Wiesner, Ruina, and Rathjens discuss SALT

(Continued from page 5) we were negotiating with the Russians before, we never could, for example, decide whether the P-II was strategic or not.

Ruins: Some of these problems were discussed with the Soviet scientists recently. They’d say: Well, what about your nuclear forces in Europe, and we’d say: What about your medium-range missiles? They’d remind us that their medium-range nuclear weapons could strike at the Soviet Union itself.

Wiesner: But in the end, at least the way we used it was to include all the medium-range weapons in Europe and then the balance isn’t so asymmetrical.

Rathjens: I think that this is one of the things that the Administration neglected to consider in the ABM debate. Some of the weapons that we consider to be tactical may look strategic to the Soviets. Some of the tactical aircraft in Europe could deliver a devastating attack against the Soviet Union, although that’s not their primary mission.

The Tech: According to the Washington Post, NATO planners have again decided to resist a large conventional Soviet attack through the immediate use of tactical nuclear weapons. Would the Soviets consider such use to be strategic?

Wiesner: If the Soviets were seriously interested in an agreement, they might consider them strategic. But if I were a European, I would not regard them as strategic. I would regard them as a good reason for not getting involved in a war in the first place. Even if it didn’t escalate the conflict, the use of tactical nuclear weapons would wipe out Western Europe, for you have to assume that the Soviets would also use them. They don’t make much sense really. I’ve never found a military situation in which both sides had tactical nuclear weapons where it turned out to be somebody’s advantage to use them.

Ruins: Of course, the argument is made that somehow the threat of using tactical nuclear weapons deters large land wars from starting.

Wiesner: Of course, the real thing about tactical nuclear weapons is that they are a security blanket in the ‘Peanuts’ sense. They make someone feel safer. The number grew always. Every time we had a crisis, instead of sending more troops, we’d send more tactical nuclear weapons over, and this quieted everybody down. Nobody knows what the number of nuclear weapons in Europe is for.

The Tech: Is the retreat from mandatory on-site inspection of weapons an acceptable nuclear limitation agreement by the Nixon administration due to better satellite inspection?

Wiesner: It depends on the type of agreement you’re talking about. In the case of underground nuclear testing, it’s a combination of real improvements in seismic detection, and a better understanding of the problem, and a willingness to understand that there is so little you gain from clandestine nuclear tests that it’s inconceivable that anyone would carry them out. To do any serious weapons development would require an extensive test series which would almost certainly be detected. A mission that felt its security depended upon weapons tests would do what the Russians did in 1961, announce that their security required testing.

Rathjens: I don’t think that the Administration has faced up to the test ban question, but what they have done is face up to the question that there are some types of agreements that can be negotiated without on-site inspection. I anticipate that our position toward the SALT talks is that this is the only kind of agreement you’re going to get.

Ruins: I believe that the previous administration didn’t get hung-up on the area of on-site inspection. President Johnson faced 374 Soviet on-site inspection teams from 1962 to 1969. The first version of the guidance document was released. The feasibility of the system is already proven. There’s no question that the system as designed is technically feasible.

The Tech: Would the wording of a contract to General Electric for the first 68 MIRVed warheads indicate that the MIRV program is operational in a final form?

Ruins: I have read newspaper reports that there are submarines already starting rework for Po- seidon.

Ruina: I believe that, right now, the program is already in the deployment phase, and that no matter what we do, the country’s program would continue at the same pace with or without the L-Tests continued involvement. In that case, you can naturally ask the question: If it doesn’t make any difference, why are we still involved? For the first version of the guidance system our continued involve- ment relates to modifying designs to make things more reliable or easier to maintain. But that only speaks for the details of performance, and not whether deployment would be de- layed. The feasibility of the system is already proven. There’s no question that the system as designed is technically feasible.

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Rathjens: ASW won’t catch missile sub.}

Photo by Harold Federov

coulds may take many forms. The Tech: Do I understand correctly that MIT stopped working immediately on the MIRV that this would have virtually no ef- fect upon the rate of deploy- ment?

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