

Ronald Reagan Presidential Library Digital Library Collections

This is a PDF of a folder from our textual collections.

Collection: Regan, Donald T.: Files

Folder Title: [Rowny, Edward L.: 10
Commandments for Negotiating with the Soviet Union]
(Article)

Box: 5

To see more digitized collections visit:

<https://reaganlibrary.gov/archives/digital-library>

To see all Ronald Reagan Presidential Library inventories visit:

<https://reaganlibrary.gov/document-collection>

Contact a reference archivist at: reagan.library@nara.gov

Citation Guidelines: <https://reaganlibrary.gov/citing>

National Archives Catalogue: <https://catalog.archives.gov/>

10 'Commandments' for Negotiating With the Soviet Union

By Edward L. Rowny

WASHINGTON — As the United States and Soviet Union prepare to resume the fourth round of the strategic arms talks in Geneva, it is useful to reflect on lessons learned in past negotiations with Moscow. While much of the discussion on arms control of course concerns the merits of substantive positions, it is also important to consider negotiating techniques.

I have drawn up a list of "10 commandments," or practical principles, for negotiating with Moscow based on personal experience. Seasoned negotiators already understand these things, but they must always keep the principles in mind — as must the Congress and the public.

1. Above all, remember the objective.

The Russians have better defined, more clear-cut, longer-range objectives than we do. Moreover, while Americans are problem-solvers — inheritors of the Greek rationalist tradition who believe that all prob-

Edward L. Rowny is special adviser to the President for arms control. This article is adapted from an essay in the book "A Game for High Stakes: Lessons Learned in Negotiations with the Soviet Union," edited by Leon Sloss and Scott Davis.

lems have solutions if only we try hard enough — the Russians do not accept that notion. Furthermore, whereas we Americans think in terms of four-year Presidential election cycles, the Russians think in terms of longer periods — often decades, even centuries. These differences, which usually work to our disadvantage in negotiations, can be minimized if we keep our objectives clearly before us.

2. Be patient.

Moscow places arms control in a

'Remember the objective'

larger context than we do. The Russians are prepared to wait for shifts in what they call the "correlation of forces" that serve their political ends. Americans are not patient. Although arms control is a serious business and a game only metaphorically, it is enlightening to note the games that are popular in each country. The Russians play chess; we play video games. They like the well-thought-

through results of step-by-step reasoning; we like the instant results of electronic machines.

3. Keep secrets.

By tradition, history and type of government, Soviet society is closed and secretive. The United States is an open society. In negotiations, the Russians always play their cards close to the chest; we mostly play ours face up on the table. They can obtain many secrets from our press; it is more difficult for us to discover theirs. This makes it harder for us to verify Soviet compliance with signed agreements. It also highlights the need to work harder at keeping our negotiating positions confidential.

4. Bear in mind the differences in the two political structures.

It is obvious — but the obvious is often overlooked — that the two nations' political structures are fundamentally different. The Russians have a centralized authority, with nothing comparable to our independent legislature or our ratification process. This requires us to carefully consider Congressional perspectives in our negotiating positions. The Russians have no such constraints.

5. Beware of "Greeks" bearing gifts.

The Russians grudgingly acknowledge the necessity of making trades, but view compromise as a weakness.

They tend to follow the maxim that "what is mine is mine — what is yours is negotiable." A revealing example of their approach to compromise was an experience I had during SALT II negotiations. The two delegations took a boat ride on Lake Geneva. To thaw the cool Russians, I played Soviet tunes on my harmonica. Everyone danced and had a good time. Later, the head of the Soviet delegation took up a collection. He then grinned and said: "O.K. We will split it 50-50. You had 50 percent of the pleasure by playing, and I will get 50 percent of the pleasure by spending the money." He pocketed the money. That is how the Russians operate.

6. Remember that to the Russians form is substance.

They believe that the physical size of the table and having greater numbers there are all important matters. At the beginning of the strategic arms reduction talks in 1982, the Russians arrived with "one and six" (one negotiator and six delegates). I protested that we had agreed to "one and five." I did not want to perpetuate the conditions of SALT II in which I was pitted against two Soviet delegates. I called a recess, summoned one of my senior advisors and made him a delegate. Thus, when we reconvened, we each had one and six. My Soviet counterpart said, "You can't blame us for trying." The moral is that we must let

'Don't be deceived by words'

the Russians know they cannot rely on using form to influence substance.

7. Don't be deceived by the Soviet "fear of being invaded."

From an early age, Soviet children are taught a fear of being invaded and imbued with the nation's need for large military forces. Granted, the Soviet Union, and Russia before it, have suffered invasions. But in 1898 the Russian general staff concluded that of the 38 major wars in which Russia had been involved, 38 were offensive and only two defensive. The Soviet Union did not come to occupy one-sixth of the world's land mass by fighting defensive actions.

8. Beware of negotiating at the 11th hour.

The Russians are masters of 11th-hour negotiations. They wait until the very end, hoping to put pressure on us to make concessions simply to complete an agreement. While this is normal, the United States has on rare oc-

casions shown that it, too, can use this tactic to advantage. For example, in 1978, we were able to use the deadline of the Vienna summit conference between Jimmy Carter and Leonid J. Brezhnev to pick up several concessions. We should take advantage of such opportunities more often and not let the Soviet Union monopolize them.

9. Don't be deceived by words.

Years of dialogue with the Russians have taught me that, like Alice in Wonderland, words mean what they want them to mean. They call their troops in Afghanistan "freedom-fighters"; the opposition they call "rebels." They try to use a word to mesmerize us and thus put us at a disadvantage. They are masters at "semantic infiltration."

10. Don't misinterpret the human element.

While Soviet negotiators can be pleasant and appear conciliatory, in the end they are always tough bargainers and dedicated Communists. An apparent meeting of the minds one day is often totally forgotten or repudiated by them the next. Whatever a Soviet negotiator says or does in the belief that he is serving his country he considers to be morally irreproachable. Given the great significance of the subjects being negotiated, I believe our best approach is to be even-handed, firm and patient.