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H-Diplo Roundtable XX-20 on Matthew J. Ambrose. The Control Agenda: A History of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks

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H-Diplo Roundtable XX-20 on Matthew J. Ambrose. The Control Agenda: A History of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks

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Introduction by Scott Kaufman, Francis Marion University

The 1970s, the decade once referred to as “lost,”^[1] during which, in the words of Bruce Carroll, “It seemed like nothing happened,”^[2] have undergone a much-needed reassessment. Because much of the primary documentation related to U.S. foreign policy was classified, the first monographs to take that second look at the seventies focused primarily on domestic matters.^[3] The declassification process, including the publication of volumes of *Foreign Relations of the United States* for the Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Jimmy Carter administrations, has allowed scholars to expand the historiography of the seventies to America’s diplomacy.^[4] Matthew Ambrose’s *The Control Agenda* is part of that trend.

Ambrose offers an overview of U.S. arms control policy from the late 1960s until the early 1980s, focusing on the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT). Because this effort was led by top-level U.S. officials (and their counterparts in the Soviet Union) it is they who draw the author’s greatest attention. Tracing the genesis of SALT to the Lyndon Johnson administration, he follows the talks to the signing and ratification of the first SALT agreement in 1972, the attempt by the Ford and Carter administrations to achieve SALT II, and the tabling of the second SALT agreement following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Yet despite the failure to ratify it, SALT II influenced the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) negotiations during the Ronald Reagan administration. It was only with the collapse of those talks in 1983 that the SALT process came to an end and the United States adopted a new foundation for its arms control initiatives.

The four reviewers in this roundtable are unanimous that Ambrose’s book is well-written and researched. Ambrose “takes a highly technical, complex subject,” writes Luke Nichter, “and makes it palatable for a more general readership.” John Maurer declares the monograph “an important contribution to the history of the Cold War,” while David Tal

refers to it as “finely articulated.” Both Maurer and Ronald Granieri cite Ambrose’s use of recently-declassified materials in telling the story of SALT. Although they point to the fact that Ambrose covers a lengthy time period in only about 220 pages of text, the reviewers believe this does not detract from the book’s value. The “broad brush strokes” on which Ambrose relies, comments Tal, means one finds “more forest here than trees – and that is not necessarily a bad thing.”

But there is forest, and here too the reviewers find much to praise. Both Maurer and Granieri note that there was a close relationship between the SALT process on the one hand, and domestic politics and public opinion on the other, though Nichter would have liked to have seen more on this score. Readers will find particularly rich details on the negotiations during the Carter years, Maurer writes, which allows one to better understand the complexity of the issues confronting Reagan when he took office in 1981.

At the same time, the reviewers saw opportunities for greater clarity and stronger analysis. The strongest criticisms come from Tal, who disagrees with Ambrose on how long President Richard Nixon and National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger sought to link SALT to the broader goal of détente; believes that Ambrose exaggerates the importance of U.S. negotiator Paul Nitze to the SALT process; and argues that Ambrose downplays the significance of the backchannel talks between Kissinger and Soviet Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Dobrynin. But the biggest dissimilarity between his interpretation of the SALT process and that of Ambrose, writes Tal, is historiographical. Ambrose sees “SALT as flawed” because of the level of arms reductions achieved. To Tal, though, SALT was not about reductions or limitations to weapons, but an effort to stop the arms race and stabilize the international system. That stability was of importance to the negotiators is something that Granieri also addresses. Maurer for his part is not fully convinced by Ambrose’s assertion that SALT changed the way in which the United States used its nuclear arsenal to target Soviet military sites.

Tal also believes that the author could have mined other collections, including documents at the Nixon Presidential Library, the National Archives, and the digital documents declassified by the National Security Archive. Through further research, comments Tal, Ambrose would have had a better understanding of the extent of Nixon’s commitment to SALT. Nichter seconds Tal to some extent, expressing his wish that Ambrose had consulted the Nixon tapes and conducted interviews with players in the SALT talks. Granieri and Maurer note the lack of Soviet materials, but they add that this is due primarily to the fact that they are not available. Indeed, Maurer argues that “Given the dearth of Soviet sources, Ambrose’s emphasis is rightly on American SALT policy.”

Despite the aforementioned weaknesses, *The Control Agenda* represents a valuable contribution to the historiography of U.S. arms control policy, and to American diplomacy

during the 1970s and early 1980s. Ambrose provides policymakers, scholars, and laypersons a clearer understanding of the difficulties in achieving nuclear arms control accords at a time when the 2010 New START agreement signed between the United States and Russia is set to expire in 2021, when President Donald Trump withdrew the U.S. from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action signed with Iran, and tensions with North Korea over denuclearization of the Korean peninsula persist. *The Control Agenda* is “a serious and thoughtful book,” concludes Granieri, one “that deserves a wide audience within the ongoing scholarly dialogue about the efforts to forestall Armageddon.”

Participants:

Matthew Ambrose earned his Ph.D. in History from The Ohio State University. He has previously worked in the Office of the Secretary of Defense’s Historical Office and is currently a Senior Defense Analyst at the Government Accountability Office. The views and opinions expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of GAO, the legislative branch, or the U.S. government.

Scott Kaufman received his Ph.D. in History at Ohio University, and currently is a Board of Trustees Research Scholar and Chair of the Department of History at Francis Marion University. He is author, co-author, or editor of twelve books, including *Plans Unraveled: The Foreign Policy of the Carter Administration* (Northern Illinois University Press, 2008), *Project Plowshare: The Peaceful Use of Nuclear Explosives in Cold War America* (Cornell University Press, 2013), *Ambition, Pragmatism, and Party: A Political Biography of Gerald R. Ford* (University Press of Kansas, 2017), and *The Environment and International History* (Bloomsbury, 2018). He is currently working on a comparative history of the Panama and Suez Canals.

Ronald J. Granieri is a Senior Fellow and Director of the Center for the Study of America and the West at the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia, as well as Director of Research at the Lauder Institute at the University of Pennsylvania. A graduate of Harvard and the University of Chicago, Dr. Granieri has also worked as a Contract Historian for the Department of Defense. His most recent publications include: “Beyond Cap the Foil: Caspar Weinberger and the Reagan Era Defense Buildup,” in Bradley Coleman and Kyle Longley, eds., *The Enduring Legacy: Leadership and National Security Affairs during the Reagan Presidency*. (University of Kentucky Press, 2017): 51-80.

John Maurer is the Henry A. Kissinger Postdoctoral Fellow at International Security Studies and the Jackson Institute for Global Affairs at Yale University. His current book project focuses on the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) in the Nixon Administration, drawing on the Kissinger Papers at Yale to examine how academic ideas on the nature and purpose of arms control shaped U.S. arms control policy. He has a Ph.D. in history from

Georgetown University.

Luke A. Nichter is a Professor of History at Texas A&M University–Central Texas. His books include *Richard Nixon and Europe: The Reshaping of the Postwar Atlantic World* (Cambridge University Press), the *New York Times* bestseller *The Nixon Tapes: 1971-1972* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt), *The Nixon Tapes: 1973* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt), and the forthcoming *Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. and the Decline of the Eastern Establishment* (Yale University Press).

David Tal is the Yossi Harel Chair in Modern Israel Studies at the University of Sussex (UK). He authored two books on nuclear disarmament and arms control: *US Strategic Arms Policy in the Cold War: Negotiation and Confrontation over SALT, 1969-79* (London: Routledge, 2017) and *The American Nuclear Disarmament Dilemma, 1945-1963* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008). He is writing now a book on U.S.-Israel Relationship (*The Making of an Alliance: The Origins and Development of the US-Israel Relationship*), under contract with Cambridge University Press.

Review by Ronald J. Granieri, Foreign Policy Research Institute

The Journey or the Destination? Arms Control in the SALT Era

The *Control Agenda* offers a cogent, well-researched history of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) which should take up a worthy place within the growing literature on the late Cold War. Matthew Ambrose traces the rise and fall of the ‘SALT Process,’ which includes not only the negotiations of particular agreements, but also the politics and habits of mind that developed around Soviet-American arms control, from the late Johnson to the early Reagan Administrations.

Ambrose’s focus differs subtly but significantly from other works covering years between 1969 and 1983. This is not a history of détente *per se*, though the narrative overlaps with the détente era. Rather, Ambrose treats arms control as an issue in itself, outlining the emergence of a particular consensus that emerged between the Superpowers, “an approach to nuclear arms negotiations that featured a relatively static strategic balance, a focus on offensive forces, and weak or passive means of verification” (211). Within that framework, the superpowers pursued ongoing bilateral negotiations about nuclear weapons, producing first the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty and the Framework agreement that made up SALT I in 1972, then the more detailed (but ultimately doomed) SALT II Treaty by 1979. According to Ambrose, that consensus even survived the crisis of détente in 1979-1980,

where the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and Iran crisis, combined with the election of President Ronald Reagan, presaged the return of Cold War tensions. As Ambrose argues in his concluding chapter, Reagan entered office initially prepared to continue negotiations on intermediate nuclear weapons within the SALT framework. Those negotiations, conceived within NATO's 'two-track' decision in parallel with plans to modernize NATO's nuclear weapons in Western Europe, eventually broke down with the arrival of the 1983 deadline for deploying Pershing II and Cruise Missiles and the Soviet decision to break off the talks. When bilateral negotiations resumed in 1985, they took on a very different character. Instead of merely placing limits on the future size of nuclear arsenals, the eventual Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty abolished medium-range nuclear missiles altogether. Furthermore, the Reagan and Bush administrations eventually cooperated with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to go from the limitation of strategic arms to the concrete reduction of arsenals, from SALT to START.

Ambrose fully notes the limitations (pardon the pun) of SALT, and carefully notes the distinction between the SALT era and what came later, though he does conclude that "the *experience* of SALT—its negotiation, the debates it triggered, and its repercussions—exerted influence beyond the terms and expirations of the agreements themselves" (3) and "left durable and important legacies for the control of nuclear armaments" (221). That last point is true but debatable. The greatest weakness of the SALT process, as Ambrose's assiduous research shows, is that it was primarily about process rather than results. As with contemporary policy in the Middle East, there is value in a peace process, but that is not necessarily the same thing as peace. Outside of the ABM treaty, which did indeed keep the Superpowers from developing extensive and potentially destabilizing defensive systems in order to preserve mutually assured destruction (MAD), SALT's basic thrust was control through stable management rather than encouraging any fundamental changes in the international system, about continuing the conversation rather than reaching any conclusions. These were considered significant advances in a time when the smart money believed that achieving stability was the best one could aspire to accomplish. After all, no one ever expected the Cold War to end.

Knowing that more fundamental change was eventually possible places the accomplishments of SALT and the *détente* era more generally in a different light. A great deal of complex strategic thinking and planning from such brilliant theorists as Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and statesmen such as President Richard Nixon and Chancellor Helmut Schmidt went into maintaining stability. Celebrated at the time, all those efforts now appear like the paddling of a swan across a placid lake, the furious activity below the surface designed to make everything proceed with as little disruption as possible—no small accomplishment, to be sure, but hardly heroic.

The development of the SALT process also encouraged the creation of a bipartisan arms

control priesthood. Notwithstanding attacks from more hawkish politicians such as Senator Henry ‘Scoop’ Jackson (D-WA) and his acolytes such as future Assistant Secretary of Defense and arms control skeptic Richard Perle, who tried to derail it, or the efforts by President Jimmy Carter to accelerate it beyond the political possible, prominent members of both parties accepted the basic logic of the process, even if they differed on how hard a line to take in negotiations. Thus, Secretaries of State as different as Cyrus Vance and Alexander Haig advocated maintaining the process, and thus someone such as Paul Nitze could serve both Democratic and Republic administrations in these negotiations. This was partially due to a generalized approach to arms control that “treated nuclear weapons and the impact they would have as primarily technological phenomena and saw only a diminished role for geopolitics” (41). Such an approach privileged stability, focusing on the journey rather than any particular destination, creating stagnation and calling it peace.

It is easy to be cynical about the accomplishments of the past and one should resist the temptation here. One should not underestimate the importance of maintaining these arms control discussions, both in their immediate time and in the role that they played in contributing to the revolutionary changes in the later 1980s. Ambrose’s work is especially valuable because of the way in which it both shows how the SALT process developed and how it gradually broke down. The Reagan Administration changed the course of arms control in large part because President Reagan himself questioned the logic of the SALT process on two key points. First, he preferred to imagine reducing nuclear arsenals rather than merely controlling their growth; and second, he advocated the development of defensive systems to undermine the concept of MAD. This is not to credit Reagan with prescience or omnipotence; Ambrose outlines very well how the Reagan Administration struggled to define new policies. Although Reagan had wanted to engage the Soviets in dialogue about reductions and became an advocate of ‘the zero option’ with regard to the intermediate range weapons, he was neither willing nor able to break radically with the SALT process from the start. Rather, it took a combination of geopolitical circumstances and changes in administration personnel to manage the transition. Haig rejected zero because he feared that would make negotiation impossible (182-3). His successor George Shultz, on the other hand, was able both to speak the language of the arms control priesthood and also work with President Reagan to develop constructive new policies in time for the emergence of Mikhail Gorbachev as a new and equally creative interlocutor in Moscow. The end of the SALT process thus led to the creation of the New World Order, and a new hope for a post-Cold War world that lasted almost two decades.

The Control Agenda charts these developments with scholarly aplomb in readable prose. Ambrose makes very good use of the most recently available sources, including both the newest volumes in the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series on SALT I and SALT II, and also the collections at the Ford, Carter, and Reagan Libraries, as well as the papers of Paul Nitze. That source base, however, suffers from two significant lacunae that generally

plague scholars in this area. First is the absence of significant sources from the Soviet side. Although the subtitle proclaims this to be a history of the SALT talks, it is primarily a discussion of the American debates about SALT. Soviet voices usually only appear indirectly, through reports within the American documents of discussions with Soviet counterparts. This is not a mortal sin, of course, since the book does what it chooses to do very well. Even scholars with extensive connections and Russian language skills run into consistent problems in accessing Soviet-era collections on nuclear arms. It is nevertheless a reminder of the need for more work in that area.

A more significant problem, though also sadly common within the field these days, is its heavy State Department focus to the exclusion of other actors within the American government, especially the Department of Defense. In an era where so much of the narrative traces the wrangling between State and Defense, one side's voice comes out more clearly. Here as well, structural forces play a significant role. The State Department does a much better job of gathering and publishing its materials, both in the *FRUS* series and in its manuscript collections in the National Archives. The Pentagon lags far behind, though the volumes in the *Secretaries of Defense Historical Series*^[5] offer the possibility of bringing more primary documents from the Office of the Secretary of Defense to the attention of scholars. Secretaries of State have also been especially good at seizing the high ground in the struggle for memoir supremacy—both Henry Kissinger and George Shultz produced volumes of more than 1,000 pages—whereas Secretaries of Defense and even National Security Advisers (outside of Henry Kissinger himself, and perhaps Zbigniew Brzezinski) have been more reticent. The State Department's relationship with the media and scholarly community has also generally been much more extensive and positive, resulting in more works told from the perspective of Foggy Bottom. Ambrose does his best to rectify that imbalance through the use of National Security Council files, since so many differences (especially during the Reagan years, when Secretary of Defense Weinberger sparred with both Haig and Shultz) were aired in NSC meetings. As with the Soviet perspective, however, readers hear of policy objections from the Pentagon only when they collide with the positions of the diplomats, with less insight into the background of those positions. More often than not, that leaves the Defense Department (and the intelligence community, which also appears but fleetingly here) as an occasional roadblock or foil rather than a full participant in and contributor to the ultimate policy decisions. With works like this as encouragement, scholars can hope that future works will more fully integrate those other perspectives to enrich our understanding of the sources and outcome of policy debates between different stakeholders.

Those criticisms notwithstanding, Ambrose has produced a serious and thoughtful book that deserves a wide audience within the ongoing scholarly dialogue about the efforts to forestall Armageddon.

Review by John Maurer, Yale University

In *The Control Agenda*, Matthew Ambrose has produced a solid summary of U.S. arms limitation policy during the period of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) from 1966 to 1983. Drawing on the wealth of archival resources declassified over the past decade, *The Control Agenda* provides a useful update to the previous hodge-podge of first-hand SALT accounts. By providing a clear and accessible account of American arms control deliberations, Ambrose helps place arms control at the center of our understanding of Cold War politics, showing how arms control gradually expanded in importance on the American political scene. By exploring SALT's broader political significance, *The Control Agenda* will draw scholarly attention to an arms control process that fundamentally shaped both the conduct and the conclusion of the Cold War.

Ambrose's account stretches from SALT's genesis in the Lyndon Johnson Administration to the breakdown of arms control talks during President Ronald Reagan's first term. This is a long period to cover, especially for such an incredibly complex subject matter - five Presidential Administrations, covering the second half of the Cold War. The long time frame allows Ambrose to trace major changes in nuclear strategy and arms control policy, from Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's assured destruction framework to the warfighting strategy of the Reagan Administration. Ambrose's work does for SALT what James Cameron's recent book did for anti-ballistic missile (ABM) technology, by tracing long-term trends in U.S. arms control policy over a turbulent twenty-year period in American history.^[6] Ambrose's examination shows how deeply enmeshed the entire U.S. foreign policy process became in arms control deliberations.

Although covering the entire period from Johnson to Reagan, the bulk of Ambrose's analysis focuses on the Jimmy Carter Administration, which receives about half of the book's length. The details of negotiation in the Carter Administration are especially well done, describing the rapid evolution of the Administration's SALT policy, while also providing a valuable timeline of Secretary of State Cyrus Vance's major negotiating forays with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko and Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin (108-141). This focus on the Carter Administration, however, comes at the expense of other periods. For example, key arms control breakthroughs from the tenure of Henry Kissinger like counting rules for multiple warhead missiles are dealt with retrospectively in the Carter chapters, rather than in the chapter on the Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford Administrations (124-128). The focus on Carter does have some significant benefits as well: Ambrose does an excellent job showing how key issues in the Reagan Administration's Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces

(INF) Talks emerged from the SALT II negotiations in the Carter years, especially the Soviets' growing concern for U.S. ground-launched cruise missiles (137-142).

Ambrose deploys a wealth of new sources to interrogate and update previous journalistic and memoir accounts of SALT. The Soviet perspective is also not ignored. Ambrose draws upon Alexandr Savelyev and Nikolay Detinov's arms control memoir *The Big Five* and Pavel Podvig's work on Soviet strategic technical capabilities to provide some insight into Soviet decision-making at crucial moments.^[7] The problem remains, however, that important questions about SALT that lay behind much of the disputes at the time—for example, 'Did President X get a good deal in the negotiations or not?'—remain beyond our grasp, because our understanding of the Soviet Union's decision making about arms control remains so murky. Given the dearth of Soviet sources, Ambrose's emphasis is rightly on American SALT policy, where a wealth of new information is available.

By incorporating these new American sources, Ambrose is able to provide an interesting account of U.S. motives in SALT.

Superpower arms control has received some renewed attention recently because increasing access to declassified sources has called into question the traditional account of SALT as a cooperative exercise aimed at stabilizing mutual assured destruction (MAD).^[8] Ambrose usefully focuses attention on the domestic political imperatives of the arms control process. Presidents from Johnson onwards found in arms control a policy issue that allowed them to combine several major foreign and domestic concerns—U.S.-Soviet relations, NATO planning, nuclear strategy, defense budgeting, intelligence analysis—and put them at the center of American decision making. Only one person in the U.S. government sat at the intersection of these differing issues: the President of the United States. SALT therefore became an important tool for American Presidents to reassert their authority at a time when executive power and Cold War foreign policy were under attack from all sides (6-7). As Ambrose notes, the intensely secret and technical nature of SALT negotiations reflected his basic preoccupation with sustaining and enhancing executive power.

Ambrose is at his best in enhancing our understanding of arms control's larger place in American politics. Because SALT developed as a tool to enhance executive power, the entire SALT process was basically inimical to public opinion, a tool to shape the public, not respond to it. This basic weakness caused a great deal of the furor surrounding SALT II, when the Ford and Carter Administrations struggled to develop a compelling public rationale for so secretive and technical a process. The end of SALT therefore had as much to do with reconfigurations of the U.S. domestic political scene as it did with changing U.S.-Soviet dynamics (217-218). Previous accounts have emphasized the Reagan Administration's public bellicosity and the general deterioration of U.S.-Soviet relations as decisive in ending SALT. While not ignoring these factors, Ambrose contends that SALT ended and the

Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) began when the Reagan Administration stopped walling off public opinion from arms control, and instead saw how engaging with and shaping public opinion could be an important *asset* for arms control negotiations, rather than a liability. In Ambrose's view, Reagan's inability to manage his subordinates made secret policymaking impossible, rendering the SALT policy process unworkable. Ironically, the inability to formulate policy in secret ended up strengthening the Reagan Administration's hand in arms control negotiations by forcing it to build a broader public consensus on its arms control policy proposals (218-219). Ambrose believes that this broader public support fed back into the U.S.-Soviet negotiations, strengthening the ability of American negotiators to stand firm on proposals, even during the Soviet walk-outs of late 1983, and incentivizing the Kremlin to make concessions of their own (210-214).

Ambrose has a harder time in showing the influence of SALT on U.S. nuclear strategy during the period. His account sketches out how SALT paved the way for the United States' to pursue more flexible nuclear targeting policy during the second half of the Cold War, from initial consideration in the Nixon Administration to its full flowering during Reagan's first term. In Ambrose's telling, SALT's emphasis on the technical details of nuclear arsenals stimulated strategic thinking from the early 1970s onwards. In this way, SALT *caused* the shift in nuclear counterforce targeting from the large-scale counterforce attacks of the 1950s and 1960s to the controlled precision attacks of the 1970s and 1980s (219-220). Ambrose's account of nuclear targeting highlights important aspects of how SALT enabled new thinking about nuclear counterforce in the 1970s. For example, by limiting the deployment of ballistic missiles while allowing the proliferation of multiple warhead and cruise missiles, SALT constructed a strategic environment uniquely favorable to counterforce attacks, as increasingly-accurate warheads proliferated significantly faster than targets (56-58).

While arms control enabled the emergence of new counterforce targeting, it is less clear that SALT *caused* this development in strategy. Previous accounts of the evolution of U.S. nuclear targeting, including Terry Terriff's *The Nixon Administration and the Making of U.S. Nuclear Strategy*, Ted Greenwood's *Making the MIRV*, and Donald Mackenzie's *Inventing Accuracy*, have emphasized that the roots of American precision counterforce targeting reached back into the 1960s, prior to the commencement of SALT.^[9] More recent accounts of the evolution of U.S. nuclear targeting, including Francis Gavin's *Nuclear Statecraft*, Brendan Green and Austin Long's "The Geopolitical Origins of U.S. Hard-Target-Kill Counterforce Capabilities and MIRV," and Niccolo Petrelli and Giordana Pulcini's "Nuclear Superiority in the Age of Parity," have also emphasized the independent roots of the accuracy-counterforce concept.^[10] All of this suggests that counterforce targeting evolved in tandem with SALT, rather than being caused by it.

It is more likely the case that the desire for new counterforce targeting shaped SALT at certain points, rather than the other way around. For example, in the summer of 1971, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird, Deputy Secretary of Defense David Packard, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Thomas Moorer explained to Nixon that arms control to limit the quantitative arms race would enable the United States to pursue greater advantages in the qualitative arms race, like multiple warheads and accuracy improvements.^[11] This suggests that the alignment of the SALT process with American counterforce objectives may not have been a coincidence. Rather, American leaders used SALT as a vehicle for promoting U.S. nuclear advantage over the Soviet Union. The agreement proposed by Packard in the summer of 1971 sounds suspiciously like that promoted by conservative critics of SALT II, which also bears striking similarities to the terms of START I: strict limits on the size of missiles; steep reduction in the number of launchers; and continued proliferation of multiple warheads and accuracy improvements. While Ambrose's account of the domestic political disjuncture between SALT and START is convincing, significant continuities existed between them in U.S. nuclear strategy. American leaders in both SALT and START sought to promote U.S. nuclear advantage over the Soviet Union, even at the height of arms control negotiations.

By providing such an accessible account of nuclear arms control, Ambrose's *The Control Agenda* is an important contribution to the history of the Cold War. Covering a wide expanse of time and demonstrating the importance of arms control negotiations to the evolution of U.S. foreign policy and domestic politics, Ambrose makes a strong case for incorporating SALT and START more directly into our narratives of the later stages of the Cold War. Highlighting the importance of arms control is especially useful as historians continue to revise our understanding of the Cold War's end. The arms control process begun in SALT was a key factor in negotiating the end of the decades-long military confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. *The Control Agenda* thus represents required reading for anyone seeking to understand the role played by superpower negotiations in managing the nuclear balance of terror.

Review by Luke A. Nichter, Texas A&M University-Central Texas

On the afternoon of Wednesday, 27 June 2018, I was on the elevator on the way up to the 26th floor of 350 Park Avenue. The destination was Kissinger Associates, Inc. I had recently read the fine monograph by Matthew J. Ambrose, *The Control Agenda: A History of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks*. By coincidence, I was about to meet a principal figure in the work I was preparing to review. Dr. Kissinger had agreed to discuss two subjects I

have been working on, 1) Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., and 2) the 1968 presidential election. I had submitted my questions the week before—not because I was forbidden from asking others but because I wanted to make sure he had time to think about them.

On the elevator, the idea popped into my head to go slightly off script. The change of plans was inspired by the review of this book that I had been working on as well as some things I had heard Kissinger say in the time since I first stepped off that elevator and into his office almost ten years earlier to the day. For historians, his more recent remarks present a challenge. Kissinger's thirty-five hundred pages of memoirs were written ages ago, as were interviews he gave in which he marked off his policy turf and, according to some people who were close to President Richard Nixon, took more than his fair share of credit for various initiatives. Perhaps the most famous of these interviews was one with Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci in November 1972, in which Kissinger characterized himself as a lone cowboy riding a horse into town.^[12] For years, when asked how he could work for someone like Nixon, the general tenor of Kissinger's response was *you must understand how difficult it was to work for that man*. These were the remarks of someone who was still relatively young, vulnerable, ambitious, longed for acceptance, and had a career ahead of him.

Since my last visit, Kissinger has aged more than a decade. He is wiser and, as a result, his view of his role in historic events has taken on a greater sense of proportion. Rather than separate himself from Nixon, he has sought to be more closely associated with him. During the 2014 Nixon/Ford Annual White House Reunion, held in November at the Metropolitan Club in Washington, D.C., Kissinger said during lunchtime remarks that he owed everything to Nixon and that those were the best years of his life. That was the first staff reunion that Kissinger had ever attended, forty years after Nixon resigned in disgrace. During Kissinger's 95th birthday celebration on 19 June 2018 at Neue Gallerie in New York, the week before I met with him, he went even further to say that of the eleven presidents he had worked with, Nixon was the most brilliant. Whether one agrees with him or not, or approves of policies made during his time in government, few Americans have had the ability to make such an assessment.

During my meeting with him, I decided that I had to address Kissinger's unique role in the making of U.S. foreign policy in light of his recent remarks, in addition to the specific subjects I planned to raise. When Richard Moss and I had met him ten years earlier, he was still somewhat unsettled and edgy. When we took out our cell phones to silence them before the start of the meeting, he barked "no recording devices."^[13] As I think Rick would attest, we were not only not greeted very warmly, we were hardly greeted at all. Ten years later, this time was different. Kissinger seemed to be at peace with himself, more grandfatherly, and comfortable with the new proportionality of his role in history. Since finishing my Ph.D. in 2008, I have not had another conversation that felt more like I was meeting my academic

advisor. When our half hour was over and his scheduler entered to interrupt, he turned to me and said with a wry grin, “The problem is they don’t kick out the people I want to kick out. Stay for a few more minutes.”^[14]

It was my moment. I stepped into the batter’s box and took a cut at the first pitch. “Looking far into the future, decades from now when I am an old man, what should be written about your role in the Nixon administration?” I asked. His eyes studied me carefully, but he made no movement at all. His head started to nod forward while he closed his eyes, almost as if he was stealing a moment of rest. His hands, folded in front of him, became loose. We were the only ones in his office and the door was closed. My eyes caught a glance of a framed photograph of him in the Nixon Oval Office on the end table to the right. Behind him was a photograph I did not remember from my previous visit, of Kissinger with then Secretary of State John Kerry.

For a moment I thought Kissinger had dozed off, except when he came to he was aware of everything I had said and promptly addressed it. He had been searching his memory and preparing his answer. His chin rose, his head leveled off, and his hands resumed their position in front of him. Kissinger’s eyes opened and resumed their study of me. “I played a central role in a number of creative initiatives, but Nixon was the president,” he said. It was a perfect answer, yet so obviously different from his earlier writings and interviews. It reflected the new sense of proportion that his remarks have had in recent years. The challenge for scholars is to accurately frame Kissinger’s role going forward, since the vast majority of the records he has left us were written before he assumed this new sense of proportion.

This meeting was immediately on my mind as I re-read Matthew J. Ambrose’s *The Control Agenda: A History of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks*. It is one of the best first monographs I have read. It is tight, well-written, well-edited, thoroughly researched for the story it tells, and, most of all, it is unimpeachably balanced in its treatment of the subject and the individuals involved, including Kissinger. Ambrose argues that the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) negotiations “took place in an era with important parallels to the present,” including “the threat of ‘decline’” and “the threat of economic stagnation” (4). Ambrose quickly traces the history of the talks during the Nixon years in order to get to the most original part of the book, the fresh content on the Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, and Ronald Reagan years. Ultimately, détente failed because “like a broken bone not properly set, it began to heal around a partially dysfunctional system of technologies and doctrines” (216).

Over time, détente became a watchword for failure and disappointment. Conservative critics of the Nixon White House thought the United States gave away too much while making an agreement with the Soviets that allowed them room to cheat (126). In 1976, Jimmy Carter

ran, in part, against Gerald Ford on a “sophisticated critique of détente that was still accessible to voters” (81). Yet, under President Carter, “the president who best understood the details of the SALT negotiations” (217), Ambrose argues convincingly, “critical continuities in the SALT process remained and accelerated” (80). Therefore, is it possible that détente’s downfall has been greatly exaggerated? Even after the failure to ratify SALT II, Ambrose shows how the ideas of SALT and détente continued into the future. “SALT left durable and important legacies for the control of nuclear armaments,” he concludes (221).

This volume is timely and serves as a lesson for current policymakers that unless you know where you have been, you do not know where you are going. In light of debates over the Obama-era nuclear agreement with Iran and ongoing discussions regarding U.S.-North Korea relations, Ambrose’s emphasis on the importance of verification issues is again relevant. As compliance issues vis-à-vis the Soviet Union was an issue that vexed administrations since the Eisenhower White House, the subject again comes into focus. Tricks more recently employed in this area by all sides seem less surprising when reading Ambrose’s description of their historical antecedents. We have avoided nuclear Armageddon once already, and this book might help us to avoid it again.

In this reviewer’s opinion, the most admirable asset of the volume is that it takes a highly technical, complex subject and makes it palatable for a more general readership. I distinctly remember, at an early stage in what became *Richard Nixon and Europe: The Reshaping of the Postwar Atlantic World*,^[15] trying to decide which subjects to cover and which to leave out. After slogging through the details of monetary regimes and the fracturing of Bretton Woods in 1971, I had no appetite at all for getting into defense-related issues, including offset, numerous Mansfield Amendments, FRELOC (the costs of moving NATO headquarters to Belgium), Chancellor Willy Brandt’s *Ostpolitik*, and, among others, SALT.

I have listened to just about every conversation on the Nixon tapes related to SALT. On a regular basis, they had trouble understanding the subject. When assembling the two volumes on the tapes that I published with Douglas Brinkley,^[16] we could not convince our editor, the estimable Bruce Nichols, to include a single conversation related to SALT. We decided the subject was too impenetrable for the average reader. Thankfully, Matthew Ambrose is not the average author.

Every criticism I could think of about the work, even if the author had been available during preparation of the book to address every omission, would have taken Ambrose away from his purpose. The book details with intrinsically complicated subjects, yet the book is very readable, in part due to subject headings every few pages that provide a sense of tempo. I would have preferred a more straight-forward chronological presentation. I found myself wanting to quickly compare Nixon to Carter, or Carter to Reagan, and it was not easy to do

so in the more thematic approach used. At the same time, what I propose would probably have been less readable than the finished volume we have. I would like to have seen some original material from the Nixon tapes. The term “SALT” appears a minimum of 348 times, and only a fraction have been transcribed or published in any way. The book seems to have been weighted more heavily towards one administration, Nixon’s, than the ones where the greatest quantity of new content is available.

The book could have greatly benefitted from original interviews. Official oral history interviews might contain fresh memories, but rarely candid ones. Interviewees are still working, sometimes still in government (or might be again someday), and the people or policies they would like to critique are still living or remain sensitive. Original interviews allow one to triangulate between oral histories, declassified records, and memoirs. Figures like Kissinger—or Jimmy Carter, or Walter Mondale, or Richard Allen, or George Shultz, and others still with us – have had a long time to think about this subject. Historians could gain from the evolution of their understanding, especially in the post-Watergate period when it seems less material of substance made it to a paper record that could one day be discovered in an archive by a historian.

While reading, too many times I wondered how SALT affected other policies, such as the Helsinki Accords, rapprochement with the People’s Republic of China (PRC), and domestic politics. “Carter felt the need to wall off certain issues” (220), Ambrose writes, but we cannot afford to wall off our understanding. But going into any of these in much detail would have taken the work off course. Watergate was not centrally about “campaign finance scandals” (80). Was Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev really as debilitated in 1974 as Ambrose suggests? He sounds pretty sharp on the Nixon tapes the year before. Ambrose points out that “Kissinger noted Nixon’s tendency to become ‘glassy-eyed and irritable’ during extended debates” (27). The tapes tell a different story, and, as indicated earlier, so does Kissinger these days. Today, Kissinger 2.0 might say something like *I had the freedom to do what I did because of who the president was*. Of course, these critiques are made by a gadfly Nixon aficionado and are not intended to diminish an otherwise fine work. It is not my book, and I could not have done it as well.

As I was leaving Kissinger’s office, I had a final moment with him. He asked me to hand him his cane, which had fallen to the ground to his right. As I reached for it, I realized that he has now lived ninety-five percent of a century. However you manipulate the numbers, that is a long time to think about your place in history. Henry Kissinger’s intellectual journey continues, and he seems comfortable with the destination. Perhaps he will continue to revise his thinking, and historians need to be aware of this. I am excited to see what comes next. For that reason, my parting words were, “I’ll come back and visit you after your hundredth birthday.” He looked up and smiled. One would hope to see a similar smile if he read *The Control Agenda*; it humanizes a highly technical process and those involved, warts and all.

Review by David Tal, University of Sussex

In this well researched and finely articulated book Matthew Ambrose provides us with a broad interpretation of the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT) and beyond. He values SALT as an exercise in halting the arms race that failed, in the context of détente, and a laboratory that served future arms control negotiations. The failure of SALT, argues Ambrose, helped to make things better in the next rounds of the arms control negotiations. Ambrose places SALT within the wider context of détente, while assigning détente with the role suggested already by Jeremi Suri, as a mean to maintain the political status quo in the United States and Europe—west and east—in the face of the spreading unrest during the stormy late 1960s.^[17] Ambrose is interested more in the grand scheme of things than in the nuts and bolts of the SALT deliberations. Perhaps due to space limits, Ambrose discusses SALT in broad brush strokes, although he does not neglect to discuss details and people, where due. Thus, we can learn about the forces behind SALT, the ideas and interests that drove them, and the path SALT was taking across the years. Still, there is more forest here than trees - and this is not necessarily bad thing.

While disqualified to judge the next rounds of the arm control negotiations that took place in the aftermath of the two rounds of SALT (1969-1979), I feel that I can contribute to the discussion on SALT, based on the book I published on this topic.^[18] And here, I am not sure about several points made by Ambrose. First is the idea of ‘linkage’, the argument that SALT was connected to and was part of détente. Like many before him, Ambrose reiterates the idea that President Richard Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger were convinced that the Soviets were more interested than the United States in SALT, and hence, it would be possible, through ‘linkage,’ to exact a price from the Soviet Union in different places in return for SALT. Ambrose contends that the notion of ‘linkage’ was weakening (29), but his scanty and incomplete treatment of the meaning of the linkage is evident even in the small details. Thus, the delay in the opening of the talks on the limitation of strategic arms was not the result of Nixon and Kissinger’s sheer reluctance to “set a date too soon” (36), but because Nixon and (mainly) Kissinger tried to exact a price from the Soviet Union in return for the beginning of the talks. However, they failed, and it was the first sign to things to come, as the ‘linkage’ actually collapsed very quickly. As I have shown both in my book, and more specifically in an article on this subject,^[19] it was pretty soon that Nixon and Kissinger began to treat SALT in dissociation from other détente-related issues, as did President Jimmy Carter.

In this context, I also disagree with Ambrose's suggestion that Nixon showed little interest in the intricacies of SALT. Ambrose cites Kissinger's often quoted statement about Nixon becoming "glassy-eyed" when discussing SALT, but in doing so, he ignores the plethora of documents showing Nixon's deep and thorough involvement in the shaping, making, and advancing of SALT. The National Security Council (NSC) discussions were never really about *details*, but about broad issues, and Nixon was a lively and active participant, at least until Watergate started to take its toll. On the other hand, Ambrose attributes great importance to Paul Nitze, described by Ambrose as "distinguished figure in the national security world for over twenty years" (7) in the making of SALT. He argues that "Nitze helped shape the SALT process and its legacies more than almost any single individual" (7). This is a suggestion for a whole new reading of SALT and what it was about, and I must admit that this is not my reading. Nitze was the Department of Defence's representative in the American delegation to SALT I, under the leadership of Gerard Smith. He might have played a role at a post SALT era, but during the negotiations on SALT, he was a member of the delegation that hardly played a role in the *making* of SALT. Its role was mainly working on the fine letters of the ideas originating from Washington D.C. that were the outcome of mainly Nixon and Kissinger's thoughts and ideas. Nitze let his opinions of SALT be known, usually in opposition to Nixon and Kissinger's, but his actual contribution to the making of the Nixon/Kissinger arms control policy was negligible. In fact, it is possible to write the history of SALT without mentioning Nitze even once and the study would be just as much complete.

I disagree also with the way Ambrose treats the negotiations over the limitation on Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) systems. He acknowledges its role as a bargaining chip, but does not discuss the depth and true meaning of that. According to Ambrose, the negotiators started to discuss the limit or ban on ABM systems almost accidentally (45ff), while in fact, the ABM limit was a major pillar of the American SALT policy. It was already during the days of the Johnson administration that the defence establishment, with Robert McNamara in its head, concluded that the Sentinel/Safeguard were ineffective and not worth their price, economically and strategically. This notion was crucial to what followed, because Nixon and those around him held to the same view, and once the Soviets realized too, that the ABM would not really provide them protection against nuclear attack, the path to SALT opened wide. With that, the ABM became Nixon's prime tool in getting an agreement that would put a cap on the offensive strategic missiles. The Johnson administration made a calculated decision to stop building large intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), and to invest money in smaller but more efficient nuclear weapons like the multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle (MIRV) and later the cruise missiles. President Nixon and his successors adhered to that decision, and since they had no leverage over the Soviets to convince them to stop developing large ICBMs, the ABMs, which the Soviets wanted to see curbed, became a prime means of trade-off. In other words, Nixon struggled energetically to get the money for a system he was determined to extinguish.

I also wonder about Ambrose's treatment of the forward-based systems (FBS). He argues that the Soviets did not discuss nuclear weapons by categories, "comparing the respective stockpiles of each side," and instead "defined any weapon capable of striking Soviet soil as threatening," which led to the inclusion of the United States' European allies into the equation (44). Both the United States and the Soviet Union compared various kinds of weapons, discussing the impact of each, discussions that affected the numbers each category could have. In addition to that, the Soviets also demanded to include the FBS into the equation. But these were not exclusive, that is, either this or that. Problematic also is Ambrose's description of the debate over the meaning of strategic weapons in the context of the FBS controversy. Ambrose bases his explanation of the meaning of strategic weapons on the ideas of Lawrence Freedman, that is, on a secondary source.^[20] But there is a primary source that tells us what the protagonists suggested should be included in the strategic package. In the first meeting of the American and Soviet delegations to SALT, the head of the American delegation, Gerhard Smith, claimed that strategic weapons were those with intercontinental abilities, while his Soviet counterpart, Vladimir Semenov, argued that each weapon system that could threaten the other side should be considered as strategic weapon.^[21]

Problematic is also the somewhat diminutive role Ambrose allocates to the backchannel between Kissinger and Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin. Using descriptions such as "Kissinger's *attempts* to bypass the U.S. diplomatic apparatus..."; "Kissinger's *attempts* to negotiate alone with the upper echelons of the Soviet government..."; "The effects of the backchannel on the SALT negotiations [...] were primarily restricted to the issues of submarines and summit negotiations" (47) (italics mine), Ambrose implies that the backchannel was Kissinger's initiative, on which he embarked, with more or less success, on his own. This is not the case. Kissinger did not *attempt* to negotiate—he *did* negotiate. He did not *attempt* to negotiate alone—he negotiated with the full knowledge and blessing of the president. Ambrose's last statement here is the most astonishing, as Kissinger and Dobrynin discussed *everything*—the ABM limit agreement, limits on offensive weapons—all of them, and all the other topics that the American and Soviet delegations later turned into articles and clauses. Part of the explanation for the differences in view and perspective lay, I think, in the fact that Ambrose did not exhaust all the available sources pertinent to SALT, such as those deposited in the Nixon presidential library and the national archives, as well as the Digital National Security Archives collection. Using them might have led to different conclusions.

Ambrose's book neglects one conspicuous feature of both Nixon and Carter's SALT policy, at least in the early stages of their administrations: both sought to re-invent the wheel. Nixon completely ignored the history of SALT that started with the Johnson administration, only to

return to its fundamentals, in the face of the Soviet resistance to Nixon's innovative ideas, while Carter tried to turn the past status-quo based agreements, mainly the Vladivostok agreement (1974) into a true arm reduction agreement, once again, to turn back to the path paved from his by his predecessors.

However, more than details and points of disagreement, I would argue that the major difference between Ambrose's book and mine is historiographical. As mentioned above, Ambrose discusses SALT within the wider context of U.S. nuclear strategy, referring more than once to the allusive concept of 'deterrence' and as a mean to achieve controlled arms control. For failing to achieve that, Ambrose regards SALT as flawed (216). My understanding of SALT is different. The negotiations were never about actual reduction or limitation of contemporary strategic arms. At the most, they led to the dismantling of weapons that were nonetheless obsolete. Where it mattered, the maximum they aimed to achieve was putting a cap on the strategic arms race, and even that, as the SALT I and SALT II showed, without forcing the signatories to give up actual strategic weapons. "We are giving up nothing," insisted Kissinger when he tried to convince Senators to support SALT, and it was not just a sale-phrase.^[22] The Soviets could say the same thing to their audience. In the case of SALT II, it even meant an increase in the number of offensive weapons. That is, the agreements aimed to give the sides a sense of equality in weapons' numbers or quality and would not force them to engage in a costly arms race. The negotiations and agreements did not lead, and were not aimed to lead, to the end of the development of more destructive and more powerful strategic arms. The development of MIRV and cruise missiles is an example to that. And so, while American and Soviet teams were negotiating to put a cap on the number of ICBMs each side could hold, the United States and the Soviet Union were already developing the next generation of more powerful, more accurate, and more destructive nuclear weapons. So, what was the point of the negotiations that preoccupied the Nixon and Carter administrations (and their Soviet counterparts) for so many years? To best understand the SALT process, and process it was- the T in SALT can be used both as Treaty and Talks, we need to look at SALT as an economic and strategic project, aiming to preserve the status quo in a way that would allow its signatories to stop investing in arm systems that were considered as obsolete, for the sake of new and more innovative arms systems, without being looked at as weak. It was the no-longer-useful ABM for the new MIRV or cruise missile.

Author's Response by Matthew Ambrose, U.S. Government Accountability Office

I am grateful to the authors of the above reviews for engaging so thoughtfully with my

book. Nuclear arms control is far from an uplifting subject, but the insights and criticisms brought by Ronald Granieri, John Maurer, Luke Nichter, and David Tal, as well as Scot Kauffman in his introduction, speak to its continuing importance.

The reviewers have done an excellent job highlighting the themes of the book and raised several interesting points. Ronald Granieri was especially apt in emphasizing that the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) were a process, much like the Middle-East peace process. While such processes have benefits, those watching in real time might find the experience a bit like watching paint dry. Because SALT was more important as a process than a set of results, he finds the importance of SALT's legacies "debatable."

I take Granieri's point that substantive products of SALT negotiations are much smaller today than successful negotiations like the first Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I) and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF). But SALT's status as a 'failure' despite the incredible political capital dedicated to it, is part of what makes it so significant. It is said that individuals learn more from failures than from their successes. This may not be completely true for diplomatic history, but I think large-scale failures show historians different things. At a minimum, SALT was the main experience from which negotiators in those future successful negotiations could draw. It loomed large their minds, even if it is less evident today.

Several of the reviewers also point out that, despite some efforts to analyze the Soviet perspective, the book is primarily about the American experience of SALT. It is a fair cop. While some oral histories and English-language works like that of Alexander Savalyev and Nikolai Detinov^[23] exist, a comprehensive account of both sides' experience remains to be written, and would be extremely valuable. I fear it may not be possible barring a major change in the character of the Russian government. In particular, Russian citizens researching nuclear issues have faced jail time for possessing, let alone publishing, information that was at one point publicly available.^[24]

Luke Nichter and David Tal suggest, in different ways, that I have underrated President Richard Nixon's direct role in SALT negotiations, particularly SALT I, and it is an interesting question. My book presents Nixon as an important overseer, establishing the general direction and developing some sense of where SALT belonged in his broader foreign policy, but not being deeply involved in details beyond a certain point. I do spend far more time exploring Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's understanding of these more complicated issues. Nichter shows that Kissinger himself has backed away from his egocentric accounts of earlier decades and now readily admits that Nixon was the central figure on most issues. Tal asserts that Nixon was a "lively and active" participant in National Security Council (NSC) debates on SALT, and that Nixon was deeply engaged in SALT issues.

I agree with Tal, to an extent. In NSC transcripts Nixon indeed seems lively and active. His comments also seem to me glib and shallow, and not evidence of a sophisticated grasp of all of the technological and doctrinal issues at play. Tal himself states that NSC meetings were not really about details anyway. If one believes, as I do, that the working out of these technical details is central to SALT's historical import, then Nixon's contributions here are appropriately rated. To the extent that Nixon was making decisions about the timing of negotiations, empowering personnel, and managing the domestic politics of SALT, he was indeed quite interested. He also signed off on many of the substantive elements of the U.S. position to be presented in negotiation. But this is endorsing the work of others, and rarely did Nixon make a decision about the substance and terms of SALT against Kissinger's advice.

I am not the first to find Nixon an important but somewhat inscrutable figure. He was clearly intelligent, but not an intellectual. He lacked many of the typical extroverted attributes of successful politicians, yet his political success, regardless of the ends he sought, was undeniable. He is a difficult figure to psychologize, and his mindset is a moving target as he gradually descended into resentment and paranoia in his final years in office. As it stands, however, these were his main contributions to the substance of SALT I in particular.

John Maurer questions the level of influence arms control had on the development of counter-force doctrines in the 1970s and 1980s. The works he cites present an interesting counter-narrative. I do not mean to provide a monocausal explanation for these doctrines by any means, nor to deny these concepts' intellectual lineage, which was quite distinct from arms control. I do hope that readers come away from this book with a sense of how significant the notion of 'arms control' was during this era for anyone working on nuclear issues. I believe that historians have failed to pick up on this significance because SALT especially was so complicated and sprawling, which makes it very difficult to integrate into a historical narrative about a different, but related subject. Regardless of complexity, these negotiations were an almost overwhelming aspect of U.S. national security debates, so much so that their discontinuation in 1983 brought millions of people into the streets and raised fears of nuclear war to a fever pitch. Defense planners and policymakers were acutely aware of these pressures, and they seeped into every aspect of their planning, even if planners resented them or found them overblown.

Maurer also raises an interesting point when he states that "American leaders used SALT as a vehicle for promoting U.S. nuclear advantage." The use of arms control as a vehicle for pursuing competitive advantage has been a subject of much of Maurer's work, and it is a fascinating lens through which to consider the SALT experience. No doubt many people pursued SALT or SALT-like negotiations for many different reasons, and the more credulous

and earnest supporters likely did not see it this way. But when looking at structural outcomes, he may have a point. The weakest agreement in terms of securing a U.S. advantage, SALT II, went down in defeat, after all.

The United States was not alone in this pursuit. Who should benefit and what the relative nuclear standings should be following an agreement were central questions in SALT, and the Soviet concept of the 'correlation of forces' often seemed to imply that, since they believed their military and economic power to be on the upswing, the results of any arms control agreement ought to be tilted in their favor as well.

I worry that such a perspective might sap such agreements of the legitimacy both sides clearly thought they conveyed. How a country can achieve its arms control goals while preserving this legitimacy *and* securing the assent of the other party thus becomes a complex dance of realist security concerns and constructivist thinking.

I especially enjoyed reading Tal's review, by one of the few other scholars to have written specifically on SALT, to see where our views align and where they diverge. Tal calls my treatment of Nixon and Kissinger's early attempts at 'linkage' "scanty and incomplete." I did not dedicate much space to the administration's early attempts to delay the negotiations out of a belief that the Soviets might provide concessions in other areas. The policy fell flat within a few months due to domestic political pressure and the Soviets' unwillingness to play along. Tal's book on SALT dedicates considerable space to this doomed effort, and it is quite informative.^[25] I wonder, however, if this is not a point better made about the nature of détente, of which SALT was initially only a part, before becoming something else. As I see it, the purpose of my book is to chart how SALT could take on a life of its own. Despite the difference in emphasis, however, Tal and I still come to the same conclusion, that SALT I was remarkably resistant to influence from outside events or attempts to leverage it against other issues.

Tal also argues my treatment of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) Treaty negotiations suggests that U.S. officials had not seriously considered the importance of ABM systems in the strategic balance prior to entering negotiations. To clarify: just because the issue came up in formal negotiations before the delegation had an authorized position to share, that does not mean the U.S. government did not have strong views on the subject; only that it had no plan for how to broach it with the Soviet delegation. He also states that "Nixon struggled energetically to get the money for a system he was determined to extinguish." This is not a major revelation. After Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's failure at the Glassboro summit, he relented to the establishment of the Sentinel ABM system but continued to push for controls on ABMs and ballistic missiles. This relationship between offense and defense was always apparent, as was the idea that defense would almost certainly lose out in the bargain. The Nixon team never attempted to deny this connection

but wanted to leave open the terms of the trade.^[26]

For a history of the entire SALT process, focusing too much on ABM systems would be beside the point. The technology was less advanced and less widespread than ballistic missiles in 1969. Once ABMs were limited to very low levels, they were a settled issue from 1972-1983. Yet still the talks continued, because ABMs were not what motivated nations to pursue arms control at a gut level. Nuclear weapons (and their delivery systems) did. The ABM Treaty established some common assumptions, but offensive forces ought to remain the heart of the story.

Tal also believes I understate the import of the Kissinger-Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin backchannel. It is wrong to over-attribute the structure of SALT I to the backchannel just because much of the agreements came up for discussion there. If the backchannel had not been opened, or used in a limited fashion, the basic outlines of SALT I would likely have been the same. Trading off a de-facto ban on ABMs for a cap on offensive forces was first proposed by McNamara in 1967, and Tal admits that the Nixon administration worked its way back to this position despite early attempts to the contrary. Giving Kissinger and his backchannel the majority of the credit then feeds into Kissinger's belief that only statesmen could cut through the bureaucratic morass to achieve lasting agreements.

If we are to talk of the impact of the backchannel, we should focus on how the use of a *secret, unofficial* one ultimately shaped the agreements. And the simple fact is that Kissinger made mistakes. He made mistakes because he operated with limited staff support and without the awareness of the interagency. He made well-documented mistakes on submarine-launched ballistic missiles that would have been easily caught by involving other agencies or departments. On the eve of the 1972 Moscow summit, the official and unofficial channels converged, but their meeting was more like a car crash, because neither was fully aware of what the other had already agreed to. Yet when criticism of SALT I's terms started to come out of Congress, Kissinger had no problem blaming the arms control bureaucracy for the agreement's shortcomings.

Tal also states that I neglected to describe Nixon and President Jimmy Carter's early attempts to "reinvent the wheel." I find this puzzling. Given that the Nixon administration had only abstract studies and a single failed summit to go on, their efforts might better be described as 'constructing the wheel.' As for the Carter administration, I dedicate the fourth chapter of my book to a period of less than three months in which Carter tried and failed to force a radical break from the framework for SALT II he had inherited from Ford.

Tal believes my treatment of negotiator and defense intellectual Paul Nitze is out of proportion to his significance, going so far as to say he could be safely ignored without harming the narrative. While Nitze's impact on the structure of SALT I was limited to

technical details, it was the beginning of a prolonged engagement, both political and intellectual, that had significant repercussions. His opportunities to negotiate independently on difficult subjects in SALT I set the template for his later 'Walk in the Woods' gambit in 1982. We think of one of SALT II's main legacies as its failure to be ratified. Nitze was one of the most prominent voices against SALT II, and one of the key members of the Committee on the Present Danger, significantly influencing the positions on the treaty that organization ultimately took. Nitze then had the opportunity to build constructively on these criticisms in the INF talks. Nitze was both a significant actor in the life of these negotiations, and a bellwether for attitudes on arms control and the strategic balance, especially if we continue the story through 1983, as I do. Ignoring him makes it far more difficult to understand the strategic, doctrinal, and political issues that SALT continued to raise. SALT was controversial in its time, and ultimately failed. If we study only the views of those negotiating it and fail to engage meaningfully with those who grew into critics, we will miss essential elements of SALT's historical significance and the causes of its failure.

Finally, and in keeping with that point, I am surprised that none of the reviewers took issue with my periodization. I argue that the first three years of the INF negotiations bore a greater resemblance to the SALT negotiations than they did to the more fruitful negotiations that came after. I confess that carrying the story of SALT through 1983 was met with some skepticism by my colleagues and editors when I first proposed it. Given the reviewers' responses, however, I am hopeful that I have achieved my aim. In contrast to those who see 1981 and the rise of President Ronald Reagan as the decisive break with regard to arms control, I hope that future scholars will see the years 1981-1983 as an important time of trial in which many of the issues of the 1970s were finally allowed to come to a head. To paraphrase Winston Churchill, we should not look at the failure of ratification in 1979 as the end of SALT, but rather, as the beginning of the end.

Notes

[1] — Elisebeth Hurup, ed., *The Lost Decade: America in the Seventies* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1996).

[2] — Peter N. Carroll, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened: The Tragedy and Promise of America in the 1970s* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1982).

[3] — See, for instance, Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: Free Press, 2001); Dominic Sandbrook, *Mad as Hell: The Crisis of the 1970s and the Rise of the Populist Right* (New York: Knopf, 2011); David Frum, *How We Got Here: The 70's: The Decade that Brought You Modern Life (for Better or Worse)* (New York: Basic Books, 2000); Edward D. Berkowitz, *Something Happened: A Political and Cultural Overview of the 1970s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Shelton Waldrep, ed., *The Seventies: The Age of Glitter in Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: New Press, 2010).

[4] ___ As examples, readers may wish to consult Barbara Zanchetta, *The Transformation of American International Power in the 1970s* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Daniel J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Niall Ferguson, Charles Maier, Erez Manela, and Daniel Sargent, eds., *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010); Salim Yaqub, *Imperfect Strangers: Americans, Arabs, and U.S.-Middle East Relations in the 1970s* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2016).

[5] ___ On this era, see in particular Richard A. Hunt, *Melvin Laird and the Foundation of the Post-Vietnam Military, 1969-1973* (Washington, D.C.: Government Publishing Office, 2015) and Edward C. Keefer, *Harold Brown: Offsetting the Soviet Military Challenge, 1977-1981* (Washington, D.C.: Government Publishing Office, 2017), volumes VII and IX in the series. The entire series, including document supplements, is available at: <https://history.defense.gov/Publications/Secretaries-of-Defense-Historical-Series/>. Further volumes are forthcoming.

[6] ___ James Cameron, *The Double Game: The Demise of America's First Missile Defense System and the Rise of Strategic Arms Limitation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[7] ___ Alexandr Savelyev and Nikolay Detinov, *The Big Five: Arms Control Decision-Making in the Soviet Union* (Westport: Praeger, 1995); Pavel Podvig, "The Window of Vulnerability That Wasn't: Soviet Military Buildup in the 1970s—A Research Note," *International Security* 33:1 (2008), 118-138.

[8] ___ William Burr and David Rosenberg, "Nuclear Competition in an Era of Stalemate, 1963-1975," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Volume II: Crises and Détente*, Melvyn Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 88-111; Francis Gavin, *Nuclear Statecraft: History and Strategy in America's Atomic Age* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012); Cameron, *The Double Game*.

[9] ___ Terry Terriff, *The Nixon Administration and the Making of U.S. Nuclear Strategy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); Ted Greenwood, *Making the MIRV: Study of Defense Decision Making* (New York: HarperCollins, 1975); Donald Mackenzie, *Inventing Accuracy: A historical Sociology of Nuclear Missile Guidance* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993).

[10] ___ Gavin, *Nuclear Statecraft*; Brendan Rittenhouse Green and Austin Long, "The Geopolitical Origins of U.S. Hard-Target-Kill Counterforce Capabilities and MIRVs," in Michael Krepon, Travis Wheeler, and Shane Mason, eds., *The Lure and Pitfalls of MIRVs: From the First to the Second Nuclear Age* (Washington, DC: The Stimson Center, 2016), 19-54; Niccolo Petrelli and Giordana Pulcini, "Nuclear Superiority in the Age of Parity: U.S. Planning, Intelligence Analysis, Weapons Innovation and the Search for a Qualitative Edge, 1969-1976," *International Historical Review* 40:5 (January 2018). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2017.1420675>.

[11] ___ Conversation Among President Nixon, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Secretary of Defense Laird, and Others, 10 August 1971, Erin R. Mahan, ed., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XXXII, SALT I, 1969-1972* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2010), Document 190, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v32/d190>.

- [12] ___ The Kissinger interview and a selection of others were later published as Oriana Fallaci, *Interview with History: A Superlative Journalist's Portraits of Power and Dissent around the World* (New York: Liveright, 1976).
- [13] ___ Meeting with Henry Kissinger, New York, NY, 23 June 2008, 11:40 a.m.-12:35 p.m. With the passage of time, the sting of Kissinger's rebuke has turned into a joke between Rick and me since the meeting was to discuss the Nixon tapes. We could not imagine anyone trying to secretly record him during a meeting, but, then again, he had more experience with that than we did.
- [14] ___ Meeting with Henry Kissinger, New York, NY, 27 June 2018, 3:30-4:30 p.m.
- [15] ___ See Luke A. Nichter, *Richard Nixon and Europe: The Reshaping of the Postwar Atlantic World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
- [16] ___ See Nichter and Douglas Brinkley, *The Nixon Tapes: 1971-1972* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014) and *The Nixon Tapes: 1973* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015).
- [17] ___ Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).
- [18] ___ David Tal, *US Strategic Arms Policy in the Cold War: Negotiation and Confrontation over SALT, 1969-1979* (London: Routledge, 2017).
- [19] ___ David Tal, "Absolutes" and "Stages" in the Making and Application of Nixon's SALT Policy," *Diplomatic History* 37:5 (November 2013): 1090-1116.
- [20] ___ Lawrence Freedman, *The Evolution of Nuclear Strategy* (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2003).
- [21] ___ First Session of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks, November 17-December 22, 1969, Nixon NSC Files, SALT Vol. VII, January 1970, 3-4.
- [22] ___ Memorandum of Conversation, 11 August 1971, Digital National Security Archives, George Washington University.
- [23] ___ Alexander Savalyev and Nikolai Detinov, *The Big Five: Arms Control Decisionmaking in the Soviet Union* (Westport: Praeger, 1995).
- [24] ___ See, for example, the case of Igor Sutyagin. Seth Mydans, "15-Year Sentence for Russian Scientist Convicted as U.S. Spy," *The New York Times*, 7 April 2004.
- [25] ___ David Tal, *US Strategic Arms Policy in the Cold War: Negotiations and Confrontation over SALT, 1969-1979* (London: Routledge, 2017).
- [26] ___ The ABM Treaty also didn't "extinguish" anything, as it permitted both powers to continue to operate a limited ABM system, which the Soviets continued to do, and the Nixon administration desired. The U.S. system was brought down years after the ABM Treaty was signed, by a lack of Congressional interest in funding it.