

Main Content of the Conversation

between A.N. Yakovlev and the U.S. Undersecretary of State Reginald Bartholomew

October 8, 1991

I received R. Bartholomew at his request.

The conversation centered on issues related to the latest initiatives by the USSR and US to limit and reduce nuclear weapons.

R. Bartholomew emphasized that George Bush's initiatives, and M.S. Gorbachev's response to these initiatives, are creating a completely new situation both in U.S.-Soviet relations and the world as a whole. These initiatives "were the result of an incredible act of will" for both sides. President Bush described the Soviet side's response as "very good news," which, according to Bartholomew, is a "very strong statement" in the U.S. The Undersecretary of State also emphasized that the initiative to take these steps came from President Bush personally. After the failed August coup in the USSR, President Bush told General Scowcroft that it is necessary to undertake a major initiative of this kind. Bartholomew believes that in the coming days, right-wing circles in the U.S. and other opponents of disarmament will begin a propaganda campaign against George Bush in this regard.

Bartholomew described the purpose of his visit to the USSR as follows: "not to hold official negotiations, but to explain the content of the President's initiatives and the motives behind them, as well as to better understand what the Soviet side has to offer in response."

Bartholomew was particularly interested in the positions of the Soviet Republics – especially Ukraine, but also, to a lesser extent, Kazakhstan, and even less the RSFSR – on their possession of nuclear weapons, and their participation in the formulation and implementation of the general Soviet national security policy.

Describing the U.S. Administration's position in this matter, Bartholomew said: "In our conversations here in Moscow with representatives of Ukraine and Kazakhstan I stressed, diplomatically but clearly and decisively, that the United States really does not want to see the emergence of several new nuclear powers. The U.S. would like to preserve and continue the situation that existed up to now both in Soviet-American relations, as well as the regime of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons in the world. If anyone thinks that the possession of nuclear weapons will give them additional leverage in domestic affairs or relations with the U.S., then the result will be the opposite of their expectations, at least when it comes to relations with the United States."

The U.S. is not interested in meddling in relations between the center and the republics in these questions. It seems that the republics should have a voice in what happens with nuclear weapons that are located on their territory – but this is a question they can resolve only with

Moscow. This question is fundamentally different from the issue of acquiring the status of newly independent nuclear states. According to Bartholomew, the representative of Ukraine said during their meeting that his republic wants to have a voice and representation when matters concerning the nuclear weapons located in Ukraine are decided. However, Ukraine does not claim ownership of these weapons. In any case, the U.S. is paying close attention to Kravchuk's, Chornovil's, and Nazarbaev's statements on these issues.

Regarding the timeframe for the announced initiatives, Bartholomew stressed that it would take the U.S. from 6-9 months to remove nuclear warheads from their Navy ships and place them in centralized repositories. The U.S. would need up to 3 years to collect all the nuclear weapons that are currently stationed abroad and centralize them on U.S. territory. In the course of the conversation, Bartholomew repeatedly emphasized the desirability, from the American point of view, to collect the maximum possible number of nuclear weapons in centralized storage and/or destruction facilities. He noted that this is the goal of President Bush's proposal to eliminate tactical nuclear land-based weapons.

Bartholomew was interested generally in the technical timeframe for the Soviet side to carry out analogous processes. He emphasized that right now, with the beginning of practical implementation of declared unilateral measures, it is important both as a sign of openness and as a practical measure to inform each other on what, when, and how things will be done. The U.S. intends to do precisely that.

Bartholomew pointed out that in all the conversations he had in Moscow during this visit, he "hasn't gotten a response to one question: what will remain of the new modernization programs for Soviet ICBMs." He emphasized: "precisely ICBMs," after the start of the practical implementation of U.S. and Soviet initiatives? According to him, it is necessary to maintain "a certain momentum" in these matters.

Bartholomew said that a U.S. delegation led by Deputy Secretary of Defense Donald Atwood is coming to Moscow at the end of October 1991. It will include several major specialists in disarmament and conversion. He said that "it will be a very special team and we should seize this opportunity" to consult on a wide range of emerging issues.

Among these issues he particularly identified the exchange of ideas on the general approach to the construction of control systems for nuclear weapons and ensuring their safety. Bartholomew especially emphasized that the American side is talking about a comparison of concepts as opposed to a discussion of organizational and technical aspects of this question.

The American side also noted that the U.S. nuclear plants engaged in processing and destroying decommissioned nuclear weapons are already employing more people than they had during the "peak" production periods. The U.S. is expecting a further increase in employment at such facilities in connection with the announced program.

In response to the Soviet side's question whether right now, under the new circumstances, it may be the time to stop all nuclear weapons tests and the production of fissile materials, and to make a statement about no first use of nuclear weapons, Bartholomew said:

- The question of no first use of weapons in general is in all the Christian councils and synods starting from the year 403 A.D. The important thing is not so much the no first use of weapons; it is the non-use of military force in general. That is the first argument. Secondly: in some context it would truly be important to renounce the first-use of nuclear weapons. However, there are leaders and phenomena such as Saddam Hussein, against whom the most effective means of containment is a certain ambiguity and reticence. And the third argument: right now, when we are beginning to make unprecedented cuts in nuclear weapons, it is very important not to get sidetracked from this main question;
- Regarding the production of fissile material, Bartholomew stressed that he was expressing a purely personal point of view but said that this question warrants a review. They will study it. This does not anticipate a decision, but they will study it in light of the new situation. In the past, one of the arguments had been the possibility of production of military fissile material at Soviet civilian reactors. But these kinds of materials could be created from the nuclear weapons scheduled for destruction. "Personally I would like to stop their production." A possible solution could be found within the framework of the Middle East settlement, which would ban "the production and import of materials for military purposes" at the international level and in the context of supporting George Bush's proposals on the Middle East;
- On nuclear testing: the number and scale of tests have already been reduced to a minimum. In the U.S. scientific and military circles the prevailing opinion is that some minimal testing is necessary in order to guarantee the maximum environmental safety of nuclear weapons as well as their reliability in storage – in other words, to make them as safe as possible in all respects during peacetime. "I am not making any predictions, but I think this point of view will continue to be influential."

R. Bartholomew said in conclusion that groups have been created in the U.S. on security issues in the context of the adopted initiatives. He is heading one of them; this group will work on arms reductions and the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. By the way, he noted that the U.S. announced a contest for a new term instead of "arms control."

The second group will work on the concepts of deterrence, stability and mutual trust, suggesting high confidentiality of the consultations and discussions.

[Signed]

[Source: State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF) Fond 10063, Opis 1. Translated by Anna Melyakova for the National Security Archive]