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ORGI SALT

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NEGOTIATING WITH THE RUSSIANS

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In this exclusive interview, Lt. Gen. Edward L. Rowny, the top US military representative during the SALT II negotiations, describes Soviet negotiating techniques and objectives. General Rowny warns that the US should not negotiate without the backing of a strong strategic arsenal: "We cannot do it with mirrors."

DIPLOMATIC negotiations, a rare experience for career military officers, provided Army Lt. Gen. Edward L. Rowny with a unique insight into Soviet-American relations.

General Rowny, who was the top military man on the US team during the second round of Strategic Arms Limitation Talks, concluded that the US, after decades of dealing with the Soviet Union, had much to learn about negotiating with the Russians.

In an interview with AIR FORCE Magazine, the General explained how the Soviet negotiators tried to outfox the US delegation.

General Rowny has made it clear that he opposes the proposed treaty. Just days before voicing his frank opposition, General Rowny retired from the Army. "Only when I was sure an agreement I couldn't agree with had been reached did I leave," he explained.

This cleared the decks for his appearance before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in July, when he testified: "The emerging treaty, in my view, is not in our interest since it is inequitable, unverifiable, undermines deterrence, contributes to instability, and could adversely affect NATO security and Allied coherence." He urged the Senate to send the treaty back for further negotiations.

Hailed by Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N. C.) as "perhaps the most knowledgeable American in this field," General Rowny was the only member of the US delegation to serve the entire period of the SALT II negotiations. He was the Joint Chiefs of Staff Representative for the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks from March 1973 to June 1979.

General Rowny was well prepared for the negotiations. He has been a student of arms control and has written a number of papers on the subject. His thirty-eight years of military service also include extensive experience as a combat leader. His background includes command of an infantry battalion and a regimental task force in Italy in World War II, command of a regiment during the Korean War, and director of a special team in Vietnam charged with testing and evaluating new Army concepts for counterinsurgency operations. His military decorations include the Silver Star with two oak leaf clusters.

General Rowny, sixty-two, received a BS degree in civil engineering from Johns Hopkins University, and then resigned an Army commission to enter the US Military Academy. He was commissioned a second lieutenant in the Corps of Engineers in 1941. He holds master's degrees in civil engineering and international relations from Yale University, and was awarded a doctorate in international studies from American University.

His advocacy and study of arms control, and his participation in negotiations with the Soviet Union on the reduction of conventional arms in Europe, were factors in his selection as the JCS Chairman's representative to the SALT negotiations.

General Rowny says a minimum of six months of intensive study is absolutely necessary to participate in strategic arms negotiations. According to General Rowny, continued briefings on changes in the US and Soviet strategic arsenals were equally necessary.

Sixty-two Trips

During the six-year period with the SALT delegation, General Rowny made sixty-two round trips between Geneva and Washington, and participated in more than 1,000 hours of negotiations.

He quickly found he was involved in not one negotiation but a series of negotiations that included bargaining within the Defense Department, bargaining within the US government, and exchanges on the SALT negotiating team.

The process of hammering out a US position often was more time consuming and more complex than exchanging views with the Soviet delegation. The US position was drawn up by interagency working groups meeting in offices of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA). Sometimes these meetings were moved to the White House.

After a position was developed, it would be sent to four bodies for comment—the State Department, ACDA, the Defense Department, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The position then would be cleared by the National Security Council staff. If there was a difference of opinion, the position paper would go to the Strategic Coordinating Committee, which is chaired by the President's National Security Affairs Assistant and includes as members the Defense Secretary, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretary of State, and the CIA Director. Opposing views would be presented to the President, and his decisions would be passed on to the delegation in Geneva.

Within the Pentagon there was a separate negotiating process. Each service would work with the Joint Staff to prepare the JCS position. This position would be coordinated with the Defense Secretary by the Defense Department's SALT Task Force before being submitted to an interagency group.

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The US negotiating team never played such a role in the interagency deliberations, sometimes recommending actions and other times requesting the modification of instructions from Washington.

"The US seems to think in terms of problem solving," says General Rowny. "We negotiate in good faith, expecting give and take." The Soviet delegates, he says, do not share Western concepts and instead regard negotiations as just another means of competition. Says General Rowny: "The Soviets look to the SALT negotiations to gain or to maintain a competitive advantage."

It is General Rowny's opinion that this complex negotiating process within the US government "militates against" US efforts to get an equitable treaty: "We would arrive at a reasonable position that we felt both sides could accept, but the Soviet delegation would present an extreme position that heavily favored the Soviet position." This meant that almost any compromises between the two positions would benefit the Russians and be disadvantageous for the US.

One defense against this Soviet tactic would be for the US to arrive at a reasonable position and then outwait the Soviet delegation. General Rowny says: "We went into the bargaining sessions with such a strategy, but we never held to it."

The Soviet Team

Continuity in the negotiating team also served to the Soviet advantage, in General Rowny's view. For the most part, the Soviet delegation remained unchanged throughout the negotiations. The chief of the delegation for both SALT I and SALT II was Deputy Foreign Minister V. S. Semenov. P. S. Pleshakov, representing the Soviet defense industry, and Academician A. N. Shchukin, representing the science community, also were members of the delegation throughout the negotiations. A fourth civilian seat apparently was designated a temporary position by Moscow. It was held by a series of Soviet diplomats during the talks.

The Soviet team included two generals, in contrast to one on the US delegation. Lt. Gen. K. A. Trusov and Col. Gen. I. I. Beletsky were appointed to the delegation during the SALT I period. After General Trusov suffered a heart attack, he was replaced by General Stavobudov. General Beletsky served throughout the SALT II negotiations.

On the US delegation, only General Rowny served for the entire period of the negotiations. During the six-year period, the US delegation had five State Department representatives, four representatives of the Defense Secretary, and four representatives of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. General Rowny served as a member under three Defense Secretaries, three JCS Chairmen, and three Presidents. He offered his resignation from the negotiating team at the outset of the Carter Administration, but was asked to stay on.

Negotiations with the Soviet delegation were conducted for three or four months in Geneva. This period of bargaining would be followed by a break of three or four months when the US delegation returned to Washington for consultation. During the last eighteen months before an agreement was reached, however, the talks were in session almost continuously.

An integral role of the delegation was to keep top officials of the US and NATO nations abreast of the negotiations. This was accomplished by regular written and oral reports.

Negotiations revolved around a formal meeting, called the plenary session, on Tuesday and Thursday. The meetings would alternate between an annex to the US Mission, called the SALT Negotiation Building, and a building in the ten-acre Soviet compound.

Each plenary session began with the reading prepared statements. As each paragraph was read by the head of a delegation it would be followed by a translation. Each statement would take from twenty minutes to an hour. During most of the SALT II negotiations, Ambassador Ralph Earle II, a veteran ACDA official, served as head of the US delegation in the absence of ACDA Director Paul C. Warnke, the official delegation chief.

Very seldom was there any exchange or rebuttal to the prepared statements. If a question was asked, it might be answered by the delegation head after conferring with his colleagues. More often, the question was considered in the next plenary statement.

The formal session would last as long as two hours. After the time of the next meeting was agreed upon, the plenary session would officially end and the delegates would proceed with informal discussions.

In this phase, the chiefs of the two delegations would retire to another room for informal discussions. The remainder of the delegation would meet in separate corners of the room with their Soviet counterparts, accompanied by interpreters. This part of the meeting was off the record so that nothing said was binding upon the delegation. General Rowny says: "We would talk about what was in the latest plenary statement or what was in the previous week's statement. We talked about what ought to be taken up in the future. Or if we didn't have much to say, we engaged in small talk." Because General Rowny is fluent in French and Russian, he was able to participate in these talks without interpreters.

The informal talks would last an hour or an hour and a half, depending upon how long the chiefs of delegations met.

In addition to the plenary and informal sessions, there were social exchanges, about one every ten days. The two sides usually alternated with dinners, garden parties, and cocktail receptions. Though some informal negotiations took place at these meetings, the limited authority of Soviet delegates precluded much of an exchange of views. On one occasion, General Rowny recalls, he asked the wife of one of the Soviet guests how many children she had. He was astonished when she asked another in the Soviet party whether she could answer the question.

Negotiating Problems

One of the major problems of the negotiations, in General Rowny's views, was a failure on the part of US delegates to realize that the Soviet delegates were the product of a different environment and therefore approached negotiations differently.

"We in the US tend to think the Soviet citizen is like us," says General Rowny. "Because our leaders do not know Russian history and Russian culture, we tend to apply a 'mirror image' and think the Russian thinks and acts the same as Americans."

The differences between the two cultures, however, show themselves in negotiations:

Trickery. The Soviet delegates would resort to crude negotiating tricks in an effort to achieve an advantage. In one case, General Rowny offered a compromise in exchange for a Soviet compromise, and detailed what the two compromises should be. He offered the exchange at an informal meeting in which the Russian delegate indicated neither agreement nor opposition. When the proposal was made at a subsequent formal plenary session, the Soviet delegation walked out after the US half of the compromise was announced, without volunteering the assumed Soviet compromise, as General Rowny had suggested. From that experience on, General Rowny would not offer a compromise until after the Soviet side had made its offer.

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Eleventh Hour. The Soviet delegation would delay action until it seemed no agreement was possible, then agree to terms. General Rowny said this tactic often was used after public announcements had been made that an agreement was near, in an effort to get as many concessions as possible. This last-minute strategy played on the nerves of the US delegates: "We lacked patience and would give additional concessions as a deadline approached," General Rowny said.

Reversals. The Soviet delegation was not hesitant to reverse its stand if it suited its purposes. This caused the delegation members no embarrassment. "The Russians would argue that black is white, then switch with no explanation or apparent reason," General Rowny said.

Repetition. Soviet delegates would repeat their positions over and over without changing any point. General Rowny says this had several effects. It would tire the US delegates and cause them to shift to other negotiating issues. It would also cause the US to conclude that the Russians had strong feelings about the point being repeated and could not be persuaded to change. In some cases, the US delegation would concede parts of the Soviet position in order to move the negotiations along.

Soviet Spontaneity

Programmed Delegates. There were few spontaneous remarks from the Soviet delegation. Almost nothing was accidental or unplanned. If a US delegate asked a question, his Soviet counterpart often pulled a card from his pocket and read an answer, even though the answer might be completely unrelated to the question. Soviet delegates made this a practice both in the plenary and in the informal sessions. When Soviet delegates ran out of answer cards, they would quote Soviet Communist Party Secretary Leonid Brezhnev or Lenin.

Progress. The Soviet delegates, without offering any flexibility in their position, would urge that progress be made in the talks. "They know Americans want to make progress, and they would play on that desire," General Rowny explained. The Soviet delegates, by contrast, seemed willing to wait years if necessary to win a point.

Secrecy. The Soviet Union played on secrecy at every turn of the negotiations, even keeping its own delegates uninformed on some issues and offering little or no information to the US delegates. The US delegates were forced to negotiate with what they knew about US strategic arms and what they assumed about those of the Soviet Union.

Grand Principles. The Soviet delegates liked to pontificate on détente, nuclear proliferation, and arms control, rather than discuss specifics about a workable treaty. This tactic seemed to be for purposes of propaganda and delay.

Open Society. The Soviet delegates would quote different US civilian and military officials about SALT terms in an effort to win a negotiating point. But if they were asked for the reaction of a Soviet official, they would say his views were secret. Says General Rowny: "It is like a poker game in which they've got their cards up against their chest and yours are face up on the table."

Multiple Proposals. The Soviet delegation would patiently ask for new proposals from the US, without offering any suggestions of their own. To keep the talks moving, the US often obliged. Then the Soviet delegation would pick out what it liked of each proposal. "It was what we call taking the raisins out of the cake," says General Rowny. Often, the US would find itself making six proposals to one Soviet proposal, then having to defend itself against Soviet attempts to take the best of each proposal.

Anonymous Proposals. A Soviet delegate would tell a US delegate that he had [illegible] the negotiating room. Because of the unusual way the proposal was made, unsigned and unaddressed, the US would have to offer it as its own proposal to make it a part of the formal record. The Soviet delegate, if pressed to admit authority, would insist he had not made any proposals that were left on the table or floor without even a verbal alert to the US delegation.

Nice Cop–Mean Cop. The civilian Soviet delegates would ask their counterparts to "give us something to help us out with our generals." This approach, implying a split in the Soviet delegation, was tempting to US delegates even though they were very much aware that there could be no reciprocation by the closely controlled Soviet delegation.

Between the Lines

Coy Answers. The Soviet delegates would answer a question with another question. Or they would tell the US delegates to study the "nuances" of the plenary statement. On occasion, General Rowny would say he had restudied the prepared remarks and still did not understand them. The Soviet reply would be to study the statement harder and to read between the lines.

Good Intentions. The Soviet delegates refused to consider arms balance equations on the basis of the capabilities of the respective weapons. Instead they insisted that consideration be given to the "intent" of the Soviet Union, which they described as peaceful. General Rowny cites the Soviet Backfire bomber as the "classic case." The Soviet delegation repeatedly said that as the Soviet Union had no intention of using the Backfire against the continental US, it, therefore, could not be included in the SALT agreement.

Objective-Subjective. The Soviet delegation relied heavily on political doctrine to guide its negotiations. On one occasion General Rowny suggested that the Backfire bomber be discussed in objective terms, and his Soviet counterpart agreed. But when General Rowny cited figures from a magazine on the range and performance of the Backfire, the Soviet delegate replied that such figures were created by engineers and that engineers lie, so the figures were subjective. He offered as "objective truth" a statement by Secretary Brezhnev that the Soviet Union did not intend to use the Backfire in strategic missions.

Logic Appeal. In advancing their positions, Soviet delegates would argue their case was "logical" though in some instances the argument had nothing to do with logic and in others was actually illogical. General Rowny concluded that the appeal to logic was simply another effort to use propaganda techniques to convince the US delegation.

Trust. A frequent argument of the Soviet delegation, particularly on verification issues, was trust. "Trust us," was a frequent reply of Soviet delegates when specific issues were raised. The Soviet position was that all international treaties are based on trust and that the Soviet Union would be willing to trust the US if it trusted the Soviet Union.

Public Opinion. While the Soviet delegation held fast to its positions, the Soviet government tried to change the US position by influencing public opinion in this country. General Rowny said the Soviet Union's propaganda assaults on the US were timed to the SALT negotiations. These actions included writing letters to the US newspapers and sending Soviet officials, such as G. A. Arbatov, director of the Institute of the USA and Canada, on speaking tours in the US.

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Agenda Control. The Soviet delegation spent a great deal of time arguing over the agenda of meetings. The US delegation conceded a lot of these arguments in an effort to proceed to more substantive issues. But once the agenda was set, the Soviet delegates would not permit the US to bring up other issues—unless, of course, it suited Soviet purposes.

Despite the differences in negotiating techniques and the tight control Moscow held over the Soviet delegation, General Rowny advocates continued negotiations on strategic arms and is a strong supporter of face-to-face negotiations.

Detecting Nuances

There is a tremendous value, General Rowny says, in getting to know members of the Soviet delegation in person. Even when carefully worked-out formal statements are presented, he insists, nuances in facial expressions and voices can be detected that would otherwise be lost, if exchanges are limited to diplomatic notes. "You often can sense when a Soviet delegate is less rigid on some points than others," General Rowny says.

But for these face-to-face meetings to be profitable to the US, General Rowny insists that US delegates must be better prepared and trained in the techniques of negotiation. "I wouldn't let anyone go over and negotiate who doesn't speak Russian," he says. He cited as one example of clumsy preparation the replacement of a US aide to the delegation—an expert on the Soviet Union who spoke Russian—with an expert on South America. Civilian delegates also should be better informed on US and Soviet strategic arms, he says.

As for the question of whether the director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency should also act as chief of the negotiating team, General Rowny contends that when one person holds both positions, both jobs suffer.

At the outset of the SALT I talks, ACDA Director Gerard C. Smith also served as the chief of the delegation. When Dr. Fred C. Iklé was appointed ACDA director early in 1973, the delegation was put in the charge of U. Alexis Johnson, a career diplomat. Under the Carter Administration, Ambassador Paul C. Warnke served both as ACDA director and chief of the delegation. General Rowny says that negotiations slowed when the chief delegate was not present to make or to hear plenary statements.

It is General Rowny's view that the US delegation could have negotiated a better treaty than the one submitted to the Senate, if the US had been more patient.

In testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in July, General Rowny insisted that a good SALT treaty—one that would be better from the US standpoint and still acceptable to the Soviet Union—could still be negotiated.

General Rowny was challenged in this view by Sen. Edmund S. Muskie (D-Me.), who asked him to explain why he was the only member on the delegation who saw the potential for additional Soviet concessions.

General Rowny's reply: "I know the Soviet mentality."

General Rowny insisted before the committee that the Soviet Union "needed the treaty more than we do. They will come back to the table." The Soviets want a SALT treaty, he explained, "because of their desire to be recognized as a superpower and because it will allow them to enjoy the advantages they receive from a continuation of détente." He said that Moscow's leaders also see a treaty as a "necessary step" to achieving most-favored-nation status with the US, important to winning US trade credit.

But General Rowny cautioned the questioning senators that the US must in the meantime keep its strategic arsenal competitive with that of the Soviet Union: "We need the wherewithal to renegotiate; we can't do it with mirrors." ■

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