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TRANSCRIPT

The Negotiator Files: A Conversation with Franklin Miller

FEATURING

Franklin Miller

INTERVIEWED BY

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Amy Nelson:

So I'm here today with Frank Miller. Frank, it's a pleasure to be with you.

Frank Miller:

Nice to be here.

Amy Nelson:

It's always a pleasure to be talking about arms control. Tell us what brought you into the field, what was your educational background and how did you enter the field of arms control nuclear security policy writ large?

Frank Miller:

I backed into it. I backed into it. So early on, late high school, early college, I wanted to get involved with defense policy, so I majored in history and political science, which didn't help much. But I then spent three years on active duty as a naval officer at sea, which was interesting. And then went to graduate school, got an NPA. And I think one of the things about careers in government or careers any place, is what old folks like me would call your Rolodex, "who do you know?" And it was through people that I met through the Princeton program that I ended up spending the first two years of my government career in the State Department, I was an analyst in the Political-Military Bureau, largely brought on to do things naval, and curiously enough you triggered a memory.

One of the things that was being discussed in '77 to '79 was Indian Ocean arms control with the Russians. This was one of Carter's initiatives, which went nowhere because there was no there there. And then in '79 I transferred over to the Defense Department to start working on theater nuclear systems. And then in '81 became the head of the Strategic Forces Policy Office in OSD. I think the interesting thing about deterrence policy and by extension arms control policy in those years was we had no relationship with the Soviet Union, really. If you were doing Soviet policy, it was through the area of arms control. And that's where if you did anything to influence the Soviets, that's how it happened. It was deterrence and arms control. So that's how I fell into arms control. And mostly I was working on starting '81, Strategic Forces policy, and there was a divide in OSD policy between what I did and the arms controllers and all went up to the deputy assistant secretary. So I played a little bit in START I, and then we'll talk more about START II, where I had a much more central role.

Amy Nelson:

Terrific. Talk more about that divide because we're back in that position today.

Frank Miller:

Gosh, when I joined OSD policy, which would've been in August of '79, there were three nuclear policy offices. There was a theater nuclear policy office that had about five or six professionals. There was a Strategic Forces Policy office that had about five or six individuals, and there was a, there was a SALT office that became the START office. And that had about six or 10 individuals all reporting to a single deputy assistant secretary. Over the years, the two functional offices, the Theater Nuclear, and the Strategic Forces Office merged, and now I think that there's only one office of nuclear policy there.

And there was also at the time, because it was one of the things that was going on, there was an office of multilateral arms control in addition, which did MBFR and gosh, what were the other

ones? I don't know. Certainly MBFR, maybe some of the nascent NPT stuff, I don't remember. But it was a big deal. I mean, policy was a big deal, but policy was much smaller. I mean, today you have six or seven assistant secretaries in policy. We had two. We actually had one in the Carter administration. And then as the Reagan administration emerged, due to personalities, there were two assistant secretaries. So it was in many ways a much leaner organization at the top.

Amy Nelson:

Interesting. And you were tasked with developing national declaratory nuclear policy, is that right?

Frank Miller:

First couple of years. So again, this is one of these archaic things that you inherit even though they're not right. And so in OSD policy, my office, the Strategic Forces Office, was tasked with looking after the programs and with developing public policy, declaratory policy. Indeed, I got deeply involved also in working with the United Kingdom as they transitioned first from Polaris to Trident. And then I opened up a whole new book. I wrote a whole new book essentially on US-UK relations. But there was one office that was a residual office from the Carter years that did targeting policy, and that was jealously guarded, although they made a hash of it, they were doing a terrible job until '85 when the winds changed and I took targeting policy too. So I finally, in '85, my office did declaratory policy forces and targeting policy, and then that goes down a whole different track, which we can come back to on START II. But it was very Byzantine and bureaucratic.

Amy Nelson:

And targeting policy is something that went out of vogue. The United States, we didn't really talk about it for a long time. And it's back now, in the context of this question of whether the United States has enough nuclear.

Frank Miller:

Yeah, I guess so. Mean we never really talked about targeting policy, period. I mean, there were the general statements by secretaries of defense, but I mean, look, in the Carter administration, we had 10,000 nuclear weapons, strategic nuclear weapons, right? More on that. The interesting thing about actual targeting policy, real targeting policy was that the military basically kept OSD out, so there was no civilian oversight. And the further subset of that is that Strategic Air Command out in Omaha kept the Joint Staff out. So they were basically running their own little railroad until I was able to start breaking some doors down in '85. And beyond talking about general threats to one degree or another, that is “what do you think the enemy leadership needs to know that you're holding at risk?” The U.S. said very little.

We didn't generally talk about that. Harold Brown was very good about expanding in the Carter administration. Some of the things Weinberger said were pretty good, and then as the Cold War was easing off, Secretary Cheney made the decision we just weren't going to talk about targeting any more. We didn't talk about targeting from say, 1992, three, until much more recently. And again, the times have changed and there are reasons for that, but we can go into that.

Amy Nelson:

Terrific. Well, let's move into START I. So you were involved in the negotiation of START I, it happened on your watch?

Frank Miller:

I was a bit player.

Amy Nelson:

A bit player.

Frank Miller:

Bit player.

Amy Nelson:

Tell me about that.

Frank Miller:

We weren't as cohesive in formulating the arms control positions as we probably should have been, not as we probably, as we definitely needed to have been. And so from my perch on the side looking at the programs, I was always making sure the arms controllers weren't giving away something that I absolutely needed. So I mean, one of my contributions, if you will, is when the Reagan administration made the decision to sell Trident II to the UK. We promised them a system that could carry 12 warheads.

As we were getting into middle to end stages on START I, the arms controllers wanted to say we'd be restricting Trident to carry eight warheads. And so I mean, I intervened to make sure that we got a secretarial level decision that said, look, we'll put eight on. We're going to sell the British what we promised we're going to sell the British a missile that can carry 12. And that was one thing. And there were other questions about the degree to which we would permit the Soviets to look inside our bombers. They did on-site inspections. And so again, I got drawn into those.

I actually sat in on some long late-night sessions with our arms controllers with the Soviets, which gave significant insight into the Soviet negotiating style, which is really Russian negotiating style, which is, you sit down, you bargain really hard, and it's 10 o'clock at night, and you agree, okay, here's where we are, and you come back the next day and that's not really where you are because they pocketed what you said and they did not admit at all to what they had conceded the night before. And that is classic Russian negotiating style, which is-

Amy Nelson:

Did you find the Russians always waited for the US side to table-

Frank Miller:

Absolutely.

Amy Nelson:

... proposals to provide information.

Frank Miller:

Absolutely. Absolutely. And it's a long story where we always lead. And one of the things that we have always done wrong on arms control is as we run up to an arms control negotiation, we fight in the interagency is to what's going to be the best outcome. What do we want this treaty to say? And that becomes our opening position. And so you get walked back from it. I mean, you have to get walked back from it. I wish we would do a better job of thinking that through. It'll be interesting to see what happens as we contemplate maybe a new round.

Amy Nelson:

Our overall negotiation strategy perhaps. Yeah. So START I, negotiations began, they were concluded relatively quickly for arms control negotiations, no?

Frank Miller:

Well, no, no. START I Reagan postulated the idea of START, I think in maybe '81 or '82. And then at that point you've got three negotiations going in parallel. So you've got START I, you've got the INF Treaty negotiations, and then you've got, I guess it's '83-ish Nuclear Space Talks or something like. And it was the NST talks. I don't remember what the three initials stood for, but you had those three things going forward. And at this time, the Soviets are running a really heavy influence campaign in Western Europe. And the KGB had promised the Politburo that they would block the deployment of the Western Pershing-II and ground launch cruise missile (GLCM), and they failed. And I think it's when the first ground launch cruise went to the UK for a deployment in, it was 1983, I think, you'll have to check me on the date, the Soviets walked out. They walked out of the negotiations for two years.

I may have it wrong and they walked out when we said we were going to deploy, we said that in '79, check my dates. But there was a triggering event in '83 that caused the Soviets to walk out. And then in '85, they come back to the table. And then, so yes, from '85 you're starting START I. START I doesn't get signed until, that START I is signed by Bush '41, isn't it?

Amy Nelson:

Yeah. Well, first we go into Reykjavik and then INF comes out of Reykjavik and then START I.

Frank Miller:

Although INF is playing along all the way as we're working with the allies.

Amy Nelson:

But they waxed and waned-

Frank Miller:

Exactly.

Amy Nelson:

... on the scope at Reykjavik considering the elimination of all nuclear weapons at times.

Frank Miller:

Yes, right.

Amy Nelson:

Yes. And then INF follows shortly thereafter and then START I.

Frank Miller:

Exactly right.

Amy Nelson:

So were you at the negotiation table for START I? Were you-

Frank Miller:

Some of the sessions I was there but they were peripheral.

Amy Nelson:

This question of on-site verification was still the US and the Soviets had not reached a consensus on this, a shared approach. Can you talk about that within START I, the context of START I?

Frank Miller:

Absolutely. I mean, we were making breakthroughs in what needed to be counted. And on-site verification became extraordinarily important because of the prospect, which turned out later to be true. Today we count at least nine treaties and agreements that the Russians cheated on and probably a 10th. So we needed to get real ground truth as to what was happening in the USSR. And when you go back to SALT, and this is an overarching problem with our approach to arms control today in general, we counted what we could see through overhead systems. So you counted missiles, not warheads, and it was all done by national technical means. As we move forward, as it got to the INF systems, which were really much harder to count by national technical means, the US government decided that we needed to have some degree of greater visibility. And that was on-site inspection, which of course was anathema to the Soviet Union, but we pressed ahead with it.

And I think the breakthroughs were first made in the INF Treaty, which is an '87 treaty. And that was concluded relatively quickly, and we could talk to that in a minute because we needed to make sure that under the terms of the treaty, if they were really going to be destroying all the SS-20s, and they had a production plan in Votkinsk that was also making SS-25s, that there were no SS-20s that were being covertly built under the guise of SS-25s. So we had some really intrusive inspections and something called perimeter portal monitoring and all of that. But the reason we got to where we did on the INF treaty is that the Russians badly wanted that treaty, and the Russians badly wanted that treaty because they miscalculated the range of the Pershing-II. Pershing-II was a system that had been a Pershing-I, shorter range. We upgraded to be Pershing-II, they're 108 of them in Germany.

And the Soviet intelligence community decided that they could hit both Moscow and two underground command centers that were south of Moscow, which they actually couldn't, didn't have quite that range. But the Politburo turned to the KGB and said, "You promised us we were not going to be under a five-minute time of flight threat, and here we are, and now this is a knife to the jugular of Soviet command and control. And so, they really wanted that treaty and they paid for it with onsite inspection and having established onsite inspection in the INF treaty, this was something that we could carry forward under the START I treaty.

Amy Nelson:

Terrific. Thank you. Talk about the limitations that START I set and the process of reaching those negotiated outcomes.

Frank Miller:

So START I-

Amy Nelson:

Warheads are capped at 6,000.

Frank Miller:

Yeah. But again, at the end of the day, go back and look at what did the treaties accomplish. SALT I and the defunct SALT II placed caps on where people were growing to. Okay, START

accepted those caps, but for the first time, tried to make qualitative changes to enhance stability under the caps. And so while Richard Perle, who was the chief negotiator and Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy was widely mocked in the traditional arms control community for focusing on throw weight, what Perle was trying to do was to reduce the Soviet's ability to carry warheads. And so one of the things that START I did was to cut the size of the SS-18 force by 50%. So you had 308 SS-18s, under the rules of START I they had to get rid of half force, take it down to 154.

The other thing that START I did was to draw a distinction between ballistic missile warheads, and I should stop. So START begins talking about warheads, not missiles, not things that you can only count from NTM, but warheads. What do those things carry and how many warheads would be carried by each system? And then how did you do the verification? This is where the British system became an issue because our positions on Trident II (D5) had 12 positions, although only eight of them were filled. So you now distinguish in START I, between so-called fast-flying systems, ballistic missiles and slow-flying systems, bomber-delivered weapons with the notion that bomber-delivered weapons because they took a long time to reach their targets were less threatening to strategic stability, whatever that is, than ballistic missiles. And so yes, there's a cap of 6,000 warheads notionally. Now what's under that cap? What's under that cap is 4,900 ballistic warheads. And then what? It was 1,100 bomber warheads.

But again, on the bomber side, if it was a bomber like a B-1 or a B-2 that was delivering gravity bombs, that B-1 or B-2 counted as one weapon. While they could carry up to 16, but it's one weapon. So 6,000s, not 6,000, right? For the B-52, which carried 12 or 20 air-launched cruise missiles, depending on whether it was a G or an H model, the counting rule for the bomber was 50%. So if the B-52 H was capable of carrying 20 weapons, it counted under the Arms Control Treaty as 10. And so 6,000 weapons essentially gave you 10,000 weapons in the arsenal. Yeah. Was it at the SALT limits? Yes. You paid a penalty for ballistic systems and the heavy ICBMs were cut by 50%. And so one of the first things that arms control did in trying to increase stability therefore, was not just counting things, but counting warheads and differentiating. So trying to give the Soviets more of an incentive to go with more bomber weapons than with missile weapons.

Amy Nelson:

Because they're slower and less destabilizing.

Frank Miller:

That was the thought.

Amy Nelson:

And so this refers back to what you said about the treaty made qualitative changes to enhance strategic stability.

Frank Miller:

Exactly so.

Amy Nelson:

So following in the tradition of Schelling and Halperin, the original ideas behind the First SALT Treaty, they were renewed and re-emphasized in SALT I.

Frank Miller:

Yeah. Although, and I must be honest, we have this ongoing joke and debate in the strategic community. Everybody talks about Schelling and Halperin. I never opened Schelling. I did not refer to Schelling once in 20 odd years of dealing with nuclear policies.

Amy Nelson:

But somehow you internalized this idea that qualitative changes could be exceptionally stabilizing as opposed to quantitative ones, which many critics would argue is what arms control became.

Frank Miller:

That's true. That is exactly right.

Amy Nelson:

So what was that process like of internalizing that understanding? It came from somewhere.

Frank Miller:

It's just, again, this is where I played a role in START I and the closing phases was by '89 I become a Deputy Assistant Secretary. So I had the arms control, I had the forces, I was able to put this together. I knew what I wanted to control on the Soviet side, and I wanted as much as possible to create a situation where they were less threatening to my capabilities than without arms control. I was always of the belief, I'm still of the belief that what really counts is deterrence, arms control is nice to have, it's important, but your critical thing is having a strong and capable deterrent, which is survivable under whatever circumstances are necessary.

And so my input to START I in the Bush '41 presidency was not really at the table, but it was informing those kinds of decisions to make sure that, okay, we're going to make sure the bombers are counted this way, or the subs are counted at eight, not 12, and then writing a codicil working with the UK so that it's a US unilateral statement that the Brits are by themselves. They're an independent force. They don't count, even though the Soviets always try to bring the Brits in as part of our force. So yes.

Amy Nelson:

You were very young at the time, weren't you? When you started at the Pentagon?

Frank Miller:

I was 27.

Amy Nelson:

Yeah.

Frank Miller:

29.

Amy Nelson:

Was it intimidating?

Frank Miller:

No, not really. As someone who on active duty didn't get past the rank of lieutenant junior grade, having a four-striper captain come into my office, at first I didn't like dealing with thoe guys. But it was, yeah, I mean, being in the Pentagon in the first couple of years was, it was difficult, not

intimidating because you had all these military guys going, "What expertise do you civilians bring to policymaking anyway?" And there's a line that circulated at the time, which is still true, which is, “I fought as many nuclear wars as you have, so let's sit down and let's, it's not like we're talking about conventional conflict on the plains of Europe. I mean, you've got nothing over me.”

Amy Nelson:

Fair.

Frank Miller:

Which blends into 1985 and all the rest.

Amy Nelson:

So START I is signed and enters into force and pretty quickly negotiations for START II begin, is that right?

Frank Miller:

No. Well, coincidentally at best. So as START I has come to a close and that was signed, you're going to have to remind me, it was '90 or '91. '91. Okay, so let's roll the tape back. And in 1985, I finally get control of targeting policy and I, with the help of very talented subordinates, am able to discover that what the SIOP looks like does not in fact resemble in many serious ways the guidance that the President and the Secretary of Defense have issued.

Amy Nelson:

So for our students, SIOP is?

Frank Miller:

Strategic Integrated Operational Plan, and that is a coordinated war plan for the use of US, ICBM, SLBM and bomber weapons, actually quite historic. It was something that Eisenhower forced to be created in 1960 because the services all did their own nuclear targeting plans, which is quite another story. So the SIOP was the National Strategic War Plan, and there were specific instructions from the President and in much more detail, the Secretary of Defense. And it turns out they weren't being followed.

And it took me a couple of bites at the apple, but I was able to get Secretary Weinberger to back me in reforming the plan. But my ambit was only, if you will, the gross morphology. So what we call the option structure. What did this attack option look like in terms of general targets, not specific targets. I was forbidden by the Joint Staff from getting into into specific targets. I had a relationship, a prior relationship with Secretary Cheney before he became Secretary. He knew what I was doing. When he came in, he was given a couple of briefings by the chiefs that in front of the chiefs, it wasn't by the chiefs, it was by the strategic air commander who also was in charge of targeting. The briefings made no sense to Mr. Cheney. And he called me and he said, "You're going to have to get on top of this."

And I said, "I can't. I could do gross morphology. I can't get into the micro business." And he said, "You can now." So we did a major, well, he authorized a major review of the war plan with OSD, the Joint Staff and Strategic Air Command, and made me a deputy, yes, to help I'm made a Deputy Assistant Secretary at this point. So it's '89, and we do a two-year review of the war plan and discover, whereas we have on the order of 10,000 weapons, the target base that we have to cover in the Soviet Union is 5,888. So we had 40% more weapons than we needed. Shortly thereafter it's quite clear the Soviet Union is breaking up. And so we reopened this study again at

his direction, and we focus on Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, and Kazakhstan, because those are the places where the strategic weapons are.

And when we basically go down to it, going through a lot of puts and takes, it turns out we decide we can live with about 3,500 strategic nuclear weapons. Okay, so 10,000 5,888, 3,500, and we go to the Secretary, (Hadley was the Assistant Secretary), and we say, "We got more weapons than we need by a long shot. What if we try to use that as leverage to push the Soviet Union into a really deep cuts agreement?" And one of the bugaboos at the time, one of the concerns at the time, which is still with us today, although people focus on it a little less, is the vulnerability of MIRV ICBMs - with the notion that one warhead killed several, and therefore there is an advantage in striking first. We said, "What if we trade a significant drawdown in nuclear weapons, strategic nuclear weapons for an agreement to ban MIRV ICBMs on both sides." And he liked it, and we took it to President Bush, and President Bush liked it, made a major speech in I think September of '92.

And so this was the second time that rather than counting numbers, we were going for something at the heart of strategic stability, getting rid of these so-called vulnerable targets, which invited preemptive first strike. And we did it. I mean, Linton (Brooks) was the negotiator. It was done relatively quickly, and it ultimately failed because although the Senate ratified it and the Russian Duma ratified it, the Russians injected a poison pill about missile defense, which the Senate wouldn't agree to. And so our opportunity to ban MIRV ICBMs fell away. At the same time we did get the reductions to 3,500 agreed to. And interestingly, when Yeltsin and Bush signed the treaty, the treaty said, 3,500, and Yeltsin grabs a pen, and he writes down 3,000-3,500 on the treaty papers, and he says to Bush, "That's me, 3,000."

Amy Nelson:

Wow.

Frank Miller:

So yeah, this was the golden age of arms control where we had achieved essentially about a 70% reduction. But we had done so in a way which was designed not to reduce numbers per se, but to create a more stable strategic environment. And it was all brought about by a requirement study that decided that we had way too many weapons. Then we needed start to really establish the linkage between requirements and arms control. It wasn't that the arms controllers were off doing their thing, and on the force's side, we were doing this together. This was requirements which were translated into a sensible arms control agreement. And it's almost the only one ever, because when you go on to Treaty of Moscow, a New Start, they revert to counting missiles without linking it to the war plan.

Amy Nelson:

I've heard Linton say actually he's quite proud of Start II and talk about what an excellent treaty it is as well.

Frank Miller:

Absolutely. I mean, it's a damn shame we couldn't get it to enter into force.

Amy Nelson:

Yeah, tell me more about that. You referred to it as a poison pill. It was a spoiler in the process.

Frank Miller:

Yeah, I don't remember the details, but it was something about banning experiments or deployment of advanced ballistic missile defenses.

Amy Nelson:

This was related to Reagan's SDI?

Frank Miller:

Well yes, I mean, it's a carryover.

Amy Nelson:

Continuation.

Frank Miller:

Right. And some folks, some hardliners in the Duma had injected that in their ratification document. So when the ratification document came back to the US Senate as modified, there were enough SDI adherents, missile defense adherents, that the Russian change was unacceptable. So we wouldn't ratify the Russian modified version.

Amy Nelson:

Was Moscow worried about the now post-Soviet State signing onto a treaty?

Frank Miller:

You're talking about New START, I mean, sorry, START I or START II?

Amy Nelson:

START II was in '93.

Frank Miller:

No, I mean, the transition to Yeltsin had been made smoothly under START I, the four nuclear powers that emerged from the USSR had to give their weapons back to the Russians. So there wasn't a lot of thought, I think on Moscow's part about having to worry about the post-Soviet states as such, Russia was the repository of the Soviets nuclear weapons.

Amy Nelson:

Talk about the process of reaching an agreement. Was it highs and lows? Was it pretty continuous? Was there a euphoric post-Cold War sense settling in?

Frank Miller:

Yeah, I don't think there was, I mean, that's a long time ago. But I think one of the differences is that with SALT and START, there was this classic model: you send your delegations to Geneva and they stay there for four months and they argue and they come to commas and periods and semicolons and all the rest, and they go home for a while, and they start again. That I think it actually plays into SORT when we get to SORT, but I don't quite recall, but I think Linton went over with specific instructions on Start II because they weren't going to be sitting there for months throwing pieces of paper at each other.

It was conducted on a relatively rapid basis. And I think it was important to get away from the classic model (we're going to sit across the table and talk to you for three months at a time) because it was the kind of thing that impeded rapid progress. It gave the negotiators control as

opposed to the leaders. And then everybody would look to, oh, good, we're going to get a Reagan-Gorbachev summit or a Bush-Yeltsin summit to cut through the red tape that the negotiators have created. I mean, these things don't have to be as tortuous as they end up being sometimes.

Amy Nelson:

Yeah. It sounds like on one hand, START II paved new ground, but on the other really picked up on the momentum that had been building behind the arms control project. Can you recall a particularly difficult moment in the negotiation and how you were able to overcome an obstacle?

Frank Miller:

On START II?

Amy Nelson:

Yeah.

Frank Miller:

No, I can't.

Amy Nelson:

No.

Frank Miller:

I really can't. I mean, one of the things is that helped us a lot is that the Russian economy was cratering and they couldn't really afford to maintain some of the forces that they had.

Amy Nelson:

Great, thank you. All right, let's move on to SORT, can you talk about that, the advent of that process?

Frank Miller:

Yeah, and I've talked before, prepped for this discussion, I talked to two close friends, one of whom was on the NSC alongside me, and he had missile defense in his portfolio and someone who was on the vice president's staff. Why did we do a SORT, what impelled us to do? What was the reason to have to do SORT? We were already down at 3,500. None of us can come out with a good answer. None of us can come out with a good answer as to "why SORT." One of the reasons is everybody expected that the next administration's going to do another arms control agreement. And this is where you start to get the disjuncture between targeting requirements in arms control. Because all during the Clinton years, there was a push after START II, "well, 3,500, why can't we go to 2,500? Why 2,500? Well, because it's less than 3,500, we need to do that."

So I can't give you a good reason for why we began to start SORT negotiations. The fact is, by the time Bush '43 entered office, there were two things. I mean, our basic targeting requirements had gone down. So we were at, I don't know, around 2000 or so. I knew this because I came over to the NSC in January of 2001. I mean, I was fully current. Nobody knew more about targeting than I did at that point. I'll be so bold as to say it.

President Bush obviously considered Putin somebody he could deal with. I looked into his eyes and I saw his soul. Bush viewed the traditional view of arms control of sitting across the table as two antagonistic parties, as something that contributed to a lack of goodwill among the two

nations. He didn't want to put up with that stuff. He thought that was yesterday's news, and it was deleterious to a good outcome. So basically, after we looked at our own requirements and settled on 1,700 to 2,200, although when Chaney and Bush asked me, I said, we could go a little lower, but okay, 1,700 to 2200, that's where the Pentagon was at.

Amy Nelson:

Little hedge, Yeah.

Frank Miller:

Little hedge. He said he basically told the Russians and the interagency, "Hey, I'm just going to do this on my own. Dad did this presidential nuclear initiative, I'm going to something similar."

Amy Nelson:

I was going to ask you if you thought he was influenced by his father's accomplishments.

Frank Miller:

I think so. I think so to some extent. But he also wanted to avoid the arms control negotiating process because he didn't want to inject things that were disagreeable into the US-Russian relationship.

Amy Nelson:

But he withdrew from ABM.

Frank Miller:

Well, wait. And you had two sets of players who said, "No, no, you can't do this unilaterally. We need to do a treaty." One was the State Department under Colin Powell: “no, we have to write this stuff down.” And the other was Putin, "I want a treaty." And so they got the treaty in relatively short order. Why? One reason why is because we had START and we based almost all of the SORT/Treaty limits of Moscow on the START counting rules and on the START verification protocols. So it was basically dead easy. You just had to pick a number. We made a little bit of a push to try to get the 43 to agree to reviving the MIRV ban. And he said, "No." "Okay, why no?" He said, "Because the Russians are so poor that they can't reach 1,700 without MIRVing their ICBM force. And so I'm going to give Putin a bye on this." Retrospectively a dramatic mistake. Just a dramatic mistake. But there you go.

Amy Nelson:

Can you talk about that in the context of today or of more recent developments? Why would that have been helpful?

Frank Miller:

Well, I mean, if you get out of MIRV ICBMs and you don't have an SS-18 follow, (even though it's failing somewhat), I mean, it's a much more stable world. And you wouldn't be using a single-header ICBM on the Russian side to kill a single-header Minuteman. The U.S. went to single-headed systems. I mean, regardless of START II not entering the force, we turned a three warhead Minuteman force into a single-warhead force. And we took out the 50 peacekeepers (MX) ICBM, the 10 warhead peacekeepers of the force. The Russians did not go down that road. And so you still had the imbalance with the MIRV ICBMs on the Russian side and the US single-headers, but it was done relatively quickly. But there was a real significance to SORT, Treaty of Moscow, whatever you call it, that was overlooked in the partisan politics at the time, which is

that under SORT every weapon was counted. So we didn't do the distinction between fast flyers and slow flyers.

If a B-52 was going to carry 12 cruise missiles, it was going to count as 12 weapons. And so the 1,700 to 2,200 was a real warhead count on both sides. We tried very hard, I tried very hard to open up the US military to Russian on-site inspections of our weapons storage areas. It was a hard fight. We got that. They took it to the Russian side, and they said, absolutely not. Under no circumstances will you ever set foot inside ours. So that part of on-site verification was never furthered, but 1,700 to 2,200 was real weapons. When you look at New START, New START brings back the bomber counting rule. And so Mr. Obama was able to say, "Well, look, 1,500, no one's gone lower than 1,550." Well, that's a bit of a red herring because the bomber counting rule's back in effect, and so you could load up another 1,000 weapons on the B-52 force and the Russians similarly on their strategic aircraft. So New START's really not 1,550, it's really 2,300 to 2,500. But that distinction gets lost in the telling of the tale.

Amy Nelson:

SORT had an element of flexibility to it, would you say, in terms of counting rules?

Frank Miller:

No. I mean, it was what you got from START II, I mean if it was the Trident II at eight-

Amy Nelson:

Is it freedom to mix?

Frank Miller:

Freedom to mix? No. Yes, freedom to mix in that you had so many ballistic RVs, but that was more of a forced structure as I recall. That was how we wanted to structure our force as opposed to what we were forced to do by the treaty. And of course, our force had drawn down so much by that point that it wasn't a real issue, but we were counting every weapon. And that's a significant difference from where we are today.

Amy Nelson:

And was the inspection issue you just described, was that the biggest obstacle?

Frank Miller:

No, at the end of the day, we had the START counting rules. So we were going back to whatever we were doing under START I.

Amy Nelson:

What was the greatest lesson learned from negotiating SORT?

Frank Miller:

I don't know that we learned anything.

Amy Nelson:

Or for START II, what was the greatest lesson learned?

Frank Miller:

There's a couple of things in this. I mean, you mentioned the ABM treaty, that had been a big thing in the Bush '43 campaign team. I mean, getting rid of the ABM treaty, and that was a big deal. So they brought about getting rid of the ABM treaty in December of '01. And the fear was that, well, that's the end of arms control. Well, clearly it wasn't the end of arms control because Putin was willing to sign SORT. And so maybe one of the reasons for SORT was to help demonstrate that arms control wasn't dead. That I think is part of it.

Amy Nelson:

Sort of a biggest lesson learned?

Frank Miller:

Biggest lesson learned. You have to have both sides of the brain in case you have to have the deterrence requirements and the arms control requirements combined, and they ought to work as one to enhance stability. And I think we did that in START II. As you said, Linton said it was a beautiful treaty.

Amy Nelson:

There are those as recently as a year or so ago who would say arms control and deterrence have nothing to do with each other. How do you think we got there?

Frank Miller:

I have no idea. Those people who don't understand what nuclear deterrence is all about in the first place, there are those people who think that if you resort to a minimum deterrence strategy and threaten enemy cities, which is both immoral and ineffective, that that's all you need to do. People have various different views. You have to take into account what the other guy, the enemy leader, thinks. I mean, I think, and I've been saying for several years, if we do a new arms control negotiation, we need to take all nuclear weapons into account. We have to take account of all the theater nuclear weapons as well as the strategic nuclear weapons because we've allowed an imbalance to develop in that area. And now as we've moved into this world of two potential nuclear enemies, the 1,550 or whatever you have, 2,300 theoretical, 1,800 real, that we had decided we needed in 2010 to deter Putin then is insufficient to deter both Putin now and Xi Jinping in three years as the Chinese force continues to grow.

Amy Nelson:

So you think the United States needs more nuclear weapons now?

Frank Miller:

Yeah, I do. I think we need enough to cover the targets which matter to Putin and Xi with a little reserve for Kim Jong-un. And I think that should guide all of our thinking. And people say, "Oh my God, you're going to go up from 1,550." Well, the Russians have 2,000 theater weapons plus 1,550 plus strategic weapons. It's not like you should ignore the theater nuclear weapons, and pretend they don't exist. The theater is where the war war's going to start, right? It's not going to start on an intercontinental basis over the poles. The theater is where the war's going to start. And so if you ignore the theater nuclear weapons, you're deliberately saying, I'm wedded to numbers that don't really influence international politics.

Amy Nelson:

Is it really a numbers game?

Frank Miller:

Yes, in one sense. As long as we have enough to deter effectively, it's a numbers game. If you can guarantee me that I can have what I need to deter effectively, I'm happy to take other limits. I don't think we need as many theater nuclear weapons as the Russians have. Absolutely not. We need to enhance our regional nuclear posture. I mean, I was a member of the Congressional Strategic Posture Commission. We said that the regional nuclear posture is insufficient, needs to be enhanced. But if you're Russia, you're concerned about deterring the United States. If you're China, you're concerned about deterring the United States. Now, if you're the United States, you have to worry about Russia and China. It's not an open-ended growth. It's not a dramatic growth over what we have today. But in three years or so, my estimate is we're going to need more than we have. And so what you need is a treaty that covers all nuclear weapons with freedom to mix.

Amy Nelson:

What about the return of submarine-launched cruise missiles?

Frank Miller:

Yeah, why not?

Amy Nelson:

You think the return is a good idea, the Strategic Posture Commission was pretty supportive of that. But they should be deployed and then limited or limited and then deployed?

Frank Miller:

As long as you give me a cap, okay, say 3,500 weapons, and you tell me I'm free under that 3,500 to divide that between however many theater weapons and strategic weapons we need, then we're good. And you should have verification. The same thing with the Russians who'll likely have more theater weapons than they need strategic weapons given their deterrent requirements and ours. But to say that we have to deter Russia and China simultaneously and to deliberately have an arsenal which is inadequate to that task, either because that’s what we build or that’s what we limit, is failing the national security requirement to deter both simultaneously.

Amy Nelson:

So there's simultaneous deterrence. And then there's the idea that if the United States had to fight a nuclear war with Russia and a nuclear war with China, they wouldn't probably happen at the same time. Bolton was famously ridiculed for saying the US would need to fight a nuclear war with Russia and then turn around and fight a nuclear war with China. The laughable part, of course, the dark humor of it is that nobody would be left standing after the first nuclear war.

Frank Miller:

Absolutely. And I think my response to you would be: we're not going to fight those wars. We're going to deter those wars. We're going to prevent them from happening. What the Strategic Posture Commission said was that you could not predict that an act of aggression by one would not be joined deliberately or in an aggressive manner to pick up the pieces by the other, so that you had to deter both simultaneously. I mean, it's 1941, you've got to deter Hitler and Tojo simultaneously. We failed on that with the fate of the nation and indeed of the free world at stake. You can't premise your force structure on there'll only be one country to deter and not the other.

Amy Nelson:

Is it possible to deter two other countries simultaneously in cahoots with one another when you are outnumbered, if you are not playing a numbers game?

Frank Miller:

Well, again, if your strategy says, if your policy says, you have to hold at risk with enemy leaders value, which is themselves, the support structure that keeps them in power, their military forces, the key elements of their military forces, and war supporting industry - then you need to build the force to do that. And if you add those targets up on both sides, that drives you to a number. It's the target base. Now, if you change your policy and say, I'm going after cities, you can do that. It's totally ineffective because Russia, I mean, Putin doesn't care about the Russian people. He has killed, what? Several hundred thousand of his own soldiers? Xi Jinping, same same. You've got to hold at risk what they value, not what we value. And this is why deterrence is an interesting game.

Amy Nelson:

Yeah, game's a good word. I want to talk about you some more. Where there specific moments during the negotiations where you felt your contributions had a direct impact on the outcome?

Frank Miller:

My office essentially kicked off START II, I mean, we brought it to the President of the United States who endorsed the notion, and it was signed by the President of the United States and the president of Russia. That was our treaty. I mean, this was crafted in OSD by the warfighters. Okay. SORT was kind of an afterthought.

Amy Nelson:

Is that your proudest moment?

Frank Miller:

Oh, it's not my proudest moment, I think.

Amy Nelson:

What's your proudest moment?

Frank Miller:

I think what we did to establish civilian control of the war plan was the biggest thing. I mean, that had not existed before. And everybody after me has used that knowledge to be able to help craft the US strategic forces and asserting civilian control as it should be, was I think my biggest thing. I mean, the other thing that I did, which was building the relationship with the United Kingdom, such that we went from a unilateral set of relations on the technical side to a rich mix of political, technical, and operational interdependence was one of my major achievements. And also working with the allies. I mean, I worked with NATO for 20 odd years. I lead the NATO High-Level Group for four years. That alliance is invaluable. I had an easier time. I dealt with 16 allies, minus the French, who obviously wouldn't play. Now you've got 32 that makes a bigger negotiating table around the process.

Amy Nelson:

Bigger project. Do you think arms control can still be an effective security tool?

Frank Miller:

I think it could be a very effective augmentation. Again, my bedrock is a deterrent. If I haven't got an effective deterrent, I don't have anything. In that case, arms control does not help, because authoritarian leaders don't respect arms control. Putin has violated 10 agreements. I mean, go way back to Helsinki where he pledges not to. I mean, he inherited that, but in Helsinki final access, you're not going to invade another country in Europe, right?

Amy Nelson:

Yeah.

Frank Miller:

Oops. The Budapest agreement, which he agreed to safeguard Ukraine's sovereignty, all sorts of things. The constant violations of the incidents at sea agreement and the dangerous military activities agreement. I mean, Russian pilots and Russian planes don't go off and do things, Chinese, same same. Just because they get in the cockpit one day and are feeling cocky. They're told to do these kinds of things.

Amy Nelson:

Do you think there's a way the treaties could have been crafted that would've either anticipated these violations and proactively worked to manage them or precluded them in some way?

Frank Miller:

No. Well, I don't know. I mean, one of the problems is you've got all these commissions that get set up, the bilateral consultative commissions and all the rest. In many instances, the Russian Foreign Ministry people are absolutely ignorant of what their military is doing. And if you go back to the roots of arms control, there's the, what is it? Book by John Newhouse called “Cold Dawn” about SALT I, and the classic story where the US side goes in and asks the Russians what their force structure is, and the Russians won't tell them. So we put stuff on the table that's unclassified, and later the Russian General takes the JCS rep off of the court and says, "What are you doing?" Our foreign ministry people don't need to know that. That's in Newhouse's book. Linton did it. What's your Russian force structure? So we give them-

Amy Nelson:

Tell us what you think of it.

Frank Miller:

Right. This is our view of your force structure. So often the diplomats don't have any idea of what they're negotiating, but they've got their hard instructions. And then the question is, who wants a deal at the end of the day anyway? I think we tend to want a deal more than the Russians do, except INF, because in INF, the situation turned out that they perceived a deep, credible threat to the Soviet command and control structure, and they wanted that eliminated. So it's a question of do you have leverage?

Amy Nelson:

And my last question, what advice would you give to the next generation of arms controllers, diplomats, arms control scholars towards future arms control efforts?

Frank Miller:

That's easy. Study your deterrence requirements and translate them into your arms control approach, not vice versa. Don't come to me with a straight jacket and says, "I'm going to give you

1,550, do the best you can." Because that's not an answer. I mean, the world changes. It's just not an answer.

Amy Nelson:

The world changes. That's a good note to end on.

Frank Miller:

Yeah. All right.

Amy Nelson:

Thank you very much. That was terrific. I learned a lot.

Frank Miller:

Well, thank you. It was fun. Down memory lane, oh my goodness.

(END)