

THE PREMIER diplomatic project of the Nixon presidency, to negotiate meaningful checks on the strategic arms race, is stalemated. The point of all previous arms control agreements was to build up political momentum to tackle the problem of strategic offensive nuclear arms. As recently as the last summit, that was the goal for this one. In Moscow, however, Mr. Nixon and Mr. Brezhnev evidently could not come near finding a mutually acceptable basis to put permanent controls on offensive arms or temporary stopgap controls on the development and deployment of the multiple-warhead missiles called MIRVs, technologically and politically the hottest brand of strategic weaponry. They could only agree to send their negotiators back to Geneva to negotiate a "new agreement," to follow the interim offensive-arms limitation expiring in 1977, to cover the decade ending in 1985.

Not everyone, of course, agrees that the summit reflects such a great disappointment. Mr. Nixon, as his TV audience Wednesday night could plainly see, has his own domestic political reasons to portray his diplomacy as fruitful and forward-looking ("the process of peace is going steadily forward"): this is his principal bulwark against impeachment. Mr. Schlesinger, the Secretary of Defense, having long worried of the possibility of ill-considered arms control agreements, at once offered the stoical view that the country should be relieved just to have its dialogue with Moscow sustained. Certainly those who professed to fear that Mr. Nixon would give away the nation's security to compensate for his Watergate weakness have been proven wrong.

Before he left Moscow, however, Secretary of State Kissinger uttered what struck us as an apt remark. "Both sides have to convince their military establishments of the benefits of restraint," he said, "and that is not a thought that comes naturally to military people on either side." As a statement or allegation about the Soviet government, these words—spoken in Moscow, no less—are startling enough. As a statement or report about the American government, they are even more startling, suggesting as they do that President Nixon has not convinced the Pentagon and its political allies of those "benefits of restraint".

Recall the uncontested fact that Mr. Nixon went to Moscow without having resolved strong differences among his advisers on how to proceed on arms control. No one can say flatly what alterations in its position the Kremlin might have made but it is evident that President Nixon did not resolve the differences he brought to Moscow in a way making substantial progress possible. Certainly the American "military establishment" cannot be faulted for offering the President its best judgment of what the national security requires.

The President's responsibility, however, is to make choices among his advisers' competing judgments. In the circumstances, it is hard to avoid suspecting that Mr. Nixon negotiated as he did not merely because he may have been swayed by the Pentagon's strategic arguments but because he wished to protect his domestic political position against attack from the right. In other words, considerations of political survival influenced his determination of the requirements of national security. Here is Watergate at work in the most dispiriting and insidious way.

This is not to dismiss the particular accomplishments of this summit. The agreement not to build a second ABM site is reassuring, and perhaps not entirely the foregone conclusion that many people had thought it to be. The threshold test ban, which will limit underground tests of warheads larger than 150 kilotons starting in 1976, will strike many observers as late, weak and incomplete but it will evidently put a stop, two years from now, to certain arms work that both sides might otherwise have carried forward, and it sets some useful technical precedents—exchanging test-site geological data, for instance. Then, it is good news, if not exactly worth house-top broadcast, that Moscow and Washington will work on agreements to prevent the waging of war by modifying the weather, and to take a "first step" to control the "most dangerous, lethal" kinds of chemical warfare.

The political results of the summit, furthermore, are not to be dismissed. "Detente," we are all learning, can provide a framework for orderly discussion of difficult problems like the Mideast and Europe, even when solutions are remote. This fact is registered in the final communique. On trade, Mr. Nixon—wisely—seems to have made no promises which will precipitate a battle with Congress. The word he brings back on Soviet emigration policies will be especially important in this regard. The apparently common Soviet-American desire to make new bilateral agreements symbolizing progress in detente is leading to some pretty rarified areas, such as—this time—"artificial heart research." Mr. Brezhnev is to come to the United States next year. This is well and good. The more that summits become routine, the more they can perhaps be isolated—though of course there is a limit—from political tugs and pulls in both countries.

For all of this, the bottom line is that the dangerous arms build-up has not yet been checked. Both countries are now moving ahead to what Dr. Kissinger calls "astronomical" numbers of warheads. "What in the name of God," he declared to newsmen in Moscow, "is strategic superiority at these levels?" Barring a measure of mutual restraint in the next few years in the absence of a formal agreement, this just might be—at least in respect to the arms race—an epitaph for detente.