

## Outside View: Before Obama, Conservatives Targeted Reagan

By STANLEY A. WEISS - UPI Outside View Commentator

**Washington, Dec. 16 (UPI)** -- As U.S. President Barack Obama battles Senate Republicans over ratification of the new U.S.-Russia START treaty, it's worth remembering that the phrase at the heart of this treaty -- "arms reduction" -- was born 23 years ago this week, in a high-profile summit between the United States and the Soviet Union in Washington.

Then, as now, to no one's surprise, the strongest voices of opposition came from Communist-hating conservatives. But what was surprising was the unlikely target of conservatives' harshest criticism: Ronald Reagan.

In December 1987 -- less than six months after Reagan famously declared at the Brandenburg Gate, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" -- Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev traveled to Washington to sign the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty.

For the first time, the INF Treaty proposed the outright elimination of an entire class of missiles (and not just "arms control"): namely, nuclear and conventional ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges between 300 and 3,400 miles. The United States had about 400 such missiles in Western Europe; the Soviets had four times as many.

The Reagan administration had begun negotiating the treaty in secret more than a year earlier, with the ultimate goal of reducing strategic nuclear arsenals by 50 percent. (In fact, Reagan often said he wanted to eliminate them entirely.)

At the Reykjavik Summit between Reagan and Gorbachev in October 1986, both agreed to remove INF Systems from Europe, to equal global limits of 100 warheads. Further tweaks, driven by West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl's decision to unilaterally remove joint U.S.-West German INF-class Pershing missiles in August 1987, opened the door for total elimination, which U.S. Secretary of State George Schultz and Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze agreed to in a Geneva meeting in November.

It was too much for conservatives, who believed that the missiles were central to relations between the United States and its allies. The conservative stalwart National Review dedicated an entire issue to the INF Treaty, calling it "Reagan's Suicide Pact." Editor William F. Buckley sent Reagan the first copy, writing in an accompanying letter, "For the first time, I and my colleagues need to take very serious issue with you."

Henry Kissinger warned that the treaty undid "40 years of NATO." Conservative columnist George Will ridiculed "the cult of arms control," writing, "The Soviets want victories; we want treaties." Conservative Caucus Chairman Howard Phillips fumed that Reagan had become "the speech reader in chief for the pro-appeasement triumvirate of (White House Chief of Staff) Howard Baker, Schultz, and (Defense Secretary) Frank Carlucci."

Every Republican presidential candidate, save Vice President George H.W. Bush, opposed it. New York Times columnist William Safire seemed to sum it up best: "The Russians ... now understand the way to handle Mr. Reagan: Never murder a man who is committing suicide."

As the founder and then-chairman of Business Executives for National Security, a Washington interest group that lobbies for arms reduction on the theory that being dead is bad for business, I met with Republican senators who opposed the treaty, including the most vocal opponent, Dan Quayle, R-Ind. Their opposition was overwhelmingly principled: they believed the treaty would weaken America's security. Sen. Bob Dole, R-Kan., and his party's leader in the Senate, who was undecided on the treaty, put it bluntly, "I don't trust Gorbachev."

But nine days after the treaty was signed, Dole endorsed it. Five months later, the Senate ratified it. By the treaty's deadline of June 1, 1991, a total of 2,692 such weapons had been destroyed -- 846 by the U.S. and 1,846 by the Soviets.

Gorbachev later wrote in his memoir, "The INF Treaty represented the first step on our way out of the Cold War ... creating a security system that would be based on comprehensive cooperation instead of the threat of mutual destruction."

While the INF debate was a clash between two sets of principles, the New START debate seems to be a clash between principles and politics.

Despite support from nearly every high-ranking U.S. national security figure from the past three decades -- from Kissinger to Brent Scowcroft to James Baker to Condoleezza Rice -- Senate Republicans reportedly want to deny Obama a political victory, despite Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's threat that failure to ratify the treaty may kick off a new arms race.

This not only threatens America's security; it sets a bad precedent: how will other nations take America seriously if it is so willing to sacrifice global agreements to petty domestic politics?

In the mid-1990s, Sen. Jon Kyl, R-Ariz., and who leads the Republican opposition today, was one of the leading opponents of the Chemical Weapons Convention -- until a group of generals, led by Norman Schwarzkopf, whispered in his ear, "the boys need it." Kyl changed his vote and the treaty passed.

It's unclear who is whispering in Kyl's ear today but it may be worth passing along Reagan's words, delivered in a speech to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, 23 years ago this week: "Any successful foreign policy must be built, not upon a Republican or Democratic consensus but upon an American consensus ... upon an agreement about our nation's aims in the world that is not sectional nor partisan but rooted in the will and values of the American people themselves. That policy consensus is one that we must build for ourselves."