

June 27, 1979

STATEMENT BY
SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER HOWARD BAKER
ON THE SALT II TREATY

I have called this press conference today to announce that I shall oppose the SALT treaty. I do so with regret, for I had hoped that a treaty I felt was inadequate could be improved and strengthened and be made acceptable.

I have expressed my willingness to work toward that end if I received some assurance that those efforts would be favorably received. I talked at great length with President Carter and the Administration has not expressed a willingness to consider amendments.

In a statement by Foreign Minister Gromyko on Monday, the Soviet Government is saying that the United States Senate and the American people are faced with a "take it or leave it" treaty and threatening dire consequences if the treaty is amended or rejected.

I am disappointed by the Administration's apparent position, and I am not impressed by the Soviet position. Therefore I wish to announce today that until the Administration demonstrates a willingness to accept reasonable amendments -- and until the Soviet Government demonstrates a willingness to consider them -- I plan no further efforts to try to improve this treaty, and I would thus simply vote against it.

If I perceive a different point of view and a different attitude later, then I am perfectly willing -- and in fact I would be anxious -- to resume those efforts. But it seems to me counterproductive to proceed further at this time.

In the best light, this treaty is not favorable to the United States, and at the least, it is inequitable in that it provides a substantial strategic superiority to the Soviet Union.

The Treaty is vague where clarity is required. It rests on faith where hard evidence is essential.

And most important of all may be the signal it sends, not only the Soviet Union but the rest of the world, that the United States is willing to accept this status quo: a questionable American strategic adequacy born of a decade of vast Soviet military growth coupled with a gradual diminution of American strength.

I believe in the Strategic Arms Limitation continuum. I voted for SALT I, in the belief it was a first step toward bringing equality to the strategic forces of the two countries.

I supported the agreements arrived at in Vladivostok. While they were not perfect, they were, I thought, another step in the right direction.

I would like to support SALT II -- and III and IV and V, to the place where we have substantially reduced the threat of nuclear terror.

The question is not whether I support a SALT treaty, but whether I support this SALT treaty. I do not and I cannot, without amendments. If the Administration does not signal a willingness to consider amendments, and if the Soviet Government does not desist in trying to threaten the Senate, then I will work diligently and, I trust, effectively to defeat this treaty.

I would suggest three categories of deficiency in the treaty.

First, I think there are significant ambiguities that must be resolved by amendment or by reservations, and acceded to by the Soviet Government, particularly with respect to our right to develop and deploy new weapons systems -- according to our interpretation of the treaty, and not according to the Russian interpretation.

I was disturbed, for example, by press reports indicating that the Soviet Union disputes the propriety of the mobile basing mode of the MX missile. That would be a poor way to begin this treaty experience, with substantial disagreement between the United States and Russia on whether we have the right to do what the President has announced we intend to do.

Second, monitoring and verification: I believe the treaty fails to provide for adequate monitoring and verification of Russian adherence to the terms of the treaty. The net effect of the treaty language enables the Soviets to say, "we'll let you know whatever we want you to know about our missile tests." I am not prepared to accept that, and I fully expect that an amendment to correct that deficiency will be offered as well.

The third category is the most important: the nature of equality of weapons systems between the two countries. The goal

of arms control is to equalize the destructive capacity of each nation. I believe this treaty has lost sight of that requirement, for it provides a vast inequality.

For example, the 308 heavy missiles allowed to the Soviet Union under this treaty have firepower equal to all of our strategic ballistic missile systems put together.

For another example, I simply cannot understand why the Soviet advanced Backfire bomber should be excluded from the treaty -- and our B-1 bomber should be included. I feel certain that an amendment to restore a degree of equality in advanced aircraft will be offered in the Senate.

These are examples -- and not a list -- of treaty defects. By far, the greatest deficiency in the treaty is the difference in the firepower of the United States and the Soviet Union.

Were it not for the Soviet "heavy missiles," the SS-18s,
I doubt that we would have to commit 30 or 40 billion dollars
to a mobile deployment of our new MX missile. Were it not for
the threat of those huge weapons, I think most other matters
would fall into place.

If the Soviet Government was willing to eliminate its 308 heavy missiles, I would be predisposed to consider a most generous reconciliation of the remaining points.

But with those huge missiles in their inventory and with none in ours, there is such a vast difference in the destructive capability of our two strategic systems, and there is such grave danger to the United States, that I feel the treaty is fatally flawed for that reason alone.

These reasons suggest my concerns and disappointments with this treaty.

I would like to conclude by reiterating my opening statement. I was prepared -- I am still prepared -- to try to negotiate amendments and changes in the treaty, to improve it and to pass it.

But I am not willing to do that while the Administration
assumes an adamant position in opposition to meaningful amend-
ments, nor under Soviet threats of "grave consequences" if the
Senate and the American people don't knuckle under.

I respect the Soviet Union, I hear and understand Foreign Secretary Gromyko's words, and my reply is that the Senate will work its will and the American democracy will survive and prosper without any advice from the Russians.