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SALT II AND LEAD TIMES

While Secretary of State Cyrus Vance is busy trying to persuade the Soviets to sign a SALT II treaty, former Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird is charging that "the evidence is incontrovertible that the Soviet Union has repeatedly, flagrantly and indeed contemptuously violated" SALT I.

Laird further charges that the overriding passion for detente has been so intense that our government has either suppressed or minimized the intelligence of what the Soviets are doing. Here are some of the Soviet violations.

SALT I prohibits the development, testing and deployment of any mobile parts of an anti-ballistic missile system. But the Russians have been doing just that.

SALT I expressly forbids tests aimed at upgrading an anti-aircraft missile system to an ABM system. But the Russians made such tests at least five times.

SALT I prohibits replacement of existing intercontinental missiles with substantially larger ones. The Russians produced two new large missiles, the SS-16 and the SS-20. Being mobile and concealed, the United States cannot use the "national technical means of verification" approved by SALT I in order to check on these new Russian missiles.

SALT I gave the Soviets a 3-to-2 lead over the United States in land-based and submarine based intercontinental ballistic missiles. Not satisfied with that, the Russians have hidden, with giant tarpaulins their new submarine construction at the Severodvinsk and Khabarovsk construction yards.

Mr. Laird writes that in order "to gain decisive military superiority over the United States", the Russians "have been willing to dishonor their most fundamental agreements with us."

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As weapons have become more sophisticated and more expensive, they also take longer to build. They need more and more of a precious ingredient, worth more than money, called lead-time -- that is, the length of time it takes to get a new weapons system from the drawing board to the assembly line.

The lead-time required for our Minuteman missile was four years from the go-ahead to the first operational flight. The lead-time required for our Polaris submarine was five years from the go-ahead until the first boat was launched.

The B-47 bomber took eight years, the B-52 took eight and a half years, the B-58 took eleven years.

Our latest mode) strategic bomber, called the B-1, has already consumed twelve years.

Because the Soviets have a closed societ_y, with military secrets tightly guarded, we don't find out about their new weapons until they start operational tests. EAch time U.S. intelligence discovers a new Soviets weapon system or technique, the Soviets already have a headstart *ori* us of at least three-fourths of the lead time.

While we can outproduce the Russians by a ratio of at least two to one, our economic superiority wi11 count for naught if we are caught short on lead-time to build the weapons we need to defend our country.

When we make a decison as to whether or not to build a new weapons system, such as the B-1 bomber o the cruise missile, we sh d remember this lesson. If we build a weapon and find we don't need it, all we lose is the money. If we don't build the weapons and we find we do need it, we won't be able to buy it at any price because the lead-time will all be gone.

It makes no sense to play a giant ostrich, bury our nation's head in the sand, and pretend the Soviets aren't violating SALT 1 when former Secretary Laird presents convincing evidence that they are. . • It makes even less sense to sign SALT II while closing our eyes to the history of SALT I.

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