

J127(A78)

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Proposal Abstract J127(A78)

1. Arms Control Problem:

Nuclear weapons - reentry vehicles
- missile tests

2. Verification Type:

- (a) Remote sensors
- (b) International exchange of information

3. Source:

Potter, William C. "Coping with MIRV in a MAD World". Journal of Conflict Resolution 22, no. 4 (December 1978): 599-626.

4. Summary:

The author argues that not all types of MIRVs are inherently destabilizing in terms of the strategic balance between the two superpowers. Specifically, MIRVed SLBMs may contribute to deterrence stability by increasing the number of warheads that would survive any first strike. On the other hand, several arguments can be made favouring a ban on MIRVed ICBMs.

Given this, Potter contends that the verification of a MIRV ban is not an insurmountable obstacle to agreement. It has been argued in the past that unless the MIRV program was halted before completion of its testing phase, there would be no feasible means of verifying a treaty concerning deployment limitations. The use of national technical means would not be sufficient to distinguish MIRVed and unMIRVed warheads according to this argument; it would be necessary to physically inspect the interior of a missile's reentry vehicle or examine it at close range with special instruments. Since neither of the superpowers is likely to agree to such on-site inspection both critics and supporters of MIRVs have tended to agree that a ban on MIRVs after they have been deployed is not likely.

The approach which US negotiators have adopted to circumvent the deployed MIRV verification problem is to assume that once any missile has been tested successfully in a MIRVed mode, all missiles of that type will be counted as MIRVed. There are several problems with this approach. First, it does not permit one to distinguish between missile launchers which are identical except that one launcher contains MIRVs and the other does not. For example, how is one to determine the number of submarines carrying MIRVed missiles if the Soviets develop a new MIRVed SLBM which is compatible with old launchers on existing submarines? Requiring that all launchers capable of firing a MIRVed missile be counted towards the MIRV limit is not realistic, according to Potter.

Another problem with the above "typing" approach is that its political feasibility derives in part from the high MIRV ceiling