1983 and 1985: Suspicion to Cooperation

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The Basic Question:
In a context of high tension, how did the 1985 Review Conference Succeed?
Background Context: United States

- Prior conception of arms control was “Cambridge Community Model” (Halperin and Schelling)
  - Mutual Assured Destruction
  - Disincentives for surprise first attack
  - Verification sufficient to detect major cheating
- Reagan has new conception, “Arms Control for American Advantage”
  - Only doing negotiations if America “wins”
  - Pursued SDI/Star Wars to deter Soviet attack
  - Also really hated Communists, “Evil Empire” speech, 8 March 1983
Background Context: Soviet Union

- Concern about Reagan, Politburo believed he meant what he said
- Deep strategic insecurity
  - Pershing II missiles in West Germany
  - Short flight time, little time to react
- Technological capabilities clearly behind US
  - PSYOPS flights
  - Korean Air 007
  - SDI seems possible and very dangerous
- Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov are very paranoid
  - Operation RYAN (Ракетно-ядерное нападение) searched for evidence
Able Archer 83 and Stanislav Petrov
Reason 1: Things Changed

- Reagan finally understands effect of words
  - Ivan and Anya speech
  - “…we should always remember that we do have common interests. And the foremost among them is to avoid war and reduce the level of arms.”

- Gorbachev becomes general secretary
  - Immediately restarts arms control negotiations
  - New ideas as compared to Andropov and Chernenko
Reason 2: Shared NPT Responsibility

- 1980 Conference had foundered, accusations of Article VI non-compliance
- “In January 1984, for example, the Soviet Union explicitly charged the US with failing to honour its Article VI NPT disarmament obligations.”
  - But truly, this charge was leveled at both US and Soviet Union by NNWS
- Fears of back-to-back failures
- Results in credibility-staking behaviors
  - Restart of bilateral negotiations
  - Reagan-Gorbachev summit planned
Reason 3: No Polemics Approach

● Begins with those preparatory bilats
  ○ Very quickly, the delegation leaders and their teams developed a strong working relationship.
  ○ At one point in this process, Timerbaev informally told the author that he would do his best to ensure Soviet cooperation with the United States at the Review Conference.

● Squaring the circle with “American Advantage”
● Americans gave first speech, was No Polemics
● Soviet Ambassador Issraelyan gave No Polemics version of speech
  ○ But Yes Polemics version had been prepared
Example: The CTBT

- Major stumbling block for 1985 negotiations
- NNWS pushed hard, US particularly unwilling
- Compromise-finding small group convened, finds solution
  - Solution used in many instances in 1985
  - Final Declaration with general consensus language, then extra statements below
  - “The Conference, with exception of states whose opinions are given below”
- East Germany objected
- Very quickly, Soviet ambassador Issraelyan looked over to the East German representative and told him to leave the matter alone and in effect to be quiet.
Lessons for 2020 (or 2021...)

- Change of leadership/change of ideas
- Shared NPT Responsibility, avoid failures
- Regular, high-level interaction
- Main Lesson: Subordinate other interests to Nonproliferation

- Demonstration of nuclear threat?