

## **Record of Conversation**

**Between S.F. Akhromeev and P. Nitze at the U.S. State Department, December 8, 1987 (16.00-17.30)**

P. Nitze. I propose an exchange of opinions regarding what we hope to achieve on the question of SNF [strategic nuclear forces]. It seemed that in Geneva we had common goals. We propose to find new areas in which we can reach an agreement and to reflect this in the joint statement. We have to promote the success of our delegations' work in Geneva, and for this they need appropriate instructions. In order to work out a coordinated text for the agreement, we need to concentrate on studying the unresolved questions.

I propose to try to resolve our differences on specific questions related to working that should be included in the joint statement. Here is the text in English (he hands the text of the American proposal to S.F. Akhromeev).

S.F. Akhromeev. Allow me to say a few words. As the result of the first and second talks between the General Secretary and the U.S. President four questions have formed, which we are assigned to consider:

- the question of reducing SNF;
- the question of compliance with the ABM Treaty in relation to the SNF problem;
- the question of reducing armed forces and weapons in Europe;
- the question of liquidating chemical weapons.

If there are no objections, we will concentrate on discussing these questions.

P. Nitze. There are no objections, but I would like to discuss the issues of conventional and chemical weapons tomorrow at the working group meetings.

S.F. Akhromeev. I think that we should still start with the abovementioned main issues, and later transfer them for discussion to our representatives. On my part, I would like to give you the text of our proposals, which the General Secretary gave to Mr. President today. (He gives P. Nitze the Soviet proposal). We also prepared a list of questions for which we would like to have explanations. Specifically, the formulation of the questions is based on Cde. Bessmertnykh's report on his conversation with you. We could begin the discussion from any draft, if you would like we could start with the American proposal, but first I would like to have it read out loud.

(The American interpreter reads the translation of the American document).

Without going into the main content of the document, I would like to note that it omits two major questions: firstly, the question of the correlation between the reduction of strategic offensive weapons and the sides' observance of the ABM Treaty in the form in which it was signed in 1972; secondly, the question of limiting the development of sea-based long-range cruise missiles. These aspects are completely missing in the American side's proposals. The issues are of such nature that knowing our position you could not have accidentally left them out. I would like to hear your position on these issues, Mr. Nitze.

P. Nitze. In relation to the ABM Treaty we are proceeding from the understanding that it will most likely be necessary to reach a separate agreement on the issues of strategic defense and space. In this case the question was treated as a separate “package.”

S.F. Akhromeev. You know our basic position on this question. It states that future agreements would depend on the sides’ compliance with the ABM Treaty in the form that it was signed in 1972 for at least 10 years. This has to be stated in the Agreement on reducing strategic weapons. You heard the General Secretary say today that if either side begins to deploy its ABM, the agreement to reduce SNF could be denounced. The General Secretary also noted that in this situation, the denouncing side would have the right to deploy anti-satellite systems.

P. Nitze. I believe that our side knows your position well, and we are not trying to change it. It seems it would be logical to assume that if we cannot reach an agreement on the reduction of strategic weapons, then we just will have nothing with which to coordinate the compliance with the ABM Treaty. Therefore let us discuss the possibility of the sides coming to an agreement on the reduction of offensive weapons, as well as work on other unresolved issues. We understand that the final Agreement will depend on the Soviet side’s satisfaction with the state of affairs in observing the ABM Treaty. We propose to have a concrete discussion about the numbers, methods of tallying, etc, in order to prevent ourselves from being dragged into the jungle of theoretical reasoning. Let us first look at whether we can agree on the main issue, because if we cannot do that, the rest of the discussion would be meaningless. If we can agree then we could discuss that question as well.

S.F. Akhromeev. This is a faulty presentation of the problem. The connection between the ABM Treaty and the reduction of strategic weapons is recognized by the American side as well as by our side. It is another matter that in the period of three days we will not be able to reach a coordinated position that would satisfy both sides and which could be entered into the text of a joint statement by the General Secretary and the President. Nevertheless, the connection we are discussing will have to be acknowledged in the statement you gave us, and in any case the General Secretary and the President have to assign this problem to be studied further. Further, we would like to hear what you have to say about sea-launched long-range cruise missiles.

P. Nitze. In relation to the second question I would like to remind you that we discussed it in Reykjavik, where we were told that we do not see a possibility to control the reduction in a satisfactory manner, and nothing has changed since then. That is why we did not include this question in the statement and we would like to hear your opinion on this matter.

S.F. Akhromeev. I cannot overlook the fundamental difference in our positions. We cannot sign a document that would satisfy all the conditions of the American side and would not reflect the issues important to the Soviet side. Therefore I once again emphasize that these questions will have to be reflected in the document we are trying to work out.

As we promised, we worked on the problem of control of sea-launched long-range cruise missiles. I am ready to state our position on it, and afterwards we could move on to discussing the questions you raised.

We believe that the observance of the cruise missile reductions can be firstly controlled through national technical means. In particular, we have radio means that allow us to determine the presence, location, and an estimated force of nuclear weapons on board ships. I think that you have analogous technologies. Thus, if the national technical means discover nuclear weapons on board a ship and the suspicion arises that the Treaty is violated, the right to an on-site inspection would be granted. Your proposal describes an integral program to organize inspections to control the reduction of ground-based ICBM [Intercontinental Ballistic Missile] and submarine-launched ballistic missiles. We are not against this program in general. Then the question arises why we can control ballistic missiles on a submarine through on-site inspections but we cannot control a cruise missile on a submarine through national technical means and inspections.

And now, if there are no objections, I would like to move on to a point-by-point examination of the questions stated in your proposal.

Graham. I would like to comment on the question of using radioactivity sensors to detect nuclear weapons aboard a ship. In our point of view, there are a number of technical aspects that limit the practical expediency of using this method: these include the possibility of camouflage by shielding the radiation with the body of the ship, or distortion through background radiation from a nuclear power facility.

S.F. Akhromeev. I cannot completely agree with you, because background radiation nuclear power facility can be reliably identified; furthermore, camouflage should be prohibited by the Treaty in a similar manner as the measures stipulated in your proposal, for example the ban on telemetry encryption, etc. With some goodwill, this question can be resolved.

Graham. I would like to note that background radiation is much stronger than the radiation from the weapons, besides, the analogy with telemetry encryption is unfitting because encryption cannot be hidden, while radiation can.

S.F. Akhromeev. I can only repeat that we have the means capable of differentiating between the radiation of a nuclear weapon and the radiation of a nuclear power facility. We are ready to inform you about these means at the appropriate time.

With this I propose to finish the discussion of this question. After the American side reviews our proposal I would like to move on to discuss specific questions and then decide on which proposal—the Soviet or the American—we should use as the foundation for further work.

P. Nitze. I propose to designate a special sub-group to work on this question tomorrow.

S.F. Akhromeev. These are negotiations on strategic weapons; therefore it would be unjustified to separate sea-launched cruise missiles into a separate group like chemical weapons, for example.

P. Nitze. Since you disagree with my proposal I think we should, as you said, continue our work.

S.F. Akhromeev. I suggest that right now we examine the problems and tomorrow morning decide with which draft we will work with. Considering the delegations' work schedule, we could meet December 9 in the morning from 8.00 or 10.30, or in the evening from 21.00, and on December 10 from 10.30.

Moving on to the issues, first we need to discuss the question of sublevels. We recorded at the Geneva meeting that the difference between the American and Soviet positions consists of 300 warheads. You proposed a sublevel of 4800 units for the ICBM and SLBM [submarine-launched ballistic missile], while we proposed a sublevel of 5200-5100 units. We frankly stated our reason for this sublevel: we have no intention of building more bombers than would be needed for 900 cruise missiles. We have no need for more bombers, furthermore we are limited by our production capabilities. Therefore we ask you to accept the 5100 unit sublevel for ICBM and SLBM warheads.

P. Nitze. Before we come to any specific number we should agree on the terms of our calculations, so it is clear how we obtain this or that number. First and foremost this pertains to missiles with multiple warheads.

S. F. Akhromeev. As I understand this brings us to a discussions of the "Backfire" aircraft. You know our position—this is a medium bomber with a combat radius of 2200 km. You are also familiar with the Soviet leadership's statement from 1979, and there have been no changes since then. Consequently, this aircraft will not be considered in our review of strategic nuclear weapons. As for bombers in general, Soviet as well as American, they all carry 6 cruise missiles if I understood you correctly.

P. Nitze. Exactly right, 6 cruise missiles.

S.F. Akhromeev. But in fact your bombers carry many more missiles, why should we count them only as 6?

The question of bombers has two sides. Firstly it is related to the objective of simplifying the difficult problem of control, secondly it is related to the realities of combat implementation on this aircraft. As we know, the practical combat capabilities of a bomber are considerably lower than its expected capabilities. In order to simplify the problem of air-launched cruise missiles we proceed from the premise that it is sufficient to recognize the type of aircraft to know the number of missiles on board.

We agree to the following approach—to choose an airfield on American or Soviet territory and to land old and new types of American and Soviet bombers with mounted model cruise missiles. Each side could then inspect the aircraft to decide the level combat capacity according to the number of missiles.

P. Nitze. Operational experience shows that bombers are usually equipped with less bombs than the calculated capacity.

S.F. Akhromeev. We know that the B-52 and B-1 carry much more than 6 missiles and we are prepared to show you our aircraft.

N.F. Chervov. They carry 20 and more missiles, this was demonstrated at trials.

S.F. Akhromeev. That is to say—we are proposing an on-site inspection.

P. Nitze. We cannot agree to that. We cannot accept calculations that count ghost-missiles, i.e. missiles that we in any case do not plan to load on our bombers.

Graham. The types of bombers we are discussing on both sides are similar in size, construction, and combat capabilities, and it is very difficult to establish a number of missiles on the bomber for every given moment. The option you are suggesting would just make the negotiations more difficult.

S.F. Akhromeev. I propose not to rush to conclusions and to carefully think about this question. Further, right now you are proposing to count missiles with a range of 1500 km and more, whereas before the 600 km range missiles were considered strategic.

Graham. We discussed this issue in Geneva and came to the conclusion that a missile with a nuclear warhead is considered strategic if its range is 1500 km and more. This is explained partially by the growing anti-aircraft defense, and partially by the fact that the 600 km range was initially a mistake—it was one of the reasons why SALT-II was not ratified.

S.F. Akhromeev. We should note that the 600 km range was agreed upon at negotiations and recorded in the text of the Treaty signed by the American side.

My understanding concerning the guidelines for counting the ICBM is that you propose to count the number of warheads on ICBM and SLBM based on the test results?

P. Nitze. We propose to count the number of warheads that we state officially, and you will have the option of verifying that we are not exceeding this amount.

S.F. Akhromeev. We will consider this question and state our opinion tomorrow. Nevertheless, it seems illogical to conduct tests of a missile with a greater number of warheads than is recorded in the Treaty. We believe that the amount of warheads recorded in the Treaty for a given type of missile should be the amount that it was tested with.

P. Nitze. Allow me to conclude our meeting here, so as not to be late to the White House.

[Source: Obtained from a participant by the author in 1996

Translated by Anna Melyakova for the National Security Archive]