

# ARMS CONTROL OBJECTIVES OF THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION

SAM B. ROVIT

*Arms control proposals crafted by the Reagan administration have been more ambitious in their scope than all that preceded them. Curiously, these proposals were developed by men who, prior to their appointment to the administration in 1980, were sharply critical of past American arms control efforts. A common refrain among them was that arms control should do less, rather than more. Sam Rovit explores this contradiction by analyzing the striking contrast in the positions of arms control architects Richard Perle and Richard Burt prior to and since joining the Reagan White House. Mr. Rovit concludes that this dichotomy represents the key to understanding the true objectives of arms control in the Reagan administration — objectives distinct from those publicly proclaimed — and assesses why it is that such a schism has arisen.*

One of the most regrettable developments of the last twenty years has been the elevation of arms control to the realm of the sacrosanct. The individual who fails to support the *kind* of arms control that has been enshrined in the SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks) treaties is stigmatized as a warmonger. Questioning arms control as it has been pursued is considered heresy, as if alternative approaches do not exist. The unfortunate result has been that even those who doubt the sagacity of recent arms limitation efforts are unable to offer significantly different policies without risking political defeat and ostracism.

This dilemma is seen most clearly in the Reagan administration. All of the top officials nominated to posts with responsibility for arms control had been sharply critical of past American arms control efforts. Their nominations raised little controversy due to the weight of President Reagan's electoral victory and to the pledge of the president and his appointees to secure major reductions in nuclear weaponry. Thus, from the first day of the new administration,

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Sam B. Rovit, former partner at Dawson-Butwick Publishers, is a candidate for the MALD degree at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy.

individuals with alternative approaches to arms control found it necessary to modify their views.

The commitment by the new administration to a "new" and "more serious" kind of arms control emphasizing reductions is remarkable when one considers the background of those who were to formulate arms control policy. Major reductions of central weapons systems were contrary to virtually everything they had written. Arms control with reductions as the central objective was also at variance with the literature produced over two decades by such scholars of arms control as Hedley Bull, Thomas Schelling, Morton Halperin, and Herman Kahn.<sup>1</sup>

Whereas writings of figures such as Richard Perle and Richard Burt prior to their nominations would have led one to predict they would seek to de-emphasize arms control and scale back public expectations of what arms control could produce, their actions in office appeared to do just the opposite.

Publicly, the new administration mouthed objectives for arms control similar to those of past administrations. As time passed, those objectives became increasingly ambitious until the chimera of total disarmament, a will-o'-the-wisp not seriously entertained since the late 1950s, began to appear with increasing frequency in public statements. Disarmament was to be made conceivable by the arrival of weapons systems which would restore primacy in war to the defense. Yet these defensive systems were also at odds with the new arms control officials' pronouncements prior to their tenure in the administration. And the idea that disarmament could be achieved certainly finds no support in their pasts.

The disparities between the personal views of such influential figures as Perle and Burt and their public agenda leads to one conclusion: the real objectives of arms control in the Reagan administration are not those objectives offered for public consumption.

This is not to say that the administration would be displeased if the Soviets agreed to its proposals. Rather, as a review of the pre- and post-appointment positions of administration arms controllers will illustrate, the real objectives of arms control under President Reagan have been primarily political. The public positions have been formulated to appease domestic and allied constituencies and to secure congressional passage of defense programs deemed

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1. Hedley Bull, *The Control of the Arms Race*, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1961); Thomas Schelling and Morton Halperin, *Strategy and Arms Control* (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1961); Herman Kahn, *On Thermonuclear War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1960).

necessary to redress a decade of relative neglect. At the same time, the arms control positions impeccably represent American interests and appear to be seeking that which administration rhetoric denied existed — a free lunch. They read like national wish lists, demanding major concessions from the Soviets while offering very little in return.

The development of this schism between true, or private objectives and feigned, or public ones, is largely attributable to the charged emotions which have come to dominate discussions of arms control and nuclear weapons. In place of a rational and logical debate over objectives, threat assessments, and appropriate responses, we have a polarized battle with as much division and lack of communication as heard in discussions over abortion and affirmative action. Each side is convinced that its position is not only right but morally superior.

Despite its close identification with the conservative position on other issues, the Reagan administration could not repudiate arms control outright because it needed congressional and popular support for a large overhaul of the defense establishment. Administration officials understood that many members of Congress would have been unable to support additions to the nuclear arsenal if the public perceived that arms control held scant prospects for eliminating those weapons. They agreed to abide by the unratified SALT II treaty because to jettison it would have jeopardized congressional votes for defense appropriations. (The decision was made easier because in 1980 compliance with SALT II did not compromise plans for defense modernization.)

Even now, after SALT II would have expired legally had it been signed into law, the administration has stirred controversy in Congress with its ambiguous pronouncements on the treaty: it is dead; it will die soon; maybe it is dead.<sup>2</sup> The recent outcry over SALT II illustrates in mild form what would have befallen the administration had it advocated the kind of arms control which Burt and Perle believed appropriate.

A review of the pre- and post-1980 positions on arms control of virtually every major arms control policymaker in the Reagan administration would reveal sharp contradictions. This article, however, concentrates on Richard Perle and Richard Burt because of their dominance over arms control.

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2. Steven Roberts, "Moves Begin in Congress to Insure that U.S. Observes Arms Treaty," *New York Times*, 4 June 1986, p. A13; Gerald Boyd, "President Urges Congress to Back His Arms Build-Up," *New York Times*, 4 June 1986, p. A1; John Cushman, Jr., "Panel in Senate Cuts Funds From Missile Defense Plan," *New York Times*, 21 June 1986, p. A50.

## I. EARLY VIEWS OF RICHARD PERLE

Perle, though an assistant secretary of defense for international security policy and thus only on the third rung of the Defense Department bureaucracy, wields enormous power over arms control policy because of the relative lack of knowledge on the subject by his superiors, as well as his overwhelming commitment to the subject. Virtually his entire professional career had been spent as a key aide to Sen. Henry Jackson (D-Wash.), one of the most effective critics of arms control in Congress. Due to their long relationship, and in view of Perle's own statements, it is assumed that when Jackson spoke he reflected Perle's beliefs. Aside from Sen. Jackson's record on SALT I and II, Perle left little evidence of his own position — with one important exception: a monograph composed prior to the initial SALT I negotiations in Helsinki and published in April 1970.<sup>3</sup> Its contents coincide with Jackson's criticisms of arms control and with themes Perle was to evoke numerous times over the next decade.

In the monograph, Perle identifies three criteria by which he believes arms control should be assessed: the effect on the stability of the strategic balance; negotiability; and visibility. Perle acknowledged that the three conflicted to a certain extent and he maintained that stability should be the controlling factor. "[T]he stability of the strategic balance rests in minimizing the difference to a potential aggressor between striking first and striking second,"<sup>4</sup> wrote Perle. Anything which widens this difference — whatever else it might do — decreases stability and should be avoided.

For Perle, stability requires that there be no advantage in striking first, and that the ability to inflict a great deal of damage exist — being able to destroy a couple of cities is not enough. This leads to the position that the number of missiles should be kept high. Perle's argument, which is counter to that advocating minimal deterrence,<sup>5</sup> conflicts with the desire to reduce destruction and, as Perle conceded, is less valid now than it was when missiles were slow to respond and were themselves soft (i.e., vulnerable) targets.

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3. Richard Perle, "Criteria for the Evaluation of Arms Control Options," ASG Monograph No. 3 (Waltham, Mass.: Westinghouse Electric Corp., Advanced Studies Group, April 1970).

4. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

5. Robert Jervis, "What Deters? The Ability to Inflict Assured Destruction," reprinted from *Political Science Quarterly* 94 (Winter 1979/1980): 617-633, in *American Defense Policy*, eds. John Reichart and Steven Sturm, Fifth Edition (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), p. 161-170.

This led him, as it had others before him,<sup>6</sup> to distinguish between types of weapons and technologies on the basis of how stabilizing or destabilizing they might be.<sup>7</sup> One particular technology Perle then found destabilizing is interesting in light of the Reagan administration's current emphasis on active defense as embodied by the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI):

Large-scale programs of population defense coupled with highly accurate large yield ballistic missiles are a threat to the opponent's retention of "assured destruction" capability, and because they admit of possible difference between the consequences of striking first and striking second, are highly destabilizing.<sup>8</sup>

In expanding upon the issue of destabilizing technology, Perle distinguished between static and dynamic stability. Static stability "has to do with the absence of an incentive to strike first, a condition that is a function of the size of the gap between striking first and second, the absolute level of anticipated destruction and the value of the objective . . ."<sup>9</sup> Dynamic stability "is a function of the rate at which the conditions leading to static instability can be changed . . ."<sup>10</sup>

Perle concluded that the maintenance of stability requires:

that those systems or technologies subject to constraints through agreement should 1) not be central critical elements to the strategic balance; 2) but should require major and visible efforts to produce a change in quality and/or quantity of deployable weapons capable of adversely affecting the strategic balance and thereby producing static instability.<sup>11</sup>

The implications of this assessment are crucial to understanding Perle's position. Weapons which are important to the strategic balance and easily deployed without the other side's knowledge should not be controlled because an asymmetrical deployment — as might occur if one side cheated — would create dynamic instability.

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6. Schelling and Halperin, p. 37-38; Bull, p. 61.

7. Perle, p. 7.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Several points would seem to flow from this position. First, arms agreements should be limited to peripheral weapons systems, thus severely constraining arms control's potential achievements. Second, since "central critical elements" is likely to be interpreted differently by the U.S. and the USSR, it raises serious questions as to whether a basis for negotiation can exist. Third, the position presumes that the U.S. is indifferent between a world in which only it has a certain weapon or technology and one in which both sides have that weapon or technology. In other words, it begs the question whether something that the U.S. alone has might be worth banning rather than end up in a situation in which both countries have it. Perle appears to take the position that the U.S. must avoid controlling any force element which might offer an advantage, no matter how temporary, particularly if the element might be susceptible to secret production by the Soviets, who, it must be presumed, will cheat on a ban that the U.S. would honor. Finally, there is the unstated corollary which follows from exempting "central critical elements" from control: because the U.S. cannot predict whether the other side will develop a certain weapon, it must assume they will and in response develop its own, then take countermeasures when they take measures, *ad infinitum*.

On the issue of negotiability, Perle was brutal. "[A]ny serious arms control option will have at least a plausible negotiability,"<sup>12</sup> he said. But problems of negotiability "may well mean that an optimum balance is unattainable, especially where the optimum sought would require broad changes in the forces on one or both sides."<sup>13</sup> This statement implicitly recognizes that arms control cannot achieve radical restructuring, especially if there is a disagreement between the two sides on objectives and the concept of stability.

Finally, Perle argues that "low visibility" items should be controlled only if their impact on strategic balance is slight and their lead times are long. Of course, the larger the force, the lower the impact of items and the lower the risk involved in limiting low visibility weapons.

Much of Senator Jackson's questioning during hearings in 1972 on SALT I reflected Perle's concern with dynamic stability. Jackson questioned the "tremendous yield" the Soviets were building into their ICBM force and asked whether improved Soviet accuracies might place U.S. Minuteman missiles at risk.<sup>14</sup> His comments also were critical of parts of SALT I which appeared to

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12. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

14. U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Armed Services, *Military Implications of the Treaty on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems and the Interim Agreement on Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms*, 92nd Cong.,

leave loopholes open to the Soviets, such as allowing silo dimensions to increase from 10 percent to 15 percent of their then-current size, and permitting retrofiting. Jackson's concern was that the Soviets would take full advantage of all permissive aspects of the treaty. The U.S. force, meanwhile, would grow vulnerable, particularly since the U.S. had abandoned the notion of an active defense system.<sup>15</sup>

The Jackson Amendment to SALT I, in requiring that future agreements result in equality of numbers, bears Perle's unmistakable concern for non-minimal deterrence (i.e., deterrence which relies on sufficient missiles to enable a second, or retaliatory, strike to cause total destruction), and dynamic stability, concepts he saw SALT I ignoring. As Jackson argued in the debate over his amendment, "It stands to reason . . . that in the long run 'superior' technology cannot be relied on to offset inferior numbers. . . . [O]ver the long run, there is no substitute for equal numbers of launchers, taking into account of throw-weight differentials."<sup>16</sup>

Two other important beliefs expressed by Perle during the debate over SALT II bespeak a deep suspicion of any kind of dealing with the Soviets, especially arms negotiations, and present what amounts to a *prima facie* case against virtually any agreement. First, Perle feared that a treaty limiting arms would lull the U.S. into a false sense of security that would prevent it from spending adequately on defense.<sup>17</sup> The American experience during the 1970s would appear to buttress this position. Secondly, Perle was convinced that the U.S. with its moralist and legalist traditions and its policy of supporting the status quo would be tied strictly to the terms of an agreement, which the Soviets, who possess fewer scruples, would seek to exploit.

Underlying these beliefs are the premises that: in the absence of an agreement the U.S. would be able to muster the requisite will to improve the strategic balance; the probability of nuclear war is higher than that assumed by those favoring treaties; and imbalances which are militarily insignificant may nonetheless contain great political weight.<sup>18</sup> Perle's positions appear to

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2nd. Sess., 1972, in *SALT Handbook: Key Documents and Issues 1972-1979*, ed. Roger Labrie (Washington D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1979), p. 114.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

16. U.S. Congress, Senate, *Congressional Record*, 92nd Cong., 2nd. Sess., 1972, vol. 118, no. 130, p. S13467-S13469, in Labrie, p. 144-145.

17. "Preview of the SALT Debate: 'Killer Amendments Ahead?'" *Time*, 14 June 1979, p. 20.

18. U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, 98th Cong., 2nd. Sess., 1984, *The Role of Arms Control in U.S. Defense Policy*, p. 56.

neglect the possibility that a treaty might be so construed and limited that self-interest alone ensures it is adhered to. Such a limited accord would be subservient to the maintenance of a strong defense, thus ensuring that defense needs not be ignored.

Perle's argument is to the defense field what free market economics is to the financial marketplace: intervention creates more problems than it solves. Its sensitivity to the vagaries of the domestic political process is realistic and prudent, but in its paranoia, limited yet beneficial agreements are rejected out of fear that the process will take on a life of its own, given the strength of its constituency, or that Soviet negotiators will always have the better of their American counterparts.

## II. EARLY VIEWS OF RICHARD BURT

Burt, currently U.S. ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany, wielded as much influence over Reagan administration arms control policy as did Perle. He served as director of the State Department's Bureau of Politico-Military Affairs and then as assistant secretary of state for European affairs, in each position taking charge of arms control because of his superiors' relative lack of experience in the matter. His background as a scholar with the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in London and as a journalist with the *New York Times* gave him a perspective on arms control that was, curiously, more pragmatic than the one Perle's congressional experience gave him. Nevertheless, Burt's official arms control policy positions under President Reagan were as much a departure from the beliefs expressed in his many early papers as was Perle's.

In a 1978 article in *Foreign Affairs*, Burt criticized the SALT II treaty for failing to address the problem of Minuteman vulnerability, and possibly limiting U.S. options for responding to the problem.<sup>19</sup> He noted approvingly the argument that only by defeating SALT II would the U.S. be alert to the changing strategic balance in favor of the Soviets.

Writing a year later in *Foreign Policy*, Burt advocated a more limited role for arms control than it had been accorded during the last decade. He warned of the "tendency of arms control to create obstacles to efforts by the United States and its allies to respond to these problems [of Soviet expansionism and force modernization] through unilateral initiatives,"<sup>20</sup> giving as examples the

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19. Richard Burt, "The Scope and Limits of SALT," *Foreign Affairs* (July 1978).

20. Richard Burt, "A Glass Half-Empty," *Foreign Policy* (Fall 1979), p. 35.

ABM Treaty's foreclosure of point defense for the Minuteman force, and the SALT II protocol's constraint on deployment of mobile intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).

This view closely resembles Perle's 1970 thesis:

[I]n the absence of an agreement, both sides are free to take such measures and countermeasures as they deem necessary within the relevant lead times. This leads, in the best case, to an important force for the mitigation of dynamic instability — the continuing flexibility of response by unilateral development programs. But if one undertakes to refrain from 'self-help' measures . . . then an important corrective to potential shifts in the strategic balance is lost.<sup>21</sup>

Both Burt and Perle clearly viewed arms control agreements as potential hindrances to efficient countermeasures (whereby each side implements countermeasures as deemed appropriate), despite their recognition that this tendency toward worst-case planning promotes dynamic instability.

Burt also argued that the lack of agreement by the superpowers over what constitutes stability results in agreements that ratify rather than restructure the character of the military balance. If, as many have argued, the Soviet conception of stability emphasizes superiority and unilateral invulnerability while the American conception emphasizes equality and mutual vulnerability, then Burt's point makes sense. Demanding concessions from a party that run counter to his conception of stability may not represent serious (or intelligent) negotiations.

The only benefit Burt was able to find in arms control was the degree of predictability which it can produce. He ended his article with a powerful plea not to ask too much of arms control:

Despite the lessons of SALT II, the present administration seems interested in shaping a new set of grandiose goals for the next round of negotiations, such as deep cuts in forces and severe constraints on new technology. *This would be a major mistake.* Asking too much from SALT III runs the risk of raising expectations that will surely be disappointed later, and it places a national security burden on SALT that it cannot bear.<sup>22</sup>

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21. Perle, p. 22.

22. Burt, "A Glass Half-Empty," p. 43 (emphasis added).

Burt's solution to the quandary was to suggest that "an accord that provides both sides with some flexibility for dealing unilaterally with their perceived military problems might be more negotiable and more conducive to overall stability."<sup>23</sup> Such an accord, he reasoned, should be limited, rather than comprehensive.

Burt reiterated many of the same points in an article published in 1980 in *International Security*. He expanded on his belief in the relative disutility of arms control. Ten years of SALT, Burt argued, has shown that arms control is unable to cap Soviet force expansion.<sup>24</sup> Without a change in Soviet strategic attitudes, it is inconceivable that the U.S. can convince the Soviets to dismantle a large portion of their land-based ICBM force. Consequently, the U.S. must look to unilateral measures to deal with force vulnerability and must focus on a strategy of "escalation agility" in order to compete with the Soviet preference for "escalation dominance." Burt meant that the U.S. should exploit its preeminence in command, control, communications, and intelligence ("escalation agility") since it is unlikely to prevail in the development of more and bigger counterforce weapons ("escalation dominance").

To highlight Burt's key points: arms control has failed to produce a shared consensus on the meaning of stability; the lack of agreement on stability severely constrains the possibilities for arms control; arms control tends to ratify rather than restructure; and arms control should be sufficiently limited to retain the ability to deal unilaterally with perceived problems.

The two most influential figures in the Reagan arms control policymaking circle arrived in office with a predilection against arms control as it had been practiced. Burt was more openminded than Perle, but equally convinced that arms control was usually a mistake. Yet, had one based predictions of their policies while in office on their pre-1981 statements, one would have been grossly off the mark.

### III. ARMS CONTROL UNDER THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION

At the start of its term, the Reagan administration faced two fora for arms negotiations: Intermediate Nuclear Force (INF) talks, primarily concerned with Europe, and Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT), focused on inter-continental-range weapons. The administration found itself committed to the

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23. Ibid.

24. Richard Burt, "Reassessing The Strategic Balance," *International Security* (Summer 1980), p. 49.

INF process as a result of the Carter administration's 1979 decision to deploy Pershing II and ground-launched cruise missiles (GLCMs) in Europe and to simultaneously negotiate limits or even elimination of the U.S. missiles and the Soviet SS-20s they were intended to counterbalance. Either the administration had to continue the process or renege on the Carter decision. Ultimately, the administration chose to endorse the Carter approach. The missiles were deployed and negotiations on those missiles have been actively pursued to the present day. Because the administration's approach to strategic weapons (i.e., ICBMs) most clearly demonstrates Burt's and Perle's departure from earlier positions, this article concentrates on SALT and its successor: the Strategic Arms Reductions Talks (START). It is notable, however, that Burt and Perle equally violated their early precepts in the INF talks.

The SALT process was something of a shambles when the Reagan administration entered office. The SALT II treaty had been withdrawn from the Senate without being ratified. Incoming members of the new administration had publicly condemned the SALT II treaty prior to its withdrawal by President Carter and they were in no hurry to resurrect it. In fact, reviewing the positions of top arms control officials in the Reagan administration gives the impression that opposition to SALT II was practically a litmus test for nomination to office.<sup>25</sup> Yet for a number of reasons, the Reagan administration chose to abide by the unratified treaty's terms as long as the Soviets did as well.

Two reasons for this contradiction might be cited. First, SALT II did not stand in the immediate way of any defense modernization programs. The administration voiced its distaste for the treaty and the wrong kind of arms control it represented, while at the same time pleasing important constituencies by grudgingly adhering to it.

Secondly, although President Carter had withdrawn the treaty from the Senate for fear that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan had doomed the chances for ratification, the new administration understood that memories of Afghanistan would fade with time. They reasoned that the House, through which defense authorizations and appropriations must pass, was less antagonistic to

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25. See: Alexander Haig, Jr., "Judging SALT II," *Strategic Review* (Winter 1980); Strobe Talbott, *Deadly Gambits* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), p. 11; U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, 97th Cong., 1st Sess., *Nomination of Kenneth Adelman to be Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1983).

SALT II than was the Senate. An outright repudiation of SALT II could have hindered President Reagan's defense modernization plans.<sup>26</sup>

Aside from SALT II, no ongoing initiative existed to compel the administration to do anything on strategic arms and, in fact, inaction would seem to fit neatly with both Burt's and Perle's philosophies. By mid-1982, however, political pressure to move on strategic arms control compelled the administration to produce a proposal, coined START.

The Reagan administration contended that its emphasis on "reductions" — the "R" in START — represented a new, "more serious" form of arms control and a break with past practices that essentially ratified existing force levels.

Sizeable reductions in nuclear weapons as an arms control centerpiece turned out to be a particularly astute choice, for it rallied together a most unlikely coalition which, in somewhat tattered form, persists almost five years later. The new policy appealed to image-sensitive politicians who cared more for the appearance of seriousness than for substantial agreement, to hard-line anti-Soviet officials who recognized that proposals for reductions faced virtually insurmountable obstacles (thus ensuring that no agreement would be reached), and to the large public constituency for arms control which understands little of the strategic implications of arms control and tends to favor any kind of agreement over non-agreement.

Over time, this odd coalition began to succumb to the internecine warfare that had to arise whether agreement was reached or not. Officials opposed to agreement became more blatantly anti-agreement in response to modifications proposed by officials concerned with the president's anti-arms control image. The latter officials were, in turn, provoked to modify the U.S. negotiating position out of fear that the hard-liners were making the president look bad. And the public arms control constituency gradually became convinced that the administration was not negotiating seriously and was pursuing arms control primarily to pacify domestic and allied audiences while the real objective — a broad defense modernization — was secured.

From the beginning of the START drafting process, both Burt and Perle departed substantially from their pre-administration positions. Perle's approach was to seek major reductions in warheads and in throw-weight (literally, that which is thrown by a missile: warhead(s), guidance system, etc.). The throw-weight ceiling he sought was just below the American level, but 60

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26. This was made quite clear in 1986 when the administration began to talk seriously about abrogating the then-expired and still unratified treaty. See footnote 2.

percent beneath the Soviet level.<sup>27</sup> This is because the Soviets have invested in so-called "heavy" missiles — missiles capable of throwing many large warheads. Most of the Soviet nuclear force is concentrated in land-based ICBMs (versus the U.S. preference for submarine-launched ballistic missiles — SLBMs) and the Soviets have heavier ICBMs than the U.S.

By demanding such a drastic cut, Perle was a) striking at the heart of U.S. Minuteman vulnerability (since the Minutemen were made vulnerable by the sheer number of accurate ICBMs the Soviets had amassed); b) violating his own precept that one only control items on the periphery of the strategic balance; c) demanding a complete restructuring of Soviet forces (which he had earlier predicted was unobtainable) while offering nothing in return and; d) attempting to control something which was unverifiable or, at the least, exceptionally difficult to verify by U.S. national technical means (i.e., satellites).

Perle's approach was crafted so as to allow the U.S. modernization program to move forward while demanding that the Soviets dismantle theirs. Perle, as well as all others in the administration, never made clear from a military perspective why fewer warheads on each side were better than more, given equal levels on both sides and given that disarmament is considered impossible.

Burt took a different approach. Despite a professed disbelief in the utility of arms control, Burt apparently placed great importance on the political benefits of obtaining agreement during President Reagan's term in office. This led him, ironically, to take a position similar to that of previous SALT negotiators. He advocated a higher limit on warheads than did Perle and, ignoring throw-weight, he proposed a limit on launchers.<sup>28</sup>

The rationale behind Burt's plan was that one should limit only that which one can verify. Launchers are verifiable by national technical means, whereas throw-weight is more difficult to ascertain. Further, contended Burt, as missiles become more and more accurate, the importance of throw-weight diminishes. One can analogize the situation to a hunter who can fell an animal with a .22 instead of requiring a .45. Burt believed the START proposal had to look plausible if it were to counter American and European cries for arms control and he understood that asking the Soviets to divest themselves of their

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27. Talbott, p. 235. Talbott's excellent account of internal jockeying on arms control, 1981-1983, provided the basis for most of my references to this period.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 240.

most modern and important weapon systems would cost the U.S. a great deal in return.

Despite the fact that Burt's plan was more plausible than Perle's, it went against the grain of his pre-administration writings. Here he was proposing major reductions in weapons and setting limits on the number of land-based ICBMs and the number of ballistic missile warheads — actions that clearly favored the American predilection for sea-based systems and single-warhead missiles. Yet just two years previously Burt had argued that deep cuts would be too "grandiose" a goal for arms control.

Burt and Perle both must have recognized that opposing arms control, or seeking only modest arms control, might well have produced worse results than taking charge of the process and putting up a façade of serious arms control negotiations.

This harkens back to an observation by Herman Kahn in *On Thermonuclear War*. He acknowledged that "[i]t is psychologically very difficult for responsible military planners to take arms control seriously and constructively."<sup>29</sup> But, he added, "by being constructive [on the issue of arms control] . . . rather than blindly opposing all measures, they are more likely to increase their influence against undesirable programs and to promote constructive measures."<sup>30</sup>

To understand the pressure for arms control during the early 1980s one need only note that on August 6, 1982, 19 months after President Reagan had been inaugurated and with no sign of movement on arms control, the U.S. House of Representatives defeated by only two votes a motion to freeze nuclear forces. For the administration, the freeze movement was a substantial threat to defense modernization. In advocating a unilateral act in the face of continued Soviet expansion, it embodied the worst aspects of arms control, as understood by Burt, Perle, and others. Furthermore, it would have occurred at a time when the Soviets had just completed a major force expansion, but before the U.S. had implemented its counter program.

Critics charged that Perle was out to kill any agreement and that he was not serious about arms control. His approach was to deliver an ultimatum — give up the backbone of your strategic forces or forget about a deal — rather than to seek a negotiated agreement that necessarily involved a bargain — I'll give up X if you give up Y. It does not follow, however, that he was frivolous about arms control, or that he was anti-arms control.

29. Kahn, p. 232.

30. Ibid.

Perle would argue (and his 1970 thesis would support this) that he was anti-bad arms control, i.e., agreement for the sake of agreement. Facing widespread support for the concept of arms control — support that had been generated by an amorphous fear of nuclear weapons, by overblown expectations of the negotiating process, and by inflammatory statements on the subject of nuclear warfighting that had started with Defense Secretary James Schlesinger in the Nixon administration and escalated in the Reagan administration — Perle's response was to craft a position that was unassailably in U.S. interests, beyond negotiation, and unrealistic. Force modernization could proceed without fear of a rollback caused by arms control. In the unlikely event that the proposal was accepted, its insistence on deep force cuts and restructuring would solve the problems of Minuteman vulnerability and strategic imbalance. It also enabled Perle to say that the administration was working hard toward arms control and that Reagan arms control was more serious than past administrations' efforts because it sought deep cuts and radical restructuring, not just ratification of the status quo.

When critics asked why there had been no progress, Perle could reply that tough negotiations take time, especially when they involve a proposal as revolutionary as his.

Thus, in response to questions in 1981 from Sen. Joseph Biden (D-Del.), Perle said:

You asked earlier, are deep reductions feasible. Deep reductions are like any other proposal that would have a real impact, in that they are only feasible if we put them forward and stick with them and speak as a nation with one voice.<sup>31</sup>

Burt took a more pragmatic outlook and one more concerned with alliance politics. In his view, any proposal must appear reasonable if it is to keep the more ardent advocates of arms control at bay. This means proposals shaped more with mutual interests in mind — proposals in the tradition of SALT, as Perle was quick to point out. After all, both nations signed SALT I and II because each party believed it would benefit from the treaties under then-existing conditions.

Plausibility accounted for Burt's preference for using launchers as the unit of account (they are verifiable) and for not demanding major reductions in the

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31. U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, 97th Cong., 1st. Sess., *International Security Policy* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1981), p. 36.

Soviets' strongest suit: throw-weight. Plausibility also led Burt to take a position on de-MIRVing at odds with the rest of the administration. A MIRVed missile carries multiple independently targeted re-entry vehicles (warheads and possibly dummy warheads). De-MIRVing was a new theology that began to spread in the beginning of the Reagan administration. It is now enshrined in the 1983 Scowcroft Commission report, a 1986 report by Rep. Les Aspin (D-Wisc.), chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, and in the 1986 report of the Defense Science Task Force on Small Intercontinental Ballistic Missile Modernization.<sup>32</sup>

"De-MIRVers" supported the single-warhead Midgetman missile, rather than the MIRVed MX, as the ICBM of the future and advocated using arms control to promote a shift away from MIRVed ICBMs and back to single-warhead missiles. Single-warhead missiles like the Midgetman make sense, they argued, not only because they are easier to make mobile (and mobility helps offset MIRVed attacks of high accuracy)<sup>33</sup> but because a single-warhead missile is a less lucrative target. MIRVing is destabilizing because the concentration of many warheads on a few missiles means a preemptive attack could wipe out a larger percentage of the opposing force than if the warheads were spread over a larger number of missiles.

Burt understood the problem but considered it unrealistic to ask the Soviets to give up their prized heavy MIRVed ICBMs. His proposal not only ignored de-MIRVing, but actually encouraged MIRVing by setting a low launcher ceiling for ICBMs and SLBMs.

The proposal that was ultimately unveiled by President Reagan in his May 9, 1982 speech at Eureka College in Illinois was a compromise between Perle's and Burt's approaches. It divided the negotiations into two phases: phase one would address Burt's launcher ceiling; phase two would tackle Perle's throw-weight ceiling.<sup>34</sup> The START proposal ironically was exactly the kind of proposal that Burt and Perle would have criticized roundly had they been on the outside looking in. It encouraged MIRVing, demanded much from the Soviets without offering anything of equal value in return, and generally laid

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32. *Report of the President's Commission on Strategic Forces* (The Scowcroft Commission) 6 April 1983, p. 14; *Report of the Defense Science Advisory Task Force on Small Intercontinental Ballistic Missile Modernization* (The SICBM Report) March 1986, p. 14; Charles Mohr, "House Report Supports Single-Warhead Missile," *New York Times*, 10 February 1986, p. 1.

33. *The SICBM Report*, p. 3.

34. Talbott, p. 268-269.

a heavy burden on the arms control process. It was, in short, a thoroughly political proposal which was directed more at home consumption than at Soviet negotiators.

The Scowcroft Commission Report in early 1983 was a major impetus for change. It criticized the START proposal for encouraging MIRVing and advised that stability would be fostered through negotiating arms limitations and reductions in terms of equal levels of warheads of roughly equivalent yields, not in terms of launchers.<sup>35</sup> The report advised an upward revision of the START launcher ceiling and gently chided the administration for its emphasis on reductions to the detriment of stability.

The Scowcroft Commission proposals were not really incorporated into a START proposal until later in 1983 when continued stalemate in the talks and trouble with the MX program on Capitol Hill led the administration to accept a congressional proposal known as the "double build-down" scheme. The new proposal was innovative — it created the concept of a "standard weapon station," for example, which was a standard unit of account allowing one to work with weapons as disparate as bombers and submarines — but it went nowhere, in part because the original START proposal remained on the negotiating table.

The Soviets abandoned START in December 1983, a month after they walked out of the INF talks in protest over U.S. deployment of Pershing IIs and GLCMs. It soon became clear that the Soviets not only gained nothing by walking out, but they emerged as the spoiler, a move that served to channel some of the European arms control movement's wrath away from the U.S.

Post-walkout negotiations have produced no breakthroughs, although changes have occurred. With the ascendancy of Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviets gained a spokesman as adept at public relations as President Reagan and he has operated quite effectively in the arms control arena. The now central issue of SDI also represents an important divergence of the START focus.

Prior to the Soviet walkout, SDI did not figure prominently because it was only proposed in March 1983 and the concept was so new and ambitious that no one understood what might be involved or how serious the administration was about pursuing it. During the hiatus between the late 1983 walkout and the resumption of talks in spring 1985, the Reagan administration made clear that SDI was not a passing fad. The Soviets became genuinely concerned that

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35. *The Scowcroft Commission*, p. 23.

the project might become so entrenched that halting it would prove impossible and this factor alone was probably instrumental in persuading the Soviets to resume negotiations.

The two countries agreed to resume talks on the basis of linking offensive and defensive weapons. Negotiations were to be conducted in three parts: strategic offensive systems; strategic defensive systems; and theater nuclear weapons. Prior to the opening of talks, then National Security Advisor Robert MacFarlane explained that American priorities at the talks were: reducing offensive systems to equal levels through negotiations; unilaterally reversing the Soviet imbalance by force expansion and modernization; and strengthening deterrence through greater reliance on defense.<sup>36</sup> Despite the high priority placed on the first objective, MacFarlane was doubtful that it could be achieved.

Administration arms control advisor Paul Nitze provided a similar but more detailed list of objectives: equitable and verifiable deep cuts; resolution of concerns over erosion of the ABM Treaty resulting from Soviet actions; education of the Soviets regarding the new U.S. strategic concept of moving from deterrence based on mutual assured destruction to deterrence based more on defense; and ultimately elimination of all nuclear weapons.<sup>37</sup>

The Americans thus continued to harp on reductions, but with an increased emphasis on defense and a utopian call for a world without nuclear weapons. The Soviet position continued to favor a freeze and a ban on SDI.<sup>38</sup>

In September 1985, the Soviets proposed a 50 percent reduction in offensive weapons, contingent on a ban on SDI.<sup>39</sup> In response, the U.S. in October offered a counterproposal which raised the ceiling on land-based ICBM warheads, but called for a 50 percent overall reduction in throw-weight.<sup>40</sup>

With its continued emphasis on throw-weight, the American proposal did not depart much from earlier positions and was put forth mainly for public relations purposes.

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36. Robert MacFarlane, "Strategic Defense Initiative," speech to the Overseas Writers Association, Washington D.C., 7 March 1985, in U.S. Department of State Bureau of Public Affairs *Current Policy No. 670*.

37. Paul Nitze, "Arms Control: The First Round in Geneva," speech to the National Press Club, Washington D.C., 1 May 1985, in U.S. Department of State Bureau of Public Affairs *Current Policy No. 698*.

38. *Ibid.*

39. Bernard Weinraub, "Soviet Reported to Offer 50% Cut in Nuclear Arms," *New York Times*, 28 September 1985, p. 1.

40. Leslie Gelb, "Arms Offer: Gap Narrows," *New York Times*, 1 November 1985, p. A15.

Gorbachev's January 15, 1986 speech calling for the elimination of all nuclear weapons by the year 2000 was both a public relations gesture and artfully aimed at dividing the U.S. from its NATO allies (calling as it did for the removal of all U.S. and Soviet middle-range ballistic missiles from Europe, contingent upon a ban on SDI).

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

From the preceding review, it is evident that the Reagan administration's actual approach to arms control differed markedly from the philosophy espoused by Burt and Perle prior to their joining that administration.

The two men who shaped arms control policy were summed up as follows in a perceptive magazine report:

Richard Perle is widely seen as an ideologue who believes such negotiations are useless — even dangerous — for the United States because the Soviet Union “lies all the time.” Richard Burt is regarded as a pragmatist who thinks America must try to curb the arms race if only to prevent Moscow from gaining a worldwide propaganda advantage.<sup>41</sup>

The descriptions seem accurate. Perle was less flexible than Burt and he was convinced that the Soviets could take advantage of the U.S. in any agreement because they would exploit any loophole, disregarding the “spirit” of the agreement, while the U.S. would observe the agreement meticulously and inevitably slack off on defense programs. He supported ambitious arms control, not minor measures, but knew the demands he was making would never be met.

In office, Burt turned out to be quite willing to compromise his principles. Outside office he had warned about the disutility of arms control and the dangers that would result from expecting too much of it. In office he worried less about enhancing security and about the resiliency of arms control as a process and more about President Reagan's political future. If arms control was to be the battleground in a propaganda war with the USSR, then the U.S. would have to sacrifice serious arms control in order to fend off the

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41. “Richard Perle and Richard Burt: Shadow Warriors Over Arms Control,” *U.S. News and World Report*, 21 January 1986, p. 15.

Soviet attack. The alternative would have been really bad arms control — such as a unilateral freeze — imposed by domestic or alliance political pressure.

The arms control objectives of the Reagan administration as publicly stated and practically pursued must be read on two levels. Ostensibly, the administration was pursuing a new, more serious form of arms control which, through radical restructuring, would promote stability as compared with past agreements which had only ratified existing levels.

The administration objectives, however — reductions, stability, equality, and verifiability — reflect national, not mutual objectives.<sup>42</sup> They are simplistic buzzwords which sound good but have not been adequately defined and justified.

“Reductions” is the rallying cry, yet in the absence of a serious belief that disarmament is possible, why is less better? Lower levels of weapons increase the importance of having a highly accurate verification ability. Lower levels also increase the advantage of a sudden technological breakthrough and ultimately weaken deterrence by making a first strike feasible or by ensuring that a second strike does not result in annihilation. Finally, lower levels likely would be achieved only in the peripheral weapons systems that are viewed as expendable, not in the systems that comprise counterforce capability. Prior to 1980, neither Burt nor Perle would have disagreed with such an assessment.

“Equality,” the second objective, needs definition. Equality in throw-weight? Launchers? Force structure? Technology? Equality where? In every theater? As Burt pointed out, there are cases where the U.S. would want superiority to achieve overall equality.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, is equality in nuclear firepower in the European theater desirable if the Warsaw Pact forces have a conventional superiority? And what about the problem of assessing the value of forces to calculate equality or inequality?

“Stability” is as nebulous a term as equality and as unimpeachable. One man’s stability may require another’s instability. If one takes Perle’s initial definition of stability — the lack of an advantage to striking first — then most would agree we inhabit a relatively stable strategic environment today. Why then the push for reductions? Perle also argued against constraining central elements critical to the strategic balance. Yet he did just that by targeting Soviet throw-weight for reductions. Perle also demonstrated how opinions can differ over whether a weapon is stabilizing or destabilizing. Prior

42. George Shultz, “Realism and Responsibility: The U.S. Approach to Arms Control,” address before the League of Women Voters, Detroit, 14 May 1984, in *Department of State Bulletin*, June 1984, p. 28.

43. Burt, “A Glass Half-Empty,” p. 40.

to 1980 he considered active defenses destabilizing; since 1980, just the reverse. The same holds true for Burt's flip on defense.

Finally, "verifiability" is properly classified as a necessary criterion of a good agreement, rather than as an objective of arms control (defining "objective" as what one aims to achieve by controlling arms). But even supposing it were an objective, it ignores at least two important facts. First, self-interest ought to be the controlling reason for an agreement, particularly if, as Perle maintains (and with considerable justification), the U.S. errs in trusting the Russians. As long as the U.S. uses the self-interest of the Soviets as a limiting parameter for what should be included in an agreement, the importance of verifiability can be diminished. The price is the sacrifice of comprehensive and ambitious arms control for modest measures.

The second consideration that should be borne in mind is that verifiability is an issue for the U.S. to an extent that far exceeds its importance to the Soviet Union. An agreement between the two countries would be enforced from within the U.S. The open nature of the American system makes it difficult to hide cheating and easy to gather information. As the opposite is true for the Soviets, they have little interest in agreeing to invasive forms of verification and consequently can use concessions on verification to extract a high price from the U.S.

These criticisms of the Reagan arms control objectives might easily have been made by Reagan officials, were they themselves not the architects. The only conclusion one can draw is that the real objectives are not those issued for public consumption and that the proposals which have been offered, while they would be welcomed heartily were they accepted, are not seriously expected to be successful.

Arms control under the Reagan administration has departed from the recent past only in its primary emphasis on political objectives (although, in its defense, the administration would claim that the political objectives further military ones). These political objectives have been to deflect criticism at home and abroad, protect a program of defense modernization and expansion, and project a positive image to the uncommitted Third World and anti-nuclear protesters targeted by Soviet propaganda. These objectives — constituting what might be called a "hidden agenda" — clearly have been furthered by the proposals advanced by the administration in ways that more modest and negotiable proposals might not have been able to match.

By advancing sweeping draft treaties which would cut weapons systems by 50 percent and hold out the prospect of ultimate general disarmament, the

administration has reaped great political gain at no cost. Were the proposals more limited — some would say realistic — Soviet propaganda might have been able to paint the USSR as being more peaceful and serious about arms control and domestic constituencies raised on the miraculous properties of arms control might have been able to wield greater influence over the defense build-up than was the case.

In this regard, it is important to recall that the Reagan administration entered office with an anti-arms control reputation. This was a large liability, given the perceived need to pursue a defense modernization program and the necessity of securing congressional support for that program. This reputation precluded the kind of approach to arms control that might have been philosophically consonant with Burt's and Perle's beliefs. Had the administration pursued arms control limited to preventing accidents and proliferation, it would have opened itself to criticism from a wider political spectrum than was actually the experience.

It also might have made it more difficult to justify the extensive defense build-up if the administration had acknowledged that arms control holds dim prospects for eliminating the nuclear threat. Instead, the prospects of radical reductions gave the illusion of reversibility that Congress needed to approve additions to the nuclear arsenal.

An assessment of the presumed underlying objectives of arms control in the Reagan years would have to conclude that they have been successfully achieved. Although the anti-arms control image was not dispelled, it has not become a major political liability. The ambitious proposals have ensured that Soviet propaganda was answered and made it difficult for domestic opposition to coalesce around arms control issues. Finally, and probably most important for the Reagan administration, the defense program has been successfully shepherded through Congress.

The future of arms control as a component of national security policy is somewhat difficult to evaluate. The Reagan administration was correct in arguing against agreement for agreement's sake and in insisting that arms control return to its correct role as a part of national security policy, rather than the driving force of national security policy (as they would argue was the case with SALT I and II).

On the other hand, future administrations unencumbered with the reputation of being anti-arms control might be able to reach modest agreements that actually enhance global security. If they do, it will have been made possible in part by the defense modernization program begun by President

Carter and pursued vigorously by President Reagan. Unfortunately, the burdens that arms control has been asked to carry over the past few years, and the likelihood that political objectives will always interfere with military ones, suggest that expectations have been raised to the point where the public may be dissatisfied with modest accords. Just as unfortunate is the likelihood that this situation will continue.

