

Finally, Reagan has dumped the SALT framework

by Nicholas F. Benton

In its most important decision since launching the Strategic Defense Initiative in March 1983, the Reagan administration on May 27 announced it has broken the United States free from unilateral compliance with the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) framework.

From the time he took office in 1980, President Ronald Reagan has criticized SALT I and the never-ratified SALT II treaties as "inherently flawed." Nevertheless, until May 27, he made repeated commitments to hold U.S. strategic arsenals within the limits set by the treaties. Even while doing this, the President sent three reports to the Congress detailing extensive Soviet violations of these and other treaties—especially the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty.

Now, that self-imposed constraint has finally been broken. Larry Speakes, in making the announcement on the President's behalf at the White House press briefing May 27, said, "Today, the President announced that the U.S. cannot continue to support unilaterally a flawed SALT structure that Soviet non-compliance has so grievously undermined and that the Soviets appear unwilling to repair. Therefore, in the future, the United States will base decisions regarding its strategic forces on the nature and magnitude of the threat posed by the Soviet Union, rather than on standards contained in expired SALT agreements unilaterally observed by the United States."

Although certain major media apparently couldn't yet grasp this when they first heard it, and therefore reported virtually the opposite of what was said at the outset, the significance of this bold policy shift was lost on no one by the end of the week. All the expected sources—from the Soviets to former Carter arms-control negotiator Paul Warnke, former Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, and Britain's Margaret Thatcher—were howling in protest. Many in Congress were expected to yelp as soon as they returned to Washington follow-

ing the Memorial Day recess.

Apart from the President, only Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger seemed truly happy with the announcement. Quipping to reporters prior to giving a commencement address to the graduating class at West Point May 28, Weinberger said bluntly that compliance with SALT is over, and that when the B-52s start being loaded up with cruise missiles in August, the formal ceiling set by SALT will definitely be broken. "I think it is far better for us to equip our forces in the way that best serves our national security interests, than trying to stay within the artificial limits of a flawed treaty that has expired," he said.

Weinberger expanded his view the next day, on NBC's "Today" show: "A lot of people think the arms control process is more important than anything else. The SALT agreement is an agreement that allowed the Soviets to expand and build more of what they already had, and that's not a very good agreement. What the President wants, what I want, what everybody wants, is to try to get agreements that reduce very drastically the amount of arms on each side, and SALT wouldn't do that."

Victory for 'reality' faction

Weinberger put his finger on the significance of the administration decision. As even *New York Times* analyst Michael Gordon was forced to concede, this decision was a victory for the "reality" faction of the administration, represented by Weinberger, over the State Department faction, represented by Secretary of State George Shultz and all the career diplomats there who have held forth since the days when Henry Kissinger first locked the U.S. into the self-defeating SALT framework.

The State Department faction—which is, predictably, indistinguishable from the Eastern Liberal Establishment on this issue—argues that "any treaty is better than no treaty,"

and that without the constraints of a treaty, the Soviets will be provoked to "break out" much faster than the United States can.

This is the gist of the May 30 editorial in the *Washington Post*. It calls the Reagan decision "a mistake," adding, "The Joint Chiefs of Staff, in the past, anyway, have believed that Moscow is far better placed than Washington to field new weapons quickly if the two sides break out; that's why they have supported the treaty. The Soviet leadership must deal with a tight budget, but not with an independent Congress, opposition and public. The notion that Moscow, under this sort of American pressure, will easily change the ways of which the U.S. complains is, at the least, highly speculative."

Thus, the Eastern Establishment crowd running the *Post* threatens Reagan that Congress, under the constraints of Gramm-Rudman, will make him wish he'd never thought of "breaking out."

But what the *Post* crowd, including Warnke and McNamara (who is on the board of the *Post*), fail to mention once, of course, is the reason Reagan has decided to break SALT in the first place. Namely, because the Soviets have been engaged in the biggest military buildup in history, including gross violations of many treaties, to the point they have attained a dangerous advantage that could tempt them toward a nuclear first strike. Since 1972, under the constraints of SALT, the Soviets have made the biggest relative advance in strategic capabilities against the U.S. in history. They went from being significantly behind in almost every category, to being significantly, and now dangerously, ahead.

This, the administration insists, is why the decision to break SALT was taken. Examine the facts! At a point at which the Soviets are orchestrating a growing civil war inside West Germany, and provoking diplomatic incidents in Berlin, they are moving to exploit an advantage in strategic defense, combined with assembly-line production of mobile SS-25 and SS-24 missiles, to provoke a global showdown aimed at winning an irreversible strategic advantage within the next year, if not sooner. A successful "neutralization" of West Germany on or before its national elections next January will be the key to achieving this.

Thus, the administration decision to "base decisions regarding our strategic forces on the nature and magnitude of the threat posed by the Soviet Union, rather than on standards contained in expired SALT agreements unilaterally observed by the U.S." may be too little, too late. Especially since it includes the dismantling of the two Poseidon submarines in conjunction with the launching of the new Trident model for sea trials in late May, thus technically postponing the official "break out" of the SALT constraints for a few months. Weinberger wanted to dry-dock the Poseidons, instead, but their dismantling was a concession to the Shultz side of the faction-racked administration.

Nonetheless, the new criteria of response according to "the nature and magnitude of the Soviet threat" are a quali-

tative breakthrough for Reagan, and must be rapidly transferred as the operative criteria for decision making to Congress, as well.

Congress was expected to return from its Memorial Day break on June 2 on the warpath against the President's SALT decision, the defense budget as a whole, and, in particular, the Strategic Defense Initiative budget. Already, 43 Congressmen have banded together to launch an offensive against the SDI budget. To top it off, Rep. Patricia Schroeder (D-Colo.), from Gary Hart's home state and backed by a lot of the same people, has introduced legislation to reduce U.S. troop presence abroad by 50%. House and Senate resolutions have determined to slash the President's Fiscal Year defense budget request anywhere from \$19 to \$35 billion. Most of these steps have been justified by the constraints of the Gramm-Rudman balanced-budget law, which requires reducing the federal deficit to \$144 billion in FY87.

However, as Weinberger stressed repeatedly on his recent tour of Europe, the Congress is making a drastic mistake to place fiscal considerations ahead of the reality posed by the Soviet threat, just as the administration was making the same mistake when it placed SALT compliance ahead of the same reality.

Just what is that reality? As the Pentagon's 1986 edition of *Soviet Military Power* reports, Soviet operations include "actions and behavior which indicate that [the Soviets] believe a nuclear war could be fought and won," including via "a massive first strike."

In three reports sent by the President to the Congress, repeated Soviet violations of the SALT and ABM accords have been documented, including violations of the Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963, the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention of 1972, the Geneva Protocol on Chemical Weapons of 1925 and the Helsinki Final Act of 1975. The Soviets have also likely violated the Threshold Test Ban Treaty of 1974.

Last December's report cited the following violations:

- SALT II: New SS-25 ICBM development (combined with SS-X-24, gives the Soviets two, not the limit of one, new ICBM type), and extensive encryption of telemetry on ICBM missile flight tests (impeding U.S. verification of treaty compliance by using concealment, or coding, measures), exceeding numerical limit of Strategic Nuclear Delivery Vehicles and concealing association between SS-25 missile and its launcher. "Ambiguous" Soviet behavior involving possible violations in SS-16 activity. Backfire bomber's intercontinental capability and production rate.

- SALT I: Use of former SS-7 ICBM facilities in support of deployment and operation of new SS-25 mobile ICBMs.

- ABM Treaty: Illegal building of ballistic missile detection and tracking radar at Krasnoyarsk; combination of activities involving missile mobility, testing, and rapid reload, suggesting the Soviets may be preparing ABM defense of entire national territory.