

РОССИЙСКО-АМЕРИКАНСКИЕ ОТНОШЕНИЯ В РЕТРОСПЕКТИВЕ

UDC 327

The forgotten process: Information disarmament in the Soviet/US reproachment of the 1980s*

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This article contends that just as an excess of conventional arms requires a disarmament processes, so the weaponization of media should be met with an information disarmament process. The article examines elements of this work deployed to assist in the US — Soviet rapprochement of the 1980s. Cases discussed include a mutual textbook review project, citizen-to-citizen conferences mounted by the Chautauqua Society and a series of forums held via satellite television links called Spacebridges. The emergence of government-to-government information talks in which the United States Information Agency led by Charles Z. Wick engaged various elements of the Soviet state media apparatus is traced. The meetings from 1986 through 1989 are summarized, including the frank discussion of the challenge of disinformation and of mutual stereotyping. It is asserted that this process was more effective than is generally remembered, but success required a rough symmetry within the US/Soviet relationship. The internal crisis within the USSR repositioned the country as a junior partner and led the US to misperceive the end of the Cold War in terms of victory and defeat, with counterproductive results.

Keywords: information disarmament, propaganda, public diplomacy, disinformation, Spacebridges, citizen diplomacy, exchange diplomacy, Cold War, US — Soviet Relations, Reagan, Gorbachev, United States Information Agency.

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Any well-studied historical episode generates its milestones: the fixed points of drama or breakthrough that endure as icons of peril or possibility. The Cold War between the US and USSR is no exception. Its milestones — Yalta, Berlin, Cuba, Helsinki, Reykjavik — are well enough known to be evoked simply from a placename. The process by which the great nuclear arsenals were brought under control map readily to this timeline: the installation of the “hotline” between the White House and the Kremlin in the wake of the Cuban Missile Crisis for example. But this misses much. The weapons of the Cold War were not all physical and the process of disarmament which brought the conflict to a conclusion was not solely concerned with tangible weapons. The Cold War was a struggle for minds and its taming required attention to the realm of international image. Officials on both sides had to learn and then explain to their own citizens the importance of stepping back from mutual demonization, and the relevance of better communication.

Varieties of Disarmament

Disarmament is an enduring concept in international relations. As old as the prophet Isaiah’s vision of “swords beaten into ploughshares.” There are four clear-cut categories: 1) imposed disarmament, such as the restrictions imposed on the German military in the wake of the two World Wars or on the Japanese following World War II, 2) unilateral disarmament, when a country voluntarily abandons a particular weapon while leaving others in possession of it, as when South Africa, Ukraine, Belarus, or Kazakhstan gave up nuclear weapons, 3) multilateral disarmament when a group of countries agree together to limit their levels of particular weapons. The naval treaty following World War I and Chemical Weapons treaty following World War II reflect this. The final category is 4) bilateral disarmament where two countries agree mutual reductions in their arsenals, as with the US — Soviet Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) begun by the US and USSR in 1969. The same categories may be identified in the field of information. History includes imposed information disarmament, as with the re-education of West Germany and Japan following World War II. There are cases of unilateral information disarmament as when the United States demolished the mechanisms created to conduct propaganda and home and abroad in World War I. There are cases of multilateral information disarmament as when the League of Nations convened an intellectual exchange program or with the decision to create UNESCO. Finally, there have been examples of bilateral information disarmament. Successful examples include the mutual history textbook review process created between France and Germany after World War II [1]. All of these approaches had relevance to the Cold War, however each of these hinges on the arrival of a particular condition of either overwhelming victory, frustrating stalemate, or some kind of epiphany as to the futility of the status quo, and the Cold War failed to deliver any of these for many years.

Cold War Propaganda

The Cold War was a struggle of ideas. While entities of the power of United States and Russia were unlikely to sit easily together that tension was rendered likely by the divergence of political systems implicit in the Bolshevik Revolution on the one hand and US embrace of global commerce on the other. So it proved. At the end of the World

War II, with neither side ready or willing to embrace further slaughter the struggle for the mind of the world seemed a logical substitute. For the Soviet Union it was a relaunch of the well-established ongoing project to export Communism. For the United States it was a realization that it too was in the ideological export business and that unless it moved to formally communicate its ideology to the world it would lose vast swathes of territory to its adversary. After an *ad hoc* start initiating new programs and repurposing initiatives from the war, the US government resolved to create a one-stop shop for its overt information work. Eisenhower authorized the United States Information Agency (USIA) in August 1953. The US also pursued a range of covert activities under the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). There were some attempts to wage information war directly and for one country to introduce ideas that would disrupt the other's core home audience: the US had its *Radio Liberty* and *Voice of America* Russian service; the USSR had Radio Moscow and front organizations. Counter moves included the Soviet introduction of widespread radio jamming to block western radio transmissions. The real emphasis in the propaganda Cold War was in the approach to one-another's satellite states and in competition for the attention of the emerging nations of the developing world. Decolonization created what amounted to a game board for informational struggle. The antagonists rose to the challenge with rival networks of information centers, libraries, exhibitions, film shows, newspapers, exchange programs and subsidized books in public media space. They build rival covert structures too each looking to subvert the image of the other. Secret subsidies flowed to intellectuals, magazines, and front organizations in what has become known as the Cultural Cold War. Even if antagonists could do little to reach one another's home population, both societies looked to affirm the political sensibilities of their own people with officially sanctioned Cold War culture making the round of heroes and villains, allies and enemies, dreams, and nightmares normal. It is striking how similar issues occur in the Public Diplomacy of both countries: problems of recruiting and retaining foreign students or structuring an information campaign within a foreign policy bureaucracy were common to both. But no conflict has precise symmetry, and as the Cold War unfolded the contenders moved to specialize. The US came to trust more to its commercial culture while the Soviet Union fell back on covert "Active Measures" managed by the state security apparatus [2].

Cultural Negotiation in the Midst of Cold War

The Cold War was not without cultural negotiation. The thaw of the later Eisenhower period saw explicit discussion of information and cultural issues culminating in the US/Soviet case with the so-called Lacy — Zarubin agreement of 1958. Both countries spoke of a need for better understanding and established mechanisms for student exchange, mutual publications, and exhibitions. Performers moved between the two blocs and motion pictures created by one played on one another's cinema screen. Radio jamming receded for a season. Yet for all the reconciliatory rhetoric this was not information disarmament, rather its context was still one of power and confrontation. Leaders on both sides had great self-confidence in the appeal of their societies and assumed that access to the other's home population could provide a strategic breakthrough. There was also an awareness of the value of such contact for covert intelligence collection. These were soft power strategies for hard power advantage.

Cold War Peace Initiatives

Just as cultural initiatives had an underlying Cold War logic, so did initiatives in the field of peace. Early in the Cold War, Soviet propagandists saw great advantage in associating the USSR with ideas of peace and — by the same token — damaging the USA by associating it with war. The World Peace Council, created in 1950, was a Soviet front organization, and its work dismissed as such in the US. Of more significance was the emergence of what would now be termed “track two” initiatives, the peer-to-peer contact of US and Soviet specialists, all too aware of the dangers inherent in on-going misunderstanding. In 1958 a group of scientists from both countries founded the so-called Pugwash conference. Their connections laid important groundwork for eventual arms control [3]. There were attempts at broader elite to elite citizen dialogue in a long running series of conferences begun at Dartmouth College under the chairmanship of Norman Cousins. The series was destined to run throughout the Cold War [4].

Détente and the US — USSR Textbook Study Project

Détente opened greater bilateral opportunities between the US and USSR. Negotiation opened the way to renewed exchange. Joint communication and cultural activity followed. The joint Apollo — Soyuz space mission in 1975 was both a triumph of collaboration and public diplomacy to underline the new mood. The joint Soviet-American feature film — *The Blue Bird* (“Sinyaya pitsa”) (1976) — fared less well [5]. The Helsinki accords included provisions to expanded trade, scientific and people-to-people contact. Dialogues and exchanges flourished with an especial emphasis on youth projects. Newcomers to the space included the Esalen Institute in California, which launched a Soviet-American exchange program in 1979. Esalen — located in Big Sur on the California coast — was synonymous with innovative and even eccentric ideas. Its exchange projects included connecting young leaders, discussion of food and holistic approaches to health. Yet the flow of media between the blocs was slow to improve. Isolated successes included a TASS/*New York Times* news exchange deal in 1977, and an exchange of editors in 1979 [6, p. 145, 160, 177].

The most developed post-Helsinki attempt to address propaganda and misrepresentation began in 1977 with the launch of a bilateral textbook study project. Its American lead was Professor Howard D. Mehlinger of the Indiana University, at veteran exchange administrator who taught in the school of education and had studied Russian history. The plan was for experts in both countries to identify a set of key school history and geography textbooks representing the other, to exchange, translate and review them, meet, and listen to one another’s critique. The issue of self-representation in these textbooks was not open for discussion, only representation of the other country. The Soviet team was chosen by the Ministry of Education. The US side drew on the National Council for the Social Studies, American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and the Association of American Publishers. Mehlinger knew that this line-up would ensure that findings were noticed in the US¹.

By December 1979 the mutual textbook critiques were ready. The US team travelled to Moscow meeting that Soviet counterparts. Their discussions were frank. Issues for the USSR’s team ranged from American books’ neglect of the Soviet role in World War II

¹ Interview: Howard D. Mehlinger, 29 March 2021.

and their over-emphasis on westernization as a barometer of the Tsarist period, to such irritations as regularly getting Lenin's first name wrong in print. The US team objected to multiple uses of a story of blankets infected with smallpox being deliberately issued to native Americas being linked to claims that the US government had deployed bioweapons in the Korean War. They also noted that the version of US race relations depicted in Russian textbooks was still that of the early 1950s "Jim Crow" and did not reflect the advances of the Civil Rights movement [7]. The professors resolved to feed responses back to their own educational bureaucracies and to meet again in the US in 1980. Then the fragile bubble of détente burst. The entry of Soviet troops into Afghanistan heralded a return of Cold War attitudes and many exchange projects froze. The victory of the tough-talking Ronald Reagan in the election of 1980 promised a new era of confrontation. The textbook project remained in abeyance waiting for the right moment to recommence. Participants in both countries published interim reports and hoped for a thaw² [8; 9].

Launching Spacebridges

Despite the negative headlines of the early Reagan years, some people in both countries looked to maintain the spirit of détente and restrain the impulse to mutual vilification. A small group of visionaries in the US and USSR decided to experiment with satellite communication technology to create events at which citizens of the two countries could connect. The US root of the idea was a freelance media activist named Kim Spencer, who learned that PBS allowed independent producers to buy time on the Westar communication satellite and had begun using the technology within the US for special programs. Spencer's partner and colleague Evelyn Messinger suggested using the technique to engage Russians in the same way. The potential to use this technology in for Cold War contact appealed to tech pioneer Steve Wozniak who proposed to build such link ups into a series of rock music festivals organized by his new company UNUSON. Wozniak worked with the Jim Hickman of Esalen Institute's Soviet — US exchange program and producer Richard Lukens to explore the satellite link component. The Russian end was driven by a freethinking writer Joseph Goldin and filmmaker Yuliy Gusman, *who managed to persuade the state broadcaster Gostelradio to participate. An idea was born*³.

The first broadcast happened on 5 September 1982, the Labor Day holiday weekend in the US and saw young Russians at the Gostelradio studio in Moscow link to a throng of young Americans, gathered in front of a giant screen at Wozniak's three-day 'Us' festival in San Bernardino, California. There was no script for the connection and the technology was not perfect, but the feelings were positive and the potential clear. Wozniak staged a second festival with a more elaborate satellite dialogue called "Linking Us Together" in May 1983. Astronauts, experts, Congressman George Brown Jr. (D-CA) and studio audiences connected to counterparts during the dialogue. The Russian anchor was Vladimir Pozner who took the role with flair and charisma. Bands played (Russia provided the jazz fusion ensemble Arsenal) and young people danced during the music component [10; 11].

Wozniak cooled on the business aspect of the festival enterprise but the idea of Soviet — US dialogue lived on. Kim Spencer and his colleagues Evelyn Messinger and David Hoffman proved more attached to the concept than Wozniak. They had already established an NGO

² Interview: Howard D. Mehlinger, 29 March 2021.

³ Interview: David Hoffman, 31 March 2021; Interview: Kim Spencer, 15 April 2021.

called Internews to seek out and share stories helpful to the peace and environmental movement, and saw scope to work via satellite. Under the banner of “Telemost” in Russian and “Spacebridge” in English, Internews worked with Goldin, Pozner and a team in Moscow to organize a series of satellite connections between citizens, experts, and officials in both countries. A string of interactive programs followed including programs dealing with such *shared issues as children’s media, memories of the war and the danger of a nuclear winter.* A Spacebridge of scientists saw the first public concession by Soviet experts that a nuclear war would not be easily survivable. Children from both countries came together to perform a version of the British peace musical *Peace Child*, hosted by John Denver. Seattle connected to Leningrad for a city-to-city conversation and programs jointly hosted by Phil Donahue for the US and Vladimir Pozner for the USSR, considered social issues including gender. By 1985 Spacebridges were an accepted element in Soviet — US dialogue⁴ [12].

Launching Chautauqua

A further set of Soviet — US initiatives in the era emerged from the venerable adult education institute located at Chautauqua in upstate New York. In 1984 distinguished foreign correspondent John Wallach proposed a cultural and citizen summit between the superpowers. The Chautauqua Society brought Wallach’s vision to life working with the Union of Soviet Friendship Societies and USSR — US Society on the Soviet side. The first Chautauqua Conference on US — Soviet Relations took place in the summer of 1985. Musicians and poets from the two countries shared the stage with policy makers, Soviet visitors stayed in the homes of ordinary Americans throughout the event. Highpoints included the Eugene Fodor and Ekaterina Sarantseva playing Mozart together, Georgi Grananyan and the Louisiana Jazz Ensemble playing jazz and bravura performances from poets Andrei Voznesensky, Yevgeni Yevtushenko and singer Roy Orbison. Less harmonious was the policy debate between Paul Nitze and Pavel Podlesny over space-based weapons. There was plainly a long road ahead [13].

The vision for such meetings as the Spacebridges or Chautauqua’s summit was born of the diplomatic impasse of the early 1980s. Kim Spencer and his colleagues were deeply worried by the threat of nuclear war. Organizers found the world around them was changing. Doors opened more easily than expected. The events themselves were symptomatic of a renewed interest in exchanges and the desire of leaders to signal to their own peoples and the world that they were open to peace. Such motives were readily legible in the reaction of the Soviet state to American child Samantha Smith of Maine who wrote to General Secretary Andropov in 1982 asking for peace and was ostentatiously welcomed for a visit to the USSR in 1983 [14; 15]. Representatives of the Soviet State and its agencies like the Friendship Societies with Chautauqua or Gostelradio with Spacebridges participated because it was understood to be in the state’s interest to do so. Gostelradio also ensured the visibility of Spacebridges within the Soviet Union in a way that could not be ensured with the diffused broadcasting structures of the USA. In the US too, there was a growing interest in exchanges. An in-house expert at the Foreign Service Institute — Joseph Montville — had advanced the idea of what he termed “Track Two diplomacy” — bilateral dialogue and cultural contact to prepare the way for eventual diplomatic heavy lifting [16].

⁴ Interview: David Hoffman, 31 March 2021; Interview: Kim Spencer, 15 April 2021.

In June 1984 the Wilson Center's Kennan Institute had hosted a conference of experts to discuss the opportunities for renewed US — Soviet exchange. Reagan himself hosted speakers at the White House and assured them that he wanted to do what ever he could to open the USSR to the world: "Civilized people everywhere have a stake in keeping contacts, communication and creativity as broad, deep, and free as possible" he told them. "I feel that we should broaden opportunities for American and Soviet citizens to get to know each other better" [13]. Planning for renewed exchange began in August and USIA began to look for opportunities to reopen the channels of dialogue. The elevation of Mikhail Gorbachev to the office of General Secretary in March 1985 provided an opportunity for a new beginning.

Geneva, November 1985

In November 1985 Reagan and Gorbachev met in Geneva for the first of their summits. With many issues showing little room for early movement on either side it was perhaps only to be expected that they should agree to a raft of increased exchanges, signing a new exchange agreement. The new agreement restored the contacts that had been lost in the last year of the Carter administration. Proposals now included student exchanges and links in the field of arts and culture. Television figured too with the two leaders pledging to exchange New Year greetings to one another's populations on 1 January 1986 [17]. Above all the meeting reflected a promise to keep talking, and communication issues were high on the agenda.

Moscow, January 1986

The first specialist talks on information and exchange took place in Moscow over 10 days in January 1986. The US delegation included the USIA director himself — Charles Z. Wick — and the newly appointed US — USSR exchange administrator Ambassador Stephen Rhinesmith, whose title was itself a sign of the administration's commitment to the project. It was a special blessing extended by Reagan to ensure that Rhinesmith was taken seriously. Wick had his own built-in leverage: the distinction of being a close friend of President Reagan with a mandate to deliver on the good things agreed in outline in Geneva. Rhinesmith was one of the real experts on international exchange at the time. He was a past-president of the American Field Service and had also overseen the Association of Exchanges. While Wick was combative in his approach to the Russians, Rhinesmith was convinced that exchange could help to improve relations⁵ [18, p. 175]. Wick's opposite number in key talks was Leonid Zamyatin, the Chairman of the International Information Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Wick and Zamyatin spoke of the need for a "Truce in war of words." They agreed to allow mutual access for documentary film crews to film in one another's country. Zamyatin's complained about anti-Soviet stereotyping in US popular culture, citing *Rambo II*, the boxing drama *Rocky IV* and ABC TV's recent mini-series *Amerika* about a future Soviet occupation of the US. Wick explained that in the free US media market the US public were the arbiters of the success or failure of media content, and added that the Reagan administration itself

⁵ Interview: Stephen Rhinesmith, 22 April 2021.

was frequently annoyed by Hollywood's choices. He pointed to ABC's equally controversial mini-series about the impact of nuclear war: *The Day After* (1983). Wick's unexpected interest in reconciliation did not play well in Conservative circles in the US. He was ridiculed for naivete in the *Washington Times* [19, p. 454].

Exchanges Recommence

Both governments worked to maintain the planned exchanges. As hoped musicians Vladimir Horowitz and Dave Brubeck travelled to the USSR to perform, and the Kirov ballet, Moiseyev folklore ensemble traveled the west. The countries exchanged art exhibitions. With mounting confidence Rhinesmith brought the Chautauqua conferences under the umbrella of "The President's US — USSR Exchange Initiative." Plans took shape for 250 Americans (including officials, scholars, artists and citizens) to fly to the Baltic resort of Yurmala in Latvia and meet 2,000 Russians for a "Town Meeting of the Superpowers"⁶ [13].

The agreement of 1985 also made it possible to restart the textbook review project. The teams scheduled an overdue series of meetings⁷ [20; 21]. The Soviet state broadcaster continued to cooperate in the series of Spacebridges. Now, *even taboos were on the agenda. On 11 September 1986 a remarkable joint broadcast coordinated by the Esalen Institute and Internews addressed lessons from the Chernobyl and Three Mile Island accidents with both sides conceding the need to be honest about technological challenges* [22].

US media criticism of Wick showed that — just like regular disarmament — information disarmament had skeptics and enemies. The same was true in the USSR and ill-will broke cover later that summer. On 30 August 1986, in the run up to the Chautauqua meeting in Latvia, the KGB arrested the American journalist Nicholas Daniloff of *US News and World Report* on charges of spying. The KGB alleged that he had classified documents in his possession. The arrest was a transparent response to the western arrest of Soviet scientist Gennadi Zakharov in the US a week earlier. Several senior Reagan administration speakers pulled out of the Chautauqua conference at this point and Wick wanted to escalate further and cancel the entire Latvia meeting, but was talked into moderation. The Kremlin released Daniloff after just a couple of weeks in custody, and the affair was resolved with the traditional Cold War expedient of a round of mutual expulsions [17; 18, p. 203–205] The affair showed the fragility of dialogue and ease with which tempers could fray, but also directed attention to the ongoing problem of journalist access and suspicion of journalists.

Despite a depleted American side, the Chautauqua event was a great success. It is now best remembered locally because of Ambassador Matlock speaking in Latvian and making clear that the US and its allies had never recognized Soviet sovereignty over the Baltic countries. Of the planned activities, highlights included a duet by Latvian Raymond Pauls and American Grover Washington Jr. Lowlights included Soviet warnings over Americans stirring up Latvian nationalism. The tough policy differences emerged in a debate between Jack Matlock for the US and the Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Petrovsky. "We sense keenly the lack of trust in Soviet-American relations" Petrovsky argued. "Trust is needed in our relations. The nuclear age demands it." The meeting also

⁶ Interview: Stephen Rhinesmith, 22 April 2021.

⁷ Interview: Howard D. Mehlinger, 29 March 2021.

confronted the issue of mutual media distortion, with Vladimir Lomeiko from the Foreign Ministry in Moscow debating conservative-leaning columnist (and board member for RFE/RL) Ben Wattenberg, whose tough line was seen on the Soviet side as unwitting evidence of unhelpful attitudes underpinning the most aggressive US propaganda [13, p. 60–61, 66–70; 17; 18, p. 203–205]. There was plainly still more work to be done.

October 1986, Reykjavik

In mid-October 1986 Reagan and Gorbachev met in Reykjavik, Iceland for their second summit, wrestling once again with issues of intercontinental and intermediate nuclear missiles. After a prompt from Congress, Reagan brought new information issues to the table, complaining about Soviet radio jamming. Gorbachev justified jamming by citing the difficulty in accessing US airwaves. Reagan promised to consider ways to allow Soviet access to American radio audiences in return for an end to jamming [19, p. 458–459]. Wick had his own part in the meeting engaging the head of Soviet propaganda Alexander Yakovlev at the Saga Hotel on the evening of 11 October. Their dialogue was unexpectedly revealing. Wick came prepared to raise object to jamming his surprise was confronted by Yakovlev complaining over *Voice of America* coverage of splits within the politburo. Yakovlev pointed out that the Nazis had emphasized such tensions in the 1930s and that their addition of forged documents into the mix had driven Stalin's purges. The damage was likely due to the fact that the splits were real and serious. Yakovlev also objected to the familiar frame of Russia as "barbaric" in US media. Wick offered to facilitate Soviet access to US airwaves in trade for an end to jamming. He soon discovered that the opportunities for Soviet access were severely limited by US laws forbidding foreign ownership of radio stations⁸. The Soviet Union defiantly continued its practice (begun in the early 1980s) of broadcasting Radio Moscow over the medium wave band from Cuba at strengths which violated international standards, but at least the USSR ended jamming of VOA's Russian broadcasts. Jamming of RFE/RL broadcasts continued with enhanced capacity [23].

Confronting Disinformation, April 1987

Wick remained concerned by the Soviet use of disinformation against the US and especially the allegation that HIV/AIDS was a US bioweapon gone wrong. USIA's response to disinformation had been multi-faceted. It tracked and publicized lines of attack and also delivered rebuttals. In April 1987 USIA tried a new tack, raising the issue of disinformation as a problem at the eighth session of the US — USSR Joint Health Committee held in the US. The US surgeon general — C. Everett Koop — told the visiting Soviet delegation that there would be no further US cooperation with the Soviet Union in the field of AIDS research unless the Soviets end in the campaign [24]. The linkage between disinformation and scientific cooperation placed a price on continuing the campaign. Wick wanted an even tougher line. In June 1987 he raised Soviet disinformation in a meeting with the head of the NOVOSTI news agency, Valentin M. Falin. On this occasion it was not the AIDS story by a new claim that the US had developed an "ethnic bomb" to kill specific races. Falin defended the story as consistent with US mistreatment of Native Americans and Japa-

⁸ The full story may be found at the Ronald Reagan Library in WHORM sf CO 165, 426613 SS.

nese Americans. Wick walked out of the meeting. On 13 July he wrote to George Schultz and National Security Advisor Bud McFarlane calling for all research cooperation with the USSR to be suspended until the disinformation situation eased. Schultz and McFarlane preferred to remain with diplomatic pressure, but the battle against disinformation was plainly in a new phase [19, p. 467–468].

Gostelradio continued to cooperate with the Spacebridge broadcasts. 1987 brought a joint forum of journalists discussing the problem of mutual stereotyping and other issues. The US end of the meeting was the annual gathering of the American Society of Newspaper Editors in San Francisco [25]. Still more remarkably it saw the launch of a new series of six Spacebridges called *Capital to Capital*. The shows grew from the participation of Representative George Brown Jr. in the first Spacebridge and the idea of linking legislators in Congress and the Supreme Soviet. The setup was long and complex. Brown — an enthusiast for the power of technology — worked with colleague from across the aisle, Claudine Schneider (R-RI) to ensure US participation. Schneider was an avowed moderate with cancer survivor's determination to make her life count. She had a deep concern over issues of environment and nuclear war, and believed that face-to-face contact with America's adversaries would be a step towards peace. Brown and Schneider insisted that the show be carried live and unedited, and moderated without abrasion. They requested and were given Peter Jennings above the tougher Ted Koppel despite using the ABC "Nightline" evening schedule slot. The Soviet end of the broadcasts used Leonid Zolotarevsky as local facilitator. Soviet audiences approached 150,000,000. Topics included climate issues and human rights. The programs were history made live as in a famous moment when US participant raised the case of a Jewish family having been denied an exit visa for Israel and his Soviet opposite number announced live that the visa had now been granted. The series received an Emmy Award⁹ [26].

Late August 1987 saw the third Chautauqua meeting, which once again took place in upstate New York. Signs of official approval included a speech by Reagan himself, joining festivities via a satellite link. The Russian delegation included Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Petrovsky and first woman in space Valentina Tereshkova, president of the Friendship Society. American-Russianist Marshall D. Shulman and Russian-Americanist Vitaliy Zhurkin debated. Musical contributors included John Denver, who was active as a lobbyist for multilateral disarmament [13, p. 79].

In the parallel story of textbook review, the long-overdue meeting on US soil finally took place at a Conference center in Racine, Wisconsin in November 1987. The Russian team was led by representatives included Vladislav M. Zubok of the USA — Canada Institute of the USSR. Academy of Sciences and Grigoriy N. Sevostyanov, chief of the American and African Division of the Soviet academy's Institute of World History. The reports indicated that errors of fact identified in the interim reports of 1981 had been adjusted but that underlying stereotypes remained. Russia was still the land of perpetual winter in American texts and America was hostage to big business and mired in racism in Russian accounts. It seemed that the topsoil of error had been cleared to reveal the bedrock of ideology underneath. The project continued until 1989¹⁰ [27; 28].

⁹ Interview: David Hoffman, 31 March 2021; Interview: Kim Spencer, 15 April 2021; Interview: Claudine Schneider, 16 April 2021.

¹⁰ Interview: Howard D. Mehlinger, 29 March 2021.

December 1987, Washington, D.C

In December 1987 Gorbachev travelled to Washington for a third summit. The agenda included signing of the historic INF treaty and a discussion of regional conflicts including Central America and Southern Africa. While there was no information strand in the main dialogue Wick took advantage of Gorbachev's presence at a Department of State lunch to raise on-going concerns over disinformation. Gorbachev was reportedly irritated to be shown detailed evidence of continued Soviet use of disinformation perhaps not because of the US complaining but because of the unwillingness of his own propagandists to eliminate the theme. Gorbachev took the opportunity to pledge to work only with the truth going forward and promised: "No more lying, no more disinformation... It's going to be a new day." To the displeasure of some of his own side Gorbachev suggested a series of information talks. With these talks Information Disarmament became an ongoing process in its own right [18; 29–32].

The quickening of pace may be deduced from a series of meetings of opportunity in December. VOA director Richard Carlson visited the Soviet Union officially to open an exhibit on US information technology — *Information USA* — in Tbilisi. The Moscow embassy took advantage of Carlson's presence to schedule a series of meetings with key players in Soviet media policy including Yakovlev and Falin, to follow up on the existing request for a VOA Moscow Bureau and test the waters for further progress. Carlson found his interlocutors "hell bent on demonstrating that they were pleased with the results of the summit" Perhaps the most revealing remark came from the deputy chairman of Gosteleradio, Ivars Kezbers, who admitted: "Radio Moscow had erred in publicizing that AIDS was man made rather than a natural-occurring virus" [18, p. 473–474].

1988 brought immediate progress. Jamming of VOA and RFE's Polish broadcasts — ended leaving only VOA broadcasts to Afghanistan subject to interference [33]. Gorbachev and Reagan exchanged televised New Year greetings. Russians were especially enthusiastic about Reagan. The US embassy in Moscow reported that the Soviet public perceived the president as "sincere, straight-forward and humane... moderate... and likeable" [19, p. 473–474].

1st Bilateral Meeting on Information, February 1988

Despite the positive signals the Kremlin did not rush to begin the Bilateral Information Talks. Wick personally lobbied Yakovlev to ensure that it happened. The parties met in Washington, D.C. Wick led the US delegation and his interlocutor for the stormy disinformation meeting of June 1987, Falin of NOVOSTI, led the Soviet delegation. The talks included both government to government and media practitioner meetings. Interesting differences of opinion included a split on the 'similarity' or not of the two countries' media systems. The USSR detected many similarities while the US saw mainly differences. The two countries agreed at least that 'mutual stereotyping' was a problem in print media. The Soviet Union also expressed concern that the United States assumed its media model was suitable for every society around the world. The meeting produced no headline agreement, but it went well enough to justify continuation [19, p. 475].

2nd Bilateral Meeting on Information, September 1988

The 2nd round of talks took place in Moscow in September 1988. The US fielded a delegation of 60 including news executives, radio and television managers and figures from Hollywood, including the president of the Motion Picture Association of America, Jack Valenti. The meeting brought a string of agreements including on intellectual property rules, permission for Voice of America to open a bureau in Moscow and a proposal for mutual cultural centers. The most interesting proposal was to establish a hot-line style early warning system whereby each embassy had a mechanism to alert the other government if a misstatement or disinformation was spotted in the media to facilitate a prompt and authoritative correction [19, p. 478–479].

September 1988 also saw the 3rd Chautauqua meeting, held in Tbilisi, Georgia. USIA's deputy director Marvin Stone led the US contingent which included Apollo 11 astronaut Michael Collins, actress Jessica Tandy and Assistant Secretary of Education, Madeleine C. Will whose expertise was in the education of children with intellectual disabilities. Musical components included American and Soviet musicians playing a Brahms concerto together. While discussions were energetic over social policy and Jewish migration out the Soviet Union, the underlying mood was of goodwill and a commitment to mutual understanding [13, p. 140].

The autumn of 1988 brought the presidential election and closing months of Reagan's tenure. Wick kept the relationship warm by hosting a visit by the key Russian figures in December [19, p. 478–480]. With Vice President Bush acceding to the presidency the bones of US foreign policy seemed likely to remain the same. Senior personnel changed. Wick successor — businessman Bruce Gelb — was interested in exchange but did not have the political clout of being his president's best friend. In September 1989 Gelb travelled to Moscow for a meeting with the deputy foreign minister, Vladimir Petrovsky. Side meetings included a discussing between Gelb and Vadim Medvedev, the director of the ideological commission of the Central Committee. The underlying strategic realities had shifted. When speaking to Medvedev, Gelb mentioned the food shortages. He was shocked by the official's blunt reply in English: "Mr. Director our system has failed" [34, p. 22].

A fifth and final Chautauqua meeting took place at the University of Pittsburg. US speakers included movie star actor Robert Redford in his capacity as an environmentalist. Tereshkova led the Russian delegation. Themes included space and scientific cooperation, drug addiction, and women's issues. A workshop including veterans of the *New York Times* Moscow bureau considered: "How We View Each Other Are the Images Changing from 'Enemy' to 'Partner.'" Representative citizens met in a dialogue hosted by the now-familiar Spacebridge double act of *Phil Donahue and Vladimir Pozner*. Participants at the whole event were now seasoned practitioners at superpower dialogue. Speakers reflected on what had been accomplished. Petrovsky, who now proclaimed himself to be "a Chautauquan," spoke of the conference as "the most important confidence-building measure" and "an integral part of Soviet-American dialogue." Leonid Dobrokhotov spoke of the importance of escaping from the prison of mutual hostility "we are hostages to our own hated" he said. He also underlined the role of propaganda as a foundation for war: "the propaganda of killing precedes the technology of killing." If propaganda — including pieces he himself had written — had de-humanized the adversary, the Chautauqua meetings had helped to rehumanize them and as such were important steps towards peace [13,

p. 172–173]. Real concessions matched the encouraging words. In December 1988 Radio Liberty reported that all its transmissions were now free from jamming [35].

3rd Bilateral Meeting on Information, February 1990

The third and final information meeting took place in Washington, D.C. in February 1990. Gelb and Petrovsky led the respective delegations of media leaders. There were now many indications that the series had paid off. The Soviet Union had suspended its Medium Wave broadcasts from Cuba. The delegations agreed better access for each another's journalists and allowed expansion of Voice of America's Moscow bureau and provision for Radio Moscow in Washington, D.C. There were irritations shared: The Russians objected to Voice of America's coverage of the conflict between the Soviet Republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan. Underlying indications were, however, positive. Disinformation was considered a minor problem. The commitment of both sides to print corrections to misstatements of fact had apparently been honored [34].

Lower-level contacts continued that year including a round of talks in August 1990 between VOA and Gostelradio. The radios cleared the way to VOA feeds being more widely available on Russian airwaves. Contacts at this point were superseded by unfolding political events in the Soviet Union: the attempted coup of August 1991 and eventual breakup of the Union in December 1991.

Legacy in 1990s

The post-Soviet period saw a redefinition of the relationship between the US and Russia more akin to that of a hegemon and a developing country than that of two equals. Even so Russia indicated an appreciation for players in the information disarmament process, including recognition of John Wallach for his work with the Chautauqua meetings. Some of the Russian interlocutors remained interested in the building of peace but shifted from the US — Russian relationship. Falin relocated to Germany and became an important figure in promoting German-Russian understanding. Petrovsky continued in government service at the United Nations where he was instrumental in launching the Dialogue Among Civilizations project, applying his peace building interests globally. Goldin (pioneer of the Soviet end of the Spacebridge) moved to California and worked to apply the technology of a virtual public space — the “Interactive Plaza” — to other troubled locations in the 1990s such as war-torn Bosnia [36].

Of the Americans, Wallach found a children's camp Maine called *Seeds of Peace* where young representatives of societies in conflict could meet and come to know one another. Early camps focused on youth from Israel and Palestine [37]. Some of the Americans were active in former Soviet space. Mehlinger continued to work in international education and maintained contacts with Russian colleagues. Rhinesmith became founding Chairman of the Department of Organizational Sociology at Moscow State University¹¹. Guroff retired from USIA in 1996 and created the Foundation for International Arts and Education to promote arts outreach to the former USSR [38]. The core team behind the Spacebridges refocused their NGO — Internews — on building capacity in journalism around

¹¹ Interview: Stephen Rhinesmith, 22 April 2021.

the world and became major partners of USAID, the Department of State and the Open Society Foundation in developing free media in post-Soviet areas. The US government back from public diplomacy in the post-Cold War period. Congress looked to save money and folded USIA into the State Department in 1999¹².

Seen in retrospect the story of US — Soviet Information disarmament shows that weaponized information can and should be met with an equivalent to an arms control process. The path of the US — Soviet process suggests that parties to such a dialogue should expect doubters and enemies on their own side and not merely among the opposing nation. Moving a process from the realms of well-meaning private activities to fully mandated state-to-state contacts requires leadership from the top. Wick and Yakovlev could do more because they were known to have their leader's ear. In terms of goals met, the talks succeeded in reducing a source of bilateral tension and stood as an example of mutual good will and an underlying cultural respect. The specific discussion of disinformation, with its linkage to scientific cooperation and as a bellwether of wider progress, brought not only an end to its largescale use but also set in place mechanisms to maintain trust and avoid its return. The textbook project found that that simple errors of fact could be relatively easily corrected, but that divergent underlying ideologies placed a limit on what could be achieved. Participants were convinced that the Spacebridge broadcasts made a difference. University of California, San Diego Communication professor, Helene Kayssar, who was much involved in the children's media and war memory broadcasts, noted in her study of the Spacebridges that people in both societies were both engaged and disconcerted by what they saw on the screen [12]. All of the contacts suggested that even when the parties did not agree it was possible to move forward. Finally, it is plain that visionary individuals have a role to play. The willingness of people like Wallach, Petrovsky or the Spacebridge teams in both countries to imagine something different was an essential component of success.

These achievements raise the question of exactly why this process is forgotten. The problem seems to be the change of political context by the end of the decade. The information disarmament process was helped by the perception of a rough symmetry of power between the US and USSR. As both had the ability to cause physical devastation to the other so both ever plainly capable of damaging the other's image — endangering the other's reputational security — through its media and cultural output. By the end of the decade this symmetry was lost. The US had a disproportionate ability to address the world while Russia looked inward to address severe systemic problems. The change was palpable even between the first round of meetings in April 1988 and their second meeting in September. By the second meeting the mood was more one of opening the Soviet Union to US cultural products with Hollywood's Jack Valenti looking to maximize profits. For diplomat Divilovsky it was more of a surrender than a negotiation, opening the floodgates to mass culture at the expense of both "proletarian ideology" and "the original Russian spirituality." Divilkovsky was especially offended when USIA's Wick thought it appropriate at the closing dinner of the first meeting in April 1988 to jokingly compare the Soviet situation to that of a woman being raped [32]. The eventual disruption of the Soviet state brought a further round of consequences. The disinformation truce effectively held through to the end of 1990 but as central government weakened so propagandists

¹² Interview: David Hoffman, 31 March 2021; Interview: Kim Spencer, 15 April 2021.

defaulted to type. By mid-1991 KGB disinformation revived with the “trade in baby parts” story and other tales angled to damage the reputation of the US [34, p. 22].

For the United States the whole narrative of Cold War reconciliation, understanding and compromise shifted when it had the chance to embrace a victory narrative instead. When the United States was the unilateral winner and the Soviet Union the loser in throws of systemic collapse it made no sense to remember the reality of dialogue, trust building and bilateral success. It was like a man forgetting 30 years of hard work because success coincided with winning the lottery, and only then teaching his kids about the lottery. The embrace of the victory narrative had many negative consequences for the US, including missteps of policy, neglect of relationships and over confidence. It led to provocative behaviors which contributed to the souring of the relationship with Russia and laid the foundations for future antagonisms and a return to the ideological battles which the information disarmament process had worked to set to rest. There is much scope for further research on this story but one thing is clear. It is plainly a fallacy to assume that the only response to a communication problem is yet more communication. Even in the realm of communication diplomacy and negotiation have a place. As the White House and Kremlin once again face each other in acrimony perhaps the time has come to revisit the forgotten world of Spacebridges, textbook reviews, and hard-won media accords, and consider what from that experience might still have value.

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