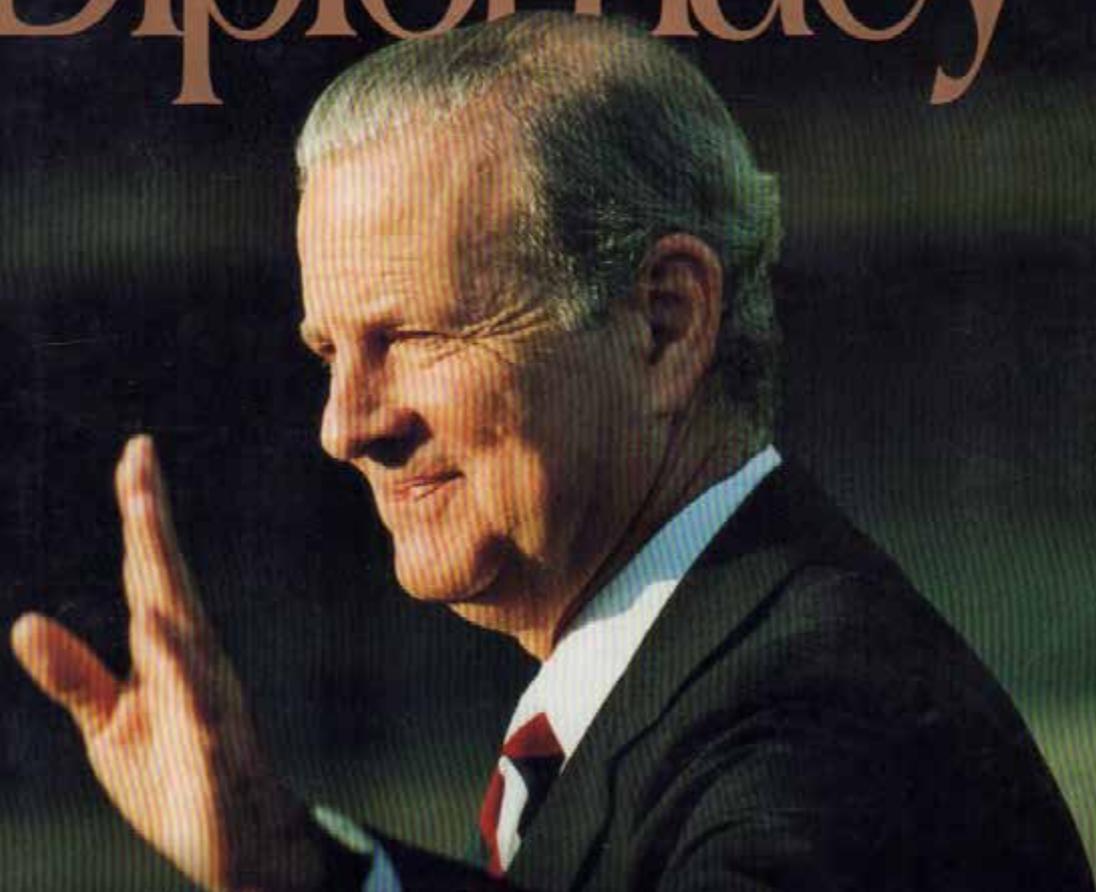


The Politics of Diplomacy



Revolution, War & Peace, 1989-1992

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also became the foundation for mobilizing U.S. support to Russia and the other new independent states. Its specific provisions included the repeal of Cold War legislation that impeded economic cooperation with Russia, encouragement of the American private sector to develop business ties with Russia, and the expansion of our technical assistance and exchange programs. But any one of these was less important than the fact that the act provided a focus for our efforts during an election year in which the President was being criticized by some for being too much of an internationalist. At the time, I argued that the Freedom Support Act was defense by other means—that is, by helping to build democracy and free markets, we were creating the political foundations for a lasting peace. I still believe that, and even if we can't remake other societies in our image as perfect democracies, the more democratic we can help them become, the better.

Of course, the announcement on April 1 was just the beginning of a long campaign to win support for the act, which included major speeches by the President and me and an intensive lobbying effort by Bob Strauss, whose intervention with congressional Democrats was critical in ensuring the act's passage that summer.

From Four Nuclear Powers to One: The START Protocol

On the security side of the equation, I spent most of the spring of 1992 managing two different yet interrelated nuclear issues. The START agreement, which the President had signed with Mikhail Gorbachev in July 1991, had been a treaty between the United States and the Soviet Union. When the USSR had collapsed, Russia had become its successor state in legal terms, but in practice, strategic nuclear weapons remained on the soil of three other republics: Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus. We had a vital interest in ensuring that only one nuclear power emerged from the breakup of the former Soviet Union. We had begun this revolution with one nuclear power on that strategic space and did not wish to see a proliferation of nuclear countries when the dust settled. Moreover, despite the Commonwealth, the political disputes between Russia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan were real, and we definitely did not want to see states with these kinds of conflicts end up in uneasy nuclear standoffs with one another.

In addition, the President was committed to go beyond the START agreement and push through another round of deep cuts in nuclear forces. The President complemented his September 27, 1991, initiative on tactical nuclear weapons with a strategic nuclear proposal, which he unveiled in his State of the Union speech on January 28, 1992. He announced that the

United States would take several unilateral steps (such as ceasing production and deployment of the Midgetman missile, and shifting a substantial portion of the bomber force to conventional roles), but the most important aspect of the speech concerned force levels. While START would reduce U.S. nuclear warheads from roughly 13,000 to 9,500, the President proposed in his State of the Union a START II agreement to reduce warheads to roughly 4,700—a fifty percent reduction below START levels (and equivalent to the United States' levels in 1971, before the first strategic arms control agreement had been signed). The forces in the former Soviet Union would drop to equally low levels. But most important, the President resurrected his de-MIRVing initiative, which I had floated with Shevardnadze in Windhoek, Namibia, in the spring of 1990. If the President's proposal were accepted, MIRVed ICBMs would be eliminated, thus leading to a far more stable nuclear balance.

At roughly the same time, President Yeltsin was coming forward with his own arms control initiative that also included a series of unilateral steps. (As a small sign of the new era we had entered, the presidents previewed their proposals with each other beforehand; during the Soviet era, both initiatives almost certainly would have been released publicly first.) Yeltsin proposed even deeper cuts, to a level of 2,000 to 2,500 warheads. He argued that all MIRVs were "the root of evil—from the point of view of threats to stability," as he put it in a letter to President Bush on January 27, 1992. He managed to get to such levels by a proposal to eliminate all MIRVed missiles, both land-based (ICBMs) and sea-based (SLBMs). Unfortunately, since we relied heavily on SLBMs, Yeltsin's proposal would have had the effect of radically changing the U.S. force structure, and shifting us away from the stabilizing triad of bombers, ICBMs, and SLBMs, that had been the hallmark of the U.S. nuclear deterrent for decades.

While I discussed ways to bridge the gaps between the two proposals on my visits to Moscow in January and February, my sense was that we were not going to make much progress on START II until we first resolved the proliferation problem with Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus. While the members of the Commonwealth had signed an agreement on strategic forces on December 30, 1991, it was becoming clear by March that political disagreements among Russia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan were quickly making that agreement irrelevant. The Russians and Ukrainians had been sparring over the disposition of the Black Sea fleet. President Kravchuk had required an oath of loyalty from all military personnel based in Ukraine, and then on March 12, Kravchuk suspended the transfer of tactical nuclear weapons from Ukraine to Russia.

On March 18, two days before a Commonwealth Summit, I held my first meeting with the new Russian Ambassador, Vladimir Lukin. He told

me that the deputy foreign ministers from the four states had met and had come to an agreement that would allow us to implement the START agreement's provisions, "although you can never know with our Ukrainian brothers," warned Lukin. On START II, he told me, "Some way needs to be found to avoid negative effects here and in Russia. Yeltsin cannot give the impression that he is dismantling everything."

But whatever agreement had been reached at the deputy minister level clearly didn't find its way to the heads of state. The Commonwealth Summit dissolved in acrimony, without the sides even addressing the nuclear issues. It became clear to me that we would have to solve the problem for the four or risk losing the START Treaty. The Un-Group—the senior inter-agency arms-control body in the government below the level of principals—had already begun developing options.* The most elegant solution was to have the four sign a protocol to the START Treaty, which would have the legal effect of making Russia the successor state to the Soviet Union, while Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus became non-nuclear weapons states consistent with the NPT.

On April 7, I called Andrei Kozyrev and broached this idea with him. "From our perspective," I began, "substance is more important than form. We have a small window for START ratification by our Congress, and if the four of you can't find a solution among yourselves, then I'd like to invite you to Washington to settle this."

"I'm not sure that will be necessary," Kozyrev replied. "I've spoken with Anatoly Zlenko [Ukraine's Foreign Minister]. He now wants to settle the issue and will come to Moscow."

But a week later, Kozyrev called and stated bluntly, "I don't have very good news." We were still dead in the water, as the April 11 meeting among Kozyrev, Zlenko, and their Kazakh and Belarussian counterparts had resulted in no resolution of the issue.

Moreover, this technical arms-control issue was becoming increasingly politicized. On a previously scheduled visit to show our support for Ukraine, Dennis Ross, Ed Hewett, and Paul Wolfowitz, the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, found the Ukrainians increasingly wary of the Russians. "The Russians see themselves as the Center," and "the Russians still have the mentality of empire" were the kinds of statements they heard from the Ukrainian leadership. Kiev was also fixated on the symbols of

*The group (named the Un-Group because no one was supposed to know of its existence) included Reggie Bartholomew and Jim Timbie from State; first Arnie Kanter and later John Gordon from the NSC; Doug MacEachin from the CIA; Vic Alessi from the Energy Department; Steve Hadley from DOD; and from the JCS, the Chairman's assistant, first Howard Graves, then John Shalikashvili, and finally Barry McCaffrey.

independence, and that meant that Ukraine wanted to be a party to the START Treaty.

Without American intervention, we were going to remain stalled, so I sent a message to Kozyrev and we talked on April 16. Kozyrev agreed with our proposed protocol in which the three would adhere to the NPT as non-nuclear weapons states, and would commit to the removal of all strategic nuclear weapons from their territories within seven years (the START time frame).

Later that day, I called President Kravchuk to discuss the proposed protocol. I outlined the concept over the phone and told Kravchuk that I would have our chargé in Kiev, Jon Gunderson, deliver a draft so the Ukrainian President could review it. Kravchuk called my initiative "very realistic" and said he'd call back the next day, which he did. "Your approach is very constructive," he said. "It shows the U.S. government is ready to take into consideration the positions of all countries involved. Ukraine supports the form and content of the protocol. I have a few comments on it, but these are not matters of principle."

With one down (or so I thought), I turned to Belarus and Kazakhstan. On April 19, I spoke by telephone to Stanislav Shushkevich of Belarus, who foresaw no problems with the protocol. The Chernobyl disaster had quite understandably led the Belarussians to acquire a severe aversion to anything nuclear.

I also spoke that day with President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan. In a letter to President Bush a few days earlier, Nazarbayev had tried to find a "third way" with regard to the NPT. He wanted Kazakhstan to become a "temporary" nuclear power for purposes of the nonproliferation pact. He had linked the length of time it would take Kazakhstan to join the NPT as a full non-nuclear state to security guarantees from nuclear weapons states, notably the United States. I told him that security guarantees had been addressed in the original NPT negotiations and that the United States had formally declared its intent in 1968 to seek U.N. Security Council assistance if any non-nuclear state were threatened by a nuclear power. I told Nazarbayev that we stood by this commitment, and would reiterate it in terms of Kazakhstan.

Nazarbayev was rather cagey, thanking me and noting that he hoped our "special relationship" would continue—but he also elliptically said that he felt certain I recognized Kazakhstan's special geopolitical role. He ended by urging me to use American diplomacy to influence the Russian leadership. "If Russian chauvinism is not checked, blood may be shed, civil war might erupt, all the reforms could go up in smoke, and Kazakhstan might get involved," he concluded.

I decided that we weren't going to make much progress with either the Ukrainians or the Kazakhs until their political needs were met. We were fortunate that we had scheduled Kravchuk and then Nazarbayev for meetings with the President in Washington in May. Yeltsin would come in June for a full-fledged summit. The political symbolism of being received at the White House would certainly help the Ukrainians' psychological need to demonstrate their independence as well as Nazarbayev's desire to exhibit our "special relationship." To reinforce both, we drafted "joint statements" for the Ukrainians and Kazakhs, to illustrate the close ties they had to America.

I felt that if we could get the Ukrainians pinned down on the START Protocol, that would give us the leverage we needed to get the Kazakhs to agree as well. By obtaining a commitment to non-nuclear status by Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, we would, in turn, address one of the most serious security challenges in the region, as well as meet our objective that only one nuclear power survive the breakup of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, it would strengthen the domestic position of Yeltsin and the democrats against rabid nationalists, and provide further impetus for Russian reform and the expansion of U.S.-Russian cooperation during the summit. Moreover, Moscow clearly was not going to act to reach agreement on START II until this aspect of START itself was solved.

As a consequence, from April 28 through May 4, I spoke to Zlenko eight times, as we haggled over the protocol and the side letter of assurances that would go along with it. Initially, the Ukrainians had two sets of problems. The first related to the Ukrainian Rada, its parliament; Kravchuk was unwilling to make a legally binding commitment or agree to a date certain for eliminating nuclear weapons, because he felt that these were decisions for the Rada. Second, Ukraine wanted security guarantees and wanted the elimination of nuclear weapons on the territory of the former Soviet Union to be under international control.

While Zlenko and I worked through the draft protocol and side letter, I came to feel a high degree of uncertainty about whether any issue we had supposedly resolved had truly been put to bed. There was a certain amount of "play" in the Ukrainian formulations, and I was nervous that we might never close the negotiation. On May 1, for example, Zlenko added the phrase "territorial integrity" to the side letter, a clear reference to the dispute then under way with Russia over the Black Sea fleet and the Crimea. I eliminated that, but we still didn't have complete agreement.

To ensure I didn't lose the Russians, I called Kozyrev on May 1 and again on May 2. I explained to him that we were now working to obtain a protocol and legally binding side letters, and that because of the need for parliaments to ratify the NPT, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine would

agree to accede to the NPT at the "earliest possible time," instead of a date certain. Kozyrev was concerned about the ambiguities inherent in some of our proposed language, but felt our approach would work nonetheless if everyone could be convinced to sign on. I told him that even though Kravchuk was due in Washington in three days, I was far from certain of obtaining Ukrainian agreement. "Additional pressure on the Ukrainians might lead to the signing of the protocol," Kozyrev observed, "though Kiev is playing a very dangerous, if typically Soviet, psychological game," a clear reference to the Communist Party backgrounds of Kravchuk and Zlenko.

On May 4, I called Zlenko to try to complete the side letter. His draft text included the language on international supervision of the elimination of nuclear weapons, an approach we couldn't accept because it would make the international community, not Ukraine, responsible for removing or destroying nuclear weapons on Ukrainian soil. When I tried to point out that we had already decided that that approach would not work, Zlenko told me that the idea of international supervision had been proposed by the Ukrainian President and the Rada. "Moreover, the letter is already signed. President Kravchuk is out of his office and will be unavailable to sign a new letter prior to departing for Washington. In any event, he would be irritated by any changes."

"The START Treaty does not provide for international control or supervision," I responded, "and the U.S. government is not willing to have this as a condition of Ukraine following through on its obligations." I told him that, if need be, we could amend Kravchuk's letter in ink, but if agreement couldn't be reached prior to the Ukrainian President's arrival, then President Bush would have to take up the issue directly with him.

"I want you to know," I continued, "how deeply I regret that this matter is still unresolved." I then read him an editorial in that day's *New York Times*, entitled "Nuclear Backsliding in Ukraine." It suggested that political and economic support be withheld from Ukraine until it made a commitment to eliminate nuclear weapons. "That's why I've been working at this for three weeks, so it won't mar President Kravchuk's visit," I said.

Finally Zlenko got the message. He said he "personally" saw no problem with eliminating the disputed phrase, but would have to try to reach Kravchuk. An hour later, he called me back, a little more frantic than before, and said he hadn't been able to talk to Kravchuk. I told him we'd just have to talk when they arrived in Washington.

Upon Kravchuk's arrival, I rode with him to Blair House, where he would be staying during the visit. "Mr. President," I began, "this visit is very important for both our countries. For the first time, the leader of a democratic and independent Ukraine is visiting the United States." I went on to explain how much we wanted his visit to succeed, but that required

closing on the protocol and the side letter. I told him, "We understand why you want some form of control over weapons once they leave Ukraine." But we couldn't accept that in START. He only needed to add the words "the position of Ukraine" to the offending sentence and we would be done. He agreed, and the visit ended up as a major success for U.S.-Ukrainian relations.

Just as important, it isolated Nazarbayev, who had given an interview on May 5—the day of the Bush-Kravchuk meeting—with the *Washington Post*, in which he said he was seeking security guarantees from Russia, China, and the United States before Kazakhstan would give up its nuclear weapons. But with the Ukrainians on board, Nazarbayev had nowhere to go, so I felt fairly confident when I wrote him on May 13, outlining our suggested approach to START and reiterating our 1968 NPT commitment. He called me back on May 16, two days before he was due to arrive in Washington to see President Bush. He told me that Kazakhstan had received a collective security guarantee from Russia and, combined with our NPT commitment, he felt secure in signing the START Protocol and joining the NPT as a non-nuclear weapons state. I noted that we also needed a side letter, and he said he would send one through our Ambassador, Bill Courtney. But in Moscow, on the way to the United States, Nazarbayev remarked, "The question of giving Kazakh territory for our common defense and for deployment of nuclear missiles will be decided on mutually advantageous grounds," a signal that he might be trying to cut a deal with the Russians to keep part of his nuclear arsenal.

Once the Kazakh President arrived in Washington at midafternoon on Monday, May 18, I spent an hour with him at Blair House, and then we breakfasted for an hour the next day in an effort to finish off the agreement, which we did in time for President Bush and Nazarbayev to announce it Tuesday afternoon. The START Protocol was done, and we would sign it that weekend in Lisbon, where all the states involved were meeting for the conference on assistance to the former Soviet Union. I breathed a sigh of relief. Three months of negotiating were over—or so I thought.

Unfortunately, even as I was headed to Lisbon, we were still haggling. In London for a stopover, I found out that the Ukrainians were balking, and so I called Zlenko from my suite at the Churchill Hotel. Within a minute of the conversation, it became clear he was backing away from minor issues we had already resolved. That infuriated me; there's nothing worse in a negotiation than to have an interlocutor who you begin to feel can't be trusted. Finally, I had enough and slammed down the receiver. "This guy's a liar," I blurted to no one in particular. "He is nothing more than a Communist. I'm sick of this issue."

Dennis Ross, who had been listening in on the conversation as my note

taker, came into the room with a huge smile on his face. "What are you smiling at?" I asked.

"Zlenko didn't realize you weren't on the line anymore. He kept talking and talking and when he didn't get any response, he said, 'Mr. Secretary? Mr. Secretary? Mr. Secretary! Oh, no, he hung up.' "

In Lisbon, it was just as bad. At 4:30 P.M. on Saturday, May 23—the day we were scheduled to sign the protocol—I had Zlenko and Kozyrev come to my holding room. Without any staff or note takers, I asked them to sit down. "Gentlemen," I said, "you need to work this out, and I'm not going to let you leave here until you do. So you better get to work." After looking at each other warily like two boxers in a prizefight, Zlenko and Kozyrev finally started talking and resolved their differences. After Zlenko left, Kozyrev exclaimed, "This is worse than dealing with a Bulgarian Communist!"*

Frankly, by that point, I didn't care. I just wanted the protocol completed. Finally, at 8:10 P.M., I filed into the Winter Garden Room of the Ritz Hotel with representatives from Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Ukraine. In an austere, wordless ceremony—we didn't want a shouting match—the protocol was signed, the letters were exchanged, and six minutes later, we had reached our goal: there would only be one nuclear power on the territory of the former Soviet Union.†

A Visit to a Friend

From Lisbon, I left on a six-hour flight to the former Soviet Union, not to negotiate over nuclear arms but to visit Georgia, the former Soviet republic now led by my friend Eduard Shevardnadze. Georgia was the only republic I had not visited since the August coup. It had been racked with turmoil in the past months, as its democratically elected leader turned despot, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, had been violently ousted in January after a year of oppressive rule. Armed thugs still roamed Tbilisi's streets at night, and with the perpetual threat of unrest looming, the government implemented an 11:00 P.M. curfew.‡

Shevardnadze had returned that spring as Georgia's interim President,

*In my report to the President that night, I wrote, "Suffice it to say, the wrangling brought back some pretty vivid memories of eight trips to the Middle East and what it took to nail down the invitation for the Madrid Conference."

†However, the Clinton administration had to deal with some delay and backsliding by Ukraine in taking the actions agreed to in the protocol.

‡The curfew was better at protecting innocents than deterring criminals. Indeed, during the night, gunfire could be heard outside the guest house where I was staying.