

Negotiation from Strength: An Interview with Eugene Rostow

Forum: President Reagan has repeatedly argued that the United States and NATO must build up their strategic and theater forces before negotiating arms control agreements with the Soviet Union, yet he has agreed to conduct negotiations before the buildup has really taken place. How do you explain this apparent inconsistency?

Rostow: I explain it very easily. There is no inconsistency because he has never made any such argument that I know of. I was offered the job [as head of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency — ACDA] in the spring of 1981 and specifically discussed this series of questions. And it was quite clear that the President had decided to move ahead *before* the United States had restored the nuclear balance with the Soviet Union.

People like Francois Mitterrand had urged the United States not to undertake such negotiations before the nuclear balance was restored, but President Reagan felt that the matter was so urgent and so important, and that the inherent strength of the United States was so great and so obvious, that the Soviet Union would pay plenty of attention to our positions with or without an exact nuclear balance. And the delay, such as it was, in preparing positions and undertaking these negotiations was entirely a matter of careful analytic preparation, as President Reagan has said.

Forum: What is the Soviet Union trying to achieve through arms control negotiations?

Rostow: The Soviet Union has achieved a great deal through arms control negotiations. It has gained immensely, and expanded greatly, during the period of SALT I and SALT II — during the last ten years. And it is hoping to make comparable gains through its arms control negotiations now. The immediate objective of the Soviet Union in these two nuclear arms negotiations that we are dealing with is to separate the United States from its allies in Europe and Asia and to prevent, above all, United States modernization of its forces — rearmament and closing the gap.

The Soviet Union has achieved a great nuclear advantage during the last ten years. It has moved ahead, especially in the category of ground-based ballistic missiles, and it does not want that great advantage to erode.

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Now beyond that, of course, its overall objectives in the field of arms control are those of its overall objectives in foreign policy generally: trying to isolate Europe, to bring Europe and the Middle East under its control and, on that basis, to extend its influence in Africa and in Asia and, indeed, in Latin America. That is what the Soviet Union means by the phrase "correlation of forces." Through affecting the correlation of forces and its willingness to use force, it is in a very powerful position.

Forum: How do the peace movement in Europe and the nuclear freeze movement in the United States affect American and Soviet negotiation postures in Geneva?

Rostow: Thus far, I think the peace movement in Europe and the nuclear freeze movement here have not directly or significantly affected the negotiating positions of either side. I think the Soviet Union is, of course, trying very hard to exploit nuclear anxiety both in Europe and in America, in order to achieve the goals it wants to achieve through these arms talks, by provoking differences between the United States, Europe and Japan, and by preventing, above all, the modernization of our forces. So any attempt to have a nuclear freeze at current levels would mean that the negotiations in Geneva would be unnecessary so far as the Soviets are concerned. That is to say, if we have a freeze before we've deployed cruise missiles or Pershings, then there is nothing to negotiate about in the INF talks. And, similarly, if we have a freeze before we have made new and modern intercontinental weapons — submarine-based or the ground-based weapons or, indeed, the aircraft — the Soviets would simply lose interest in the negotiations. Their goal in the negotiations would have been satisfied. The peace movements would have a profound effect if they are carried forward and if we get a binding nuclear freeze joint resolution — which would have a force of law in the United States — freezing our nuclear arsenal at current levels or providing that it could not be increased. Then I think the nuclear arms negotiations would simply cease to exist.

Forum: The Reagan Administration, arguing that land-based nuclear forces pose the greatest threat to stability, has proposed significant reductions in such weapons in both the START and the Theater Nuclear Force talks. What incentive do the Soviets, who have based their force posture and doctrine on large numbers of land-based missiles, have to reduce those forces without parallel reductions in SLBMs and bombers, areas of American superiority?

Rostow: Well, in the START negotiation, to take that one first, the United States proposal is that both sides address, in the first instance,

not only land-based missiles but submarine-based missiles. If you take the number of warheads on ICBMs and the submarine-based missiles together, each side has the convenient force of 7,500 warheads. The United States proposal is to reduce that figure of 7,500 to 5,000 with no more than half for each side in land-based missiles. So that means that the Soviet Union would have to reduce its land-based forces more than we would but, on the other hand, we would have to reduce our submarine-based forces more than they would. So the weakness, which your question assumes, does not exist in the START negotiations.

In the intermediate-range negotiations, the question is equally wide of the mark because our proposal there is to reduce the intermediate-range ground-launched missile force on each side to an equal level — the Soviet Union by dismantling its existing stock and we by not building a new stock. Now there is absolutely nothing wrong — nothing morally wrong or politically wrong — with proposing unequal reductions to equal levels. Under the Washington Naval Treaty, the United States sank a lot more naval tonnage than anybody else. And so here we're proposing equal levels, equal deterrence and an end of this most destabilizing competition in the ground-based ballistic missiles. You ask what incentive do they have to make such reductions — they have the incentive of taking a long step towards stability and peace. This is not a bargain between peasants about the price of potatoes.

Forum: How would a nuclear freeze affect the stability of the strategic balance? How would a freeze affect the ability of the United States to prevent Soviet aggression or expansion outside of the European area?

Rostow: A nuclear freeze affecting only the United States, or even one freezing both countries at the current levels, would "freeze-in" a Soviet advantage of great importance, namely the Soviet advantage in ground-based ballistic missiles. It would affect the strategic balance very much, as the legitimation of the SS-18 and SS-19 in SALT I affected the strategic balance. That is to say, it would be extremely adverse to the interests of the United States.

Now, as to the second question. The Soviet advantage in ground-based ballistic missiles mentioned above is the source of Soviet ability to employ nuclear coercion or nuclear blackmail. A freeze would mean that the Soviet Union would be in an excellent position to expand and to prevent any American response to aggression by reason of its ability to control any possible escalation of the crisis. The Soviets would be in the position that the United States was in twenty years ago at the time of the Cuban missile

crisis. They could control the escalation and therefore we would not react effectively.

Forum: What are the effects of an American nuclear freeze resolution which specifies a bilateral and a verifiable freeze? Is such a resolution in itself dangerous?

Rostow: Well, a bilateral and verifiable freeze is profoundly ambiguous and, of course, it is designed to be profoundly ambiguous. It doesn't tell us whether the freeze is at current levels or at some other levels. Some of those draft resolutions that I've seen that have passed state legislatures or the town meetings in Vermont were resolutions that I could readily vote for — they were just so ambiguous and mysterious. They just amounted to saying, "Look, we're worried. We don't like this; do something about this but, for heaven's sake, don't do anything foolish." That's the reason I try, very carefully, to say a nuclear freeze at current levels would be very damaging. But freeze resolutions which specify a bilateral and verifiable freeze — no. Such a resolution would not be dangerous. It would just be confusing and might give the wrong expectations.

Forum: What expectations are those?

Rostow: That we would not build anymore. The Soviet Union might assume that a freeze is a freeze. It seems to me that it is a great diversion of the efforts that are needed on serious subjects.

Forum: Many nuclear strategists have argued that one solution to the problem of ICBM vulnerability would be to build a ballistic missile defense system. This would probably involve abrogation of the SALT I treaty. Do you agree, and what are your views on this?

Rostow: Abrogation of the SALT treaty — or rather its modification — would not be the end of the world. The object is a situation in which the nuclear forces on each side are stable and they are not exposed to pressure for launch on warning. So I do not regard the abrogation of the ABM [antiballistic missile] treaty, or its substantial modification as, in any sense, a catastrophe in itself. The ABM treaty is part of the old MAD doctrine — the mutually assured destruction doctrine — and it suffers from all the weaknesses of that doctrine. However, it is there and at the moment there seems to be no particular reason to modify it.

But the overall problem is to achieve stability and invulnerability of

the ICBM forces on each side, and that will probably have to be done in the end by a combination of factors. One way, of course, is to build a great many of them. Another way is to build lots of smaller ones which will be harder to find and which will be paralyzing simply because they're harder to find. Everybody knows they're numerous but they would be a recipe for mutual deterrence. So there are a good many solutions. One possibility would be ballistic missile defenses, and technology may answer that question in the fairly near future in one of a number of ways.

So my answer, in brief, to your question is that this is without question one possible solution, or part of one possible solution, to the problem — but there are simpler ones. And I hope that the Soviet Union will agree to simpler ones: namely, drastic reductions to equal levels.

Forum: How would a failure to deploy Pershing IIs and cruise missiles affect the ability of the United States to deter a Soviet attack in Europe? How would it affect NATO's policy of flexible response?

Rostow: I think the proper answer to that question would be to start one step back and to emphasize a point that I find very few people really perceive or feel: It is that the nuclear weapon is primarily a political instrument and not a military instrument. The great advantage that the Soviets are now experiencing — having nuclear superiority in the field of ground-based ballistic missiles — deters any expectation of an American response. Very serious people are now saying that the American nuclear guarantee is basically incredible — it can't be used. This means that it is not a question of deterring an attack in Europe so much, or an attack elsewhere, as it is of accepting the consequences of such an attack without the attack being made. These are devices in which you say, "Well, we can't resist an attack, and therefore you can act and we will accept solutions in which the result of an attack will be built into our agreement."

The failure to deploy Pershing IIs and cruise missiles would convince the Soviet Union that a determined psychological warfare campaign can induce profound changes in the policy of NATO. It would mean that it would be very easy, by huffing and puffing, to persuade NATO to do quite a number of other things, not only in terms of its own defenses — dismantling its own defenses or failing to build them up — but in making political accommodations and political adjustments as well. And, perhaps, ultimately removing United States troops from Europe.

Forum: Are there any specific political adjustments that one could foresee Western Europe making in such a situation?

Rostow: Well, sure, the Soviets have tried these things before and they'll always do it again. For example, they might suggest that Norway and Denmark get out of NATO and join a neutral Nordic bloc or that Greece and Turkey get out of NATO.

Forum: What would be the implications if the United States declared, as many have advocated, a policy of "no first use" of nuclear weapons in Europe?

Rostow: It would reduce the credibility of the American nuclear guarantee because deterrence is uncertainty. At the present time and for the last thirty-five years, uncertainty on the Soviet side as to whether we would, in fact, use the nuclear weapon first if the tanks rolled across the German plain against Western Europe has been an important and, most people think, a decisive element in the fact that the Soviet tanks have not rolled across the western plains. If you say, "whatever happens, we will not use those nuclear weapons first in the event of an attack with conventional forces," then you are removing one more barrier to the possibility of those conventional forces being used. I don't see what conceivable advantage that is to our security.

Forum: Paul Nitze and Yuli Kvitsinsky, the top American and Soviet negotiators, reached agreement on a preliminary working draft of a treaty which was then rejected by both superpowers. To what extent was this preliminary agreement a product of the negotiators' personal exploration and to what extent did it derive from the instructions they received from their governments?

Rostow: In the first place, it was not a preliminary working draft of a treaty. It was a sketch, an outline of possible positions or topics to be worked into a draft treaty. It was a trial balloon. It was about a page and a quarter long, maybe a page and a half long, and it indicated the key elements of a possible agreement — a package deal to replace the two proposals which were before the negotiating teams in Geneva.

To what extent was it a product of the negotiators' personal explorations and to what extent did it derive from their instructions? Well, I don't know what Kvitsinsky's instructions were, but one of Mr. Nitze's instructions was to explore and to examine the possibilities of a compromise if the Soviet Union rejected our proposal. He had been at that for some months and he had reported that — everyone knew. The actual terms of this possible trial balloon, which was sponsored by both the ambassadors, was

not a product in detail of any particular instructions from the American government. It would have been impossible to have obtained any such thing. In the nature of negotiation, the negotiators are always expected to come up with a breakthrough of this kind for study. And the United States government studied the proposal, made certain suggestions about it for change, but was perfectly willing to go ahead and consider it. The Soviet Union rejected it completely.

Forum: What was objectionable about the preliminary agreement? Did you support the agreement?

Rostow: I thought it was well worth pursuing. As far as we were concerned, there was little that was objectionable. The main objections that had been raised in the United States government to it had been about tactics. Was it tactically the right time to modify our zero position? Well, the Soviet Union has been rejecting that position for a year.

And there's nothing sacred about the zero option. In fact, it has a profound difficulty from the point of view of decoupling, tending to increase the reliance on the intercontinental American guarantee. But it's worthwhile; it would be worthwhile if the Soviets were willing to do it. But they say they are not and, after they say it long enough, the question is can Western interests be served almost as well — or perhaps even better — by an alternative approach. So the main objections within the American government to going forward with the Nitze and Kvitsinsky trial balloon at this time were objections of tactics and timing rather than of substance.

Forum: So essentially it was the Soviet Union that rejected this so-called trial balloon?

Rostow: Yes. The Soviet Union rejected it, as I've said in public and official speeches — with vehemence.

Forum: Formally, the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency [ACDA] is part of the Department of State. How is it tied to other government agencies?

Rostow: No, ACDA is *not* part of the State Department. ACDA was set up in 1961 under a statute as an autonomous agency. It can report and make recommendations directly to the President and to Congress and to other branches of the government. In carrying out policies which have been prescribed by the President — especially diplomatic policies, negotiation

policies — it operates under the direction of the President and the Secretary of State. But it is not part of the Department of State.

How is it tied to other government agencies? Well, it is tied to them by the usual Washington relationship of bargaining and negotiation, and cooperation and rivalry. But it functions in quite an autonomous way. But it does have, under the statute, a special relationship with the Department of State.

Forum: Does ACDA, as an organization concerned solely with arms control, act as a “lobby group” for arms control agreements? Has ACDA assumed a self-interest in arms control? If so, does this lead to conflict with other government agencies and other national security policies?

Rostow: Well, potentially the responsibilities of ACDA could lead to conflict, and there is almost always conflict within the U.S. government — healthy conflict or unhealthy conflict. But the approach, at least, that I took in directing ACDA is that arms control is an integral part of foreign and national security policy as a whole and cannot be considered to be a separate kind of policy. Its main function is to advance the broader goals of American foreign policy and security policy. Despite this approach, which was fully accepted by the President and by the government as a whole, there were the usual kind of frictions and some very special brands of friction in the pursuit of the President’s goals and in the kind of recommendations that were made.

As to whether ACDA has assumed a self-interest in arms control, acting on its own as a “lobby group” for arms control agreements, I believe it depends on who’s directing it and what the personnel are like. Remember, we came in after ten years of very active pursuit of arms control agreements in which there was profound disappointment, and the first and fundamental task was what went wrong with arms control? Why were the 1970s a period of such deep disappointment in arms control? And it was that question we had to answer before we started off again.

Forum: What are the consequences, in terms of strategic stability, of a failure to negotiate and ratify some type of arms control treaty? In other words, how stable will the balance be in five to ten years if the arms race continues at the present rate?

Rostow: Well, one of the great difficulties is that these arms control agreements tend to be perpetual. The interim agreement under SALT I expired in its own terms in October 1977 but it is still deemed to be in

effect — and deemed to be in effect without any congressional action on our side. And the SALT II treaty, which was not ratified by the Senate (ratified by the President with the advice and consent of the Senate, I should say more accurately), is being respected on both sides. Both we and the Soviets have said that we won't undercut its limits. And those limits are very burdensome for us. The numerical limits of SALT II are the factors that prevent us from adopting a solution for the MX basing problem which could make MX invulnerable.

Now, the failure to negotiate and ratify some type of arms control treaty — what would be the consequences for strategic stability? Well, the answer depends on the kind of treaty. We might be much better off without any treaty at all than under SALT II. I profoundly believe that SALT II is a tremendous obstacle to restoring strategic stability.

And I think the implication of the question is that an arms control agreement is somehow soothing to the Soviet breast, that it somehow restrains the Soviet administrators. Well, I think that anybody that believes that should take another look at what happened in the 1970s when the Soviet Union made an agreement with us — not only about arms control but about peace in Indochina — and then tore it up and threw it in our faces. They made an agreement with President Nixon in 1972 about the Middle East which they had already broken a month before, by undertaking to supply Sadat with all kinds of military hardware for the attack in 1973. So there are circumstances that you can readily envisage in which the failure to negotiate and ratify an arms control treaty would have a positive effect on strategic stability. On the other hand, a good arms control treaty planned as part of a strong policy of collective security could well make a positive contribution. So again, I don't think this can be answered yes or no.

Forum: What type of arms control agreement do you personally support? How would you limit various weapons systems and technologies and what particular goals, such as stability, lower numbers or quality limitations, are most important to you?

Rostow: I support agreements which would be based, for both sides, on the principle of deterrence and deterrence only and which would eliminate the Soviet capacity for nuclear blackmail. I think that is the only kind of arms control agreement under present circumstances that would be worth having. I would limit various weapons systems and technologies, in the name of that principle, to equal levels — as low as possible to achieve that goal. There have to be some forces if only to minimize the risk that nuclear weapons would fall into the hands of totally irrational

political leaders like Qaddafi, Idi Amin and so on, and to make sure that the Soviet Union remains in the posture that such an agreement would achieve.

Which goals — such as stability, lower numbers or quality limitations — are most important to me? Well, we're trying to achieve stability by having both lower numbers and quality limitations. That is to say, the unit of account we are proposing for START and INF has two elements: It has the number of warheads and their destructive capacity, their throw-weight. Now, you have these limitations in order to contribute to political stability. So there are not three alternative goals; there is one goal — stability — to be achieved by lower numbers and quality limitations in the name of the principle of deterrence and deterrence only.

Forum: In what way, if at all, can arms control agreements actually slow down the arms race to any significant degree? Is arms control really useful or will it simply continue to be used to satisfy our moral and humanitarian principle while we continue to rely on the arms race and nuclear deterrents to protect our national security?

Rostow: I think the question, from my point of view, is misconceived. Let me put my answer this way: Arms control is meaningless, totally unintelligible and without any capacity to make a contribution to anything good or useful unless it is bracketed with policies of collective security — effective policies of collective security, not the arms race and nuclear deterrence alone, but the willingness of coalitions in Asia and in the Atlantic and the Middle East to resist aggression by conventional means backed by the umbrella of the American nuclear armed force. Now, if you can envisage the restoration of collective security as an effective influence in world politics, then arms control agreements can indeed make a contribution by reinforcing that system, by helping to bring it into being and by helping to protect it when it's under great pressure. I've always remarked that the greatest, most successful arms control is the Rush-Bagot Agreement of 1817 providing for the demilitarization of the Great Lakes; that really worked. Everybody in Canada and the United States believes in it and there is no possibility of either government breaching it or abrogating it. It has served a very useful purpose in many crises in our relations with Great Britain and Canada throughout the nineteenth century. Everything is so peaceful now that we forgot that there once was an American political slogan "54°40' or Fight." Well, we didn't get 54°40' and we did not fight over the disputed territory in the Pacific Northwest, but there was plenty of trouble between the United States and Canada.

Now, unless arms control agreements are bracketed with collective security arrangements, they cannot make a significant contribution to peace. And bad arms control agreements can do a great deal of harm — as I think the numerical limits of SALT II are doing harm today. Can arms control agreements be used to satisfy our moral-humanitarian principles? In other words, can they be devices of hypocrisy in which we feel self-righteous while we're not doing anything? Of course they can. It's up to us to see that they're better than that.

Forum: How serious is this administration about arms control?

Rostow: I wouldn't have taken the job unless I was convinced that the President is very serious about it. I still am convinced that he's serious about it. But being serious about arms control has to mean being serious about foreign policy as a whole. It's not a magic wand that you can wave and produce an agreement with the Soviet Union.

Forum: So you feel this administration has not been as serious as it could be about American foreign policy as a whole?

Rostow: No, I didn't mean to say that. I think that you're putting words in my mouth. What I'd say is that, thus far, the administration has been struggling to restore our armed forces, which is indispensable to our having a foreign policy. And it's only beginning to tackle the question of what those armed forces are for and when and how they can and should be used. We'll have to see. I'm not saying they're not serious about having a foreign policy as a whole. But how far that vision of a coherent foreign policy, which has to be that of President Truman and Secretary Acheson — that's all the foreign policy we've got or can have — can and will be carried out, that's another thing.