

# Seeking nuclear-arms control —the hard lessons of SALT I

By John Gellner

The first stage of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks — SALT I, as it is beginning to be called in anticipation of further stages to come — was concluded by the signing in Moscow, on May 26 last, of a U.S.-Soviet Treaty on Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems and of an Interim Agreement and Protocol on Strategic Offensive Missiles. Also part of the package are a number of "agreed interpretations" and "common understandings". The whole represents the net result of seven rounds of bargaining (four in Helsinki, three in Vienna) that began on November 17, 1969.

After reading the texts, and going entirely by what they say, one can only come to the conclusion that the mountains laboured mightily to bring forth a mouse — and a rather sickly one at that. If it were not for the indirect, the imponderable as it were, results it may have, SALT I would have to be written off as yet another of those exercises in futility which arms-control negotiations so often are.

The anti-ballistic missile (ABM) pact limits the treaty partners to two complexes of 100 missiles each, one round the national capital, the other round a grouping of land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM). There are some further restrictions on the area covered and on the deployment of radar, but not such that they would interfere with what the two sides have or intend to have: for the Russians, the already-emplaced ABM system around Moscow; for the Americans, the *Safeguard* ABM installation at Grand Forks, North Dakota, which is under construction and slated for completion late in 1974. As things look now, the Soviets will probably thicken and modernize the ABM shield protecting Moscow, but neither side is likely to pick up its second option, which would be an ABM system defending a Soviet ICBM complex and a *Safeguard* installation ringing Washington.

All in all, the ABM pact amounts to an admission by the two powers that the chances for a successful nuclear first strike are so slight as not to be worth consider-

ing; the aggressor cannot save himself from being crushed by the counter-attack, the second strike, whether or not there are anti-ballistic missile defences. This is pretty plain. We do not know, of course, what Russian thinking on this point was earlier, but there could not have been any doubt in American minds — not after 1966, when the Soviets started deploying ICBMs and building missile-carrying nuclear submarines at an unprecedentedly rapid rate. The punch a nuclear force can deliver is often expressed in megaton equivalents (MTE), equal to two-thirds of the explosive yield of the nuclear weapons that can be counted upon to reach enemy territory. For some time, it has been unwritten U.S. military doctrine that the delivery of about 400 MTEs would result in the "assured destruction" of the Soviet Union.

The latest estimate by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) puts the present "maximum theoretical capacity" of the U.S. strategic nuclear forces at just under 19,000 megatons, and that of the Soviet Union at 15,000 megatons, or about 12,300 and 10,000 MTEs. Even though the figures for deliverable weapons would be less (not all nuclear submarines would be on station, not all ICBMs or bombers would be serviceable), no conceivable first strike, in whatever way executed, could reduce the weight of the inevitable counter-attack to less than 400 MTEs.

So, at least as far as the military

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