

**Record of Conversation Between Chief of USSR General Staff Marshal Sergey Fyodorovich Akhromeev and William J. Crowe with members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the Pentagon, December 10, 1987 (8.00-9.30)**

Crowe. We welcome you to the Pentagon, Marshal Akhromeev. Regrettably you did not have a chance during this visit to seriously get to know our country and armed forces.

Akhromeev. I regret this myself. I'm not in the U.S. that often.

Crowe. I would like to fix that. I officially invite you, Marshal, to visit the U.S. as my guest. I would like to have the opportunity to show you a number of military sites and even visit a battleship with you. You could decide on the time of the visit.

Akhromeev. Thank you very much for the invitation, Admiral. I accept it. Let us agree on the time through the apparatus. It would be useful for us to discuss the questions that I only touched upon yesterday with the Defense Minister Carlucci. We, members of the military, have to be guided by objective reality and the policies of our governments. We know, and President Reagan has spoken about this on numerous occasions, that the nature of relations between the USSR and the U.S. is such that the administration and the Congress consider it expedient to follow a policy of force in relation to the USSR. The question arises: how can we build military contacts under these conditions, and even more—mutual relations between our armed forces. In many parts of the world our armed forces stand in opposition. Should we be pushing for a confrontation and aggravation in our relations under these circumstances? Or perhaps we could [try to] understand the policies of our governments and guided by them we could develop a line aimed at more-or-less normal, correct and respectful relations that would not lead to aggravations, which in themselves are dangerous. Can we continue moving in the direction of predictability and increased openness of the armed forces' actions, sometimes possibly contacting each other about the issues that concern us.

Crowe. Right now we have a great opportunity to improve relations between our armed forces: the agreement we just signed on intermediate-range missiles will have a positive influence on these relations. Moreover, our new Defense Minister strongly believes in the benefits of the measures we are taking to strengthen trust, and wants to develop them. I fully support our Minister in this question. I strongly believe in dialogue between us. Understandably, there are a number of points in relations between branches of armed forces about which I am concerned. I have in mind incidents with military liaison missions, incidents related to the use of lasers. In relations between our Navies, there is a mechanism that investigates these types of incidents. Perhaps we should suggest to our political leaders to have some groups meet in order to discuss such problems. Many statesmen in the U.S. think that there should be more contacts between our armed forces, first and foremost these statesmen are the Secretary of State Shultz and the Minister of Defense Carlucci.

Akhromeev. I was going to bring up this question. What do our armies stand to lose if we have more human contacts? If we mutually disagree with each other's actions, the absence of contact will not improve the situation. To shift this idea to the practical sphere, I would like to know your opinion if I should give you a plan of such contacts for the next 1.5-2 years? Let these contacts begin with basketball games or military bands visits, with a gradual increase in the levels of contact as we gain experience. Can I expect that you will look over the proposal and let me know your answer?

Crowe. Of course, I will seriously consider your proposal and try to convince my leadership to accept it. I have a hunch that it will be seen very favorably.

Akhromeev. Any answer from your side will be received with understanding.

Crowe. It seems to me that it would be expedient to examine the question of conducting regular meetings of small groups to discuss problems that arise in relations between our armed forces. We could take turns hosting the meetings between Moscow and Washington.

Akhromeev. Right now the situation is that our strategic nuclear forces are deployed and we have already reached a certain level of predictability in this sphere: I am speaking of notification of launching ballistic missiles, a signed agreement on the creation of national nuclear safety centers. I do not know under which department is your center, but in the USSR it is the Ministry of Defense. We will notify and report to each other on the progress of carrying out the intermediate and short-range missiles agreement. We are expecting that there will be many inspector group visits, many different types of requirements for each other. In relation to this I would like to get your opinion on the issue of handing over all the organizational work related to carrying out the agreement (notification, information, etc.) to the abovementioned centers? Especially considering the fact we will establish direct contacts between them.

Crowe. I cannot answer this question right away. I would only like to say that questions of verifying the compliance with the agreements would be one of the objectives of this center.

Akhromeev. I would like to clarify that the nuclear safety center is an interdepartmental organ representing the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, etc. The Ministry of Defense is responsible for organizing communications for the center. The Agreement gives us little time to fulfill the inspection duties we have before each other. That is why we need highly energetic work from the Ministry of Defense. I would also like to call your attention to the known misunderstanding of each other that we have on another issue. I am speaking of the fact that right now we are developing a mandate for negotiations on reducing armed forces and weapons in Europe. This work is going on in Vienna between representatives of 23 countries, and the main obstacle is the issue of dual-use weapons. As far as I know, you and your allies are proposing to remove these weapons from the negotiations agenda. A question arises: what types of weapons will we be able to discuss at the negotiations at all? We propose to

discuss ground forces and strategic aviation. In case the dual-use means are excluded from the negotiations table, the 155-mm and higher caliber artillery will be excluded, as well as strategic missiles, and all combat aviation aircraft—nuclear and conventional weapons carriers. Then it is not clear what kind of weapons will remain for discussion at the negotiations. It seems this is an issue of politics or misunderstanding.

Crowe. Yesterday I listened with interest to your thoughts on the evolution of nuclear weapons. It seems to me that the nodal point in this evolution is the balance of conventional weapons. The U.S. and its allies plan to retain nuclear weapons as long as the disbalance in conventional weapons is not resolved. We understand that negotiations on conventional weapons are difficult, especially between blocs.

Akhromeev. In order to ensure movement forward in these agonizing negotiations it is necessary to first of all sit down at the table of negotiations. We agree that certain disbalances exist in Europe, and significant ones, for example with tanks. In a number of cases the disbalance is favorable to NATO, particularly in combat aviation. It is necessary to reveal the numbers to each other so we can come to an agreement on the disbalances.

Crowe. I assure you that there is a political will to move in this direction, but the fact of life is that it is just agonizingly difficult to reach a unity of opinions. We are working on that right now. As for the dual-use aircraft—they are part of a long path to strengthening trust, which we spoke about earlier. It is necessary to work out measures that would convince people of the seriousness of our approach to limiting conventional weapons. Then the problem of dual-use aviation will become an open question. It is part of the balance and should be open to discussion.

Akhromeev. Thank you for the last comment. We received your inspectors in Byelorussia and GSVG. The inspection in general is not a pleasant affair, but I strictly ordered to follow the Stockholm agreements to the last detail, opening to inspection everything that we were supposed to open. I do not know what your instructions were, but judging by what was asked from our inspections, in the First Armored Tank Division for example, they seemed to be the same. In other words, measures to strengthen trust turn out to be effective. We need a similarly significant breakthrough in the negotiations.

Crowe. I understand that we have been conducting negotiations for many years now and cannot reach an understanding even on the issue of data exchange: the problems are too serious.

Akhromeev. It seems that the very approach to the problem was wrong. We cut out a little piece from Europe. Right now we are looking at Europe as a whole and this is a better approach.

Crowe. And this is a step forward. But frankly speaking, after analyzing the negotiations in Vienna my level of suspicion rose greatly. Right now there is a very high level of distrust between us.

Akhromeev. The goal of our conversation is to understand each other and to act on the results of the exchange of opinions accordingly. Now in relation to the question of the so-called laser influence on your airplane. Frankly speaking, when I received this data I was in a difficult situation. The ships we had in that region were not equipped with any laser technology that would specifically irradiate airplanes. I gave an order to carefully examine this: what had happened? It turned out that the ships had laser binoculars. I do not exclude the possibility but also do not assert, but only suppose that when the airplane was watched this might have happened. But I absolutely exclude any evil intent or premeditation from our side. And there were no laser weapons on the ships. That is why I would like to conclude the discussion of this question and to consider this problem resolved.

Crowe. That is exactly why I think it is necessary to establish a specific mechanism to resolve these types of questions and to increase mutual understanding.

Marshal, I propose to go into the conference hall of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and to meet chiefs of staff of different armed force [branches].

#### Meeting with members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Crowe. Mr. Marshal, regular sessions of the Joint Chiefs of Staff take place in this hall. We are glad to welcome you here today.

Considering that we have little time, I would ask you to state your point of view on the nature of mutual relations between our countries. Primarily I mean the military-political aspect.

Akhromeev. I thank you, Mr. Admiral, for the attention you have shown me.

Gentlemen generals, admirals, I can tell you that despite all the difficulties of Soviet-American relations, the Soviet people feel deep respect for the American people. Our armed forces respect the armed forces of the United States. Firstly, we will never forget that during the difficult years of World War II, when the fate of civilization hung by a thread, we worked together and fought together. Blood that was shed together is never forgotten. Secondly, we respect the U.S. armed forces as a real power. We reckon with the U.S. armed forces because we live in a modern world. And although neither you nor we say this in print very often, the sense of moderation and responsibility in the actions of your and our armed forces speaks of mutual respect. Of course, our countries' political courses have more differences than similarities. We are divided by deep contradictions, but in the USSR we are convinced that the world is such right now that it is impossible to resolve anything by military action. You understand that yourself. In our opinion we should act consequently to normalize the situation in the world and the relations between our countries, and we should establish contacts between our armed forces. Admiral Crowe is of the same opinion. We believe that contacts between our armed forces would be useful. We have no intention of changing our allies and we do not call upon you to do that either. But normal relations have to exist. And as we became convinced during the conversation, many of the misunderstandings that arise between us can be settled.

R. Herres. Marshal, do you see a possibility of broadening the measures to lower the danger of war between our nations?

Akhromeev. We discussed this question with Admiral Crowe. I think that further steps are possible. You probably already know that national centers of nuclear safety have been established. They will soon start functioning. If our contacts and trust develop, we could agree to have national representatives at the centers, especially since they will have 24 hour direct contact. We could quickly resolve any misunderstandings or problems that come up. This is one of the ways. We could think about others.

D. Wickham. For a while now we've been hearing about a doctrine of "reasonable sufficiency." Right now it is discussed only on the political plane. What practical consequences might this doctrine have if it were realized in practice?

Akhromeev. I earnestly ask Admiral Crowe to tell his colleagues about our conversation. We discussed this in our conversation.

To say it briefly, we have to bring our armed forces to such a condition where the disbalances currently present on each side are liquidated. Let us suppose that we have more of a certain type of weapons in Europe—and such weapons exist—we are ready to liquidate them unilaterally. But your armed forces have more of a different type of weapon; consequently we would expect reductions from your side. If we sit down at the table of negotiations and lay the data out before each other, we could count the weapons and agree on the appropriate reductions. We could also take different measures, they are mentioned in our program.

W. Throst. Could you say a few words about broadening contacts between our armed forces. Since 1971, for example, there have been pretty good contacts to resolve problems arising between our Naval forces. Could we envisage our ships visiting each other's ports? Do you propose to broaden contacts between other types of armed forces?

Akhromeev. Yes, the seamen turned out luckier. Firstly, they developed a great agreement in right time. It is in effect right now and helps us behave respectably towards each other on the seas and oceans. Admiral Crowe and I discussed this issue and agreed that in a little while I would send him a list of activities that could be carried out between our armed forces. Admiral Crowe will consider this list of activities and we will come to an agreement about such contacts. Among them might be mutual visits, official visits of battleships and other contacts.

L. Welch. Returning to the concept of "reasonable sufficiency," I would like to say that in the process of implementing such a concept we will run into the difficulties of geographical imbalance. Considering the geographical asymmetry in the context of developing the agreement on short and medium-range missiles, we agreed to a "0-0." I would be interested to find out how you view the concept of "sufficiency" in relation to conventional forces on a global basis. How would the conventional forces of NATO and the WTO, of USSR and the U.S. be limited?

Akhromeev. Yes, this is a major question.

We believe that if Europe is considered as the area from the Atlantic to the Urals, then you could consider all the aspects, including the physical-geographical ones. But you mentioned global sufficiency. In this case I have a question for you. We are considering the reductions of strategic weapons, we came to an agreement on medium and shorter-range weapons and of their liquidation, we are looking at the problem of reducing ground forces and the air force. But during the past 20 years the situation developed, in which the Navy fleet was not subject to verification and reductions. How can we speak of global sufficiency if we do not consider the fleet? I am not demanding an answer. I am leaving this question for further consideration on both sides.

L. Welch. Of course I understand how difficult this question is in both the theoretical and the practical spheres. Of course, there is geographical asymmetry between our countries, and this needs to be taken into consideration when we are practically deciding the question of “sufficiency.” Because the U.S. is in essence an island nation, while the USSR is not.

K. Dean. The Marine Corps is always first in every mission. I propose my candidacy to be first to visit your country, Marshal.

Akhromeev. We will consider your words, General.

Gentlemen, Admiral Crowe will let you know about our conversation. Despite our disagreements on many political issues, we are fully willing to work for the better outcomes while remaining who we are and understanding that in today’s world it is impossible to solve problems the way they were solved before.

The time has come when we have to think about our role, about the role of the armed forces.

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