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Mondale, Walter (Long under SALT)

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SALT to Be Signed in Vienna in Mid-June; Support From Kissinger Is Called Crucial

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Mondale Hopes Ex-Secretary Will Work for Accord

Vice President Walter Mondale believes that the support of former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger "is crucial to the ratification" of a new strategic arms limitation treaty with the Soviet Union.

In an interview with editors and reporters of The Washington Star yesterday, Mondale recalled that Democrats offered support for such diplomatic initiatives under Republican administrations as the first SALT treaty and the opening to China. Kissinger should now respond in like spirit, he said.

Mondale said the treaty President Carter will sign at a summit meeting with Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev next month faces a ferocious Senate debate, but can be successfully defended.

The treaty, he went on, "serves our nation's security, it's verifiable and enforceable; it's essential to any civilized restraint on nuclear weaponry."

Failure by the Senate to ratify the treaty "would be an utter disaster for international stability," he said.

The following is an edited transcript of the interview:

Question: *Can we expect a Senate ratification vote on the SALT treaty by the end of the year?*

MONDALE: I hope so. It's our hope to have the summit soon and to sign it and send it to the Senate as soon as we can. Our negotiators in Geneva have orders to reduce these agreements to writing. It takes two or three weeks. There's no way to get it done faster than that. And I believe the president hopes to give this to the Senate within a week or two after he gets back. Whether that's achievable or not, I know the mood of the Senate is to get it up and decide it one way or the other in this session. That's certainly the way (Senate Democratic Leader Robert C.) Byrd's been talking and I think (Senate Republican Leader Howard H.) Baker said something of the same thing.

Q: *How important will Henry Kissinger be in influencing the outcome of the Senate vote on the treaty?*

A: I think very important. When I was in the Senate I tried to support the administration, regardless of party, when I thought our country had to have the Chinese opening, SALT I and so on. And I think that Hubert (Humphrey) and I developed a pretty good record of doing what had to be done on policies being urged by Kissinger and under those administrations, to serve the interests of this nation. We got this agreement with the Russians, and I know for a fact that Kissinger couldn't have negotiated a better one, and if he would have negotiated this agreement he would have been proud of it and he would have been up on the Hill asking us to support it. Now, I think Kissinger is crucial to the ratification of this process, and I hope that he will try to help us get it ratified.

Q: *What are the realistic prospects of getting the treaty through the Senate without amendment and how dangerous to the agreement would an amendment by the Senate be?*

A: You can only speculate at this time. I called several senators yesterday and I (sensed) queasiness, but I also saw the possibilities of (ratification). I think the polls shows that 75 percent of the American people favor the concept of the SALT agreement. If we're able to persuade them — as I think we will be — that American interests are protected and (the Soviets) can't cheat on the basic terms, I think that will help a lot.

When we announced the Panama Canal treaty, I think one poll showed 8 percent of the American people favored it. That's not very good. We got it ratified despite the fact that the last poll I saw showed that less than a majority were for it.

Here you have a very strong national interest perceived by Americans in getting some kind of civilized restraint in nuclear weaponry. Anxiety about nuclear energy and weaponry across the board is obvious. I think this time we will be negotiating against the backdrop of pretty general and deep public approval, which will help a lot.

We want the treaty approved based on its terms, not amended in ways that fundamentally and adversely affect the basis of the agreement. I would anticipate the opponents will start out with what Byrd calls "killer amendments" that modify the agreement in the way that destroys its spirit. We'll have to fight those things off. What our chances are, I don't know.

Q: *Would any amendment require renegotiation with the Soviets?*

A: You have that complex series of procedures under the Senate rules: understandings, reservations and so on. Our hope is to keep it the way it is and get it ratified. I know the Senate fairly well, and my guess is it's going to be pretty tough, but we have a pretty good chance of making it intact.

Q: *What would be the vote if it were taken today?*

A: I've heard figures of 40 (for) and 20 (against), something like that, but I don't know. I called two or three senators that are on the undecided list and they indicate to me they'll probably support it. I came away very encouraged, realizing it's a tough fight, and they're all under tremendous pressure.

They all want to know whether it's in fact verifiable; they want to be satisfied on the issue and be satisfied that they can satisfy their voters. Some of them will wait for the sort of accepted experts in the Senate to speak out.

One of the problems is this thing is so fiendishly complicated. It's beyond belief to try to sort one's way through all these different weapons systems and how they relate. Unless a senator is willing to sit down and spend six weeks studying it, they cannot be personally satisfied, and for that reason they will look to the standard leaders in the field and see what they do.

Q: *You're talking about verification?*

A: Yes.

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Q: *Is that more of an issue, say, than the substantive numbers?*

A: I think so. I haven't heard much about the numbers. I have heard something about the vulnerability of the land-based ICBMs and what our strategy is going to be there.

Q: *In that regard, do you think the president can get the whole treaty ratified if he can't do something about the vulnerability of the Minute Man force?*

A: As you know, we're studying the MX issue now. I don't know. He might be pressed hard on it. I can't answer that question.

Q: *How much harder is this than Panama by the simple fact that we're closer to an election, and a time when people like Baker and Sen. Robert Dole might figure they have to separate themselves from the administration?*

A: I think what the people who are coming out running for president on the Republican ticket are finding is that taking this dogmatic hard line against SALT is not getting the broad response they hoped for.

Q: *What did you learn from Panama about using public opinion as a means of pressure?*

A: It does make a difference. We've got a citizens' committee going in every state. It percolates. We have any number of those groups, editors and so on. It takes a lot of public information to work, but with something as complex as this, there's no alternative.

To make certain the public supports us in encouraging the Congress to ratify it, (National Security Adviser) Zbig (Brzezinski) and myself and (Secretary of State) Cy (Vance) and others have already given major speeches on this around the country. We have these conferences around the nation that have been running, and they've done a lot of good.

Q: *How do you assess the political risk of this to the president? Is it of the magnitude of Wilson and Versailles?*

A: I don't know. It's one of those issues that in my opinion is so important that you do it whether you win or lose your office. If you can't take on these kinds of issues that bear on the future, then let somebody else take over. I think it's an issue that the president is very comfortable with.

He feels good about this agreement. It reflects his values of peace and restraint. Frankly, I think Carter would be doing this whether it were politically unsound because he thinks it's right. But it happens, in my opinion, to be good politics, too. I think the American people are supporting it.

Q: *There's a school of thought that the treaty is a good peace issue in 1980 for whomever is in power and that it would be politically beneficial to delay a Senate vote until next year. Do you share that view?*

A: No. I think it's important for us to get this ratified. The Senate leadership wants to get it out of the way now. I think a better time to deal with the SALT treaty is in an environment where there's at least a major part of a year's gap between the final decision and the election so the poeple have time to analyze that.

I think when you get closer and closer to the red heat of the campaign it's more and more difficult to stay on the merits of the issue itself rather than being distracted.

Q: *Will the Joint Chiefs of Staff support the treaty?*

A: I'm not in a position to answer that yet. They've been involved in every stage of these negotiations. What role they plan to play, what specific position, I don't know.

Q: *Sen. Sam Nunn, whose vote is seen by many as vital to the administration's hopes of winning the treaty fight, has expressed concerns about bolstering NATO even more than the president has said he would, having an MX system. He's also in favor of reinstituting the draft. How far is the president willing to go to satisfy these kinds of concerns?*

A: There's a couple of rules for a vice president. One is that if there are going to be negotiations between a senator and him, I shouldn't be negotiating it in the paper.

Q: *Do you have any real hope of keeping the debate focused on the treaty itself, or is it likely to go into various other aspects of U.S.-Soviet relations?*

A: We think the agreement makes sense by its own terms. But it's inevitable that others will want to raise all aspects of U.S.-Soviet relations and we will have to be prepared to deal with that. We are.

That's the way the Senate is. I think those who under no circumstances would agree to SALT in its present terms will try to use all the irritations that are inevitable in the current situation of the Soviet Union to try to bring about a public mood that's negative to ratification. I think we'll just have to live with that.

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