerably larger number of land and submarine missiles fixed in the SALT I Agreement, the much higher payload of Soviet intercontinental missiles and the medium-range missiles.

The endeavour to allow the Russians a higher number of missiles in return for an agreement not to introduce multiple warheads has failed. The Soviet Union has played for time and successfully tested the guidance systems for its new multiple warheads. It has secured the right to carry out further tests. And while the third agreement, concluded this summer between Richard Nixon and Leonid Brezhnev, now forbids underground nuclear weapons testing, it only applies to explosive charges of more than 150 kilotonnes (the equivalent of seven Hiroshima bombs, all the same) and even then will not come into effect until 15 March 1976.

By combining, as will soon be possible, the substantially higher payloads carried by Soviet missiles, the new multiple warhead technology and improved target precision, the Soviet Union will in a few short years, say by 1980, have surpassed the American arsenals. The Soviet Union could then breach American missile silos without the Americans having a reciprocal capability. All this could lead to Moscow securing for itself the first strike capacity 'outlawed' by the policies of deterrence and détente.

The objection that enough is enough and that parity of superabundance is not really essential is plausible, but wrong. For what is meant here is always total nuclear war directed against large cities and provoking equivalent retaliation. Doubts about the credibility of this form of deterrence arise from the impossibility of imagining a willingness to commit suicide through mutual murder. More credible, as it now seems, would be a strategy explicitly limited, in the event of an aggression, to stripping the opponent of its means of attack. This 'counter-force strategy', with which James Schlesinger has replaced the 'counter-city strategy', requires, however, much greater attention to parity in the two countries' increased offensive nuclear capabilities, in relation to each other and to conventional forces — the so-called 'fundamental equality'.