

A FREEZE MAKES NO SENSE

The rhetorical appeal of "nuclear freeze" is almost irresistible. Congress is now being tempted by this alluring--but potentially destructive--siren. It takes the form of the Zablocki-Bingham Resolution calling for a mutual and verifiable freeze on and reductions in nuclear weapons and for approval of the SALT II agreement. This was introduced in the House of Representatives on June 23, 1982, and was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs. It may soon be debated on the House Floor as H.J. Res. 521.

Although the Resolution's seven findings vary in importance, two are worth close examination. The first asserts that "the increasing stockpiles of nuclear weapons and nuclear delivery systems by both the United States and the Soviet Union have not strengthened international peace and security but in fact [have] enhance[d] the prospect of mutual destruction." Actually, whatever else one may say about it, strategic nuclear deterrence over the past 37 years has prevented war between the two superpowers, and this in a century which has been wracked by two World Wars and numerous smaller regional conflicts.

The second finding worth studying lists the benefits which the Resolution's sponsors feel accrue from the SALT II Treaty. These include SALT II's mandating of "the prompt reduction of Soviet strategic forces by 254 deployable strategic nuclear delivery systems" and the imposition of "significant restrictions on Soviet multiple-warhead deployable intercontinental ballistic missiles, and on warheads for these missiles, in terms of numbers and throwweight." The clear implication of this finding is that ratification of the SALT II Treaty would benefit the United States.

This view, however, is based upon an extremely selective reading of the Treaty. For example, while SALT II would require Soviet dismantling of some 250 strategic nuclear delivery vehicles, it does not specify which systems are to be dismantled. Experience shows that the Soviet Union almost certainly would make reductions from among its older and less-capable systems--those nuclear delivery systems in its current arsenal that are least worrisome to the United States and thus least important to reduce.

The Resolution's listing of SALT II provisions, moreover, simply ignores such negative aspects of the Treaty as its failure to constrain the Soviet Union's modern large ballistic missiles (the SS-18s), which directly threaten the survivability of the U.S. land-based ICBM force and its exclusion of the Soviet intercontinental-range Backfire bomber from its ceilings.

According to the language of the Resolution, the United States and the Soviet Union "should immediately begin the strategic arms reduction talks" (they began June 29), and these talks should pursue objectives including "pursuing a complete halt to the nuclear arms race," "deciding when and how to achieve a mutual and verifiable freeze" on nuclear weapons testing, production and deployment, and "giving special attention to destabilizing weapons whose deployment would make such a freeze more difficult to achieve." These points would pose great difficulties in the current U.S.-Soviet arms negotiations. A nuclear freeze is simply incompatible with serious arms reduction talks. Given the Soviet Union's advantages in such areas as heavy missiles, a freeze solidifying this supremacy would give the U.S.S.R. little reason to negotiate reductions seriously.

Further complicating this picture is the Resolution's recommendation that the intermediate-range nuclear force talks (INF) be subsumed under START, since despite an additional recommendation to "make every effort to reach a common position" with our NATO allies on elements of such an agreement inconsistent with our NATO commitments, such a merging of the two negotiations would immeasurably increase the possibility that no worthwhile arms agreement could ever be reached.

Finally, the Zablocki-Bingham Resolution's recommendation that the United States "promptly approve the SALT II agreement provided adequate verification capabilities are maintained" is a call for ratifying a treaty which the Senate, by its actions in failing to ratify it earlier despite intense pressure from the Carter Administration, obviously found disadvantageous to U.S. national interests.

In sum, House Joint Resolution 521 is replete with language reflecting an extreme position--language which fails to appraise realistically either the SALT II Treaty or the problems for serious U.S.-Soviet attempts to reduce nuclear weapons. It makes no sense to impose a nuclear freeze when the U.S.S.R. maintains critical strategic force advantages. Arms reductions are very desirable. But they must occur in a way consistent with the needs of U.S. national security. The resolution now before Congress fails to do this.

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For further information, see: "The Flawed Premises Behind a Nuclear Freeze," National Security Record (The Heritage Foundation), April 1982; "Soviet Violations of Arms Agreements," National Security Record, May 1982; and Jeffrey G. Barlow, "Moscow and The Peace Offensive," Heritage Foundation Backgrounder #184, May 14, 1982. See also, Edward L. Rowny, "A Nuclear Freeze-- Or a Cut?" Washington Post, March 21, 1982, p. A13.