

CHAPTER 10

THE USAF AND STRATEGIC ARMS CONTROL

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From the dawn of the nuclear age until the present time it should be no surprise that arms control (the process and the substance) evolved as the global environment changed, and as the US-Soviet/Russia relationship progressed from adversarial to more cooperative. There were no serious arms control initiatives by US administrations until the US faced a peer competitor in the Soviet Union. Throughout the history of strategic arms control there are several noticeable trends and realities that provide guidance as to the role arms control will and can play in the future. These arms control realities relate to both the process of negotiating agreements and to the substantive terms of those agreements. For the United States Air Force (USAF), its involvement in US strategic arms control initiatives followed a rather predictable path given the political nature of the arms control process. The military in general, and the USAF in particular, were able to exercise influence when they felt compelled to do so and when they were organized to make it happen.

The Process

The first characteristic of the arms control process in the United States is that it was and still is primarily a civilian dominated exercise in the political sector with the military playing a reactive, though sometimes influential role. By contrast, in the Soviet Union/Russia the military is an active and formidable participant, whose role is made more prominent because the Soviets do not have a civilian arms control agency to take on an active/leadership role (this was most likely intentional). This author is not convinced the Soviets suffered significantly from this in the Cold War years in terms of getting much of what they wanted.

As Wheeler notes in his examination of arms control in the early years, there were opportunities for military involvement but mostly to voice support for positions already negotiated by the political leadership. Though the military was not excluded in the early years, its involvement was diminished because of secrecy surrounding the atomic bomb. Being in a reactive mode would last for the military and for the Air Force until organizational structures were in place allowing the Air Force to be more proactive. Larsen

is probably correct that there has been a lack of interest in the Air Force in the details of arms control negotiations, but a willingness to voice its concern about or support for certain outcomes.

Whether serving to stymie progress in arms control negotiations or allowing for a certain decisiveness leading to success, another noticeable characteristic is the continuity of many of the political actors through much of US strategic arms control history. For the most part the military was not poised to provide the same continuity within its ranks (though as Waller notes, there was some continuity during the Reagan years). Having some of the same political actors involved in the process from agreement to agreement across presidential administrations accentuates the importance of individual actors and their own beliefs about the objectives of arms control. It also influences the outcome because of the actors' notions about what deterrence and strategic stability require.

For the Department of Defense and for the Air Force, bureaucratic perspectives prevailed after the early years. For the military, it wasn't until later that a Service perspective prevailed (i.e., what is good for the Service). In the early years there was a certain consistency between the Air Force and those in the political arena about the likely success of arms control. The Air Force was involved and supported US political arms control initiatives. Kaplan's chapter demonstrates how the Air Force perspective was the perspective of its chiefs of staff and the leaders of Strategic Air Command (SAC). Their personal experiences, like those in the political arena, influenced their opinions about arms control.

In the 1950s and early 1960s, when civilian and military perspectives diverged, and the Air Force did not support the Kennedy and Johnson arms control positions, Kaplan shows how the Air Force was not organizationally situated to examine, devise, and subsequently present a Service perspective, thus, its input was ad hoc and not influential. At the beginning of the SALT era, when Air Force weapons were not really at issue, the Air Force wasn't engaged. Larsen concludes the Air Force wasn't interested enough to be engaged. SALT II changed this, with the Air Force becoming more involved. But, the Air Force position resulted from a centralized process that reflected individual inputs from a few. It wasn't until the late-1970s that the Air Force staff reorganized to expand the number of members dealing with arms control related issues. What Larsen writes in his piece on the SALT era holds true today—the organizational structure within DoD serves to “mute” individual Service inputs and promote a Joint perspective. The Air Force would need to be motivated and creative to address this organizational challenge.

The third noticeable characteristic of strategic arms control, whether necessitated by the political process or by the technological advancement of the strategic arsenal, is the evolutionary nature of arms control. It has been a systematic engagement with subsequent agreements building on previous ones, sometimes correcting certain shortcomings in previous agreements. Campbell reviews how SALT I, which negotiated inequalities in strategic offensive weapons, required (some would say mandated) certain outcomes for SALT II in order to reverse that inequality. Dusch demonstrates how START focused on SALT's shortcomings and a desire to reverse SALT's adverse consequences for stability and security.

The START negotiations are the model of modern day Air Force involvement in formal arms control, and it's an indicator of what is required for the Air Force to succeed when it comes to articulating its views on weapons systems in its portfolio. According to Waller's account, the Air Staff, SAC, and the Joint Staff worked over a period of eight years to get bomber discount rules that wouldn't threaten the future of the bomber force. This kind of sustained involvement produced substantive results.

The Substance

These characteristics of the strategic arms control process—civilian dominated, though military influenced and supported; continuity over time of many of the political actors involved in the negotiation process; and the evolutionary nature of agreements—have resulted in and contributed to certain trends in arms control and in the strategic weapons they are designed to address.

One is struck by how since WWI there has been a clear intent to satisfy at least one of the classic objectives of arms control not just because they are desirable goals, but also in order to gain military and political support at home and allied support abroad. It has been a challenge at times because these objectives (preventing war, limiting damage should war occur, and reducing the costs preparing for war) can conflict when devising a national security strategy, and when negotiating limits and reductions in nuclear arms.

In general, one can conclude that the overall substantive themes one sees in arms control agreements are either those that are ambitious in nature with broad objectives (mostly in the early years), to more narrowly defined outcomes pointed at certain weapons systems (though the negotiation exercise might have been linked to other political behavior), to pessimism about arms control's benefits and concern that initiatives today can be a straightjacket to US national security goals in the future.

The desire for arms control at the beginning of the atomic age was first motivated by the weapon's destructiveness. The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) showed support for the need for arms control because the military recognized that others would acquire similar weapons and possibly use them against the United States. Put another way, the United States should negotiate from a position of strength, a theme that would resonate throughout the Cold War. Even during the early years there were concerns about treaty compliance and this issue would be an ever-present element during negotiations throughout the Cold War period, sometimes limiting what weapons and weapons characteristics could be "controlled." Kaplan reviews how the Air Force position was one that insisted on verification as a necessary part of arms control because of distrust of Soviet motivations and fear they would cheat. This was a constant military and civilian position throughout the history of strategic arms control leading to intrusive on-site inspections as the expectation instead of relying on verification by national technical means.

Since the 1950s the Air Force focus has been on technological capability and superiority, and thus, it had concern about any attempts to limit technological and qualitative advancement in more than just offensive weapons systems (e.g., reconnaissance satellites, space vehicles). Air Force war plans called for a quantitative edge as well. So, any arms control initiatives that put limits on an Air Force advantage were met with opposition. It is clear that for the Air Force the essence of arms control starting in the 1950s—reductions and/or limits—were contrary to what it saw as necessary for performing its national security role. Though many thought early on that deterrence was the best response should arms control fail, the Air Force leadership was more concerned about having the forces necessary should deterrence fail. While the US had superiority there was no motivation to limit or even dilute that superiority (e.g., the Air Force opposition to the 1963 Limited Test Ban Treaty).

The mid-1950s saw the evolution and maturation of deterrence as a concept in the strategic arena, and the evolution of various deterrence strategies designed to deter the Soviet threat and minimize the costs of doing so (e.g., minimum and graduated deterrence, and counter-value targeting). The Air Force did not support these approaches because it felt they were not credible responses to the Soviet threat, and could have unintended consequences. Minimum deterrence, for example, would require an increase in costly conventional forces as a counter-weight to a smaller nuclear force structure.

In an environment of US-Soviet parity in the 1970s, arms control became a device to control the strategic arsenal, keep the other side from advancing

ahead, and for enhancing stability. Campbell and Larsen review this vigorous era of arms control.

Campbell's chapter covers how during the SALT era arms control's goals were broadened. Not only was it a vehicle to stop Soviet advancement and reduce defense expenditures, it was hoped it could be used to increase stability by reducing military competition elsewhere. While it became a political tool in the 1970s to address certain fiscal realities (i.e., the need to reduce defense spending) there were other political benefits from an era of détente. This linkage between arms control and broader issues during the Nixon administration was inevitable though not supported by subsequent administrations. This gave arms control additional responsibility over and above its classic objectives.

The SALT years, the ambitious era of arms control which included using arms control to engage the Soviets on broader international security issues, resulted in a clash not only between the DoD and State departments, but within DoD itself, between the military and a strong Secretary of Defense (McNamara). Dusch shows how DoD and State diverged in opinion, and how civil-military tensions within DoD during the McNamara years limited the Air Force's ability to influence the strategic debate. Given all this, when the debate centered on particular weapons systems, the OSD and JCS had influence on relevant positions that affected the outcome (e.g., insisting on the requirement for on-site inspections for a MIRV flight test ban the military didn't want knowing it wouldn't be accepted by the Soviets).

One could argue that arms control becomes very difficult when linked to broader political goals. But even when negotiations focus on weapon systems the task has been difficult, with agreements taking years to finalize and the outcomes sometimes considered ineffective, if not dangerous. One reason for this was the constant disagreement between the United States and the Soviets as to which weapons contribute to or detract from strategic stability. Added to this is the military's insistence that it not be prevented or limited in being able to fight and prevail in a conflict should deterrence fail.

Because the USAF had an obvious interest in the systems under contention in SALT II (mainly due to its concerns about ICBM vulnerability), it is not surprising that it established an office to deal with arms control issues. In addition to this action, Larsen notes how the Air Force used the political process to make its views known (e.g., meetings with members of Congress, the State Department, the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, etc.). Waller says the Air Force used the lengthy arms control negotiation process to consolidate its position and gather inputs from its subordinate units. This proactive approach was needed if the Air Force's

organizational interests were to be considered (and some of these positions were inconsistent with those held by some in the administration).

Waller is right; the Air Force sees things like security, stability, and predictability in strictly military terms while the political arena sees these things achieved through a variety of political and military actions culminating in these desirable goals. When it was proactive, organized to provide a substantive input, and used the political process to its advantage, the Air Force usually got what it needed.

This is a lesson that among others should be noted by Air Force leadership, especially since, as the Miller chapter reminds us, over 40 treaties and agreements have direct implication for the Air Force. Given the current focus on dramatic strategic arms reductions of systems "owned" by the Air Force, the leadership will need to be organized, proactive, and savvy enough to influence how many are reduced and how fast. The Air Force has not supported the dramatic post-Cold War reductions proposals, and Miller shows how its opposition continues to reflect the military's views since the dawn of the atomic age—avoiding operational constraints and opposing proposals that limit the use of future technology.

It is unclear whether and how internal DoD organizational changes might dilute the Air Force's ability to influence strategic arms control. The Larsen chapter covers how DoD's organizational structure serves to "mute" individual Service inputs by promoting a joint perspective. Goldwater-Nichols is responsible for this organizational change and the consequences resulting from it. On the other hand, as Miller notes, even the Joint Staff needs Air Force input and its support. Another significant organizational development is the dissolution of SAC and the obvious questions relate to what this means in terms of Air Force influence on arms control, and on the ability to maintain a pipeline of development of USAF arms control expertise.

All of the authors note the primacy of SAC in the DoD arms control arena. Miller talks about how SAC's leaders were influential in the process and how this command provided many of the arms control staff officers who would be engaged in the process. SAC "owned" the strategic nuclear bombers and land-based ICBMs (the two legs of the triad belonging to the Air Force), and it "owned" the officers involved in negotiating their limits and reduction. When SAC was dissolved the bombers went to Air Combat Command and the ICBMs went to Space Command. On the other hand, the Air Force's Pentagon-based arms controllers are still in place organizationally (AF/XONP) and members of that organization appear to be proactive and creative in developing and promoting Air Force interests.

LESSONS LEARNED

There are a few inevitable realities about the future of strategic arms control in general, and a few lessons learned for the Air Force to consider. For the most part, the future of strategic arms control will be a reflection of the international environment, its challenges and threats. Strategic arms control is still a bilateral exercise between the United States and Russia, but it no longer holds center stage: the relationship has mellowed and it is no longer adversarial; the weapons still concern the United States, but other weapons of mass destruction (WMD) concern many states. And these are getting the same attention now as nuclear weapons have in the past.

The new weapons of concern are chemical and biological, and the likely employers may not be states. Thus, the shift for arms control will be multilateral initiatives aimed at WMD in general. This also suggests the continued focus on strategic and theater defenses as a means to satisfy one of the classic objectives of arms control—reducing the damage should war (attack) occur. Without knowing any details of how and whether the Air Force influenced this new direction towards defenses, it got what it must want—no limit on its ability to develop new and better technologies; and no limits on its ability to prevail should deterrence fail.

- LESSON #1. The general trend at the end of the 1990s was one in which the Air Force was organized to engage in the arms control arena. This is positive because the history of strategic arms control is one that showed the Air Force is generally successful when it is proactive and engaged. Developing and maintaining a cadre of Air Force expertise in arms control can not be overstated. The continuity of political actors helped, and the expertise of military participants helped when it was available. Having some historical perspective increases the likelihood of success.
- LESSON #2. Having influence and being organized to maximize it (for the Air Force) is important because history also shows that the political community needs it and will reward Service support perhaps in the form of weapons systems funding to compensate for some capability lost at the negotiating table (as it did in getting strategic modernization and the B-1 in the early 1970s).
- LESSON #3. An arms control outcome the Air Force (and military) worried about throughout the Cold War and the current administration worries about now (and has dealt with it head on) is

the fact that earlier arms control agreements can bind you when they prevent you from taking advantage of new technologies, or prevent you from addressing current and future security challenges. This is an obvious reference to the ABM Treaty (which the Bush administration has decided to walk away from) and the need to make progress in national and theater defenses technologies.

- LESSON #4. The previous lesson increases the likelihood that unilateral actions will continue. This started with the first Bush Administration's decisions on tactical nuclear systems in Europe, and continues with the current Bush Administration's initiatives. With no formal agreements to bind you, you can make adjustments in your arsenal when the environment dictates change. Also, there aren't any states involved that might later see dramatic changes in their political systems that could complicate things. In general, unilateral actions are quick, can be exactly what you want to do (not a watered-down, negotiated outcome), and they are reversible.
- LESSON #5. These realities, along with the nature of arms control being one that is evolutionary, not revolutionary (except for perhaps the revolutionary INF Treaty that resulted in the elimination of a class of nuclear weapons) means that bilateral arms control will have limits in what it will achieve in the immediate future (yet another justification for unilateral actions). Even the current dramatic nuclear weapons proposals have provisions for reductions over a long period of time, with weapons being "stored," not destroyed.
- LESSON #6. Successful arms control ultimately depends on more than just the brilliance and logic of one's negotiation proposal. Sometimes prodding by the public based on a desire to alter spending priorities matters. Also, the men sitting in the White House or Kremlin, along with their staffs' ideological views can set the tone for success for failure. There are a number of explanations for the end of the Cold War, among which are the tough Reagan arms control positions based on a strategy of negotiating from a position of strength, along with insistence on tough verification measures. But clearly, Reagan's success with getting the Soviets back to the negotiating table, and his influence on "ending" the Cold War were due to the centrality of SDI, and the Soviet economic crisis, and the

new Soviet political leadership in the form of Mikhail Gorbachev. All of the planets were in alignment.

- LESSON #7. Graham Allison's Bureaucratic Politics (BP) model describes the strategic arms control process in the US, within both the civilian and military arenas, as it focuses on the pulling and hauling within these sectors and between them. The differences between DoD and State, within the administration, and between the administration and the DoD (and the Air Force) are the result of "fundamental disagreement among reasonable men about how to solve" problems.¹ Graham also notes that "different groups pulling in different directions produce a result, or better a resultant—a mixture of conflicting preferences and unequal power of various individuals—distinct from what any person or group intended."² As Dusch notes, one's negotiating strategy begins at home where the various constituencies hash out a set of proposals based on the president's guidelines. In strategic arms control, the Air Force is one of those constituencies. And finally, "To explain why a particular formal governmental decision was made, or why a pattern of governmental behavior emerged, it is necessary to identify the games and players, to display the coalitions, bargains, and compromises, and to convey some feel for the confusion."³

This book on the Air Force and strategic arms control does just that. Arms control has come a long way from "how much is enough," during the Cold War to "how low can we go" in the post-Cold War era (i.e., strategic sufficiency, which was not supported by CINCSTRAT). There was some serious discussion during the Reagan years about eliminating all ballistic missiles (see Larsen's review of the Weinberger proposal in preparation for the Reykjavik summit). These discussions don't come close to the debate generated by retired General Lee Butler, former CINCSAC, who proposed in 1996, the total elimination of nuclear weapons. General Butler was supported by many retired and well-known flag ranked officers in the United States and in Russia. Total elimination of nuclear weapons could be considered the ultimate goal of arms control for some.

The debate this generated rejuvenated arms control in the post-Cold War period if only to introduce new formations of arms control-type actions such as "de-alerting" and "virtual arsenals." Not surprisingly, the military does not support numbers below those in START II, and it opposes these creative conceptualizations of how to base one's strategic nuclear forces. This leads to the final lesson.

- LESSON #8. Strategic nuclear arsenals, once they start declining as the means of control, will continue to decline to minimum levels deemed safe by the military. It is hard to imagine strategic nuclear forces increasing. There is reason to believe that technological development will continue so that smaller forces are more capable to meet emerging and evolving threats. Whether or not formal arms control measures are used, traditional elements of the process and concerns about the substance of those limits, reductions, and controls will remain.

NOTES

¹ Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971), 145.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.