

Explanations and implications of Soviet-U.S. arms talks

By Robin Ranger

Sir Winston Churchill's advice that "jaw-jaw is better than war-war" seems to have been heeded this year. The super-power Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT) have produced an outline for a SALT II agreement. The United States, the Soviet Union and Britain seem close to agreement on a Comprehensive Test-Ban (CTB). These two agreements combine to limit the strategic-arms race, according to their supporters. Reducing the greatest concentration of military power in the world – the U.S./West European North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the U.S.S.R./East European Warsaw Pact Organization (WPO) – has proved more difficult. The negotiations on Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions (MBFR) – to use the NATO term – that started in 1974 are stalemated. In addition, the Soviet Union has deployed a new generation of "Euro-strategic systems", notably the SS-20 IRBM, the *Backfire* bomber and a new generation of vastly superior fighter-bombers. Since they can strike strategic targets, including capital cities, anywhere in Western Europe in a matter of minutes, they are, to the Western Europeans, "strategic systems".

The French Government, in its statement on disarmament of January 25, 1978 (an interesting indication of renewed French interest in negotiations in this area, from which France had held aloof), suggested a novel solution. While SALT II dealt with the strategic nuclear balance, the European balance, both nuclear and conventional, should be dealt with in a larger forum than the MBFR talks, which cover

only the Central Front. This new group would comprise all 35 signatories to the August 1, 1975, Final Act of the Conference on Co-operation and Security in Europe (CSCE). They would consider arms control "from the Atlantic to the Urals", resurrecting the Gaullist definition of Europe.

Finally, the United Nations is holding a special session on disarmament. If words were acts, then 1978 would be a good year for arms control. But to judge by actions, especially Soviet actions and those of the U.S.S.R.'s involuntary allies in the WPO, 1978 will see the continued failure of arms control to deal with any of the rapidly-increasing threats to strategic and tactical nuclear stability, and to related conventional balances – inside and outside Europe.

Since the U.S.S.R. prefers the slogan "arm to parley", the West, especially the United States, must follow suit. While arms control remains a desirable object, effective negotiations require rough parity of forces; the U.S. failure to hold the Soviet Union to the 1972 SALT I agreements or to take the necessary steps to correct the resulting strategic imbalance has removed any Soviet incentive to negotiate seriously in SALT or MBFR. The same is true, though to a lesser extent, of NATO *vis-à-vis* the WPO – though it must, regrettably, be noted that Canada has been the worst offender here, spending less on defence than any NATO member except Luxembourg and Iceland. Recent efforts have been made to remedy these deficiencies, but there is still much leeway to be made up.

If this assessment seems unduly bleak, it is worth while to remember that, when the SALT I agreements were signed in 1972, their architect Henry Kissinger hailed them as an earnest of a super-power *détente* that would eventually become an *entente*, while a SALT II based on the 1974 Vladivostok accords would "put the cap on" the strategic arms race.

But following these euphoric predictions, Dr Kissinger was unable to negotiate a SALT II because of excessive Soviet de-

Rough parity of forces required for effective negotiations.

Dr Ranger is a member of the Department of Political Science at St Francis Xavier University. During 1978-79 he will be on sabbatical leave and will be working in London and Washington on a Department of National Defence fellowship. He has written widely on strategic questions. The views expressed here are those of Dr Ranger.