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BROWN'S DECEIT ON WARHEAD LIMITS

In his Commencement address in Annapolis on May 30, Defense Secretary Harold Brown deceived the Naval Academy graduates and the American people on a major issue of the SALT II Treaty. ~~The Pentagon office of Public Affairs cannot substantiate Brown's statement and is stonewalling requests for clarification.~~

Secretary Brown used the occasion of the Annapolis graduation to make a major speech defending SALT II. On page 4 of his speech, he said: "SALT II ... limits the number of warheads that can be targeted against our forces." The term "warhead" means an explosive weapon "head" and includes both single-headed missiles and MIRVs (Multiple Independently-targeted Re-entry Vehicles).

Using the Pentagon phone number given on the official release of Brown's speech (202/OXford 5-0192), I tried for a week to get an answer to the simple question, "What is the SALT II limit on warheads?" Referred from one officer to another, ~~and~~ I finally ~~to~~ reached the man identified as the SALT II authority in the office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, Mr. James Freeman, ~~all I got was equivocation.~~

In two long conversations with Mr. Freeman on June 19, in which he could not cite any Treaty provision substantiating Secretary Brown's claim that SALT II "limits the number of warheads that can be targeted against our forces," Freeman retreated to the argument that the "warhead limits" could be inferred from the interlacing provisions governing the various types of missile launchers capable of being equipped with MIRVs.

So, considering only land-based launchers of ICBMs (Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles; by far the most destructive of all weapons) which SALT II allows to be MIRVed, Mr. Freeman and I went through the Treaty provisions. Article V allows each side to have 820 MIRVed launchers of land-based ICBMs..

It is admitted by all that the Soviets have 308 "heavy" SS-18 ICBMs. Article IV of SALT II specifically allows each SS-18 to have ten MIRVs. (The U.S. does not have any "heavy" missiles and SALT II forbids us to build any.)

(more)

That leaves 512 (820 minus 308) other land-based launchers of ICBMs which SALT II allows the Soviets to equip with MIRVs. Since SALT II allows the Soviets to MIRV any mix of ICBMs they choose, and since neither the Soviets nor the Pentagon will say how many SS-17s and SS-18s the Soviets have, they can choose to deploy all 512 as SS-19s, on each of which Article IV of SALT II permits six MIRVs.

This adds up to such a frightening warhead total that it is no wonder that neither the Soviets nor the Carter Administration wanted the figures to be spelled out in the Treaty. SALT II thus permits the Soviets to have 3,080 (308 times 10) warheads on their SS-18 force, and 3,072 (512 times 6) warheads on their SS-19 force; a total of 6,152 Soviet warheads on their land-based MIRVed ICBM force alone.

Now let's look at the SALT II warhead limits on our MIRVed land-based force, which Secretary Brown conveniently failed to mention in his Annapolis speech. SALT II sternly limits the United States to three MIRVs on each of our 550 Minuteman III missile launchers, making a clearcut land-based limit of 1,650 MIRVs. The United States solemnly promises in Article IV of SALT II that we "will not flight-test or deploy missiles of this type [Minuteman III] with more than three re-entry vehicles [MIRVs]."

Therefore, the SALT II "warhead limits" on MIRVed land-based missile launchers are 1,650 for the U.S. and 6,152 for the U.S.S.R. SALT II allows the Soviets almost four times as many as it allows us.

But that's not all. SALT II places no limit whatsoever on the power of warheads. Mr. Freeman admitted that the Soviet SS-18 MIRVs are 1.2 megatons each, and that the U.S. Minuteman III MIRVs are 0.17 megaton each. Some informed sources estimate the SS-18 and SS-19 MIRVs at 2 megatons each, but let's be conservative and accept Freeman's figure.

Multiplying 1.2 megatons by 6,152 MIRVs gives the Soviets at least 7,382.4 megatons (7 billion, 382 million, 400 thousand tons) of TNT explosive-equivalent in their land-based MIRVed missile force alone. Multiplying 0.17 megaton by 1,650 U.S. MIRVs gives us 280.5 megatons (280 million, 500 thousand tons) of TNT explosive-equivalent in our land-based MIRVed missile force. The Soviets' warhead explosive power is thus more than 26 times that of ours.

~~I asked Mr. Freeman, "What do you think about the accuracy or the honesty of Secretary Brown's statement that SALT II limits warheads?" He replied, "I'll call you back." But he never did, and thereafter refused to return my calls. It is obvious why Pentagon spokesmen don't want to talk about SALT II "warhead limits."~~

(end)

Changes given to Copley on June 29 before it went out:

Mr. Freeman finally called me back ten days later. He confirmed that SALT II allows the Soviets to build "about 6,000" land-based MIRV warheads of 1.2 megatons each, while the United States is limited to 1,650 land-based MIRV warheads of 0.17 megatons each. No wonder the actual warhead limits were omitted from the treaty.