

Record of Conversation
of Chief of General Staff of the USSR Armed Forces Marshal of the Soviet Union
S.F. Akhromeev and H. Brown, C. Vance, H. Kissinger, and D. Jones.
February 4, 1987

Akhromeev. Allow me to welcome you to Moscow. We welcome you, prominent statesmen of the United States, who have made a great contribution to the development of Soviet-American relations and to reaching agreements on arms limitations in the 1970s.

Regrettably, since then, during the 1980s, we have made almost no progress. Perhaps your visit to Moscow will to some extent help us to sort through the heaps that we have piled up around us in the 1980s, especially the U.S. administration. But since negotiations are a bilateral process it seems we have also played a part in stacking up these heaps. We are prepared to talk with you.

Brown. Mr. Marshal, I want to specify right away that we are not expressing the views of the current U.S. administration here and therefore we cannot hope to resolve the problems that have been stacking up because of our government. We do not intend to resolve questions of arms limitations for the U.S. administration. We are here as private persons. But whatever interests we represent, I must say that we are deeply interested in issues of mutual security.

I think that it is in the interest of the U.S. and the Soviet Union right now to participate in an intensive dialogue with the aim of reaching mutually acceptable, fair agreements and providing strategic stability. It is clear to all of us that the issues of strategic offensive weapons and strategic defensive weapons are closely related. We also know that the USSR included medium-range weapons in the single package of its proposals in Reykjavik. Without question, the negotiations going on in Geneva aimed at significantly reducing nuclear weapons in every category are useful. However, I cannot say whether these negotiations will be successful in the last two years of Reagan's administration. Hopefully, the achievements in Geneva over the next couple of years will positively influence the next U.S. administration's work in the sphere of arms control.

Vance. I fully agree with Mr. Brown's observations. I would also like to draw your attention to the objective necessity of conducting the negotiations in Geneva during the remaining two years of Reagan's term. We have already been asked numerous times in Moscow whether we believe in the possibility of success for the negotiations in the near future. And although the short-term outlook for the negotiations is uncertain, I think it would be a mistake to expect no progress from the Geneva negotiations and to take them less seriously as a result of this pessimistic viewpoint. I do not know whether anything can be achieved in Geneva during the next couple of years, but I am absolutely convinced that the failure or cessation of the negotiations would be a grave mistake. Regardless of who will be president of the United States in 1988, the situation would be most unfavorable if the progress of the negotiations were stopped at some period during these two years.

Kissinger. I agree with my colleagues. Progress in the next two years is possible. The disagreements between our delegations are not so significant. Should the

negotiations fail over the next two years it would mean stagnation on the question of the limitation and reduction of strategic nuclear weapons for at least three or four years.

I would like to use this opportunity to state my personal position on the issue of the negotiations. As you know, I was against the U.S. position stated by President Reagan in Reykjavik on strategic weapons. I was opposed because as I thought then and think now, the goal of our negotiations should be not only the reduction or liquidation of strategic weapons, but the search for an agreement that would provide strategic stability for both sides. The negotiations taking place in Geneva right now stipulate the preservation of existing trends in weapons development. I think it is necessary to work out a different approach to the negotiations.

But whatever the case may be, the negotiations in Geneva are taking place and I would not want them to fail. As for my publications on this matter, I doubt that they will be translated into Russian. But I repeat that I am not against the negotiations.

Akhromeev. We read a great deal on these issues, including your publications, so we have the appropriate information.

Jones. I am glad to have the opportunity to meet with you once again Mr. Marshal. With great satisfaction I recall our meeting last year. I was impressed then by your deep interest in questions of arms control.

When I represented the U.S. armed forces, I spoke in favor of the SALT I and SALT II agreements. I, myself, and my colleagues from the Heads of State Committee currently speak in favor of arms control. We are in favor of reducing not only strategic but also conventional weapons.

I also agree with Dr. Kissinger and I think that in Reykjavik our side's approach to the limitation and reduction of strategic weapons was too narrow. In my opinion, the total liquidation of strategic ballistic missiles will not promote the establishment of strategic stability between our countries. Major reductions of strategic weapons will without question yield positive results. But for real stability it is necessary to foresee the reduction of conventional forces and arms. I would like to hear your opinion on this question, Mr. Marshal.

Vance. In addition to what has been stated by General Jones, I would like to express my concern in relation to the liquidation of strategic nuclear weapons and mid-range nuclear weapons. Even if such an agreement were developed between our two sides, it would have little chance of being approved by the U.S. Congress. But the U.S. Congress would approve an agreement on major reductions in strategic weapons. If we speak realistically, nuclear missiles will be in our arsenals for many years to come.

Akhromeev. Allow me to state my point of view.

Firstly, concerning the desire to continue negotiations and understanding the fact that the Soviet Union will have to work with any U.S. administration that comes to power. We understand quite clearly that whoever has power in the United States, the USSR will have to work and negotiate with that administration. We cannot influence who comes to power in the U.S., just as the United States cannot influence who comes to

power in the Soviet Union. Since this is the case, we understand very well that we have to work with the Reagan administration while he is in power for two more years.

We view the negotiations on nuclear and space weapons with full responsibility and would like to reach an agreement. You should have no doubts about this.

In my opinion there is one fundamental question that right now is the primary one which hinders us from reaching an agreement. This is the question Mr. Brown mentioned—about the relationship between strategic offensive and strategic defensive weapons. At one time the American side also did not deny this relationship and with your active participation, Mr. Kissinger, we signed agreements in which this relationship was emphasized in many ways. That was in 1972. Now the Reagan administration is telling us: “Let us reduce strategic offensive weapons.” It was proposed to reduce them by 50%, and in Reykjavik President Reagan even proposed to reduce land- and sea-based ballistic missiles by 100%. But the relationship mentioned earlier is denied by the American administration—they talk about reducing strategic offensive weapons and at the same time of the possibility of developing a national anti-missile defense system, including the development of an ABM space combat echelon. I think I do not have to explain this to you at great length: it is impossible to radically reduce strategic offensive weapons and at the same time develop a country’s anti-missile defense system.

For example, C[aspar] Weinberger is saying that the country’s first echelon of its anti-missile defense system should be developed as soon as possible. My opinion is that as soon as the first combat space systems capable of striking satellites and warheads of ballistic missiles appear in space every hope for any reductions or even limitations of strategic offensive weapons will be made null and void. Then a real arms race will start, the likes of which none of us has ever seen before.

Is it possible to reach any agreement during the last two years of Reagan’s term? It is. We have similar positions on limiting strategic offensive weapons and mid-range missiles, but they are tied up by the question of space, and by the question of creating an anti-missile defense system with a space echelon. If we could agree on not creating combat systems in space, I think we could agree on the rest of the questions as well.

On the question of arms control, which General Jones spoke about—I think the time has come when this question is becoming irrelevant because the Soviet Union is prepared to enforce every kind of verification. This concerns all types of weapons and it seems that everybody can see this progress from our side.

And now on the question of the total liquidation of strategic offensive weapons. You say that the U.S. Congress will not ratify such an agreement. This proposal did not initiate with the Soviet Union but with President Reagan. You know the packet that we came to Reykjavik with, and we presented it to your delegation. More precisely, this was during the talks between the U.S. President and the CC CPSU General Secretary. At the conclusion of talks on the second day President Reagan proposed that we completely liquidate intercontinental ballistic missiles and submarine-based ballistic missiles over the next 10 years.

The Soviet delegation considered this proposal during a short recess. The question arose of accepting these proposals emanating from the American side, but of accepting them fairly, which would mean not excluding bombers—we would need to liquidate all three components of the “triad.” The CC CPSU General Secretary M.S. Gorbachev presented this proposal to the President.

The President took a break, collected his delegation and discussed this proposal with his advisers for an hour and fifteen minutes. Afterwards he announced that he agreed with the CC CPSU General Secretary's proposal. This is what happened. I have not added anything.

If we proceed consecutively and gradually, then we could settle on 50% reductions as the space question is being resolved.

Now on conventional weapons. We agree with reducing armed forces and conventional weapons. The West maintains that the Warsaw Treaty and the USSR have surpassed NATO and the U.S. in conventional weapons. I think that all four of you have comprehensive information on this issue. You all were in positions in which you had all the data right in front of you.

The armed forces of NATO and the WTO are about the same in numbers; we could argue forever about the differences in amounts and quality of weapons. Once, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff said that when a correspondent asked him whether he would like to exchange his armed forces for the armed forces of the Soviet Union he answered flatly: no, he would not like to do that. We also would not like to do that. I am saying that a balance in the military is an objective reality. It exists not only in the strategic sphere, but also in the general forces and conventional weapons.

Conventional armed forces have one serious feature. This feature is that we do not allow a global approach in evaluating them. We speak of reducing the armed forces and armaments in Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals. Here a military balance exists. We are ready to start negotiations and we have concrete proposals—to reduce the armed forces of the two alliances in Europe by 25%. This proposal was offered in June of last year in Budapest. Regrettably, we have not even started an exchange of opinions on this question, although it is no fault of ours. But the WTO Budapest proposal remains valid and we are prepared to work persistently to realize it in negotiations.

An issue arises in resolving the problem of conventional weapons—and here I would like to mention that this is not an official proposal but my personal opinion—the time is coming when a global approach is necessary for conventional armed forces. We consider strategic weapons globally; following the suggestion of the U.S. we consider medium-range missiles globally. Right now the U.S. is working on making missiles with less than a 1000-km range a global issue also. Your delegation produced this proposal at the negotiations in Geneva. The question arises: why are conventional armed forces not a global issue? But I repeat that this is only my personal opinion. The heads of the Warsaw Treaty states presented an official proposal in Budapest—to reduce the armed forces and conventional weapons in Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals by 25 percent. This proposal is ready for discussion.

Jones. I would like to comment on the correlation of conventional weapons. Such factors as population and industrial capacity influence this correlation. In this sense, the Western countries surpass the Warsaw Treaty countries. But we are worried by your 40,000 tanks in the countries of Eastern Europe.

The time has come when we have to discuss questions related to conventional weapons, which could be a prelude to serious negotiations on the reduction of conventional troops and weapons.

Brown. I also think that reducing conventional forces and weapons is a very important issue. The opinion in the West is that the current correlation of conventional troops and weapons is not favorable to the West in case of a short-term war. Although in a 3-year war, for example, the outcome might not be in favor of the Warsaw Treaty. But very differing opinions on this issue exist.

Your idea of a global approach to reducing conventional troops and weapons is undoubtedly very interesting, Mr. Marshal. But certain questions would inevitably come up: how to take into account the armed forces of Iran, the PRC, India?

Akhromeev. I would like to mention once again that the conversation about a global approach during the consideration of conventional weapons is my personal opinion. In my opinion this issue is truly serious. I think General Jones understands very well that there are peacetime armies with a certain quantity of weapons and there are wartime armies. There is such a concept as troop mobilization in case of war. There is nothing you can do: life is such that we have to take into consideration the possibility of war. The Soviet Union's mobilization resources are in Europe and they are included within the scope of weapons and forces that need to be reduced, while the U.S. territory with all of its mobilization resources is outside the scope of reductions. This means that such a question exists for the Soviet Union.

Kissinger. I agree with you, Mr. Marshal. But is it possible to engage third countries in the process of reducing armed forces?

Akhromeev. Right now, probably not. That is why we propose to start negotiations on reducing armed forces and conventional weapons in Europe. But the global issue does not disappear; we will have to deal with it.

Incidentally, when I mentioned this for the first time last September in Stockholm, the U.S. representative even took offense at me. He said that I had stepped outside the limits of the Stockholm requirements in my statement. But for my part this question was presented as a problem for the future.

Vance. If we reach an agreement on full liquidation of strategic nuclear weapons, the issue of reducing conventional armed forces for the provision of strategic stability will arise. In this situation the military force of the PRC would cause more worry to you than it would to us.

Akhromeev. If we achieve a sharp reduction in strategic nuclear weapons and begin reducing conventional weapons, then all countries will have to reduce their military forces. There was a reason why some of your allies were up in arms against President Reagan for what he proposed in Reykjavik. It is nice to reduce somebody else's weapons, much less pleasant to reduce your own. Global-scale reductions of conventional weapons and military forces are only possible with the participation of all countries, including China.

But I only raise this question to show you that the very process of reductions in Europe has, for the Soviet Union, problematic links with the fact that U.S. territory is not encompassed by these negotiations. It works out that the U.S. does not mind reducing

Soviet weapons while the weapons on their territory remain inviolable. Such a question exists for us. There is also this question: we are always dealing with ground forces and tactical aviation. Meanwhile, the fleet remains on the sidelines, as if 15 American aircraft carriers are nothing, weapons that do not mean anything. This is also a question for the future if we wish for greater security, as Mr. Brown said.

Kissinger. Let us move on to the question of SDI. Allow me to start with a question. When at the start of our conversation you spoke of SDI you used the term “combat space means.” What is your interpretation of this term?

Akhromeev. The SDI program includes a land part, a space part, and a combat control system. As far as I know, the “combat space system” (I hesitate to give it a precise designation; this is done at negotiations) is at the same time a carrier with weapons, whether it is kinetic or laser.

Vance. What do you consider space noncombat means, for example surveillance and intelligence, navigation, research, etc?

Akhromeev. We and you both have such means deployed right now. These are systems of intelligence, navigation, communications, meteorology, topography, and geodesy.

To speak frankly, we still do not understand the American side’s position on space. It is not stated during negotiations. There is a clear position on START and medium-range missiles. There is a very clear position on nuclear testing—to continue nuclear explosions, which the U.S. does. But it is not clear to us what the U.S. wants in relation to space.

Chervov. The American side does not have a position on this in negotiations. Mr. Kampelman, who heads this group, cannot state the Americans’ position on space to us. And negotiations on this issue have been going on for three years.

Brown. The problem is that our position on space is still being discussed in the U.S. We are not in a position of sufficient confidence with either Mr. Kampelman or President Reagan for them to trust us with thorough information on the official position on space defense. We are aware that the U.S. position on space presented in the press is unacceptable for the USSR. Our position is that the ABM Treaty should be complied with by both sides for the next 10 years and that during this period the sides would have the right to make developments and conduct experiments in space of space-based elements using the principally new achievements of science and technology.

Akhromeev. But the ABM Treaty prohibits this.

Brown. Even in the U.S. we are dealing with different interpretations of the ABM Treaty. The official interpretation of the ABM Treaty in the U.S. assumes that if there is no agreement on the deployment of space-based means of strategic defense within the

next 10 years, each side has the right to withdraw from the Treaty and to begin deploying space-based elements upon the expiration of this 10-year period.

Akhromeev. Our position is different.

Brown. I know that. You interpret the ABM Treaty in the “narrow” sense. Such an interpretation excludes any testing of space-based elements outside of laboratories.

As you can see, the differences between these two interpretations of the Treaty are vast. On the one hand, these differences can be understood as the absence of any kind of foundation for an agreement on the space question. On the other hand, we can set a goal of immediately bringing together the two sides’ positions on the question of space means. Personally I am in favor of the second path toward solving this problem, in favor of the effort to bring the positions of the USSR and the U.S. closer together.

Our lack of trust in each other on issues of space can be explained by the fact that some U.S. experts believe that the current scientific-technological and industrial potential of the USSR could allow it to get ahead and achieve a kind of supremacy over the U.S. It seems the USSR has similar concerns about the possibilities and intentions of the U.S. As a result, each side interprets the Treaty to its benefit.

Vance. I adhere to a “narrow” understanding of the ABM Treaty. Both sides must discuss in detail what is allowed according to the Treaty and what is not; what type of developments and tests can be allowed under what conditions, and which cannot be.

Akhromeev. In our opinion, space combat systems or their components cannot be tested in space, the ABM Treaty prohibits it. And not only the Treaty. As soon as space combat apparatus appear in space, capable of destroying satellites and another country’s warheads, it will become impossible to reduce strategic offensive weapons in any way. The arms race process will escape any possible kind of control by the governments, any possibility of agreeing on limitations and reductions of strategic offensive weapons will disappear.

As the question stands, according to SDI work is permitted only on the ground, in laboratories. The sides have not yet clearly established what this means. It seems this concept of what the sides are allowed should be clarified and mutually acceptable resolutions and agreements should be found along these lines. There can be no agreement on testing these systems in space.

Kissinger. From talks with our scientists I found out that they are preparing an experiment in space with the use of laser technology in order to study Mars. Under your interpretation of the Treaty, would such an experiment be possible? If the laser installation is used to study Mars, then it can be supposed that it can also be aimed at a satellite of a potential enemy.

Akhromeev. I think that such an experiment can be conducted. After all, laser-technology is already being used for intelligence gathering, in communications systems, in other satellites. The main issue is that it should not be used as a military means, as a means for destruction, as a weapon mounted on a special apparatus (a satellite).

Kissinger. Mr. Marshal, is it possible to draw a distinction between laser installations used for scientific purposes, or even intelligence, and military installations?

Akhromeev. We need to seek such distinctions.

Kissinger. Could such questions of a technical nature become the subject of negotiations?

Akhromeev. I think that they can.

Brown. You believe that testing any element of a space-based combat device should be prohibited. But what should be done about space-based means of surveillance and intelligence, which use laser or in-beam technology? Where do we draw the line between a combat and noncombat designation for these devices? How do we tell them apart in space?

Akhromeev. We could agree on the power level of these systems and on other technical factors that determine the designation of this or that system.

Brown. In the U.S. even the experts who do not view the SDI program as stabilizing have doubts whether it would be possible to resolve technical problems in the process of negotiations with the USSR. These questions are already arising now, when it is still a long while before real space combat devices appear.

Akhromeev. It is true that right now the question is not specifically being discussed at the negotiations on space-based devices. But if it comes to that then of course the technical specialists from both sides will discuss all these technical details. We are urging that these negotiations be started, [that we] begin discussing the problem of a space combat echelon. But because of the American side we are not discussing these issues right now.

Did we not have difficult issues to deal with in the 1970s? Dr. Kissinger must still remember the problem of how to count a missile with a MIRVed warhead. We argued for three years over this question and found a solution. The fact of the matter was that at that time both sides wanted to find a solution. Now we are under the impression that the U.S. administration does not want to find a solution to this problem. But we will continue to negotiate, even though we are getting the impression that the American administration does not take the negotiations seriously.

Brown. Speaking of the technological aspects of these questions, we could use the positive experience we obtained during the development of the ABM Treaty. I remember my work together with P[aul] Nitze. He thinks of you very positively and sends you his best regards.

Akhromeev. Thank you.

Brown. As I understand it, you are not against discussing technical questions related to space systems such as the characteristics of aircraft sensors, data processing systems, surveillance and intelligence systems, power units on satellites. All of these would be topics for negotiation?

Akhromeev. That is correct, Mr. Brown. Still, first we have to discuss the positions of the [two] sides, and then we can discuss the details. Right now, regrettably, the American side does not have a position on the questions of space. For our part, we will be ready to discuss all questions in detail.

Chervov. Mr. Brown, the American side does not want to discuss the details you mentioned at the negotiations.

Brown. I can understand why those details are not being discussed right now. First and foremost it is because the U.S. administration does not have a position on space. Therefore, my question was hypothetical in nature.

Akhromeev. Nevertheless, practical work is being conducted on SDI, while the negotiations are at a standstill and treading water. There is movement in creating systems for SDI. This is where the danger is right now.

I am afraid that I might leave you without lunch. As far as I know you will be meeting with the CC CPSU General Secretary Comrade M.S. Gorbachev shortly. I do not mean to be impolite, I am just thinking of your situation. Thank you.

Brown, Vance, Kissinger, and Jones thank Akhromeev for the conversation.

Present from the Soviet side were: Colonel-General Chervov N.F., Major-General Lebedev Yu. V. The conversation was translated by Colonel Popov, F.F. (General Staff of the GRU).

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