Adventures in Risk Reduction
Oral History Project

Lynn Rusten
Interviewed by Ian Fleming Zhou

Facilitated by
Dave Cullen

June 6-7, 2026
Vienna, Austria

Transcript

[This is an interview with Lynn Rusten conducted by Ian Fleming Zhou for the Oral History Project, a project of the Stanley Center for Peace and Security and BASIC. The interview is taking place on June 6, 2026, in Vienna Austria. Dave Cullen of BASIC is facilitating the interview. This is session one of three.]

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:00:00):

Okay. This oral history project seeks to understand the diplomatic conditions, political dynamics and human relationships that made the New START negotiations possible. Rather than focusing primarily on law and treaty provisions, the project aims to document how opportunities for engagement emerged, how trust was built, how bureaucratic and political actors navigated obstacles and what lessons future practitioners can draw from the experience. The questions below serve as a thematic guide rather than a rigid script. Lynn, thank you for participating in this oral history project. The purpose of this interview is to document the diplomatic conditions as I mentioned earlier. So, to get us started, how would you describe your role in the New START process to someone who knows nothing about arms control?

Lynn Rusten (00:00:54):

Well, first of all, Ian, thank you so much and thanks to the Stanley Foundation [read: Stanley Center for Peace and Security] and BASIC for including me in this project. I think it's really exciting and important and I'm looking forward to our conversation. So, my role in the New START Treaty was primarily to lead an interagency working group process in Washington that supported the diplomats that were actually in Geneva negotiating the treaty. So, we were supporting the U.S. delegation in terms of providing guidance on what their negotiating positions would be and what the U.S. positions would be and then how to respond as the negotiations evolved and we got responses from the Russians and the delegation would have to seek guidance from Washington to change positions or advance the discussion in certain ways. So, I was primarily leading that interagency process in Washington and engaging with the delegation through phone and that kind of thing.

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:02:09):

Can you tell us how you got into arms control and nuclear policy? Who or what inspired you?

Lynn Rusten (00:02:16):

Yeah, sure. So I'll take you back to when I went to college. I went to Oberlin College in Ohio in the late '70s. And one of my professors there was a wonderful man named George Lanyi, who was an expert in Soviet foreign policy. And I will date myself by saying in those days it was Soviet, not Russian. And I got really interested in the topic. By coincidence, he also was the mentor of another person in our field named Scott Sagan. Scott was a little older than me, but I actually had heard about him from Professor Lanyi, but we had this kind of connection in common in terms of an early mentor. Anyway, I got very interested in Soviet foreign policy. I even started studying Russian language at the time.

(00:03:11):

And then I decided from Oberlin to go immediately to get a master's degree in Russian and East European studies. I ended up doing that at the University of Michigan where they gave me a fellowship, a foreign language and area studies fellowship to do that for two years. And then at that point I decided I wanted to work in the field. And when I came to Washington and was looking for work in the government sector, but also in the private sector, and it seemed like in those days, if you were in Soviet studies, the jobs were kind of in intelligence or in defense or in arms control. And honestly, I kind of fell into arms control through some combination of interest and luck and ruling out things that at the time I didn't think I wanted to do. So that's how I first got into it.

(00:04:06):

And my first serious job was actually at the Congressional Research Service of the Library of Congress working for a senior specialist in international affairs. And we were tracking all of the US-Soviet arms control negotiations-- nuclear and conventional -- and writing Issue Briefs and reports for Congress. And in fact, we were also tracking what was happening domestically. So there was the nuclear freeze movement in the United States. So that's how I got my start.

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:04:43):

In your early career, what experiences or mentors shaped how you think about arms control?

Lynn Rusten (00:04:51):

Well, I think probably the most impactful experience I had was after the job I had at the Library of Congress, which was a great job, but it was a two-year terminating position. So I needed to do something else as that two years was approaching. And I was so fortunate to end up working for the Committee on International Security and Arms Control of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences. This was a group of very senior scientists who had worked on the Manhattan Project, very senior former civilian leaders and very senior former military flag officers. As an example, actually Bill Perry, who later became Secretary of Defense was on that committee. Ash Carter was on that committee. The chairman was a wonderful physicist from Stanford named Wolfgang Panofsky.

(00:05:56):

And its primary activity was having twice a year meetings with the counterpart group of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. And so although my first trip to the Soviet Union had been in 1981 because I studied Russian at Leningrad State University for a summer when I was in graduate school. But then with the Academy, I was going every year. But the amazing thing was the caliber of the Soviets on their side was just as distinguished as ours. Some very famous people like Evgeny Velikhov and Roald Sagdeev as well as people in their academy, a kind of academic system, like Arbatov. And I mean not Alexei Arbatov, but his father. I can't remember his first name. (Note: It was Georgy.}

(00:06:56):

And these were the people who ended up becoming the top advisors to Gorbachev. So I'd like to say that I was a fly on a really interesting wall because I was quite young. I was probably, I don't know, 25 or something. I was in my mid to late 20s through the six years I was with the Academy. And it was an incredible experience. The staff director of the committee who hired me was named Spurgeon Keeny. He had been the deputy director of the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency under President Carter. There was a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on our committee. So Dick Garwin was on the committee. I mean, it was amazing.

(00:07:43):

So I learned so much in many ways from that experience. First of all, I learned a lot of substance because we were having these twice a year meetings with the Soviets and talking about very specific things. And I'll give you an example. When the Strategic Defense Initiative came up, because Reagan was president then, and he launched the Strategic Defense Initiative claiming to try to create a nationwide defense over the United States, which the Soviets were very upset about. We had a lot of conversations with people who really had technical expertise to talk about how this actually wasn't really feasible and that it wouldn't undercut the Soviet strategic deterrent.

(00:08:29):

So I learned a lot of substance, but I also just learned a lot about diplomacy. I certainly learned a lot about the Soviet Union. And maybe one of the things that was probably most important is... I'll take you back. So I grew up in a household where nobody had really served... Well, my dad I think had served in the military because it was mandatory, but he was like between wars. So it was before the Korean War and after World War II. And he had a great assignment in Hawaii or something. But anyway, but basically I didn't grow up in a family with a military culture. And I grew up in the Vietnam War era where there was frankly a feeling of certainly anti-war, but unfortunately in those days it kind of spread a little bit to anti-military. And so I'd say I almost grew up with a little bit of a bias against the military.

(00:09:27):

And I have to say that one of the eye-opening experiences at that time was the incredibly high caliber of these very senior former military flag officers on our committee totally changed my attitude about the military. And also these were the people who were the most thoughtful about the use of force and didn't see the military utility of nuclear weapons. And anyway, it was really eye-opening. And I have to say that that also influenced me as I went on through government and worked a lot with the U.S. military. So anyway, that was a really formative experience and kind of the wisdom and knowledge of the people that I had the honor of working for and with in that job was really impactful for me.

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:10:23):

This brings me to my next question. Before 2009, what was your sense of U.S.-Russia arms control? How did you view START by the late 2000s? Because I know you were also involved in START's negotiation.

Lynn Rusten (00:10:40):

Yeah. If you don't mind, let me just kind of fill in the gap between what I did at the National Academy of Sciences and when I got to New START because it's relevant. So after being at the Academy for about six years, and I'll say when I started the Academy, it was in a period in the Reagan administration when there was no arms control discussions and no official dialogue. And our channel was considered extremely influential and we would come back from meetings in Moscow or wherever and we would actually go around and brief very senior levels of the U.S. government who'd want to hear about what the Soviets were saying. And because there weren't many channels, it was considered a channel that was conveying some signals or some information that was meant to get to the U.S. government and vice versa.

(00:11:33):

By the time I left the academy, everything had changed. Gorbachev had come into power. There were negotiations actually on the START Treaty, that negotiation went on for a long time. I ended up participating in it, but it had just started. The Soviet Union had completely opened up. And so there were now lots of non-governmental organizations going over and having their dialogues and the Russians were free to say whatever they wanted. And so it was great because it was an opening society, but it also meant that it wasn't necessarily significant that somebody was suddenly saying something that was different from whatever the policy was. It wasn't a signal necessarily anymore. It was just people were free to speak their mind.

(00:12:19):

And so I just decided that I wanted to get experience in government, that that was kind of where the action was. And plus I was ready to have a different kind of experience. So I went from the Academy to what was called the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, which was an independent agency. It was physically housed in the State Department, but it had the lead in the U.S. government on arms control negotiation and implementation. It subsequently was abolished and merged into the State Department. But anyway, I went there and the first thing I did was I was assigned to work on the original START Treaty. So I was working in the interagency process in Washington and I served on the delegation in Geneva. This was 1991.

(00:13:09):

And I was there... So this negotiation went on for nine years or something. I was lucky to be there for the last nine months, including the end game when we got it done in I think July of 1991 because it was a deliverable for a, I guess it was Bush 41. It was a Bush... Who was the Russian? Was it Yeltsin? [Note: It was Gorbachev!] Anyway, it was... How can I not remember? Anyway, it was the summit and there was a summit set and this treaty was supposed to be signed. And so we were negotiating against the deadline. And so that was super exciting. I was there for the last few months in Geneva on the delegation negotiating the end of the START Treaty.

(00:13:58):

And then I had responsibility over the years in State, I'm sorry, in ACDA (Arms Control and Disarmament Agency) and then at State when it became State, both on implementing the START Treaty and also the INF Treaty and also policy development for future arms control. So I had that knowledge and history before 2009. In the Bush 43 administration, I spent two years on the policy planning staff working for Richard Haass. And then at some point I left. It wasn't the best environment with John Bolton as the Under Secretary of State. And there was a lot of decimation of expertise then too, although not as bad as it is now. And I kind of voted with my feet and I went and worked in the Senate for six years.

(00:14:52):

And then Rose Gottemoeller brought me back when she became the Assistant Secretary in the Obama administration in 2009. She was trying to reconstitute expertise to help negotiate what would become New START. And I was one of the people she sought out and brought back as a senior advisor to help with that. So that's important context and you'll have to remind me of what the question was that you asked that triggered that long...

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:15:24):

The answer was really good. I think the key word to get away with is the reconstitution of expertise, which is something that my project is hoping to achieve or help out in some way. By 2008, were you concerned about strategic stability or the expiration of START? Did anyone articulate a dead end in arms control at the time?

Lynn Rusten (00:15:52):

No, I don't think anyone anticipated a dead end at all. And I think during that transition period... So Rose, as she told me during the transition period, she was asked... I guess it was Secretary Clinton, right? She was asked by incoming Secretary Clinton to... I can't remember which. She was offered one job, but ended up with two. And I'm trying to remember which she was offered. Well, her book probably says, but I think maybe she was offered the negotiating role, but she also asked to be the Assistant Secretary for Arms Control or it was the other way around. She was offered the Assistant Secretary role and she also asked to be the negotiator. But anyway, the point is during the transition period, she knew she would have those responsibilities and she was already working hard on kind of developing ideas and consulting people on what the content of that successor treaty should be.

(00:16:59):

And so it was known that the original START Treaty would expire in 2009. There was no more ability to extend it without further Senate action. It was known that both the Soviet Union and United States wanted a successor agreement. So I don't think that was really in question. It was kind of what would the content of that agreement be and what would the negotiations be? And so when she talked to me, I mean, I remember having lunch with her right before the holidays at the end of 2008 when she was asking me if I would join her and help her. She was already talking about this priority and ideas for what the successor treaty would be.

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:17:54):

Were there particular moments in your career in negotiation briefing conversation or crisis that crystallized for you why this work mattered?

Lynn Rusten (00:18:06):

I'm sorry. Oh, why this worked mattered?

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:18:08):

Yeah.

Lynn Rusten (00:18:10):

Oh boy, I think I've always felt that it's incredibly important that the two countries with the largest nuclear arsenals in the world work together to regulate them, to limit them, to prevent their use, to reduce them and to basically responsibly manage these incredibly destructive weapons that really have no practical military utility. So I've always felt that this work was meaningful and important and that working on these issues really mattered. Plus it was fun and interesting.

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:19:01):

Also, you said earlier that that's where you wanted to go, where the action is.

Lynn Rusten (00:19:04):

Yeah.

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:19:05):

Who were the individuals who most influenced how you think about arms control as a practice?

Lynn Rusten (00:19:18):

There were a lot of people, but certainly a lot of the people that I met on the National Academy of Sciences committee, including Spurgeon Keeny, the staff director, but all of the members of that committee were influential. When I got into government, people like Linton Brooks, who was the negotiator for the START Treaty at the end, the original START Treaty. And there was a guy at the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency named Lucas Fisher, who was the deputy assistant director. They called them directors, not secretaries, but who was a long time career person with a lot of experience in arms control. I think he was influential. Just thinking back about those early years. I mean, I learned from a lot of people, Susan Koch, Stan Riveles, and of course then later Rose. I'm sure there's more that I'm forgetting.

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:20:43):

I know, it's okay. When Chris-

Lynn Rusten (00:20:45):

I should say Jim (James) Timbie. I mean, he's somebody too that his name will come up later.

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:20:50):

Okay. When President Obama took office, what arms control environment did the administration inherit?

Lynn Rusten (00:21:01):

Well, I think it inherited a pretty positive environment. I think he had already made commitments during the campaign about arms control. And as I said, I mean, we knew that the original START Treaty was expiring, but that there was an intention and willingness to negotiate a successor. Russia was not considered a particular threat at the time. I mean, it was still a period of declining threat and nuclear weapons were less salient between the U.S. and Russia. So I think it was a pretty conducive environment at the time, unless my memory is completely wrong.

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:22:14):

So what did the United States inherit from the Bush administration regarding strategic arms control and relations with Russia?

Lynn Rusten (00:22:34):

Yeah. Again, the original START Treaty was still in force, but about to expire. INF (Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty) was still in force. I guess the relationship had... I'm trying to remember. The relationship had deteriorated some. Of course, the Bush administration withdrew from the ABM Treaty (Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty), which was divisive and opposed by Russia and unilateral and probably shaped Putin's thinking. I don't know. Those are some of the things I remember.

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:23:25):

And in 2009, how was the impending exploration of START viewed inside the policy community in general in DC?

Lynn Rusten (00:23:37):

Yeah. I don't think there was anything very controversial about the idea that it was in the U.S. national security interest to maintain limits and verification on U.S. and Russian strategic nuclear systems and we wanted to have a successor agreement. I don't recall really any opposition to that idea. And there were thoughts about what could be different from the original START Treaty. Something maybe less complicated, less expensive to implement, less onerous or impactful on U.S. military operational practices. So there were some things. START was kind of the starting point and it was sort of like, aside from the numbers changing, what parts of START do we want to preserve and what do we want to change

and why? So I think that was more the discussion than do we want to continue strategic arms control with Russia? I just don't think there was much of a debate about that.

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:24:59):

Okay. When you look back at that particular period to the reaction of START expiring and the reaction now in 2026 when New START expired, how are the reactions? How would you equate the two reactions, the differences or similarities in policy cycles as well?

Lynn Rusten (00:25:19):

Yeah, I mean, completely different. Of course, the strategic environment with Russia is completely different. Russia has first and foremost launched its war against Ukraine and rattled the nuclear saber. And there's concern in the policy community about China's growing nuclear arsenal. So there seems to be to be a surprising complacency or lack of concern about the absence of constraints on Russia and a lot of focus on how some people think we can't live within the current, what were the New START numbers. And we need the freedom to do what we're going to do. So to me, it's surprising and disappointing that there isn't much of an appetite at the moment to negotiate a successor agreement and that there wasn't interest in taking up the Putin suggestion that both sides at least commit to maintaining New START levels for another year. Although there's conflicting information as to whether there was some kind of a tacit agreement that just hasn't been publicized or not. I don't have insight into that. I think the reality is it will take a little time anyway to upload and that kind of thing.

(00:27:06):

So it's a completely different environment. And I think people are losing sight of the fact that I like to say that someone famously said, was asked, "Why do you rob banks?" And said, "Well, that's where the money is." I mean, why do we do nuclear arms control with Russia still? And the answer is that is where the nukes are. I mean, they have so many more nuclear weapons compared to China. And to temporarily lose sight of the fact of how much it's in our interest to maintain mutual regulation and verification and transparency I think is dangerous. And although I'd like to see us do that at the levels of New START or even lower levels, even if a decision is made that we do it at a higher number of nuclear weapons, it's still important to maintain limits and have verification at whatever numbers we both agree to.

(00:28:02):

And there's time to address China, which still has many, many fewer nuclear weapons than either us or Russia.

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:28:13):

What did policymakers mean when discussing a START extension versus negotiating a completely new treaty?

Lynn Rusten (00:28:22):

I'm sorry. Sometimes it's not that the question is sometimes honestly with your... I just didn't understand the first half of that question. If you could just repeat the question. It's not...

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:28:44):

Was there a widespread sense that a successor agreement was necessary after START?

Lynn Rusten (00:28:52):

Oh, yeah. I think I talked about that briefly. Yeah, I don't think there was any... I just don't remember any debate or opposition. And like I said, I think the Obama administration came in saying it would do that.

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:29:13):

Were there significant voices arguing against pursuing a follow- on treaty during the time?

Lynn Rusten (00:29:18):

Again, I don't have any recollection of that.

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:29:20):

Okay. What did success... Okay, so we can't get to that question as well. The Bush administration had spent several years trying to find a path forward with Russia. Do you have any idea why those efforts stalled?

Lynn Rusten (00:29:41):

On arms control?

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:29:43):

Yeah.

Lynn Rusten (00:29:48):

Well, as I mentioned, I think that the Bush administration withdrawal from the ABM Treaty dealt a real blow to the relationship and to... So that was one factor. I actually don't recall what else they were trying to do since there was still another year to go on New START, I mean, on the original Start Treaty. So I have to say I don't have a firm recollection of that period. I was at the Senate at the time doing other things, focused on other things, so I just don't...

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:30:30):

Would you say in terms of relationships with Russian counterparts, was there a foundation to build or did trust have to be rebuilt? This is after the Bush administration into the Obama administration.

Lynn Rusten (00:30:48):

I think there was a really strong foundation of trust. I mean, the US and Russian nuclear policy communities have been engaging in negotiation and implementation of treaties for decades. And there are habits of interaction and personal relationships that have built up. And people forget, I mean, people always think about there's the treaty and the signing and the ceremony with the klieg lights and they think it's over. But for instance, with START, that then led to 15 years of implementation, which included many onsite inspections every year, teams from one country going to the other country on to sensitive military bases, acting very professionally to do what they were supposed to do in terms of the inspection. But also there's some social element too.

(00:31:53):

And similarly, there were regular meetings in the consulting body, implementing body of the treaty in Geneva and many of the same people who negotiated the treaty and their colleagues met regularly in Geneva a couple times a year to talk about implementation of the treaty, any problems that had come up, that kind of thing. And then there were other ongoing dialogues on strategic stability, and there's a defense dialogue.

(00:32:22):

There are two things. There are habits of communication and interaction that have been built up over a long time and practiced over a period of time very professionally and collegially, even when there were very differences of positions and also personal relationships. And so that carried into the negotiation of New START. There were people who I knew from

the original START negotiations who were engaged in New START. There were a lot of people... I mean, we'll get later to a discussion of the interagency process in Washington, but a lot of the people who were brought back to work on New START were people who in Washington who had worked on the original START Treaty, some of whom had spent time in the delegation in Geneva working with Russians who were some of the same people working there.

(00:33:19):

So, the...

Lynn Rusten (00:33:20):

... working with Russians who are some of the same people working there. So, that's very deep and that is what doesn't exist at all yet with China, but needs to if we want to get to the point of having the kind of mature nuclear dialogue with China and negotiations that people aspire to. But that is way premature at this stage in my view, partly because we don't have that mature nuclear relationship yet.

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:33:50):

So, how do you think Russian leaders viewed the strategic relationship at that time?

Lynn Rusten (00:34:00):

Well, again, I mean, there was definitely bad blood over the withdrawal from the ABM treaty. The Russians were very clear that they wouldn't permit... There was an expiration of perimeter portal monitoring at Votkinsk. I'm sorry that my memory of the details is foggy. And I can't remember if that was because the... I guess it's because that part of the inspection provisions of the INF treaty expired at that time or because something wasn't being produced. Anyway, we lost the legal right to have perimeter portal monitoring which is the monitoring of every single item that came out of that missile production factory. And the Russians were adamant that they were not going to resume that. So, under a new treaty, they were not going to give us that right. So, there were certain things that they were already changing. And there was resistance to a certain level of intrusiveness or transparency to some degree, but in other ways it turned out not. So, anyway.

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:35:29):

So, this part I know that you had not returned to State, but I have a few... Oh, sorry. Although you-

Lynn Rusten (00:35:37):

Honestly, sometimes it's your accent. I can't... Sometimes I just-

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:35:40):

Oh, sorry. I also-

Lynn Rusten (00:35:42):

No, you don't have to say sorry. I mean, just sometimes my ear just isn't attuned.

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:35:46):

Oh, okay. I'm sorry. Yeah. Okay. Let me try to be louder.

Lynn Rusten (00:35:47):

So, speak up a little.

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:35:48):

Yeah. Although you had not returned to State in April 2009, I have a few questions I would like to ask on the London Summit and the Prague Speech, if you are privy to that information. Otherwise, if you are not, we can just move on. How significant do you think was President Obama's Prague Speech in shaping the administration's arms control agenda?

Lynn Rusten (00:36:13):

Oh, I think it was extremely important. It really set out the pillars of a very ambitious nuclear arms control and non-proliferation and energy policy agenda that was a guidepost for the administration throughout. And it was the president's personal imprimatur on that issue set. And he personally was engaged and cared about those issues. And that started at his time in the Senate, under the tutelage of Senator Lugar and others. And it was genuine. So, I think that was really, really important. It was also done very early in the administration before all the policy reviews and all the people were in place. Frankly, I don't know if that speech would've survived the way it was if it had been later in the administration, when 1,000 knives would've been out, but it was the president's vision and it was extremely important.

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:37:22):

Do you think Prague created momentum or formalized momentum that already existed?

Lynn Rusten (00:37:30):

Well, I mean, you've asked a couple questions and I probably haven't answered them well about... I guess, US-Russian relations had deteriorated pretty badly under the Bush administration, hence the need for and desire for a "reset," quote, unquote. And so, I think the Prague Speech was also part of a signaling on that score, although it was much broader than that. I'm sorry, what was the question?

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:38:06):

Did Prague create momentum-

Lynn Rusten (00:38:06):

Oh, did it create momentum?

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:38:08):

... or formalized momentum that already existed?

Lynn Rusten (00:38:12):

I think it helped create momentum.

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:38:16):

Do you have an idea how the speech was received inside the U.S. government at the time?

Lynn Rusten (00:38:22):

Well, I wasn't inside yet. I don't know. I'm sure there were pockets of resistance, but I think a lot of it would've been supported. I'm sure there were some pockets of resistance. And it wasn't that, I mean, on the one hand, it had the vision of total elimination, but it also had very practical next steps. And again, I mean, I don't think there was a lot of divisiveness about needing a successor agreement to New START. I don't think there was a lot of divisiveness about non-proliferation. I don't think there was a lot of divisiveness about a lot of the things that were in there, in terms of the practical next steps.

I'm sure there was some congressional opposition. I mean, I'm sure there was something on... I can't remember all the details, but I'm sure there was something on CTBT, so that probably wasn't popular.

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:39:35):

You just briefly mentioned the reset. I just want us to circle back to that. How important was the broader reset with Russia in creating conditions for New START?

Lynn Rusten (00:39:48):

Yeah. I think that was important. I mean, I guess relationships had deteriorated. There was distrust. And I think, I'm sure the Russians were hoping that the relationship would be better from their perspective under Obama than it was under Bush. And so, that symbolism of reset was important.

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:40:18):

Prague articulated a very ambitious vision. Was there a gap between that public vision and what policymakers privately thought was achievable?

Lynn Rusten (00:40:40):

I'm not sure. I think, certainly in the realm of strategic arms control, what people in the administration thought was achievable at the beginning of the first term proved not to be achievable even after two terms. And as an example, at the end, the New START Treaty, I think, a decision was made to do a relatively easy, though it wasn't that easy, modest treaty to get something in place so that there wouldn't be a big gap after the expiration of the original START, with the expectation that we would get another bite out of the apple for another strategic agreement in the second term. And that turned out to be unrealistic, partly because I think no one anticipated that the ratification of the first (New START) Treaty would be as challenging as it was. And so it would have been hard to do another. Also, we couldn't get the Russians to bite on a follow-on treaty.

(00:41:57):

And then the JCPOA, which was an incredible accomplishment, which I'm so sad to see the Trump administration walked away from. But that took up a lot of bandwidth and a lot of senior level bandwidth in the second term. And I don't know that there would've been the capacity to do another big negotiation. So, anyway, the point being maybe it wasn't even so much that what was in the Prague Speech wasn't achievable, but that expectations were more optimistic and unrealistic than reality proved to be.

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:42:45):.

So, staying on challenges to get the Russians to bite on arms control. When you look back, were there signals or conditions that told you now is the time for a New START? Were there technical or political green lights on either side?

Lynn Rusten (00:43:08):

Well, you asked about the London Summit and I wasn't in government at the time, but I think the point is the presidents met early. And they made clear that they wanted to negotiate a follow-on agreement and they set forth a couple of parameters for it. And I can't remember what they were. So, it seems like that didn't take a lot of convincing, if my memory serves and maybe it doesn't.

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:43:38):

Are you familiar with any informal or big channel signals from the Russians or US senior leaders that indicated seriousness about negotiations?

Lynn Rusten (00:43:55):

Again, and I wasn't in government yet, so I can't remember if there were any kind of discussions during the transition. And usually, incoming administrations are pretty careful about that, because we have one president and one government at a time. I think there was public signaling, but I just don't know exactly.

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:44:30):

Can you pause? I don't know. Do we pause or we just continue speaking? I just want to ask an important question. We had just stopped the recording to have a brief break and now we're back. Can you please describe how the inter-agency process was organized for New START? Which agencies and offices were involved?

Lynn Rusten (00:44:53):

Sure. So, the primary agencies that participate in policymaking for nuclear arms control treaties are... Well, at the time of New START, because by then the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency didn't exist anymore. So, it was the State Department, the Department of Defense, the Joint Staff. So, interestingly, in the arms control process, the OSD policy (defense policy) and the Joint Chiefs of Staff (the uniformed military), they act as two different voting entities in the process. They are usually aligned, but not always. So, that's interesting. Anyway, so State, OSD policy, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Intelligence Community, and the Department of Energy are the five agencies.

(00:45:55):

And then of course, there's the NSC, which has oversight and leadership. But in terms of the backstopping process that I was leading, it was the agencies I mentioned. The NSC did not participate. I would report the results of that process to the NSC and they would go through them for approval. For instance, if we drafted a cable that gave negotiating instructions, it would go to the NSC for approval before it would actually go out to the delegation. And also, if issues couldn't be resolved at the level that I was working them in the inter-agency, then they would be referred to the NSC, which would then have its own process, convening all of the agencies I just mentioned to then try to resolve the issues.

(00:46:57):

At the Deputy Assistant Secretary, at the Assistant Secretary level, it could even go up to the Deputy's level or even the Principal's Committee, which is the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, the Cabinet. So, there was a whole process, but those are the agencies that generally participated. And just to kind of spell it out, in terms of the general expertise. So, obviously, the State Department had the diplomatic piece, the lead on negotiations, relations with other countries, which included allies and that kind of thing. People keeping in mind the interests and concerns of various partners. The Intelligence Community has a very specific role. They have a role in assessing the verifiability of an agreement. Well, they helped us assess capabilities and that kind of thing. So, they have a unique role.

(00:48:06):

Defense Department, obviously. Defense policy has primary responsibility for what are U.S. nuclear requirements, force posture, that kind of thing. And the Joint Staff actually operates those systems. And of course, is impacted by not only any limits and that kind of thing, but their operational practices can be affected by the content of a treaty. Meaning, if there's an inspection announced and all operations at a sub base have to stop, that means if they were planning to send a sub out to sea, they can't. And so, those things matter in the timelines and all those things, they need to be consulted. And the intrusiveness of any inspections, because what's good for the goose is good for the gander. So, it's great that we want to go and crawl around all kinds of Russian strategic systems, but that means you have to accept the Russians doing the same on ours.

(00:49:08):

So, there are lots of interesting discussions between the Joint Staff and the Intelligence Community about where you draw that balance between the... And then there was something called the... it used to be called the Defense Threat Reduction Agency. I think the name changed over the years. But basically, that's part of the Defense Department too, but those are the people who actually go and conduct inspections. And they were very involved in policymaking and negotiating the actual detailed procedures for inspections and that kind of thing. And then, of course, the Department of Energy has unique expertise in nuclear weapons themselves. And so, they played an important role in that or something like, in the end, we negotiated using radiation detection equipment up close, inspectors could, to determine whether or not a warhead on a designated missile was nuclear or not.

(00:50:06):

And they were very involved in the development with the Russians, joint development of a capability that was acceptable to both sides to use, to learn what we needed to for the treaty, but to keep each other from learning more than we needed to for the treaty, in terms of... So, anyway, those roughly are the agencies that participate and some of the equities that they have in the process. And those different perspectives, of course, led to different opinions, sometimes about what should or shouldn't be in a treaty. And so, judgments had to be made about ultimately where the U.S. government interests lie and what the position would be.

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:50:52):

Do you mind to share some of the different perspectives and opinions that emerged during the process?

Lynn Rusten (00:51:03):

Yeah. I'm trying to think of some good examples. Well, so there were decisions to be made... And again, a lot of this was in contrast to New START. So, one of the things going into the treaty was in terms of looking at the original START Treaty, which was a really effective treaty. But there was a desire to make New START a little less complicated, a little less costly to implement, have it be a little less impactful on operational practices. And again, I mean this stems from an assessment of the environment we were in, at the time that we negotiated the original START Treaty, which went all through the mid to late '80s and was finally concluded in 1991. I mean, Russia, well, the Soviet Union, was still a formidable adversary. We were worried about its nuclear forces. We wanted to limit them.

(00:52:26):

We wanted to encourage their deployment in a way that was stabilizing, not destabilizing. So, we did things like banned heavy MIRVed missiles in the original START Treaty, because we thought those were destabilizing. We wanted extremely intrusive and effective verification. That was the environment we were in then. In the environment in 2009, post-Soviet, post-Cold War, we still had a somewhat antagonistic relationship with Russia. But at the time, no one thought there was going to be a hot war in Europe. No one foresaw what happened in Ukraine. Russia wasn't considered so much of an adversary. Nuclear weapons were less salient. And so, there was more interest in having flexibility for U.S. military forces and planning than there was in constraining Russia.

(00:53:42):

So, we didn't, for instance, worry about MIRVs. Maybe we should have, because now the Russians are deploying a heavy MIRVed missile called the Sarmat, which never would've been allowed under the original START Treaty. We needed firm verification and an ability to verify the provisions of the treaty, but in some ways it wasn't as intrusive. In some ways it was, though. So, anyway, it was just a different time and the requirements were different. I mean, traditionally, there is a bit of a difference between the Intelligence Community and the Department of Defense, in that the Intelligence Community is interested in having as much transparency and the highest degree of verification on Russia as possible, partly because

it has a statutory requirement to assess the verifiability of a treaty. But also, because it's its job to learn as much as it can about potential threats to the United States and report accurately to policymakers.

(00:54:55):

And then you have the Department of Defense and the Joint Staff who want to limit the opportunities of Russia to do the same to us. So, it's a matter of understanding the equities and striking the balance. And I think one of the most important things about the inter-agency process... And I definitely learned this from mentors, although I couldn't name a particular one. But the culture, the inter-agency arms control culture in which I was trained, and grew up in, and was imbued in me was one that included a fair and thorough inter-agency process, whose objective was to make sure that the equities of every element of the US government were understood and made clear. And that differences were adjudicated in a transparent and fair way.

(00:55:55):

And that when there were differences, they were elevated to increasingly higher levels of government with full understanding, so that when, whoever it was, the deputy national security advisor, the national security advisor, the president sometimes made a decision, they had a full view of the views of the major entities of government, options, the pros and cons, the consequences. And made that decision carefully and well-informed. It was not my job, even though I was sitting in the State department, to put my thumb on the scale of these matters by imposing a State department view. It was to lead a fair process.

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:56:46):

So, how would you say the differences in opinion or perspectives were resolved or managed? I know you just briefly touched on it just now.

Lynn Rusten (00:56:58):

Yeah. I mean, that's the process. So, often, vehicles for this would be option papers. Sometimes we'd just write a paper of options of different ways to handle an issue in the negotiations, and use that as a vehicle for exploring the pros and cons and trying to gain consensus. But if not, sometimes you'd have a cable or a draft cable or a policy paper that would include options and brackets. And at the end of the bracket, it would say State and IC support, DOD opposes. And then you'd have the other option that would say DOD and JCS support, State and the IC (Intelligence Community) oppose. And it would go up to the NSC that way. And they would either just choose the option they wanted or they'd call a meeting or do something to figure out how to adjudicate it. So, that's just examples of the process in a detailed way.

Ian Fleming Zhou (00:58:17):

I hope there was consensus that was reached. So, what was the hardest internal argument you remember inside the U.S. government? And how was it ultimately settled during this process of negotiating New START, if any?

Lynn Rusten (00:58:39):

I'm sure there were. We had some interesting discussions about... I'm sure this wasn't the hardest. I'm just remembering. In the policy development process, which started way before the... The backstopping process didn't get set up until there was a team that formally deployed to Geneva and was really sitting there in Geneva for months on end, across the table from the Russians. But there was a policy formulation process before that. One interesting issue is what the bomber attribution rule should be, because there was an interest in... Well, under the New START Treaty that we just used in attribution rule, whereas for ICBMs and SLBMs, the treaty counted actual warheads on each missile. For bombers, there was just an attribution rule and it ended up being one. So, a bomber counted as one nuclear warhead, even though in fact heavy bombers can carry many cruise missiles and gravity bombs.

(00:59:58):

And in the original START Treaty, there was a higher attribution based on attachment points and stuff like that. So, this simplified it, but there was actually a desire., there was some interest at first in the U.S. government to have an actual count, but it would've required very intrusive inspections. I mean, we were trying to figure out how we'd even do it and what you would look at. And you'd have to probably go into warhead storage areas. And so, there was pretty vigorous discussions about whether that was desirable and feasible and what it would take. In the end, the Russians wouldn't agree to it anyway. I mean, it was explored. And we also then even tried with the Russians to just have a higher attribution rule of three, three warheads per bomber instead of one, but they wouldn't even go for that so we ended up with one.

(01:00:53):

Another interesting issue is telemetry, but that wasn't a debate within the government. That was kind of a weird thing, where the Senate wanted telemetry and couldn't understand why the treaty as it was being negotiated didn't have provisions for exchanging telemetry. Now, the original START Treaty had provisions for exchanging telemetry, which are the encrypted signals that are given off when you test launch a missile, which is really an intrusive thing to share with each side. But the reason it had that and it was negotiated was because there was this ban on throw-weight limits and heavy ICBMs, which meant the size of the ICBM and the weight of warheads that it could carry and project over a certain distance. And you learn all that through telemetry. So, you needed telemetry to verify the provisions of the treaty. But New START didn't have any such provisions.

(01:02:02):

There was a limit on the number of ICBMs you could have and warheads on ICBMs, but there was nothing about the character of the ICBMs. So, there were no provisions in the treaty that required an exchange of telemetry. But no matter how much this was explained to the Senate, because there were briefings along the way about the treaty, so that "in at the takeoff, in at the landing," -- you wanted to have their support. So, they were kept somewhat informed along the way. There were some people who just had it in their heads that it was a failing of the treaty, that it didn't have telemetry provision exchanges and it had to. And ultimately, we negotiated for it to satisfy the Senate, but it's kind of a meaningless provision that basically says once a year, the sides will meet and decide whether or not they're going to exchange telemetry on anywhere between one to five flight tests.

(01:03:02):

And I think over the entire course of the treaty, we never exchanged telemetry. But it was also hard to negotiate with the Russians, because they couldn't understand why we were negotiating telemetry provisions that weren't needed. So, anyway, that was a different kind of issue. And it went to the presidents and Mike McFaul, who when I was at the NSC, was the Senior Director for Russia. He later became our ambassador to Russia, but he learned the hard way the lesson of "never let an issue like telemetry get to the presidential level." You don't want to staff your president, having to talk to the Russian president about telemetry.

Ian Fleming Zhou (01:03:41):

You mentioned earlier that Russia... Oh, no, no. I want to ask follow- up question. Would Russia flat-out refuse or these were assumptions that Russia might not agree to certain issues?

Lynn Rusten (01:03:58):

Well, when I was talking about the bomber counting rules, that was explored and rejected in negotiation. Sometimes we didn't know. Sometimes we wanted something that we thought they might not agree to, but we sought it anyway. And it just went different ways. And some things are just complete non-starters. So, for instance, if someone said, "Oh, let's just ask the Russians to not have any ICBMs in silos," or something like that. I mean, people would've said, "Come on."

Ian Fleming Zhou (01:04:41):

Yeah, that makes sense. How did the NSC team work to align some of the stakeholders? Were there homework memos, NSC principal meetings or other mechanisms that were key?

Lynn Rusten (01:04:59):

Yeah. I mean, of course, there were lots. But when I first came in to State to work for Rose... And I didn't get in until the summer of 2009. They had started on January 21st or whatever, 2009. So, I didn't get in for about the first six months. There was already a process underway being led at the NSC by George Look, who was the Senior Director for Arms Control and Non-proliferation, to develop a draft treaty text. And that was really interesting, because that is not how the treaties are normally negotiated and that's not how the original START Treaty was negotiated. That started more with principles from the president, and then working down and across the table with the Russians on principles, and then provisions, and then of the main treaty obligations, and then working out all the details of inspection and verification.

(01:06:02):

And by the way, the hardest work of treaty negotiation and the most work is in the detailed annexes for verification, and notification exchange, and inspections and all that stuff. The most important part of a treaty are the fundamental rights and obligations, which are the primary treaty texts. I mean that's hard too, but what takes so much time to develop and implement are all those annexes and stuff that say exactly what happens when an inspection team shows up at a Russian missile base or whatever. And the original START Treaty is hundreds of pages long. So, on New START, because the foundation for it was the original START Treaty and the main question was, how can we streamline it so that it's a little less complex and easier to implement? And of course, what should the fundamental obligations be? And so, a couple of people with a lot of experience from the original START Treaty, including George Look, who was then at the NSC, he had been an OSD official. And a guy from one of the national labs, who had worked on the original START Treaty-

Lynn Rusten (01:07:20):

and Rose also employed him as an expert, they actually just started playing around with creating a treaty text, which basically started with START and just started subtracting and changing things to have a much shorter treaty, more streamlined, less complex inspection procedures and other procedures.

(01:07:52):

And it didn't resolve some of the fundamental issues in terms of what are the numbers that are going to be in this treaty in terms of. It didn't try to do that. There were later processes, and that was underpinned by a Department of Defense nuclear posture review assessment, stuff like that. So it wasn't trying to kind of settle some of the key parts of a treaty. When you think about it, you think about then what are the limits? But this was just trying to deal with the whole regime.

(01:08:24):

And so in that process, and it was still going on by the time I came on board, I participated in many of those meetings at the NSC, we developed this whole draft text. And when the negotiations got going, the United States actually tabled an entire draft treaty text, which is unheard of and interesting. I think it gives you, one thing I learned in government is the power of the pen. Holding the pen gives you a lot of power. And so writing the first draft of that treaty was probably smart, but it was a very unorthodox way to do it.

(01:09:05):

And they got a lot of things right. I think some things maybe didn't. It turns out that when you start to unravel a tightly woven fabric to make it less complex and stuff, I think a couple things fell through the cracks. But of course what we tabled is not exactly what we ended up with, but it was the starting point for the negotiations with the Russians.

(01:09:31):

And they were of the same mind in some ways philosophically, the idea to do something a little less complicated, having a little less operational impact on the normal everyday activities of the Russian military, that kind of thing. So I think they were kind of on board with the philosophy. There were some things that didn't work out so well.

Ian Fleming Zhou (01:10:02):

This is a very interesting point, you raise, yeah. I just wanted us to dwell on that for a little second. So they are trying to reduce START, right, and then into a lesser complex treaty, New START. And as you said, some things are going to fall through the cranks.

(01:10:24):

What was the strategy behind this? And do you think when they were going through this, they saw that there might be loopholes that might be created or there might be certain issues that might now end up being overlooked because you're trying to make a document as less complicated as possible?

Lynn Rusten (01:10:51):

I'm sure we knew that to some extent. I think I'm sure some things were just like mistakes that we didn't learn until implementation and some were fixable. And, of course, it drives me crazy when people talk about verification like it's an independent variable 'cause it's not. I mean, verification is, it's always about verification of what? Verification is linked to the provisions, the obligations of a treaty. So going back to the telemetry example, if you don't have provisions in a treaty that require verification, I'm sorry, that require an exchange of telemetry, then telemetry is not critical to verification of that particular agreement. And there are other things like that. But one of the things ...

(01:11:48):

So the original START Treaty had extremely detailed procedures for what are called conversions or eliminations of systems. New START continued that practice. And again, this was partly driven on both sides, but a lot on our side. The desire to reduce costs in the implementation of the treaty. So the Joint Staff, we wanted the right to reduce the number of weapons assigned to a missile through elimination procedures or conversion procedures. We wanted to take what used to be a heavy bomber equipped for nuclear weapons out of accountability from the treaty by turning it into a heavy bomber that wasn't equipped for nuclear weapons. And, so, the questions is: what were the procedures for doing that that would be acceptable so it wouldn't count against the treaty's limits?

(01:12:53):

And what was unfortunate is we had, for everything that needed to be permitted, there were very specific procedures and they were negotiated on both sides and agreed to. But at the US instigation, there was also kind of a loophole that was like, or a procedure to be developed later, that would be demonstrated to the other side and discussed in the verification commission. But the problem is with that kind of third ... So, you've got like door number one, here's exactly how you do it. Door number two, here's another way that you do it exactly. And door number three is some other thing we haven't thought of yet and you just have to demonstrate it to the other side and then you can do it.

(01:13:40):

But the problem is that there was really no ... other than the mutual interest of both parties to have a treaty be successful and work, there was nothing that required the inspecting party to approve the procedure. And, so, we ended up having disputes throughout the implementation of New START specifically over the way that United States was taking heavy bombers out of accountability and the way we were converting launchers on SLBMs to not be equipped to carry nuclear warheads.

(01:14:19):

And I remember being uncomfortable as the treaty was being negotiated because it sort of wasn't how I was taught to do treaties. But again, this was that culture of focus on flexibility for the US military more than we were worried about constraining the Russians or what they might do with that. And as it turned out, they didn't really do anything that gave us a lot of heartbreak in that area. They did other things. But it was a continual source of contention that they thought that it was too reversible the things that we were taking, the steps we were taking. And there were many fights and discussions and accusations.

(01:15:05):

And, ironically, if the US does decide to increase its capacity now beyond New START limits now that the treaty's out of force, we will in fact be demonstrating that we can reverse those steps and upload onto those systems again. How easy it is, how much time it takes remains to be seen. But I think it wasn't good treaty practice or hygiene to negotiate unclear obligations or kind of kick down the road significant issues that could be points of difference that don't give both treaty partners a right to kind of say how it will go.

Ian Fleming Zhou (01:16:06):

Can we just circle back for a little bit? You mentioned you were uncomfortable at some point during the processes. Could you describe again what specifically made you uncomfortable in certain moments?

Lynn Rusten (01:16:23):

Well, I mean, there were a couple times where I just thought -- we can get to the Russian positions too, but I didn't have any control over the Russian positions. But there were a couple of times where I thought the U.S. position was a mistake and this was one of them on the conversion or elimination procedures, this idea that there could be ... It would have been fine if you wrote into a treaty "or other methods that were mutually agreed," but the idea that it was written in a way that said it could be other methods that will be demonstrated to the other side but doesn't require their consent, I think that was a mistake because it opened the door to doing something unilaterally that the other side would object to. And that's exactly what happened. And, so, there were disputes about whether we were complying with the treaty limits, complying with the treaty rules.

Ian Fleming Zhou (01:17:25):

That's very interesting, Lynn.

(01:17:27):

Do you think in a bid to be flexible, because you have referenced to the word flexible for a while, do you think the treaty was getting watered down as a negotiator? Do you think so?

Lynn Rusten (01:17:48):

Well, again, I mean it wasn't as stringent as the original START Treaty in certain ways. It certainly wasn't trying to ... A fundamental principle for the U.S. was the idea of freedom to mix. So, within the overall limits of launchers and warheads, both sides could have whatever force structure they wanted. And so that meant that we were getting away from trying to keep the Russians from having, for instance, MIRVed heavy ICBMs, which are destabilizing. Again, because we were in a period of time where we were less concerned about the Russian nuclear threat in a way and more concerned about our own freedom of action. And it wasn't even so much with nuclear weapons. Some of these systems are dual capable, especially bombers.

(01:18:53):

But also, the flexibility to meet the treaty without having to do really expensive things like completely cut up a bomber like we had to in the original START Treaty to take a bomber out of accountability, you had to cut off the tail and cut off the wings. And they were like, "No, we want to reuse this thing for conventional missions. So, what can we do to just say it's not a … Can we cut a few wires and take off a few attachment points and say it's no longer nuclear capable?" And you can, but the question from the Russians is, "Yeah, and how long would it take you to reverse that if you decide that you're going to?"

(01:19:37):

So, I think doing anything unilaterally is a mistake because the whole premise of a treaty is to have mutually agreed constraints and understandings about it. So, the other thing we did at the very end at the end game, which I really was upset about, was a unilateral declaration that if we were to deploy long- range conventional prompt global strike systems that were conventional, they wouldn't count against the treaty limits.

(01:20:09):

And it ended up not mattering because we didn't do it. We don't have that capability. But it was problematic because it goes against the entire philosophy of the treaty because basically the treaty said any warhead on top of an ICBM or an SLBM will count as nuclear, whether it is or not. That's just how it works. So, to suddenly say that we could have a new class of long-range strike systems and just claim they're conventional and not have them count when they could be dual-capable I think was problematic and there would have been a big fight about it if we'd done it.

Ian Fleming Zhou (01:20:57):

Did you raise any concerns during the process? Did you voice out any concerns?

Lynn Rusten (01:21:05):

I think I did voice a concern. That one kind of happened at a very high level and I did voice my concern that it was the wrong outcome, but it was done at the last minute in a … Yeah, there was no ability to influence it.

(01:21:25):

I think on the conversion and elimination procedures, I don't know if I did as strongly as I should have. I think I did express concerns, but I don't think there was a lot of appetite to fight it. And to some extent that was really the Russians' fight to have, right? I mean, they agreed to it. They didn't have to.

(01:21:58):

But it also meant we were living with that risk with the Russians. It just so happens that we took advantage of that creative door number three and they didn't. But it did cause implementation problems throughout, so I think there's a lesson learned for the future.

Ian Fleming Zhou (01:22:20):

Okay.

(01:22:22):

What was the dynamic between the negotiating delegations in Geneva and Washington-based policymakers?

Lynn Rusten (01:22:31):

Yeah. So that's really interesting and that is very complicated. In general, we're all working together and we're all trying to achieve an outcome. But there are tensions that arise in both directions. And so I'm speaking a little generically based on all the treaties I've been involved in, but then I'll give a few New START examples.

(01:23:07):

So the team in Geneva is, obviously they're closer to the negotiations. But they can also kind of lose sight of what the Washington concerns are and perspectives. They have judgments to make about how far out ahead of their instructions they can get and when they need to come back for guidance.

(01:23:42):

And sometimes Washington doesn't understand the pressures there. There were times where I don't think it worked very well during New START. One example was the NSC put a lot of pressure on the negotiating delegation. This was early on. Remember START was expiring at the end of 2009, I think. And it was clear the treaty wasn't going to be done yet, the new treaty. And the NSC started putting a lot of pressure on Rose and the delegation to get the Russians to agree to continue some kind of a verification scheme. And the Russians just weren't having it.

(01:24:35):

And there was a lot of pressure put on the delegation and Rose. And I just remember thinking. And I think I said it to my counterparts at NSC, but this was coming from really high up in the NSC, that it was really unfair and they were getting criticized a lot. And it was really unfair because if that was really a U.S. government priority, that needed to be worked between the White House and the Kremlin.

(01:25:02):

It was clear after. It was fine to have them explore it, but once the door was shut, it was clear that that was only going to happen because the national security advisor or the president picked up the phone and called their counterparts and tried to make it happen. And they never did that. They just put a lot of pressure on the delegation and were highly critical of the delegation for not getting it done.

(01:25:26):

And there were examples later when we were negotiating against a deadline again. And deadlines are helpful in negotiations, but there was a deadline to get the treaty done because Obama and the Russian president were going to meet at the summit in April 2010 and get it done. And there was a lot of pressure put on the delegation. They were forced to work through Thanksgiving and not come home and see their families, which was very demoralizing for people.

(01:26:06):

At the end, they sent over Ellen Tauscher, who was the Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security and Jim Timbie, who worked for her, who's a longtime expert, to help them finish the treaty, which was kind of insulting to the delegation. And they sat over there for several weeks to try to get it done. But I'm not sure that that was helpful and it was dispiriting for the delegation. And then at one point there was at the very end, the NSC insisted on twice a day check-ins with the delegation to hear what progress they were making, which is pretty unrealistic because things don't move that fast between the morning and the evening. On any given day it's going to be hard to report progress. And it also at some point just exhausted the delegation team and distracts from what they're trying to do in Geneva, not to mention the time difference. So, I had never quite seen anything like that.

(01:27:21):

But more generally, sometimes there's just kind of a difference in perspectives because when the negotiators are very focused on getting the deal done and they can kind of get a little disconnected from what the priorities are back in Washington, even though on every delegation, there's a senior member from each of the voting agencies on the delegation. So OSD policy had Ted Warner and the Joint Staff had Mike Elliott. And these people were in very close contact with the senior levels in their own agencies and communicating about equities. But still, sometimes there are disconnects.

Ian Fleming Zhou (01:28:05):

Do you remember–

Lynn Rusten (01:28:07):

I'll just say it's kind of like sometimes ambassadors get accused of clientitis or if you're the ambassador to country X, you become too overly sympathetic with that country and country's interests and you kind of forget what some of the priorities are at home. There's a little bit of that dynamic. Or sometimes there's a perception of that dynamic whether it's fair or not.

(01:28:36):

And I'll just say one other thing. I've never talked with Rose, so I don't know how she feels about this, but it was unusual and I've never seen in my experience that the lead negotiator for the delegation was dual hatted as a confirmed Assistant Secretary, which can present almost a little bit of a conflict of interest. And that was a first. It also made it, as a practical matter, she couldn't really do both jobs. The entire time she was in Geneva, it was hard for her to fulfill the Assistant Secretary functions and her deputy [Assistant Secretary] was doing a lot of that. But still, if there was an inter-agency meeting at that level, she was there both representing the State Department and representing the negotiating delegation. And as I say, that probably isn't the best structure.

Ian Fleming Zhou (01:29:35):

Do you remember who was part of the delegation in Geneva besides Rose? The names?

Lynn Rusten (01:29:42):

Yeah. So the OSD policy lead was Ted Warner. The Joint Staff lead was Michael Elliott. Marcie Ries, she was a foreign service officer, was Rose's deputy [on the delegation}. I don't know if I should say the names of people for the intelligence community, although I think they were … I won't. And I think Kurt Siemon was probably the most senior person from DOE and he was a veteran of the original START Treaty too.

(01:30:39):

One thing that was interesting about going back to the inter-agency process and reconstituting expertise is there was implementing work going on of course in Bush 43. They were still implementing the original START Treaty. They were still implementing the INF Treaty. But some of the expertise had been eliminated by intention, I mean reorganizations in State and DoD. Some people left like me. I voted with my feet. Some people left. Some people went off and did other things in their departments, but there was less [expertise]. So there was a need to kind of reconstitute capability.

(01:31:31):

And in most of the agencies, they brought back the people who had been doing this in the past. Either they were still in their agencies, but maybe not working so much on these issues or maybe they had been doing, or they brought some people out of retirement. I know OSD policy did. Rose brought me back from the Hill, that kind of thing.

(01:31:52):

The one agency that was the hardest hit by the lack of institutional memory and institutional knowledge was the Joint Staff. And the reason for that is because in that military culture, people rotate in and out of positions every three years. And so all the people that I had worked with had gone on to other things and had moved on. And that was the agency that took the most kind of retraining or training like how we actually do this and how the process works and what they're supposed to do and how they engage with the inter-agency.

(01:32:35):

And even Michael Elliott, who was the head of, the lead Joint Staff negotiator who had come out of STRATCOM and was on the Joint Staff, he hadn't really done arms control negotiations before, so he was really learning on the fly. So that was interesting.

Ian Fleming Zhou (01:32:57):

What was the role of Congress and particularly the Senate during the negotiating process?

Lynn Rusten (01:33:05):

Yeah. Well, as is kind of traditional, I mean, it's traditional to find ways to keep Congress generally and the Senate specifically and most importantly informed about the progress of negotiations. Because at the end of the day, if it's a treaty, they're going to have to give their advice and consent to ratification. So you want to keep them informed, but you also have to kind of find a line where they're not interfering in the executive branch function.

(01:33:40):

But Rose and the administration very conscientiously and consistently advised key members and committees. There used to be called something called the Arms Control Working Group sort of back in the day during the original START negotiations and other treaties. I think they reconstituted something kind of like that. And so they did try to keep them informed. They occasionally came over to Geneva. I mean, it's not like they actually sat in the room during the negotiations, but they would come, they would meet with the U.S. delegation in a classified format to hear what was going on. Maybe there'd be a reception with the Russian delegation. They'd get a feel.

(01:34:27):

So that was really important. And that's how we got early warning about some things that they were going to care about a lot, including this telemetry issue, which was kind of crazy, but they cared and we found a way. The other really hot button issue was missile defense, which Congress was extremely exercised about that it not be limited any way. Even if it was a way that would have no practical impact on us, but philosophically they're uber sensitive about that.

Ian Fleming Zhou (01:35:08):

What was the inter-urgency process supporting the ratification effort after the treaty was concluded?

Lynn Rusten (01:35:16):

Yeah. So there was a process and it was led since then-Vice President Biden came from the Senate, had been chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he and his team really led that process. And in fact, he has had a guy, Brian McKeon, who had been his top legal counsel on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. And Brian was working for the Vice President in the administration in the White House. And Brian led that effort.

(01:35:51):

There were two pieces of it. There was the process that was all about interacting with members and briefing them and all that. But there was the other process which I continued to lead, which was the preparation with the inter-agency of all the substantive materials supporting the ratification effort. So that meant everything starting with the article-by-article analysis and the entire what we call the ratification package that actually gets sent to the Hill, which includes a letter from the President, letter from the Secretary of State, the treaty itself, this article-by-article analysis, which kind of explains item by item what's in the treaty. And then all the congressional testimony by everybody who testified on it, which was like every cabinet secretary and others.

(01:36:50):

The really hard thing was all the questions for the record. So we got over a thousand questions for the record out of these hearings that we had to answer. And initially the way that's handled is they go to the agency that would have jurisdiction. So if there was a question about like, I don't know, a verification issue, it might go to the intelligence community. And they would do that question the way they would always do questions within their agency and through their congressional affairs office. Or maybe there was a question about what's the U.S. force structure going to be? So the ICBM caucus was very concerned about whether they'd still have ICBMs in their states or something like that, or how many bombers would we have, or whatever. And those would go to the Defense Department and something about radiation detection equipment would go to DOE.

(01:37:45):

Of course there was a lot of redundancy and repetitiveness in the questions that were coming from Foreign Relations Committee, the Defense, the Armed Services Committee, the Intelligence Committee. But there was a lot of redundancy in the questions. But I pretty quickly figured out that the same questions were not being answered in the same way by every agency or some agencies were answering questions in ways that weren't right.

(01:38:19):

So I talked to Brian McKeon and said, "This process isn't working. It's a problem. And I think what we need to do is have a process where every single answer, no matter which agency is creating it, comes through my backstopping committee and we approve it before it goes up." And I said, "But I need your support to do it because it's unconventional and all these agencies are going to balk." And he agreed absolutely. And that's what we did.

(01:38:50):

But I mean, I remember I had a time once where a question came up from the Joint Staff and I said they had to change it. And they said, "Well, I can't do that. The Chairman of Joint Chiefs approved this language. I can't change it. It was his testimony." And I was like, "I don't care. You have to." And because I had the backing of the White House, I was able to enforce it.

(01:39:16):

But it partly came to light because I realized incredibly that OSD policy and the Joint Staff were not answering a simple question the same way, which was, what's the final force structure going to be and how many heavy bombers equipped for nuclear weapons will there be? And they were giving different numbers. And I kept calling Jim Miller, who was the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, well, his person. And I said, "Something's wrong here because you guys, it's a simple question and you guys are giving different numbers. Sort it out. What's going on?" And some of it had already gone up.

(01:39:58):

And so they finally sorted it out and they actually had to retract and re-answer some of the ones that gave the wrong number. But that was an example of why I had to get control of this process and make sure that we were speaking with

one voice on every question. But it was hard and it broke a lot of china because agencies are not used to, other than maybe with the NSC, but they're not used to having to kind of clear a question in their own building by the Chairman or the Secretary of Defense and then have somebody else say like, "Actually, we need you to change these three words or that number." But we did it and it worked. And again, it was because I had the backing of the White House that they wanted it done this way.

Ian Fleming Zhou (01:40:51):

Do you remember on the issue of numbers, which were the numbers for what exactly? Do you remember?

Lynn Rusten (01:40:58):

Yeah, it was how many heavy bombers? Members of Congress are very interested in when the treaty is fully implemented, what is the force structure going to be? How many bombers will there be? And of course in whose district and at what base? How many ICBMs will there be and where

Lynn Rusten (01:41:21):

.they'll be. So they wanted to know at the end of the treaty, when we meet the limits, and in some cases they actually hadn't fully decided, but the point was we had to answer that question the same way every single time, no matter who was asking it. And it was actually fascinating that of all things, it's one thing if the DOE answers the question a little differently than the State department would, but the idea that OSD policy and the Joint Staff didn't have their story straight on the numbers of weapons, it was like, wow. Houston, we have a problem.

Ian Fleming Zhou (01:41:57):

Definitely Houston we have a problem. So staying on verification, can you explain the verification provisions of New START?

Lynn Rusten (01:42:08):

Yeah. And this is so underappreciated. First of all, even up until 2022, well, I should say up until the pandemic, so even after Crimea, whatever, I think it's, and I might be rusty on the numbers, but basically 18 times a year, the United States and Russia respectively were sending inspection teams to each other's country to inspect missile and sub bases and bomber bases and other facilities. And that only stopped during the pandemic. And then when we were, I'm going to go back and talk about other provisions, but then when the U.S. was prepared to resume after vaccines and stuff, that's when the Russians refused to resume inspections as a reaction to Ukraine having bombed a base where they have heavy bombers.

(01:43:15):

But I think the inspection regime was a little less onerous than the original START Treaty, but it was still a lot. I think it was 18 a year. There were so-called type one and type two inspections. I won't get into the difference, but it had to do with which type of facilities. The thing that was really novel about New START, whereas the original START Treaty strictly had an attribution rule. So if it was a certain type of missile, it was considered to have 10 warheads in Russia or a different type, six warheads. New START, because we, again, and this was something that was permitted to allow us to reach numbers in a more cost-effective way, it allowed the downloading of warheads. So a missile that could be capable of carrying, let's say a submarine-launched missile that could be capable of carrying six warheads could be attributed with only having four, but it was subject to inspection.

(01:44:21):

So twice a year, the other thing that's really important is the data exchanges. Twice a year we exchanged under the treaty a very detailed lay down of exactly all the weapon systems that we have, how many nuclear warheads were attributed to them, where they were. And in addition, there are notifications that required that every time a treaty limited item moved location, we had to send each other a notice. So if you had a bomber, and again, these bombers are used in conventional

too. If it left the United States to go visit the UK or do an exercise or something, you'd have to send a notification. If a submarine-launched ballistic missile went from a sub base to sea, you had to send a notification that it's out to sea. If it was in a repair facility, you have to tell them.

(01:45:15):

So we were doing multiple ones a day, but we had incredible real time insight notified to each other of where our nuclear-capable strategic systems were at all times. And, of course, we have our own independent means of verification, but this helps you queue that up too. You can confirm whether it's accurate or not based on other means or at least try to. But the one thing you can't tell is an attribution. So, if you have a missile in a silo or that's gone to sea that we know is capable of carrying six warheads, but we're told that it's only got four because that's how they're meeting the treaty limits, how do you know?

(01:45:59):

And the answer is there was the ability for an inspection team to show up at a sub base or an ICBM base. The team would arrive, let's say it's an ICBM base, and they would be told, "Okay, in silo number one, there's a missile with four warheads. In silo number two, there's a missile with eight warheads." And I'm just making this up. Anyway, say exactly which silo and how many warheads on each missile. And the team could randomly say, "Okay, we want to see the missile that's in silo number five." And they would have the ability to watch it the entire time. It would take many hours for a missile to be pulled out of a silo, for the nose cone to be pulled off in front of the inspection team. It could be covered with a shroud that had been negotiated what it would be like so that you could see the bumps, but you couldn't actually see the warheads themselves.

(01:46:59):

And you could also use this radiation detection equipment I referenced earlier. So you could count how many bumps and you could see if there was radiation. And so that was the first time that we've negotiated the ability to actually inspect and count the specific number of warheads on a missile. And this also was true for missiles on submarines. So the sub would come into port within a specified amount of time. If it was there, it would have to stay there. You could say, "I want to see tube number six." They would do the preparations to open up the hatch and show the team tube number six. So that was incredible and incredibly intrusive and it had never been done before.

Ian Fleming Zhou (01:47:51):

One of the themes of this project is understanding what made New START possible. Looking back, how important was the shared belief in verification and transparency in creating a foundation for negotiation?

Lynn Rusten (01:48:11):

Yeah. I think the fact that there was a shared history of doing this and of having almost shockingly frank and transparent conversations about our systems and practices and allowing this kind of intrusive onsite inspection or other cooperative measures. Sometimes there's things like, let's say there's a requirement to eliminate a missile, you have to cut it up. Under the original START Treaty. There was a requirement to notify it, to leave it out in the open for a certain number of days so that we could each, through satellites, see it and see the pieces and all that. So there's different ways to do these things. But the fact that that was the culture of how our countries have come to do these agreements and there is a fair amount of trust. And there was at the time, certainly a mutual interest in having these verifiable agreements. That said, there were some things that each side didn't want to keep doing.

(01:49:28):

I mentioned the Russians didn't want to allow us to do perimeter portal monitoring anymore at the Votkinsk factory. Now, there was not a reason to anymore because that element of the INF treaty had gone out of force. Now turns out it might

be because they were producing a missile there they shouldn't have been that we later learned. But anyway, they were not going to let that happen again. The Russians wanted to get rid of all the, what was called the Article V prohibitions from the original START Treaty. And those were the prohibitions that banned the development and deployment of ICBMs and SLBMs in exotic basing modes, which meant under the sea and from air. And instead we had this provision that if either side was thought to be developing a new kind of weapon, it could be discussed in the BCC. But again, there was no provision for having an agreement about accountability. And then we know they ended up announcing in 2018 that they were developing these exotic systems like the Poseidon and the Burevestnik. So clearly they were protecting that.

(01:50:45):

And if they had, it turned out not to be an issue under the treaty because they didn't get to the stage of development or deployment that would have caused them to need to be spoken about in the BCC. But again, there was no requirement to do anything but discuss. So it's an open question whether we would have reached agreement on whether they should be counted under the treaty. But as I mentioned earlier in our conversation, the fact that we made a unilateral declaration that something that we might do wouldn't count under the treaty, that would be the Conventional Prompt Global Strike.

(01:51:24):

Just having already done that would have completely undermined our ability to demand that new kinds of Russian systems be counted under the treaty. Now interestingly, they did deploy the Avangard hypersonic warhead on top of a treaty accountable missile. But there was no question because of the way the rules work, that any warhead on top of a missile would count as nuclear, whether it was or not. It didn't matter that it was hypersonic. It still counted and they demonstrated it. They agreed it would be accountable and there wasn't actually any contention about that.

Ian Fleming Zhou (01:52:13):

Was there a particular verification issue or breakthrough that made you think, "We can actually get this done."?

Lynn Rusten (01:52:24):

I never thought we couldn't get it done, but I think the warhead verification provision was really important and it was really important as a way that would facilitate even further reductions. And also if you thought ahead to the possibility of regimes where we would monitor total warhead stockpiles and non-strategic nuclear warheads, the fact that we had gotten to the point where we would let each other get up close and personal to warheads, that we would jointly develop a radiation detection system that both sides were comfortable allowing be physically close to their warheads, which allows you to characterize it, that was a good harbinger for future potential agreements, which now seem far away.

Ian Fleming Zhou (01:53:25):

Is there anything on the issue of verification that you think you might need to share for the benefit of this project that I might have missed?

Lynn Rusten (01:53:42):

Well, one thing that I think is interesting is that when the original START Treaty was being negotiated, there was an office within the Defense Department within OSD called the... I forget what it was called. Something like the Treaty Compliance Group or something. But it was the internal watchdog within DOD to make sure that their internal procedures were compliant with treaty obligations. They were like hawks. And they were mostly hawks because they cared about what the Russians were doing and they wanted to be sure that the Russians were complying and they understood that they needed to too. I think over the years consistent with this kind of idea that we became less concerned about the Russians and constraining the Russians and more concerned about our own freedom and flexibility that the internal watchdog functions at DOD have atrophied.

(01:54:58):

And I think it would be healthier for them to play that function more vigorously. I actually saw the woman who used to run that office who honestly was difficult to deal with in the interagency and stuff because she was such a hawk about the way the Russians were doing things. But I actually told her in my old age, I now really appreciate her and the role she played and her doggedness in making sure that the Pentagon was scrupulous in complying with everything because we wanted that same standard for the Russians. And I think that is useful. But look, I think verification and transparency are really important. And I think we take it for granted now because we have so much accumulated knowledge both through treaties and just from our intelligence assets that we take it for granted. But I think over time, if we go significantly longer without having those kinds of mechanisms in place with Russia, our confidence level about understanding what they're doing and where their forces are will atrophy over time and we'll regret that we've lost that.

Ian Fleming Zhou (01:56:24):

If you could only choose one verification mechanism from New START, which one would you identify as the best? Just one.

Lynn Rusten (01:56:37):

I'm sorry, but I think it's impossible to answer that question that way because I think what works is the fabric of data exchange, notifications and onsite inspections and cooperative measures, including not interfering with overhead imagery and stuff. It's the fabric of it all that works together. And honestly, how we get to how many numbers of inspections we have and for what purposes -- a lot of that is derived from some analytical and mathematical work that's done in the intelligence community. For instance, to basically say how many times do we have to see something or do something or inspect something to have X degree of confidence that if they're cheating, we'll catch them? So it's very...

(01:57:41):

And all of that is based on a combination of all the sources of information we have, which is our own information that we get independently plus the data exchange, the notifications, all of that. So it's really hard for me to separate out one thing. One thing I didn't mention that I just thought of it now, that's another thing that was novel in this treaty was something called unique identifiers where there's a specific number on every treaty limited item. And so you can correlate when we get the data exchange about where all the items are, the missiles or whatever, and then they say it's like a missile with serial code number XYZABC. When you go and inspect it, you can see if the one that you see actually has a unique identifier of an item that's supposed to be there. So that was unique. That actually went to high levels. I think Admiral Mullen was involved in helping to negotiate that when he was the Chairman with his counterpart.

Ian Fleming Zhou (01:59:02):

I'm seeing it's two hours now. I don't know if you guys want to continue.

Lynn Rusten (01:59:05):

Yeah. Should we stop?

Ian Fleming Zhou (01:59:06):

No, you're fine.

Lynn Rusten (01:59:06):

It's up to you. Should we stop? Save something for tomorrow?

Lynn Rusten (01:59:12):

Yeah, I think it's enough for today.

Ian Fleming Zhou (01:59:13):

When, where, how and why? My name is Ian Fleming Zhou and today we are in Vienna, Austria. It's the 7th of June 2026. And I'm with Lynn Rusten and Dave Cullen. Recording session two.

Lynn Rusten (01:59:47):

Okay.

Ian Fleming Zhou (01:59:49):

Hi Lynn.

Lynn Rusten (01:59:50):

Good morning.

Ian Fleming Zhou (01:59:51):

Good morning to you too. Let us just carry on from where we left off yesterday. So we want to start with discussing top leadership roles. Can you recall a moment when presidential leadership changed the internal U.S. calculus on New START?

Lynn Rusten (02:00:13):

Well, I think presidential leadership was essential throughout the entire process. First of all, President Obama made it clear that this was a priority of his administration and his first term. He met early with the Russian president to set out the goals for the treaty and some guidelines to the negotiators. And then the top White House officials and National Security Council staff and the president's national security advisor kept very close tabs on the progress of the treaty. And the president was engaged periodically as needed to help resolve issues or advance the negotiations. And that includes his involvement in determining key elements of the U.S. negotiating position, primarily what the limits would be, what U.S. nuclear force requirements are and what the limits therefore of the treaty should be from our perspective. But also the president was engaged in trying to resolve some key differences that arose along the way in the negotiations.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:01:40):

Vice President Biden chaired many National Security Committee sessions. How did he influence the process? Did he have particular priorities?

Lynn Rusten (02:01:57):

So, I was not at the NSC then. I was at the State Department and I can't speak personally to that. I mean, I know that he was very engaged in the ratification process very personally, working Senators he knew, working on the strategy. And I'm sure that during the negotiating process, he was partially focused on what would be needed to get Senate support in the end.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:02:33):

And Secretary Clinton announced the treaty's conclusion in 2010. How engaged was she in shaping the treaty terms?

Lynn Rusten (02:02:43):

My impression is that Secretary Clinton was not very engaged at all, to be honest. Undersecretary of State for International Security and Arms Control, Ellen Tauscher was somewhat engaged and very engaged in the end game when she was actually sent over to Geneva to help the team finish the final negotiations. But I never had the impression that Secretary Clinton was personally deeply engaged.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:03:18):

So what was the role of Undersecretary of State, Ellen Tauscher?

Lynn Rusten (02:03:26):

Well, of course, in the bureaucratic structure, she sat on top of the position of Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control, which was Rose Gottemoeller's position while she was also the negotiator. So in principle, Rose as the negotiator was reporting to Ellen Tauscher. The other person at State who I'd say was very involved was Bill Burns, who was the Deputy Secretary, but of course he also had been Ambassador to Russia. He had a long involvement with this issue set. And I'd say that he, although his involvement probably wasn't very sort of visible on the outside, I think in terms of he and his staff were following the progress of negotiations very closely.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:04:21):

Interesting. Do you mind to share a little bit more on what else Bill Burns might have done? Do you mind to share a little bit more on Bill Burns' role?

Lynn Rusten (02:04:37):

I think he tracked the negotiations. I think he was probably, I'm just surmising, probably Secretary Clinton relied on him to follow this issue set more closely because I think it was maybe something more familiar to Bill Burns. I never had the sense that Secretary Clinton was deeply engaged on nuclear policy issues and nuclear arms control issues. And I think he was also someone who was trusted by Rose and others. And also like a source of advice because he was so experienced in dealing with the Russians. So if there were issues in the negotiations or even issues, bureaucratic issues, in Washington that were being navigated, I think he was probably a trusted source of advice and counsel.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:05:45):

Of the lead negotiators and policymakers, who do you recall as especially influential in setting strategy?

Lynn Rusten (02:05:56):

Well, I mean, of course Rose herself played a big role because she was, and again, this kind of had to do with the dual nature of her position since she was dual hatted as the Assistant Secretary for Arms Control as well as the lead negotiator. She was very involved in all of the policy development. That isn't always the case. It hasn't always been the case in past negotiations because usually the negotiator kind of came later. The policy is initially set and then the negotiator is selected and announced. But she was there from the beginning. And so obviously she's really important. I mean, the NSC staff was very important. Gary Samore and George Look on the arms control and non-proliferation side of the house. And then Mike McFaul, who was the Senior Director for Russia, was very engaged in policy development, even though he was not a nuclear policy expert, but he was a Russia expert.

(02:07:05):

And then in terms of in the interagency, at the Department of the Defense, Jim Miller, who was the UnderSecretary of Defense for Policy was very, very engaged. And there's a whole Deputy's level policy committee. Admiral James Winnefeld on the Joint Staff was key. So there were a lot of people. And then we had the leads, I think we discussed yesterday, the leads from each of the agencies who were on the negotiating delegation. So, Ted Warner from the Department of Defense who was a long-time defense official and policy analyst at RAND and was a political appointee. He was the DoD rep. Michael Elliot was the Joint Chiefss of Staff rep. So each of the agency senior reps on the delegation were very influential.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:08:14):

Were there mid-level or behind the scenes figures who were crucial but might be overlooked by historians?

Lynn Rusten (02:08:25):

Yes. Well, someone like George Look, who was the Senior Director for Arms Control and Nonproliferation at the NSC played a big role in the initial policy development. Brian McKeon, who worked for Vice President Biden, played a very important role in the ratification process. As I say, I'd say that Jim Miller was quite important in the Department of Defense. Jim Timbie, who was a senior advisor to Ellen Tauscher, but has been a senior advisor to senior level Department of State officials going back to, I don't know, when Paul Nitze was there. I mean, he is someone who has been very involved. He's an interesting person because, by training, he's a physicist, PhD physicist from Stanford, but he's been long involved in arms control and non-proliferation policy. And he has that rare blend of skills of really understanding the technical issues, but being able to explain them to non-technical policymakers.

(02:09:50):

And I think he played a very key role throughout. He was certainly a trusted advisor. He was someone I worked with closely when I was running the backstopping committee. And he went over with Ellen Tauscher at the end to help finalize the treaty and wrap up the last couple of issues. So he's been key in so many different negotiations. He was very important in the JCPOA with Iran too. And I know the Russians used to say, "When Jim Timbie shows up, we know the United States is serious."

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:10:30):

And just moving now to personal relationships, how important was understanding Russia's perspective in making New START possible?

Lynn Rusten (02:10:41):

Well, I think that's critical. And it's critical in any negotiation, because it's so important to understand the interests and perspectives of your negotiating partner. You need to understand what their concerns are, what their priorities are. And part of the objective in a negotiation is to understand your own objectives and requirements, but also to understand the needs and requirements of the other side and then, you know, to try to find that sweet spot of mutual interest to be able to reach an agreement. So I think that's incredibly important.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:11:28):

Which specific verification and transparency measures mattered most in practice? I think I want to scrap this question because I think we spoke about it yesterday.

Lynn Rusten (02:11:42):

We did. We did, yes.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:11:46):

What thoughts do you have on the topic of trust and personal relationships within the USG policy community among the U.S. negotiating delegation members and between the U.S. delegation in Geneva and policymakers in Washington? I think we also covered this one as well.

Lynn Rusten (02:12:02):

We did.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:12:07):

Yeah. What did the U.S. side need to believe about Russia and what did you think Russia needed to believe about the U.S. before the talks could really move on?

Lynn Rusten (02:12:24):

I think there had to be some agreement on shared principles or objectives for the negotiation. And to some extent, that was established at the presidential level. And I think it existed. I mean, there was a mutual interest in continuing to have mutual regulation on our strategic nuclear forces, to have limits, to have verification. There was a predictability that the treaty requires. There was some shared interest in kind of having a somewhat simplified regime from the original START Treaty. So there were some broad principled shared objectives. And then as you get into the details, there obviously might have been different perspectives that had to be worked out or traded off in terms of one interest versus the other. And of course, we have asymmetrical geographies and force structures and that kind of thing. And so there has to be some give and take.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:13:45):

What major misconceptions or fears did you have to overcome on either side?

Lynn Rusten (02:13:54):

Well, I mean, the Russians have a longstanding antipathy toward and concern about U.S. missile defenses and concern that our national missile defenses will undermine their strategic deterrent. And so with the U.S. having withdrawn from the ABM Treaty, the Russians were always seeking assurances about our respecting the offense/defense relationship and committing that missile defenses wouldn't undermine strategic stability and that kind of thing. And yet at the same time, that issue is kind of a third rail in American politics where there's a lot of opposition to accepting any kind of constraints on our development of missile defense. Even if we had no plans of deploying missile defenses beyond a certain level, writing that down and putting that in a treaty was kind of a non-starter for us. So that was one issue set where we had to understand the Russian sensitivity, but find a solution that didn't cross red lines for the U.S. government or for what we thought the Senate could tolerate in terms of a ratification effort.

Lynn Rusten (02:15:20):

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:15:22):

What do you think Russia wanted most from New START and what did the U.S. side understand correctly or incorrectly about those motivations?

Lynn Rusten (02:15:37):

I think Russia traditionally has wanted to maintain parity with the United States and wanted to ensure that there would be continued mutual limits on our strategic nuclear forces. And I actually think that's an enduring interest for Russia, which is why I hope that, ultimately, we'll get back to some kind of negotiations with them. There may be a continued lapse for a couple of years, but I think in the end, and frankly, I think it's in our interest to have limits, to have predictability, to have some transparency and verification.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:16:32):

Missile defense was parked officially, but did it ever seep into the negotiations?

Lynn Rusten (02:16:42):

It did. First of all, there was preambular language in the treaty about the offense defense relationship and strategic stability, which was agreed. I think there's a provision in the treaty that said that the United States commits or will not or shall not convert launchers intended for offensive systems. So ICBM launchers, we would not convert them into missile defense launchers. So I think that's the one aspect that I think did end up in the treaty in terms of ostensibly limiting

missile defenses, except we never had any intention of doing that. So, it wasn't problematic. But the Russians did push for more on missile defense that we couldn't agree to.

(02:17:41):

And there was a lot of high-level negotiation directly between Rose Gottemoeller, our negotiator and Anatoly Antonov, their chief negotiator on this issue. And it went down to the end of the negotiations. And I think in the end, there might have been some side statements. That's one way sometimes that we resolve issues that actually aren't resolved or don't end up in the treaty where a side makes a unilateral statement and it's part of the treaty record. So I think we might have, I forget now, but I think we might've had some unilateral statements where one side stated its view and the other side stated its view. But in the end, the treaty does not in any material way really restrict missile defenses.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:18:38):

Did the US and Russian teams share similar expectations going into talks or were there surprising disagreements in the initial meetings?

Lynn Rusten (02:18:50):

So again, I didn't come in until the summer. So there were some. I know that there was a meeting in Rome, I think early where some of these things were discussed. So I'm not sure I can speak to that, but as I've said now a couple of times, I think there was this general sense that the original START Treaty was the starting point and we were looking at what aspects of that would we keep and what aspects would we either get rid of or modify? And I think that was a shared approach because we had so much experience with negotiating and then implementing over 15 years the START Treaty and that was the starting point of where our forces were.

(02:19:40):

I think both militaries had some interest in reducing some of the operational burden of the inspection regime under the original START Treaty. The numbers weren't decided until the very end in terms of the limits on delivery vehicles and warheads. And it's funny, the U.S. wanted to go down to 1500 [warheads] and the Russians just would not go below 1550, which I though was odd just in terms of optical round numbers. And, of course, the Russians always wanted to have a lower limit on delivery vehicles and the United States didn't. Of course, one of the concerns for Russia was that that meant we had more upload capacity, so more ability to break out if we were going to, but we thought it was more stabilizing and also it was more cost-effective to not have to eliminate delivery vehicles.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:20:45):

So in the event that there were some contentious issues, how would you resolve them?

Lynn Rusten (02:20:54):

You mean within the U.S. government or between the U.S. and Russia?

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:20:58):

Between U.S. and Russia.

Lynn Rusten (02:21:00):

Well, we talked them through and part of it sometimes there were just issues that just need to be negotiated, compromised. Sometimes it's a matter of understanding what the real concern is. And I can think of a couple times and it's hard sometimes to get the other party to just say, but I can think of on some smaller issues where we had to tease out of the Russians what the problem was. And it might have been that it had to do with some practical thing about how they exercise their nuclear forces or how it would be hard for them to do something because it's just not the way they're set

up. And so sometimes if they would actually tell you what their true concern was or true reason for why they couldn't do something in a certain way.

(02:22:08):

It was then possible to talk through or think through or be creative about an alternative solution. But if they aren't candid about like, "No, here's why we can't do that," then it gets harder to find the solution. But sometimes there were just differences. And for instance, I mentioned yesterday, I mean, we wanted to retain the Article V from the original START Treaty prohibitions on exotic basing modes for ballistic missiles and they just wouldn't agree. And so we came up with this alternative provision, which was an idea if a side was developing what were called not new kinds, I mean, not new types, but new kinds of strategic delivery vehicles, meaning kinds that were not already listed in the treaty as being subject to it, that there would be a right to bring it to the Bilateral Consultative Commission and raise a concern or ask a question and the other party would have to talk about the system. So that was the solution, but it was only a partial solution because it didn't set up rules or requirements for how to address how the treaty would apply to such new kinds. Now, as I said yesterday, it ended up not being an issue only because Russia ended up not bringing into development during the life of the treaty those systems. But now they exist. And so, in a future treaty, they will have to be addressed.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:23:45):

Let us just circle back a little moment. Could you elaborate on the point you made that if Russia could have been specific or candid, things could have been resolved better? I'm sensing that they were not being very specific or candid on the-

Lynn Rusten (02:24:05):

No, that is not a generalization. I was just making the point that I've seen it happen both ways on various issues. And I can't remember the details, but there was an issue in the original START Treaty which had to do with we wanted them to basically commit to not camouflage when they were exercising their mobile missiles so that we could observe from overhead. We wanted to have a prohibition on them and they just wouldn't agree to it. And I mean, my memory is vague, but when we finally got down to the nitty-gritty, the problem was that it had to do with the way they exercised and what their normal operational practice is and they just couldn't change it. So we found another way to deal with the problem is what I'm saying.

(02:25:08):

Because they finally said like, "Here's why we can't do it. It's not that we are trying to keep you from verifying this or that we're trying to hide this activity, but we can't accomplish what we're trying to accomplish in terms of our training if we do it in the way that you're asking us to." And so we found some other way. And again, I'm sorry because the memory of the details isn't strong, but that's just an example where it was a practical problem that we didn't understand because we do things differently and we don't even have mobile ICBMs as an example. And so it also meant that whatever we decided was only going to apply to them, not us.

(02:25:59):

And that does get back to that trust issue and also the advantage of having military operators on the delegations which both sides did. Because if there's enough trust, you can actually talk very practically about, "Look, here's why this verification method that you're proposing just doesn't work for the way we do things. And so let's talk about a different way to accomplish the objective of you being sure that we're not secretly doing whatever and see if there's another way to do it that doesn't completely disrupt what our normal operational practices are." And that would happen a lot.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:26:51):

Was there a moment in negotiations when something unexpected happened?

Lynn Rusten (02:26:59):

I'm sure there are lots of moments. Again, since I wasn't sitting over there in Geneva, I'm not sure I have a good an example of that. I'm not sure I can-

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:27:14):

Sure. Okay. Looking back on New START, what aspects of how it came about do you think are misunderstood or under-appreciated today?

Lynn Rusten (02:27:35):

I'm not sure how to answer that. I think when I look at the way the current administration is operating, I think there is a lack of appreciation or understanding in general about what it takes to negotiate an agreement, a complex nuclear agreement with another country and how important it is to tap into and trust the expertise that's resident in the U.S. government. How important it is to have a policy process that is disciplined, that is fair, that fully explores the issues and equities involved in the different agencies that presents options to the president with full consideration of the pros and cons.

(02:28:47):

And also that takes an approach toward the party on the other side of the negotiating table, which recognizes that a successful negotiation doesn't seek capitulation. I mean, a successful negotiation requires some identification of mutual interests and goals and then starts to build out what the details of an agreement might be that satisfies both sides' key objectives and doesn't significantly undermine their interests. So it's really like it's a search for mutual security, not unilateral advantage. And I mean, to me, this seems so obvious, but it seems like we have to relearn how to think about these things. And also it just drives me crazy when opponents of arms control agreements in general or anyone in specific talk about arms control as if it's an end in itself or a goal in itself. And of course it isn't. I mean, arms control is a diplomatic tool that can help advance our national security and that's how it should be seen.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:30:11):

What part of the New START story do you think gets left out most often when people write or talk about it?

Lynn Rusten (02:30:24):

I think people underestimate the value of the verification and transparency regime. I think people, the general public and people who aren't focused on this every day, focus on the numerical limits. And they don't even realize, as I've mentioned, I mean, I don't think most Americans had any idea that 18 times a year, U.S. inspection teams were doing short notice inspections on Russian missile and ICBM bases for the last -- up until the pandemic, for 10 years basically until the pandemic. And the Russians were coming here and doing the same thing. And I think people also underestimate the value of the human interaction that occurs both at the negotiating table, but also amongst the inspecting teams and the military that are hosting these inspections.

(02:31:30):

There's a human element that's really important and it helps us to humanize people from countries, even countries that we consider adversaries, in a way that I think is important. And I think we're losing that, especially since we have really a complete absence of dialogue right now with the Russians across almost every issue, including nuclear because of the war in Ukraine. But I actually have come to think that's really a mistake, that diplomacy is not a reward for good behavior. It's a tool that you use with countries that you have to engage with in the world, even with countries that are doing bad things or that are adversarial to you. And I think it is not to our advantage to have so little regular contact with a country like Russia.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:32:34):

Conversely, what parts of the standard narrative do you think gets too much attention?

Lynn Rusten (02:32:49):

Well, as I say, although I think the numerical limits are important, there's probably over focus on that. I'm not sure what else to say.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:33:01):

What surprised you most during the process, good or bad?

Lynn Rusten (02:33:14):

I was a little surprised about the atrophy that had already occurred in the U.S. government in terms of familiarity with the original START Treaty, with how we do this, with how the inter-agency functions to support negotiations. But I think we were able to bring that back fairly quickly and train people who hadn't had experience with it.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:33:50):

Was there a moment that nearly derailed the whole deal? And how was it saved if there was a moment of that nature?

Lynn Rusten (02:34:01):

I'm not sure I ever... I always had confidence that we would get it done. There were sticking points. I mean, another sticking point where we, and we ended up sending Admiral Mike Mullen over to Moscow to meet with his counterpart, General Makarov. And I remember that one of the issues they worked out was this idea of putting unique identifiers on every single missile. So that meant a serial number. So I remember that was a breakthrough. There were a couple of other hard issues. Telemetry was hard and it went to the presidents to resolve.

(02:34:46):

Missile defense was hard and that also went to very senior levels to resolve. But I don't know. I'm not sure I ever thought we wouldn't get it done. And partly it was because it was a presidential priority. And so the White House kept the focus on it. They did put a tremendous amount of pressure on the negotiating team to get it done quickly after. There was a lot of concern about the original START Treaty lapsing and the absence of verification. And there was almost inordinate pressure put on the delegation to get it done quickly. But we did get it done with the Russians.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:35:38):

If you could change one thing in the timeline or process, what would it be? That's start talks earlier or different tactics. What would you change?

Lynn Rusten (02:35:51):

I don't really have a response to that.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:35:55):

So the process was fine as it was. There's nothing you would say, what could have changed this? The negotiation process?

Lynn Rusten (02:36:07):

I'll reflect on that and come back. I'm sure there are things, but I'm just not, nothing's like... No, it wasn't. Well, I mean, on the U.S. side, I think at the end I think it wasn't ideal the way Washington and the White House was treating the delegation. I think there was a lack of understanding about how negotiations happen and get done that was unfair. I don't actually think it was necessary to send Ellen Tauscher over to Geneva for the last two weeks to help get the treaty done. And I

think that was an unfortunate signal of almost lack of confidence in the negotiating team. So, there were some things that I wish had happened differently.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:37:12):

What did you think about the relationship between President Obama and President Medvedev, generally speaking?

Lynn Rusten (02:37:21):

Yeah. Again, I wasn't at the White House then, but I think it started out good. And there were definitely shared objectives for the treaty. Of course, Medvedev had interest in modernizing and diversifying the Russian economy and was very interested in seeing Silicon Valley and that kind of thing. I'm not sure much came of that at the end, but I'm not sure I have a lot of insight into that.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:37:59):

Okay. One of the goals of this project is to capture the negotiation muscle memory of that era. What knowledge do you worry is being lost as negotiators retire? Technical, procedural, personal?

Lynn Rusten (02:38:16):

Yeah, no, I think a lot is being lost. And as I said, I mean, I saw that even as I came back to the State Department to work on New START and I saw there were still people in the interagency that were working on implementing the START Treaty and INF Treaty and there were some of the interagency processes still in place to support the implementation effort. But there was also a real loss of institutional memory and especially, as I mentioned, in the Joint Staff, because that's a culture where everybody rotates their position every three years.

(02:38:54):

Unlike in State or DOD or the Intelligence Community, where the person who works on strategic arms control policy and negotiations has been there for 30 years. So that still existed. But I think now we're really losing it and we're losing it even more. I mean, a ton of people at the State Department have literally resigned or been riffed or fired where there's a lot of expertise. And as you mentioned, people are just aging out and retiring at various agencies. And because there aren't any active ongoing negotiations, you're not training the next generation in real time. So I think that is a real risk.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:39:47):

What skills or habits do successful arms control negotiators have? Are these teachable?

Lynn Rusten (02:39:56):

Yeah. Well, I think I mentioned some of them already, which is some of it has to do with the internal processes here. Some of it has to do with just basic negotiating skills and the attitude about how you view the purpose of negotiations and how you view your negotiating partner, whether you have an ability to have empathy or at least understanding of what their security interests and objectives are as well as yours and to understand that you're searching for not to get unilateral advantage, but to find the overlap of advancing a mutual interest in a way that advances your security, but also theirs in their perception.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:40:55):

And on the side of the unteachable aspect, which aspects of being an effective arms control negotiator are the hardest to teach? For example, can personal relationships, judgment, credibility, or the ability to read a negotiating counterparts really be taught? Or are those things that only come with experience?

Lynn Rusten (02:41:30):

I don't know. It's some of both. I mean, I think you can certainly teach the principles, but the practice of it comes with experience. And I do think some of these, the questions about process, I mean, even things like how a negotiating delegation sets up and works in Geneva. I mean, it's almost like a mini interagency process in Geneva because literally every agency has their own people on the delegation. All the ones that I mentioned that are in Washington. You've got the Joint Staff, DoD policy, the Intelligence Community, the State Department. So you've got this whole team and how they work together. And usually it's broken up into working groups to address the various issues.

(02:42:26):

So how that delegation works, how that delegation... There's a formal process of getting guidance and stuff from Washington, but there's of course informal channels too where each element of the delegation, if you're from the Department of Defense, you're probably calling back to your own department to get guidance, to hear what they are concerned about, to get any information to support because maybe you want to explore some idea for a verification or inspection and you need to call home and see, will this work? Can we do this? What are the concerns? The Russians have proposed this. So there's just so much about how it works.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:43:15):

Are there tacit lessons you learned that you wish younger people could know? Things that only became clear in practice, not from memos?

Lynn Rusten (02:43:31):

Yeah. I mean, there is a lot. I do think this idea of, especially if you're at the NSC or you're leading an interagency process, I think the integrity of the process is just really important. And to realize that it's not about you personally and it's not even about your agency personally. It's about finding the right approach for U.S. national security. It's about presenting options and information to senior leaders. I mean, it is a really interesting question about how on subjects like this that are very technical and often senior leaders that we're working for, whether they're UnderSecretaries or Secretaries of State or presidents, they're not technical experts. And so understanding how to serve them, how to provide them information that is helpful in their making decisions about the options before them I think is really important and takes some skill and experience.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:44:53):

How important is familiarity with the details, counting rules, verification steps versus broader strategy?

Lynn Rusten (02:45:05):

Well, it's all important, but it depends where you sit in the process because you're not going to ask the President of the United States' most likely to make a decision about counting rules. But if you're leading the backstopping process, if you're negotiating the treaty, you need to be steeped in all those details and understand the options and the consequences and then be able to present the choices in broad terms to senior leaders on the issues that are of fundamental importance.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:45:48):

If policymakers wanted to create another ripeness similar to 2009 in the current era, where would they begin?

Lynn Rusten (02:46:02):

Well, I think it begins with a recognition. It begins with political will. It begins with a recognition of an existential interest and mutual interest in regulating the most destructive weapons on the planet, nuclear weapons, and recognizing or making a decision that we actually don't want to be in a situation of no regulation. Right now, we are, but I think over time, I hope there'll be a recognition that that's not the world that we want to live in. So I think that it needs to come from the

president and not just our president, but the Russian president, that there is a mutual interest in resuming some kind of regulation and hopefully transparency on these weapons.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:47:11):

Are there, sorry. Are the conditions that enabled New START reproducible or was 2009 a unique circumstance?

Lynn Rusten (02:47:28):

Well, it was a different circumstance. Obviously, we're in a really different time where Russia has attacked a nonnuclear weapon state in the middle of Europe. Relations are bad with Russia. There's concern about China. So we're in a totally different space, but I still think there's an opportunity just as we hade in the past. During the Cold War, we agreed on mutual regulation of nuclear weapons with the Soviet Union because it was a vital national security interest. And so I think it can be, the conditions are different, the geopolitical global situation is different, but the principle of why that's important remains and I think it's possible to return to some kind of negotiations and agreements. But again, we need the political will and I think right now it's not evident that it's there.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:48:38):

Which lessons from 2009 to 2010 remain-

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:48:41):

From 2009 to 2010 remain valid regardless of context. You just mentioned the issue of political will right now. Do you care to elaborate on more lessons?

Lynn Rusten (02:48:53):

Well, I think presidential focus and attention is important. I can't think of a single significant nuclear agreement that didn't happen without the president and an administration truly making it a priority and maintaining focus on it, and ensuring that the government was acting on it. So I think that's really important.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:49:34):

How should verification be handled in any future treaty? For example, do we still prioritize data exchanges and frequent inspections as you earlier emphasized?

Lynn Rusten (02:49:53):

So verification, I think we talked about this yesterday too. I mean, verification is not a standalone objective. Verification is directly tied to the obligations in a treaty that you're trying to make sure a party complies with. So I think it's preferable to have high confidence and verification of whether or not a party is complying with the terms of whatever agreement is negotiated. So that's kind of an overarching principle.

(02:50:33):

What it takes to get that depends on what the agreement is. But in a kind of a traditional START, New START type agreement, the combination of data exchange, notifications, onsite inspections, and use of national technical means in combination have worked very well to provide a high level of confidence. Now there are other techniques, and we talked a little bit yesterday about the use of radiation detection equipment also as part of an onsite inspection. It's possible that new technologies including AI will open up other avenues for verifiability.

(02:51:21):

So I think we have a rich menu of tools. Now there are other kinds of agreements that also would be in our interest that aren't going to be verifiable to the same standard. And by that I mean understandings about or commitments about keeping humans in the loop in terms of decisions about nuclear weapons or other weapons use. It's hard to verify that, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't do it. Or rules of the road in terms of limiting cyber interference into each side's nuclear command and control, or rules of the road about activities in space.

(02:52:05):

So there's different kinds of agreements will require different levels of verification. And some may not be verifiable in the traditional sense, but they still may be worth doing. So it kind of depends on what the agreement is. But we do have a really rich menu of tools available for verification, and I think new technologies may offer new ones too. They may also offer new ways to get around compliance with agreements. But in general, I think when countries enter agreements, they enter with the intention of complying and wanting the other party to comply. I mean, problems arise when a country no longer thinks the agreement serves its purpose.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:53:00):

What do you consider your most important personal contribution to the New START process?

Lynn Rusten (02:53:14):

I think the experience and capability that I brought to the process, to lead that process and to kind of teach the interagency how to ride the bicycle again was really important. I think I served as a good kind of a two-way conveyor belt between, first of all, between the kind of working level interagency and the more senior level process run out of the White House, and between the Washington working level and the delegation. And then also just my deep understanding of the original START Treaty and a lot of the substantive issues involved in the negotiation allowed me to help shape the interagency process and tee up questions and options and assess them and also just develop creative ideas as issues arose in the negotiations.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:54:33):

What are you proudest of in how the negotiations went?

Lynn Rusten (02:54:39):

We finished the treaty and it was a good treaty.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:54:43):

Is there a story or detail we haven't asked about, but that you think historians should know?

Lynn Rusten (02:54:55):

I'll ponder that more, but I have nothing off the top of my head.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:54:58):

All right. So when folks look back on New START, what single lesson about making it possible should stand out and what cautionary lesson might they miss unless told?

Lynn Rusten (02:55:16):

So I think the main lesson, as mentioned, is the importance of priority, that this is a presidential and an administration priority, and that that's conveyed to the government. And that when it's needed, that senior level focus attention is given

to help break logjams and deal with senior level Russian counterparts, or even the Russian president, to kind of get the breakthroughs to get the deal done. So that's one lesson.

(02:55:50):

And another one is keeping an eye toward the ultimate need at the end to get the agreement, if it's a treaty, to get it ratified, and keeping an eye on keeping Congress appropriately consulted without permitting interference from the separate branch of government. And understanding, educating them along the way about what you're doing and why, and also taking into account any concerns that may arise so that you're not blindsided when you get to the end. And the second half of the question was?

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:56:27):

And what question or lesson might they miss unless told?

Lynn Rusten (02:56:30):

Oh. So I mean, I think an important lesson is, and I'm sure there are a lot of people who wouldn't agree with me, I think it was shortsighted of us in hindsight to not have used this treaty, as we have in the past, to encourage a stabilizing force structure on Russia's side to... I mean, yes, we wanted to have numerical limits on Russian nuclear forces and we wanted to have confidence and predictability about the future, but we were so much more concerned about flexibility for ourselves in terms of how we structured our forces, wanting to convert systems out of nuclear capability cheaply.

(02:57:29):

And so we ended up allowing a situation that we didn't foresee, that 15 years later Russia would be seen as a much more aggressive power who now is able to deploy the new Sarmat missile with more than 10 warheads on it because we got rid of the ban on MIRVs that was in the original START treaty. There were some things we wanted to do that the Russians wouldn't agree to, like the ban on exotic basing systems. But I mean, I think in general, we overemphasized our interests and underemphasized how we could use a treaty to constrain Russian nuclear force development in the future.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:58:26):

When scholars look back on New START, what single lesson about making it possible should stand out and... Sorry, I'm repeating it again. If you could leave one piece of advice for future arms control negotiators, maybe something you only fully understood in hindsight, what would it be?

Lynn Rusten (02:58:53):

I don't really... No.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:58:54):

Do you want to think about it?

Lynn Rusten (02:58:56):

Yeah. I mean, I feel like we're kind of, it's getting repetitive.

Ian Fleming Zhou (02:59:03):

Okay. We are literally... Okay. This is also another reflection question. With New START now expired, what signals or steps would you watch for that might indicate a window for new negotiations?

Lynn Rusten (02:59:28):

Well, I mean certainly if and when there's a cessation of hostilities in Ukraine, I think that will open up the door. To some extent, I've thought that the door's already open. I mean, people took this cynically, but I'm not sure I did completely, that President Putin suggested a political agreement to continue to abide by the New START limits. I think the door's open to start a discussion. I just think the sides are really far apart. I mean the current administration in the United States wants to pursue a multilateral approach. I think it's premature and not likely to succeed to try to get a trilateral agreement between the US, Russia, and China.

(03:00:21):

But I do think that there's an opportunity already to sit down and start to talk about this, but I don't see that we're actually ready. I don't see a lot of capacity. I don't see evidence of a serious process in the U.S. government about what our positions would be. And of course there's a lot of antipathy right now toward normalizing dialogue with Russia, but I think that's a mistake because I think we have an existential interest to talk to them about and manage our nuclear stockpiles. And we should be doing that, even though what they're doing in Ukraine is abhorrent. But it may be that it requires a cessation of hostilities there to really open the door.

Ian Fleming Zhou (03:01:16):

How does the multilateral situation affect how we should think about a bilateral U.S.-Russia deal?

Lynn Rusten (03:01:28):

Well, I mean, China is expanding its nuclear arsenal, and it is projected to grow significantly over the next 10 years. And so we do have to keep an eye on that. I am not in the camp that thinks that the United States needs to have significantly, to have really any more nuclear weapons than we do now, even given China, at least for the next 10 years. And I don't think we're going to get a trilateral agreement with China at the moment because their nuclear forces are still so much smaller than those of the United States and Russia.

(03:02:17):

And so I think the more practical approach is to try to negotiate a next agreement with Russia. It could have a pretty short duration, 10 years or something. And although I do still think that limits and verification are more important than numbers, so although I wouldn't advocate having a higher number than we have now under New START, if it comes out that way, that's one way to do it, to have a slightly higher number. I think it would be a bad signal for the world, but whatever.

(03:02:49):

But we can keep that in place and keep an eye on China, and then kind of work toward a future agreement that might involve all of the N5, or have commitments from China and others not to exceed certain levels. If the US and Russia start for the first time in 30 years going in the opposite direction in terms of increasing our stockpiles instead of decreasing them, that is not going to incentivize China to stop expanding its arsenal.

Ian Fleming Zhou (03:03:27):

Lynn, we spoke on this subject matter yesterday, and again now just briefly on New START, and how it's considerably shorter and less detailed than START I. I just wanted us to circle back to that issue again because you raised an important question just a few minutes ago. And for clarity, I just want us to do a little deep dive. What gave negotiators the confidence to simplify the treaty, and how did they decide which provisions could safely be removed and which remained essential? Because you just mentioned something that was an interesting area. So I just want to know.

Lynn Rusten (03:04:11):

So some of the obligations were simplified. So for instance, I've talked a couple times about the fact that the treaty central limits were on warheads, deployed launchers, and non-deployed and deployed launchers. So as long as everybody lives within those limits, they were fine. There were no obligations to not have, for instance, MIRVed missiles or different things. So getting rid of that obligation meant that you didn't need the accompanying verification measure. So that's why we didn't need telemetry because we weren't trying to establish... There were no throwweight limits and all this stuff. We weren't in the original START treaty. So by getting rid of some of those more complex obligations, you didn't need the corollary verification that went with it. In other aspects of verification, I mean, there were still a lot of really detailed procedures. And 18 inspections a year. I actually think that number was lower than the number that was permitted under the original START treaty, incredibly. So we had fewer inspections. The actual verification of warheads on missiles was the one additional verification measure, which was an important...

(03:05:41):

And that actually, maybe going back to one of your other questions, I think that is one of the least appreciated and understood elements of the treaty, and that was groundbreaking, that we actually counted real warheads on missiles instead of just going by an attribution method for counting warheads on missiles. And that's really, really important if we're going to have future agreements at lower numbers where it's even more important to verify that countries are complying with the agreement. Because if an agreement only permits 100 warheads, cheating matters a lot more than if it allows 1,550 warheads. I've lost the thread of the question.

Ian Fleming Zhou (03:06:29):

[inaudible 03:06:32].

Lynn Rusten (03:06:31):

Oh, simplification. Yeah. And so I think there was some in details of like, for instance, when a country notifies that it's going to conduct an inspection, it has to do that, I can't remember any of the details now, but so many hours before the inspection. And from the time it's notified, all activities have to stop at that base. And ships can't leave and things can't happen. And so some of those timelines were changed and shortened and stuff so that there was less operational impact on both sides' militaries.

(03:07:13):

Anyway, instead of not being able to do something for five days and have whatever you were planning to do just completely freeze, it was cut down, that kind of thing. And it was born out of experience of how things actually worked, but also obviously assessments by the intelligence community and the interagency that we could make these changes without significantly sacrificing our confidence that we would catch cheating. So it's that balance between operational impact and the goals of the treaty. And I think both sides, both militaries, both countries were interested in lightening some of those burdens. So that kind of thing.

Ian Fleming Zhou (03:08:02):

Were there provisions from START I that some participants wanted to retain, but that ultimately did not make it into New START? Because I'm guessing there should have been some back and forth in terms of what gets left out, what gets into it?

Lynn Rusten (03:08:21):

Yeah. I mean, that was a conversation both internally in the U.S. government and then between the U.S. and Russia. And so internally in the U.S. government, that was in the process. I mean, as I mentioned yesterday, we did something which

was unique, which was we developed an entire first draft of a treaty and tabled it with the Russians. And that was basically, I would call it START light. It was like stripping down START to something simpler and presenting it.

(03:08:50):

And I wasn't there for the first six months, so I actually missed a lot of the detailed discussions of that. But I think that's where there are a lot of discussions about what worked for us in START, what did we like, and what could we jettison, and why? And so there was a lot of those discussions. And it's not like we just tabled it and they said, "Great, let's sign on the dotted line." It was the basis for, it was the beginning of a discussion. I'm sorry, I kind of lost track of what the question was.

Ian Fleming Zhou (03:09:45):

It was, was there concern that simplifying the inspection regime would reduce confidence? Or did most participants experience... Geez, was that the question? Yeah.

Lynn Rusten (03:10:01):

Well, no, you were asking about how do we decide what to keep and what to [inaudible 03:10:04].

Ian Fleming Zhou (03:10:04):

Oh, yeah, yeah. What to keep. Yeah, yeah, okay. Was there provisions from START I that some participants wanted to retain, but that ultimately did not make it into New START?

Lynn Rusten (03:10:17):

Yeah. Well, again, I don't remember. I wasn't there for all of the... If there was much debate about the things that were dropped out, that we initially tabled. We did have this problem that the Russians would not agree to retain the Article V provisions on exotic basing modes. So that was a disappointment. And of course we now know because they were actually deploying, they were developing some of those systems we now know. So that's why they didn't want the prohibition.

(03:10:57):

And I do think, I've talked about this yesterday too, I do think it was considered like a creative negotiating idea to have, there were procedures from START I about how to take SLBMs and ICBMs and bombers out of accountability under the treaty because they either were just no longer going to be there so a tube would be filled with nothing on a sub instead of an actual missile, or how you take silos out of accountability, or how you convert heavy bombers from those capable of carrying nuclear weapons to those only for conventional.

(03:11:53):

And some of the procedures to do that were simplified a little, but we also in the end, and it was considered a very creative thing that the Joint Staff came up with, to have kind of a third category, or a third, or there could be an alternative method that's devised later and discuss in the BCC. But as I mentioned, I think that proved problematic because it wasn't written in a way that required the other treaty partner to approve it.

(03:12:24):

And so we ended up having disagreements, serious disagreements with Russia about whether the United States had properly taken certain missiles, SLBMs, or bombers out of accountability and how could they have confidence in that? And there were efforts made to demonstrate it, and to even take some extra steps to give them confidence, but there were lingering questions and they were constantly accusing us of not living within the limits or circumventing the limits.

(03:12:58):

So [inaudible 03:12:58] for me, again, a lesson learned is that even though it may sound good to kind of avoid a hard issue or just write in maximum flexibility, it's going to be a recipe for disagreement down the road if you don't have a way of making sure there's mutual agreement that the method being pursued is acceptable or the outcome is acceptable. So I think it was a mistake.

(03:13:34):

But again, I mean, that was really, and I don't have a strong recollection of whether the Russians vigorously opposed the way that provision was written, which said you can use method A that's all spelled out, method B that's all spelled out, or develop a method in the future and present it in the BCC. And the fact that it didn't say, and you shall not use it until the other party explicitly agrees or something. But the Russians either didn't advocate for that, or they did and we wouldn't agree to it. So they got what they got, but it didn't serve the treaty well, I think, to have the ability to have a unilateral approach.

(03:14:27):

But the same goes for their unwillingness to ban exotic basing modes, and that the best we could get from them to agree to was the right to discuss any such new systems in the BCC. And there too, there was no obligation for the side that was developing a new system to agree to bring it under the treaty. So there would've been like a discussion and potentially an argument then about whether a certain system counted. So both sides took positions that helped to create that problem, if you're following me.

Ian Fleming Zhou (03:15:10):

I am following you. Then would you say the simplification of New START was a reflection of growing start between the US and Russia? Or was it simply a practical necessity?

Lynn Rusten (03:15:26):

I'm sorry, reflection of what?

Ian Fleming Zhou (03:15:28):

Would you say the simplification of New START was a reflection of growing trust between the United States and Russia or simply a practical necessity?

Lynn Rusten (03:15:41):

Yeah, I think it was a reflection of definitely practical, I don't know necessity, practical considerations. And yeah, some element of growing trust and reduced perception of the other side as an adversary who's... There was just less priority on controlling the details or trying to shape the details of what their nuclear forces and threat to us would be.

(03:16:29):

So it was like a reflection of changing U.S. defense requirements and priorities, which we're looking more at how we use our forces against a multitude of threats and interests in the world. And when I say our forces, I mean conventional capability as well, as a higher priority than just focused on Russia and restraining Russia. So it was a reflection in a way of reduced tensions and reduced threat perceptions about Russia relative to other priorities as well as just lessons learned from the practical experience of negotiating START and kind of realizing in some areas maybe we didn't need belts and suspenders. We could just have belts. Yeah. Do you want to take a break or stop?

Ian Fleming Zhou (03:17:51):

No.

Speaker 2 (03:17:51):

Okay. [inaudible 03:17:51].

Ian Fleming Zhou (03:17:51):

I'm saying we are done.

Lynn Rusten (03:17:52):

Okay. It's up to you.

Ian Fleming Zhou (03:17:56):

So yeah. These were very nice points about the last... I was literally taking them in my head, like the top [inaudible 03:18:04].

Lynn Rusten (03:18:03):

Listen, I feel bad because I feel like I was really redundant.

Ian Fleming Zhou (03:18:11):

No, No, no.

Lynn Rusten (03:18:11):

And I can't remember anything.

Ian Fleming Zhou (03:18:11):

They actually triggered you to answer certain questions that you had put on the side. So I actually loved that I took us around that line of questioning. When I was doing the reflection, it was done. So I was like, huh, let's just go back to that [inaudible 03:18:33] of START and New START. Then yeah, it opened a whole new window that was really interesting. Thank you very much now.

Lynn Rusten (03:18:43):

Okay, good. Well, thank you. I hope it was... It was like I sort of I feel like, eh.

Speaker 2 (03:18:48):

You can start the recording whenever you're ready.

Ian Fleming Zhou (03:18:52):

Yeah. Is there anything I should say when we are done?

Speaker 2 (03:18:54):

You should [inaudible 03:18:55] so it's in the record books.

Ian Fleming Zhou (03:18:59):

Okay. Just thank you, Lynn. I really appreciate it. Well, that ends our recording session for today, and I would like to take this moment to thank you, Lynn, for this amazing oral history recording session. I truly appreciate it.

Lynn Rusten (03:19:21):

Well, thank you very much, Ian. It's really been fun to talk about these issues with you, and think about them, spark my memory. And I'm just really thrilled that you're interested, that the Stanley Foundation [read: Stanley Center for Peace and Security] and BASIC are interested in capturing these histories from me and my colleagues and I wish you all the best.

Ian Fleming Zhou (03:19:46):

Thank you very much.

Lynn Rusten (03:19:47):

Okay.

[END OF INTERVIEW] [03:19:14]



About The Oral History Project

The Oral History Project gathers firsthand accounts from practitioners in nuclear risk reduction to preserve a record of how participants experienced historical events, what informed their thinking, and how they interpreted those events. The project provides professional training in oral history methods to nuclear policy researchers seeking to develop their skill sets, expand their professional networks, and add primary-source data to the historical record. To learn more, visit riskreduction.stanleycenter.org/oral-history.