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**TAINTED VICTORY:  
THE BUREAUCRATIC POLITICS OF  
THE INF NEGOTIATIONS**

The Reagan Administration produced one arms control agreement with the Soviet Union, the Treaty on Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces. The INF agreement eliminated an entire class of weapons, just as the United States had proposed when negotiations began in 1981. Signature of the treaty was the centerpiece of the Washington Summit in December 1987 -- a triumph for the President and the United States. Or was it?

**The Rational Actor Model**

If we consider states as rational actors, the treaty looks like a great success. In the 1970's, the Soviets had started to deploy a new missile -- the SS-20 -- with three nuclear warheads that could strike anywhere in Europe. West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt warned in 1977 that NATO needed to respond to this new threat. His concern was that the SS-20 could "de-couple" the American strategic nuclear deterrent from the defense of Europe. The Soviets could strike Europe with the SS-20, facing the United States with a difficult choice. It could either do nothing or invite attack on the United States by retaliating with long-range strategic systems.

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# Report Documentation Page

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As a result, NATO agreed in December 1979 on what came to be known as the "two-track" decision. On one hand, the United States would deploy to Europe 464 ground-launched cruise missiles (GLCMs) and 108 intermediate-range ballistic missiles, the Pershing II. They could strike the Soviet Union from Europe with nuclear warheads, thus "balancing" the SS-20. On the other hand, the United States would also try to negotiate limitations on these intermediate-range nuclear missiles. When the talks began, the United States proposed to ban both the SS-20, the GLCM, and the Pershing II -- a position known as the "zero option." Those negotiations, and the "zero option," ultimately bore fruit in the INF Treaty.

#### **The Bureaucratic and Organizational Model**

Readers of Graham Allison may suspect that this happy story does not convey the totality of what really happened.<sup>1</sup> States do not really behave like unitary, rational actors. Organizational routines and bureaucratic politics also determine their actions. This was certainly true in the INF case.

The proponents of the "zero option" in the Defense Department never expected or wanted the Soviets to accept it. The opponents of the "zero option" in the State Department ended up negotiating the treaty. In between, there was a lot of bureaucratic infighting involving a shift of power from Defense

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<sup>1</sup> Graham T. Allison, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis (Harper Collins:1971).

to State.

A broad-brush summary of what happened from the bureaucratic and organizational perspectives goes like this. The first agreement limiting strategic nuclear weapons -- SALT I -- blocked the Soviet Union's Strategic Rocket Forces from developing new intercontinental ballistic missile types. To justify their budget, they produced a new system with less than intercontinental range, the SS-20. It did not represent a new threat, since existing Soviet warheads could hit the same European targets.

The United States faced a difficult choice in the event of any Soviet nuclear attack on Europe, but President Carter was in no position to ignore Schmidt's alarm about the SS-20. Carter had raised European doubts about U.S. reliability by planning to deploy the so-called "neutron bomb" -- and then suddenly changing his mind. He was also under fire domestically for being "soft" on defense.

Coincidentally, the Defense Department was already developing two ground-launched nuclear missiles of intermediate range: ground-launched cruise missiles and a successor to the Pershing I ballistic missiles already in Germany. The Carter Administration packaged them as a response to the SS-20, even though existing American strategic systems were capable of responding to any Soviet attack on Europe.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Strobe Talbott, Deadly Gambits: The Reagan Administration and the Stalemate in Nuclear Arms Control (New York: Alfred A. Knopf:1984) 36.

Our Allies were not necessarily enthusiastic about hosting new American nuclear weapons. To sell the concept to their publics, European governments needed the arms control "track." It would show that NATO preferred arms control to deployments. The chances of actually reaching agreement seemed slim in 1979. The SS-20 was already in the field and increasing steadily in numbers. The first U.S. deployments would not begin until late 1983.

The chances for success in the arms control track looked even slimmer to the incoming Reagan Administration in 1981. Some senior officials thought of repudiating the two-track decision altogether. They believed arms control jeopardized national security. Nevertheless, the Office of the Secretary of Defense seized on Chancellor Schmidt's suggestion that the U.S. should propose to eliminate all intermediate-range nuclear missiles. The "zero option" -- which would trade existing Soviet missiles for American systems still under development -- offered an opportunity to prolong the negotiations, while keeping the Europeans happy. The State Department disagreed -- and lost.

Then-Secretary of State Haig wrote that Schmidt "huckstered" the "zero option:"<sup>3</sup>

It was enthusiastically championed by the Department of Defense. I opposed it, telling the President that it was a mistake that he would have to modify within the year...The fatal flaw in the zero option as a basis for negotiation was

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<sup>3</sup> Alexander M. Haig, Caveat: Realism, Reagan, and Foreign Policy (New York: MacMillan, 1984) 228.

that it was not negotiable.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, Haig argued that, if we got it, the "zero option" would de-couple U.S. strategic forces from the defense of Europe, intensify doubts among our allies, and encourage miscalculation by the Soviets.<sup>5</sup>

So the United States reluctantly began a negotiation with a non-negotiable position. State's Director for Political-Military Affairs, Richard Burt, considered the negotiation "a sham, but a justifiable, indeed an unavoidable and vital sham, one necessary for keeping the alliance together," according to journalist Strobe Talbott.<sup>6</sup>

The Soviets walked out of the talks when American missile deployments began in 1983, but they returned early in 1985 and proved surprisingly receptive to the "zero option." A member of the U.S. delegation described what happened:

...some quarters of the alliance exhibited dismay when Gorbachev unexpectedly began to accept allied demands....There was simply no practical alternative to endorsing an INF Treaty once the Geneva negotiations produced one - even if the treaty required withdrawal of the very same U.S. missiles for which several allied leaders had jeopardized their governments just a few years earlier.<sup>7</sup>

Had we been too clever for our own good? Fortunately, the end of the Cold War makes the issue far less relevant today than

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<sup>4</sup> Haig 229.

<sup>5</sup> Haig 229.

<sup>6</sup> Talbott 82.

<sup>7</sup> Leo Reddy, "Practical Negotiating Lessons from INF," Washington Quarterly (Spring 1989): 78.

when the treaty was signed. If the Cold War had not been thawing, the INF Treaty might never have been signed at all. And perhaps its signature helped accelerate the thaw. In the end, the outcome seems positive, but the policy-making process far from ideal.

The protagonists in Washington were Defense on one side and State on the other, with the National Security Council and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA) playing supporting roles. The original negotiator in Geneva, Paul Nitze, also had a major impact, first with ACDA and then with State.

If we ignore the brief initial round held at the end of the Carter Administration, the negotiations fell into two stages:

- from the start of the Reagan Administration to the Soviet walkout in November 1983, when the Defense Department dominated decision-making within the U.S. government, and
- from the resumption of talks in March 1985 to signature of the agreement in December 1987, when State dominated.

A closer look at the history of the negotiation reveals key bureaucratic and organizational factors which influenced policy decisions. They were the ear of the President, continuity and experience, control of the negotiator, the use of foreign views, timing, and the engagement of senior officials.

#### **The Ear of the President**

The relationship of Cabinet members with the President directly affected the power of their Departments. Defense

Secretary Casper Weinberger had more clout with President Reagan than Secretary of State Al Haig, although State revived under George Shultz.

Haig lasted from the start of the Reagan Administration until June 1982. He did not have the advantage of being one of Reagan's inner circle. In fact, the President's friends suspected Haig. He was tainted by past association with Henry Kissinger, and he had considered running against Reagan for President in 1980. Haig was appointed because of his foreign policy experience, but "The same qualities that made him reassuring to the West Europeans and other foreigners made him suspect in Reagan's inner circle."<sup>8</sup>

Far from building bridges to those close to the President, Haig only confirmed their suspicions by his actions in office. His initial effort to become the "vicar" of foreign policy by placing himself at the center of national security decision-making looked like a power grab. So did the assertion that he was "in charge" after the March 1981 assassination attempt on the President. Haig clashed almost immediately with Defense Secretary Weinberger -- a charter member of the inner circle -- over a public statement Weinberger made about neutron warheads.<sup>9</sup>

Haig was a voice from the past in an Administration which saw itself breaking with tradition -- especially in arms control. The Department he headed was even more suspect, but Haig seemed

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<sup>8</sup> Talbott 10.

<sup>9</sup> Haig 86-88.



to become its prisoner rather than its warden. The defense policy director on the National Security Council staff, General Robert Schweitzer, said of Haig: "Al's been taken over by the striped-pants types; he's been co-opted by the softies."<sup>10</sup>

Schweitzer was clearly not the only one in the White House with such views.

In retrospect, Haig considered himself "mortally handicapped by lack of access to the President."<sup>11</sup> He found the Reagan White House incomprehensible:

But to me, the White House was as mysterious as a ghost ship; you heard the creak of the rigging and the groan of the timbers and sometimes even glimpsed the crew on deck. But which of the crew had the helm? Was it Meese, was it Baker, was it someone else? It was impossible to know for sure.<sup>12</sup>

A Department can be no stronger than its chief. Haig's credibility and access problems reflected on his subordinates, like Director for Political-Military Affairs Rick Burt.<sup>13</sup> Himself a political appointee, Burt was State's main policy-maker on INF. Whereas Haig handicapped Burt, Defense Secretary Weinberger's easy access to the President buttressed the position of Burt's counterpart in the Defense Department, Richard Perle.

State did not always lose those early battles, but Defense had the upper hand. It took a personal appeal from Haig to the

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<sup>10</sup> Talbott 49.

<sup>11</sup> Haig 356.

<sup>12</sup> Haig 85.

<sup>13</sup> Talbott 13.

President to win a commitment to start INF negotiations before the end of 1981. Defense tried to delay as long as possible, insisting on completion of a "work program" to prepare the U.S. position. Haig told his staff, "'Work program,' my ass! It's a make work program, that's what it is! It's the oldest stalling tactic in the book."<sup>14</sup>

When George Shultz replaced Haig in 1982, State's position began to strengthen. From California, like Reagan, Shultz was on the fringes of the inner circle when he took office. He had no independent political ambitions and did not pose a threat to Reagan. He was a team player and built relationships in the White House, working particularly well on arms control with Bud McFarlane, who served as National Security Adviser from October 1983 to December 1985. In contrast to Haig's experience, the later Reagan years found the President overruling conservatives in the Administration on key issues, such as his decision to include conventionally-armed cruise missiles in the agreement.<sup>15</sup>

#### **Experience and Continuity**

Defense gained in the early INF negotiations because of experience and continuity. Burt was new to government; Perle had thirteen years of Washington infighting.<sup>16</sup> He did not need to learn the ropes.

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<sup>14</sup> Talbott 48.

<sup>15</sup> Reddy 75.

<sup>16</sup> Talbott 16.

Perle was able to maneuver the Joint Chiefs of Staff to support his preferred "zero option." The Chiefs initially leaned toward a more negotiable "zero-plus option" advanced by State. It would have set equal limits on Soviet and American missiles at a level above zero. To influence the Chiefs, Perle threatened to revisit the question of limits on aircraft. The Chiefs very much wanted to keep aircraft out of the negotiation, and Perle had previously agreed with that position.<sup>17</sup> The tactic worked; the Chiefs joined a common Defense Department position behind the "zero option."

As expected, the Soviets rejected the "zero option" in the early negotiations, but an unauthorized initiative by Paul Nitze, the American negotiator, almost produced a breakthrough in August 1992. Nitze took a "walk in the woods" with his Soviet counterpart, and they agreed to recommend a compromise package to their capitals. It would have allowed 75 U.S. cruise missile and Soviet SS-20 launchers in Europe, while denying the U.S. the right to deploy the Pershing II.

The news reached Washington when State was playing musical chairs. Haig's departure after only eighteen months brought in Shultz -- an arms control neophyte who took time to learn the subject. Burt was in the process of moving from Political-Military Affairs to head the Bureau of European Affairs. The appointment faced conservative criticism in Congress, and Burt

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<sup>17</sup> Talbott 67-8.

was lying low on arms control issues.<sup>18</sup> The new Political-Military Director, Rear Admiral Jonathan Howe, had been in office only a few months.

Perle argued successfully against Washington endorsement of the "walk-in-the-woods" deal. Burt did not really like the compromise either, and the Soviets also failed to support the work of the two negotiators. The outcome, however, might have been different if State -- the department with the greatest interest in reaching an agreement -- had a more experienced team in place.

#### **Control the Delegation**

The "walk-in-the-woods" episode highlighted the importance of controlling the negotiator. It helped shift power on the INF issue from Defense to State. Institutional arrangements in the early Reagan Administration were deliberately crafted so as to divide State, the negotiator, and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA), to which the negotiator reported.

ACDA theoretically worked for both the President and the Secretary of State, but the Reagan White House wanted to prevent a close relationship between State and ACDA. Consequently, it chose Eugene Rostow to head ACDA:

(National Security Adviser) Allen and (Presidential Counselor) Meese were ... mistrustful of Haig. They were always looking for ways of checking Haig's influence on the President. One opportunity was in filling the job of Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency

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<sup>18</sup> Talbott 133.

(ACDA)....Rostow got the job because he was seen as more likely to counterbalance Haig's suspected softness on the issue....The bureaucratic combat between Rostow and Haig made for continual friction between their agencies....<sup>19</sup>

To head the INF delegation, Rostow proposed Nitze, a close friend. Haig and Burt had favored a career Foreign Service Officer, Maynard Glitman, who became Nitze's deputy. Haig's memoirs make plain that Nitze was "Reagan's choice," implying that he was not Haig's.<sup>20</sup>

Nitze was in his seventies and had held important positions in several previous administrations. He was a power in his own right. To the extent that he looked to Washington for direction, it was to his friend Rostow, not to the State Department. He consulted with Rostow in developing the "walk-in-the-woods" formula, and Rostow was the only senior official he telephoned after the walk. The proposal might have received a warmer reception in Washington if it had not been just a Nitze-Rostow production.

Rostow shared with Haig traits of arrogance and independence.<sup>21</sup> His performance in office and Nitze's unwelcome initiative caused the White House to reevaluate the structure it had created for arms control decision-making. After the "walk in the woods," National Security Adviser William Clark directed Shultz to reestablish control over ACDA and Nitze. Clark also

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<sup>19</sup> Talbott 11.

<sup>20</sup> Haig 231.

<sup>21</sup> Talbott 152.

rejected Rostow's requests to chair the interdepartmental group handling INF and to have direct access to the President.<sup>22</sup>

Shultz asked his new deputy, Kenneth Dam, to form an arms control coordinating committee, which became known as the "Dam Group."<sup>23</sup> It proved ineffective, but the fact that Rostow and Nitze had overstepped their bounds increased State's power -- at least temporarily.

Rostow's power weakened, and in January, 1983, the White House had Secretary Shultz fire him. But Rostow's departure did not give Shultz control of ACDA. With Rostow out of the way, the White House again opted to divide power in arms control. National Security Adviser Clark chose Kenneth Adelman, an ally of the Defense Department, to head ACDA. Talbott writes that Shultz was now less in charge than before.<sup>24</sup>

Within two years, however, Shultz was in the driver's seat, able to bypass ACDA with the help of a new National Security Adviser and Nitze himself.

The Soviets walked out of the INF (and strategic arms) negotiations in November, 1983, when the U.S. began to deploy INF missiles in Germany. A year later, the new National Security adviser, "Bud" McFarlane asked Nitze to become an arms control "czar." According to Nitze,

It was about this time that Bud McFarlane decided that this

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<sup>22</sup> Talbott 145.

<sup>23</sup> Talbott 154.

<sup>24</sup> Talbott 168.

work in Washington on arms control matters needed greater centralization and coordination. He asked me whether I would take the job, reporting both to the President and to Secretary Shultz.<sup>25</sup>

Shultz may have had a hand in this maneuver, which effectively gave Nitze the responsibilities of the ACDA Director. Nitze writes that Shultz objected "vigorously" to McFarlane's suggestion that Nitze have offices both in State and at the NSC.<sup>26</sup> Shultz succeeded in moving Nitze from ACDA to an office near his own in State.

When the negotiations resumed in March 1985, Shultz approved Nitze's proposal that Glitman head the INF delegation.<sup>27</sup> Shultz thus established an effective chain of command running from himself through Nitze to Glitman. According to a State Department officer on the delegation, the subsequent negotiations marked

the reemergence of the secretary of state in his traditional role as the nation's chief negotiator and policy spokesman. A highly efficient interaction and division of labor also developed between the secretary of state and the INF delegation in Geneva....By staying in close touch with his negotiator in Geneva, the secretary of state was able to time and use meetings with the Soviet Foreign Minister, reinforced by high-level experts from both capitals and the chief negotiators, to break negotiating deadlocks on major points of difference.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Paul Nitze, From Hiroshima to Glasnost: At the Center of Decision: A Memoir (New York: Grove, Weidenfeld, 1989) 402.

<sup>26</sup> Nitze 402.

<sup>27</sup> Nitze 402.

<sup>28</sup> Reddy 76.

### Foreign Views

The views of foreigners were used by both State and Defense in the infighting over the INF negotiations. In one sense, State's management of relations with NATO and foreign states was a liability. The Department was suspected of being too solicitous to their views. During Haig's tenure, Weinberger complained to President Reagan, "Al's automatically siding with the West Europeans all the time."<sup>29</sup>

At the same time, State's leadership in dealing with foreign governments could prove advantageous. It played an important role in ensuring that the United States would observe the two-track decision.

Any incoming Administration inherits policies from its predecessor. The Reagan Administration, however, marked a sharp ideological swing to the right. Senior officials were not sure they wanted to continue policies that Carter started. In particular, Perle and his superior in Defense, Fred Ikle, thought that the two-track decision was a mistake.<sup>30</sup>

Before they could overturn it, they suddenly found President Reagan supporting it. State's Assistant Secretary for European Affairs, Larry Eagleburger, used an early visit by Prime Minister Thatcher to get the President on record. Eagleburger arranged for an endorsement of the NATO decision to appear in the

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<sup>29</sup> Talbott 57.

<sup>30</sup> Talbott 43-4.



President's remarks.<sup>31</sup>

The game worked both ways. When Schmidt proposed the "zero option," he undercut State's preferred negotiating position. State could hardly argue that this major allied leader was ill-advised on strategy and ignorant of European public opinion. Perle took full advantage of the opportunity to endorse "Schmidt's" position.

The game continued when Schmidt lost the German elections in March 1983. Rejected by the Soviets, the "zero option" was increasingly perceived in Europe as non-negotiable. Public demonstrations were mounting as the date for deployment of U.S. missiles approached. Schmidt's successor, Helmut Kohl, favored movement in the negotiation and told the media as much. The same month, Washington authorized Nitze to propose an "interim" solution, calling for equal ceilings, much like State's old "zero plus option."

It is not inconceivable that State encouraged Kohl to press for movement. Referring to Burt's contacts with the British Embassy, Strobe Talbott writes, "Burt worked hard at orchestrating what he called 'echoes' of his own position from across the Atlantic."<sup>32</sup>

#### Timing

Another influential factor in Departmental power was timing.

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<sup>31</sup> Talbott 44-45.

<sup>32</sup> Talbott 180.

The Reagan Administration came to office believing that the Soviet Union had gained important military advantages, in part because of past arms control agreements. Its priority was a military buildup -- the function of the Defense Department -- not new negotiations. As a result, the function which the State Department performed -- negotiations -- was of little interest to the White House.

By the second Reagan Administration, the situation had changed. The military buildup was so well underway that its cost was encountering resistance. Furthermore, the Soviet walkout in November 1983 meant that no arms control negotiations were taking place. Disruption of the arms control process was unsettling both American voters and Allied governments, already concerned by some Administration rhetoric about nuclear war.

In addition, by 1985 there seemed to be an opportunity for progress. After three Soviet leaders died in quick succession, the younger and more personable Gorbachev seemed to offer something different. Even more important, with the U.S. missiles actually being deployed, the U.S. had more negotiating leverage. For whatever reason, President Reagan was far more interested in arms control than during his first term. This interest enhanced the power of the institution which could deliver the agreement -- State.

#### **Engagement of Senior Officials**

The increasing involvement of the Secretary of State and

President in the INF negotiations, not surprisingly, increased the influence of State. The Soviet walkout in 1983 broke the Defense-dominated pattern of the early years. During the hiatus between formal negotiations in Geneva, the Secretary of State became by default our major interlocutor with the Soviets on INF and arms control in general. The interlude provided Shultz with the opportunity to learn the intricacies of the negotiation and increased his power when it became possible to re-establish the talks in 1985.

The President also became personally involved -- and personally interested in progress. Improving relations led to the first U.S.-Soviet Summit of the Reagan administration in Geneva in October 1985, and the second in Reykjavik a year later. These meetings directly engaged the attention of the President in a way impossible when the two sides were not talking.

#### Good Policy?

The "zero option" ultimately triumphed. It pleased Helmut Schmidt and dramatized the link between the SS-20 and the planned American deployments: we'll give up ours if they give up theirs. With a slight adjustment in 1983 -- the "interim" proposal -- it made the search for a negotiated solution sufficiently credible that the basing governments could go ahead with deployments that fall.

The problem came when the talks resumed in 1985. The U.S. failed to revive Soviet interest in the "walk-in-the-woods"

formula or to excite interest in variations allowing some missiles on each side. Once on the table, the "zero option" could not be withdrawn, and the Soviets had the gall to accept.

The agreement had some advantages, such as on-site verification procedures. It eliminated more Soviet than American warheads. But it marked a giant step toward the removal of American nuclear weapons from Western Europe at a time when they seemed essential to deter superior Soviet conventional forces. An equal ceiling for each side would have better served our strategic interests in the context of deterrence strategy.

The end of the Cold War has made the issue almost moot. In retrospect, however, the State Department should have argued more forcefully that the Soviets might accept the "zero option," not that it was non-negotiable. In the end, following standard operating procedures, State dutifully negotiated a treaty it had originally opposed. And all sides in Washington hailed an agreement which they had not expected to realize.