

## CHAPTER 21

START Talks: The Sakharov Finesse,  
Stone Variety

*The main obstacle in the START talks is the Soviet demand, in response to Reagan's announced interest in the ABM, that the United States pledge not to abrogate the ABM Treaty at least for a term of years. A bear-bug strategy is devised in which the Soviets would agree to ongoing continuing disarmament subject to the condition that the ABM Treaty be maintained. Washington and Moscow are lobbied to this end with good effect. The deadlock begins to crack in Moscow when Sakharov takes a similar line that comes to be known as the "Sakharov finesse." But the bear-bug version is the one eventually adopted.*

I had a strong interest in the ABM, which, readers will remember, I had worked on from 1963 to 1972, when the ABM Treaty prohibiting these weapons was signed. Over a decade later, in March 1983, I began receiving phone calls from distinguished FAS scientists who had been invited to the White House for a dinner with the president with no reason having been given. They wanted to know what was happening. Rumors swirled about satellites having been shot down, problems in Central America—you name it.

It turned out to be the evening that President Reagan gave his "Star Wars" speech calling for a Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). After it was given, I remember calling the White House press room and telling Sam Donaldson that the best people he could ask for an opinion on the speech were, even then, having dinner with the president! The next day, however, I was one of the very few around who seemed to want to be on TV on the subject; some of our lead-

## "EVERY MAN SHOULD TRY"

ing experts did not want to denounce the president so soon after sitting at his table! Nine different domestic and foreign TV stations interviewed me in the next forty-eight hours. I knew all the most incisive anti-ABM lines, several drawn from my intellectual betters.

About that time, a philanthropist named Jay Harris decided to set up some kind of Space Policy Group; at the suggestion of a specialist in the starting of nonprofit peace organizations, Lindsey Mattison, he offered us two years' upkeep for one staffer to get such a thing started. We hired John Pike, who, in the end, became the most visible opponent of ABM for the next ten years, from 1983 to 1993. The issue had gotten far more complex than the one I had dealt with in the sixties, and many technical details were beyond me and required full-time work.

In fact, the U.S.-Soviet ABM debate had now a reversed polarity from the one I knew in the sixties, when we were trying to persuade the Soviets not to build an ABM and to give up on "defenses." Now Reagan was urging defenses, and the Russians were trying to persuade *us* to give them up. Disarmament was at stake. McNamara had summed it up well in the sixties when he said that either side could just build more missiles to overcome any ABM the other side might have. Under this logic, the Soviets were certainly not going to engage in missile disarmament in the face of the specter of a U.S. ABM system that could shoot down missiles.

My idea was a simple one combining my two main themes: no ABM and continuing reductions year by year. What if the Russians held the ABM Treaty hostage with such ongoing disarmament? What if they reversed themselves and said they *would* engage in continuing disarmament but only so long as the United States did not violate the ABM Treaty? It would take self-control and nerve on their part. But it would work. They would always have time to rebuild the stock of their missiles if we abandoned our commitments and started to build an ABM. And their threat to rebuild the stock of their missiles would lock us into the ABM Treaty. This was my "bear-hug" strategy. In due course, it appeared in my March 17

*START Talks: The Sakharov Finesse, Stone Variety*

*Washington Post* article under the title “A Bear Hug to Avoid Star Wars? Moscow Could Offer Steady Reductions of Offensive Nuclear Arms.”<sup>[374]</sup>

Velikhov, Frank von Hippel, and I had agreed that Velikhov’s Committee of Soviet Scientists (CSS) and FAS would have a traveling “school” to give lectures on arms control, with biannual meetings, alternately in Washington and Moscow. By chance, the first meeting was in April 1985 in Moscow, where I was able to present my lecture on the bear-hug strategy to the largest and most distinguished audience I have ever had in Russia: about forty distinguished guests from research institutes, along with defense, foreign ministry, and press observers. The lecture was videotaped by the Russians.

The current undersecretary of state, Strobe Talbott, is certainly the finest chronicler of U.S.-Soviet arms control negotiations, with no less than three relevant books. In his splendid work *The Master of the Game: Paul Nitze and the Nuclear Peace*, he quoted my speech:

You people are saying that if we go ahead with Star Wars, there can be no disarmament. I agree, but you should turn it around. You should see that if both sides go ahead with disarmament, there can be no Star Wars. Disarmament in and of itself might be the answer to Star Wars. With offensive reductions underway, there would be no political support for Star Wars [in the United States]. On the other hand, if there are no offensive reductions in prospect, there will be all the more support for Star Wars. You need political restraints, not further legal assurances concerning the ABM treaty.<sup>375</sup>

This was the bear-hug strategy in its delinked form: Just do it! Start disarmament and let things take their course.

After the April 1 talk, I had an appointment with Arbatov and was joined by a few of his aides who had attended my lecture. I explained the argument. Arbatov immediately objected and denounced the idea. Only one of his assistants dared to defend my

## "EVERY MAN SHOULD TRY"

approach—Alexei Vasiliev. Arbatov immediately cut him off and said, "There would be blood all over the floor." He meant that feelings ran high in Moscow against SDI and few would have the nerve to face it down with my disarmament approach, unaided by assurances on SDI from Washington.<sup>[376]</sup>

I called on the famous strategist and negotiator Paul Nitze on my return home. Among other things, Nitze had been secretary of the Navy, deputy secretary of defense, and was now special adviser to the president and secretary of state for arms control. Strobe Talbott, a veteran of many discussions with Nitze, recorded the situation in his book:

On May 3, after his return to Washington, Stone called on Nitze and urged percentage reductions in offense, linked to "perpetuation" of the ABM treaty. Nitze was at first resistant, then listened attentively and receptively, although with a touch of discouragement and apprehension. "Jeremy," he said, "people in this Administration already treat me like a radical dove without any interest in national security."

I remember this meeting well because, by that time, I knew how Paul Nitze operated. He was the complete negotiator, always taking careful notes and scrupulously observant of the smallest details of Soviet behavior. Meeting him, I felt like a spy coming in from the cold and giving a negotiator a view of what his counterparts looked like from the rump side.

I had attacked Paul Nitze in 1977 for his strident attacks on Paul C. Warnke at the time of the latter's confirmation hearings for director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA). And I had resolutely opposed his attacks, launched from his Committee on the Present Danger, on SALT II. Furthermore, Nitze had once blackmailed the Foreign Relations Committee by telling them that he would not appear on a panel if I were on it because I was not an "opponent" of the SALT II Treaty but only a "critic." We were far from close.

*START Talks: The Sakharov Finesse, Stone Variety*

But I respected his intellectual skills and restless intelligence. I knew that he was the only avenue to arms control in the Reagan administration, and not only because he was the main adviser to Secretary of State Shultz on this subject. There just was no one else at all who was as sympathetic and influential on these issues.

Paul Warnke had once confided to me that in his opinion, Nitze might attack any treaty he did not himself negotiate but that he would, if given the chance, try his utmost to secure his own arms control treaty. (I had also played a few games of tennis with Nitze on his estate once and had seen, firsthand, how competitive he was; he definitely was the complete negotiator.) Nitze had himself endured confirmation-hearing attacks when he was nominated as Secretary of the Navy in November 1963. (It was alleged that in 1958 he had flirted with such notions as turning U.S. strategic forces over to NATO, or even to the General Assembly, under certain utopian presuppositions.)<sup>377</sup> Such a person could not be all bad.

I had brought to my appointment with Nitze complete documentation on percentage reductions: the beginning at GAC; the write-up in *The Washington Post*; the vetting by the Defense Department; the secret proposal by an earlier president, Jimmy Carter; and the unanimous approval of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. In short, this proposal had a damned good pedigree.

My approach to Nitze was, "Have I got something for you! This is exactly what you need. You can tell the Senate you got reductions through the threat of ABM breakout and that you gave away nothing—in the Nitze style! And you can say you secured an outcome that had already been thoroughly examined and approved: percentage reductions."

In my vision, Gorbachev would also be able to make a similar boast that he was holding back the ongoing threat of Star Wars by threatening to break off the continuing reductions to which he had agreed. Meanwhile, Nitze would be telling Congress that he had forced the Soviets into continuing reductions through the ongoing threat of Star Wars. The bear-hug strategy was a *mutual* bear hug

“EVERY MAN SHOULD TRY”

with *mutual* hostage-taking. It was, in short, symmetric and beautiful and they both would get what they wanted without giving up anything they wanted. Talk about win-win strategies and win-win outcomes!<sup>[378]</sup>

In Talbott’s retelling, Nitze, Shultz, and McFarlane then managed to get Reagan’s approval for such an approach preparing a supersecret document embodying the idea and briefing an inattentive president in a “most low-key, cursory fashion” so as to elicit a “presidential shrug and a nod.”<sup>379</sup> The supersecret document, dubbed the “Sunday Paper,” was later summarized in a “Monday Paper” of talking points; it was the bear-hug strategy with two details filled in: inclusion of intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) along with strategic ones and specification of which interpretation of the ABM Treaty would prevail. It even had an agreement of “indefinite duration.”

Needless to say, I was privy to none of this glorious news at that time, and I learned about it only when Talbott’s book was published in 1988. But Nitze encouraged me to return to see him and sent an aide, Colonel Norman Clyne, outside after one meeting to say, “Nitze thinks you are one of the few honest critics around.” Accordingly, I had my hopes up, and he *had* seemed interested.

At the November 1985 summit in Geneva, President Reagan handed Gorbachev a “massaged” version of the Monday Paper with its “nub” still there. It said that “in addition to accepting a 50-percent cut in strategic offensive forces, ‘the sides should provide assurances that their strategic defense programs shall be conducted as permitted by, and in full compliance with, the ABM Treaty.’”<sup>380</sup> [From my point of view, two presidents had now handed over proposals I had originated to two premiers; not bad for a butterfly.] But according to Talbott, Reagan did not explain that the ABM program would continue only as R&D. Gorbachev said, “But this allows SDI to continue,” and they could not reach an agreement.<sup>381</sup>

At Reykjavík on October 11, 1986, Gorbachev offered a 50 percent cut in offensive weapons so long as both sides remained in compliance with the ABM Treaty for at least ten years.<sup>382</sup> In a confused atmos-

*START Talks: The Sakharov Finesse, Stone Variety*

phere of hectic talk of other utopian proposals, and many efforts to sabotage agreement by arms control opponents, the talks failed.

## Sakharov Finesse: An Unadopted Variant of the Bear-Hug Strategy

Strobe Talbott puts considerable weight on the so-called Sakharov finesse in the Soviet acceptance of START. Sakharov presented it at a forum in Moscow in February 1987, his first major appearance after his release from Gorky.

During that forum I spent three evenings with Andrei Sakharov at his apartment. As a consequence, I can describe his thinking and mood both before and after his historic presentation drawing on my contemporaneous account in the *FAS Public Interest Report*.<sup>383</sup> Andrei was obviously nervous about his forum presentation. He was pleased to see that my two-page paper was similar to his own in arguing “disarmament now.” As he read my six points, he looked slightly surprised and pronounced it “very reasonable.”

We began discussing suitable terminology. “Negotiating” linkage was the Soviet position—no agreement on reductions without agreement on SDI. “Action” linkage was our position [i.e., mine and Sakharov’s]—start the disarmament now and stop it only if SDI is “deployed” (his position) or if a narrow interpretation of the ABM Treaty is violated (my position). Both of us, we agreed, were for “conditional” disarmament, which, we decided, was a better adjective than “contingent.”<sup>[384]</sup>

The next morning at the forum, Sakharov was tense, surrounded by cameras. I saw him tell the forum that the Reykjavík talks had failed because the United States wanted a free hand. He explained, however, that SDI would not be effective because of space mines and other countermeasures, and because large numbers of satellite battle stations would be needed. SDI supporters, Sakharov argued, wanted to ruin the USSR, and this could be very dangerous. He did

## "EVERY MAN SHOULD TRY"

not think the United States would dare deploy SDI, but if it did, the USSR would know how to defeat it. In any case, the breaking of the linkage between disarmament and a halt to Star Wars research would resolve the deadlock and make agreement possible.

On Monday night, and again on the next Thursday night, he thanked me for the support on the issue of linkage; even his wife, Elena Bonner, was warm in her thanks for this.

It was at times like this that I felt so fortunate to be an entrepreneurial activist instead of a think-tank operative or government bureaucrat. I was actually able to brief Sakharov and encourage his views before he spoke. But in his enthusiasm for disarmament and his scorn for ABM systems, he proceeded to a logical rather than a political conclusion. For Gorbachev to take Sakharov's formulation conditioning reductions on actual ABM deployment would have been to throw away the ABM Treaty unnecessarily since the Russian threat would not have been keyed to its violation. My formulation, which threatened to break off disarmament if the ABM Treaty were violated in any way, was the obvious and natural position that eventually prevailed.

But whether his exact formulation was politically feasible or not, Sakharov gave the Russians the necessary shot of confidence that SDI would not work. As a scientist of great stature, he helped stop a kind of panic about an unreal danger. Sakharov gave the Moscow community the courage to give Gorbachev full support. Two years after Arbatov had told me my bear-hug strategy would not work because there would be "blood all over the floor," the Russian side had calmed down, and Sakharov had helped to get them calmed down. Now the delinked bear-hug strategy was feasible.

It was just as I had thought when, in 1985, I handed Velikhov a copy of Sakharov's 1968 position on ABM systems from *Progress, Coexistence, and Intellectual Freedom* and whispered that the world's strongest opponent of Star Wars was locked up in Gorky. Why not let him out? By releasing Sakharov, Gorbachev had, indeed, gotten some help on Star Wars.

On September 21, 1987, NBC news reported the following:



*START Talks: The Sakharov Finesse, Stone Variety*

A high-ranking Soviet official has outlined . . . the Moscow strategy in arms control over the remaining months of the Reagan Administration. This Soviet official said that once the agreement on short- and intermediate-range missiles is complete, they want to move toward a 50 percent reduction on long-range missiles. Star Wars would be treated as a separate issue, he said, but Moscow would nullify the agreement on long-range missiles if work on Star Wars went too far.<sup>385</sup>

How far was too far? This report did not say. A few months later, on January 15, 1988, I had an opportunity to take this matter up with Gorbachev himself in a roundtable discussion at the Kremlin in which he met with the advisers and Board of the International Foundation for Survival and Humanity. This was the first meeting of Sakharov and Gorbachev, and I was standing there, taking a picture of them both, when they had their first conversation. Sakharov said, modestly, "It's good to have freedom and responsibility again." Gorbachev, without missing a beat, said, "It's good that you believe that with freedom goes responsibility."

When, at the meeting, my turn came to ask a question, I mentioned the idea that Professor Samuel Huntington of Harvard had propounded that elaborate Maginot lines, like Star Wars, normally come at the end of arms races as desperate efforts that don't work.<sup>386</sup> Such efforts seemed, in his terms, the "frantic belated efforts of the challenged state" to assert an absolute superiority over its arms race challenger. And when they do get to this stage, it seems a sign that the energy in the arms race is exhausted.<sup>[387]</sup> I suggested to Gorbachev that perhaps, in this context, SDI should not be taken



*At the Kremlin reception for the International Foundation for Survival and Humanity. From left to right: Anatoly Dobrynin, Gorbachev, E. P. Velikbov, Federico Mayor (director-general of UNESCO), and the author. Others around the table, not shown, included Andrei Sakharov, Jerome P. Wiesner, Frank von Hippel, Wade Greene, Roald Sagdeev, Armand Hammer, and about eight others*

## "EVERY MAN SHOULD TRY"

too seriously. (I had lectured about this in Berkeley about a year earlier and concluded that in historical perspective, Star Wars might mean the arms race was really over.) Gorbachev answered, "But you don't want me to permit an arms race in space, do you?" Still, I had made the point.

In the end, two years later, as was inevitable really, what was agreed was the elder brother to the Sakharov finesse, the bear-hug strategy—involving ABM Treaty violations of any kind rather than ABM deployment in particular. For example, on October 1, 1989, *The Washington Post* reported that a letter from Gorbachev to President George Bush had: a) withdrawn the Soviet demand that both sides agree to adhere to the ABM Treaty for at least ten years; b) asked that the two sides reach an "understanding" that violation of the ABM accord by one is grounds for the other to withdraw from the arms accord; c) suggested that the two sides clarify what research and testing on space weapons constitutes an ABM violation; and d) said that the two sides need not agree on this issue before signing and implementing the strategic arms accord.

In sum, the Soviets had agreed to go ahead without linkage but had made clear that they considered that violations of the ABM Treaty (and not just the "deployment" of which Sakharov spoke) would be grounds for their withdrawal.<sup>388</sup> It had been four and a half years since I had proposed that reductions could keep the ABM Treaty hostage and two and a half years since Sakharov (and I) had proposed that the hostage-taking could be done tacitly. The mills ground very slowly.

Indeed, it was on July 31, 1991, nine years after negotiations began, that the START Treaty was signed as a bilateral agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union. The Cold War was already over. Five months later, on December 25, 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed.

Nongovernmental experts have considerable advantages. In discussing how the outsiders on the two sides sought to shape the Reagan-Gorbachev arms control proposals, Talbott wrote:

*START Talks: The Sakharov Finesse, Stone Variety*

The approximate American equivalent of Velikhov and the Soviet *institutchiki* were the RAND specialists who had been helping McFarland refine the terms of the great sting and Jeremy Stone of the Federation of American Scientists, who had been consulting with Nitze.<sup>389</sup>

But, in this process I had several advantages. In the first place, I was lobbying the Soviet side as well as the U.S. side, which, effectively, they could not. And in the second place, I could move more quickly, as small organizations invariably can.<sup>[390]</sup> Third, the people I was in touch with—Velikhov, Sagdeev, and Arbatov—were exactly the Soviet “outsiders” whom Talbott described as “the best known and most effective spokesmen” on whom Gorbachev was relying.<sup>391</sup> And they were often ahead of the negotiators.<sup>[392]</sup>

What can we conclude from all this? When governments face painful decisions, their internal procedures for securing consensus are under strain, and their normal processes do not work. In these cases one must do more than work on a government-to-government basis to influence the outcome. The goal should be to find a person (or persons) inside the government who shares one’s views. After infecting them with the virus of one’s ideas, it can then be left to them to manipulate the levers and controls of a government they know better than we and in which they are not hostile intruders.

This was, really, the main conclusion of my book *Strategic Persuasion: Arms Control Through Dialogue*. And now, reviewing this history, I feel that in working with Arbatov, Velikhov, and Sagdeev, I was faithfully implementing its central idea.<sup>393</sup> (And I was successfully applying this approach to the U.S. side through Paul Nitze.)

Arms control was, really, a coalition of doves in both camps against hawks. But only when they were in touch with one another could their full effectiveness be felt. Our contacts with the “flying squad” of experts that Gorbachev relied upon was critical to whatever success we had.

More generally, Gorbachev was the “dove in place” for which we all devoutly wished—and the key to change in Russia. He was

## "EVERY MAN SHOULD TRY"

ready to be inoculated with every conceptual virus we had. But when he arrived, the establishment of experts was profoundly reluctant to accept his sincerity. On December 8, 1988, for example, Gorbachev made a magic UN speech calling for reductions in military force. The next day, every single commentator on *The Washington Post* op-ed page had something bad to say about it.<sup>[394]</sup>

It seemed crazy to me not to help Gorbachev. In late February 1989, hearing rumors coming out of Russia that Gorbachev was in trouble, I wrote a *New York Times* op-ed essay entitled "Let's Do All We Can for Gorbachev." I wrote, "He represents an asset and an opportunity. If we fail to seize this opportunity in time, who among us will not later regret it profoundly?"<sup>395</sup> The public turned out to be much at odds with the pundits. The piece sparked such an unusually large and positive response that I received an unprecedented thank-you letter from the deputy editorial-page editor.<sup>396</sup>

The *Times* editors knew what Gorbachev meant and what he was doing. Two months later, on April 2, 1989, the *Times* editorial board announced, in a two-foot-long editorial, "The Cold War Is Over." And I was the first of about a dozen experts quoted in this editorial. It meant a lot to me to be mentioned in such an historic editorial.

Still, it was another six months before a *New York Times* headline could announce, "U.S. Offers to Aid Gorbachev's Plan to Revamp System; in a Change in Tone, Baker Says Washington Could Provide Advice and Technical Help." In general, the caution of experts, and the inertia of governments, was so great that the arms negotiations had not begun to be successful until the Soviet Union had begun to collapse. To that extent, all of the above efforts on arms control itself became moot. But the disarmament debate and dialogue helped the superpowers stay well back from the brink during the most dangerous period of the Cold War. And it also helped set an indispensable example for movements for world disarmament and nuclear nonproliferation in the post-Cold War period.