



## PRIME MINISTER

FOR MEDIA

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The Government considers it very important that the US and the USSR continue their present policies of not undercutting the SALT II agreement, pending the negotiation of a new agreement providing for significant reductions in the nuclear forces.

The SALT II agreement - signed in 1979 but never ratified - expires on 31 December 1985. Of more immediate concern is that, in the coming months, the United States will come up against one of the key sub-limits imposed by the Treaty - the ceiling of 1200 on MIRVed ballistic missiles.

Although SALT II is far from ideal as a measure of nuclear arms control, its key provisions serve as an important framework of constraint and impart a valuable degree of predictability to the future evolution of the strategic forces.

The Government appreciates US concerns about Soviet compliance with existing arms control agreements, including SALT II. Nevertheless, it remains our view that the Soviet Union has adhered to the broad terms of both SALT I and SALT II and, so far as we are aware, is not contemplating steps which could seriously destabilise the strategic balance or result in a meaningful strategic advantage.

With the current effort by the superpowers to devise a new framework for the control and reduction of the nuclear arsenals at the very difficult formative stage, the Government sees it as particularly important to preserve the existing framework.

We consider that the maintenance of the SALT framework contributes to the security of the United States and its allies, including Australia.

Moreover, we believe that the goal of nuclear non-proliferation, to which the Australian Government is strongly committed, would not be served by public evidence that the two superpowers were removing defined and agreed restraints on their nuclear capabilities. The removal of such restraints would not augur well for the NPT Review Conference, due to get under way in August this year.

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With these considerations in mind, the Government has in recent days communicated its strong view to the United States and Soviet Governments that the existing SALT II limits should continue to be observed, while the Geneva arms control negotiations pursue new agreements.