

RECORD OF THE MAIN CONTENT  
OF CONSULATIONS BETWEEN A.A. OBUKHOV AND R. BARTHOLOMEW  
[Excerpts]  
OCTOBER 6, 1991  
(10:00 - 19:00)

A.A. Obukhov. The Soviet and the American delegations were tasked with exchanging opinions about the practical aspects of reciprocal initiatives of the Presidents of the USSR and the USA on nuclear weapons.

President Bush's proposals on these issues were met with positive response in the USSR. USSR President M.S. Gorbachev in his statement on the Soviet television pointed out that "in this initiative, we see a confirmation of the fact that the new thinking has received wide acceptance in the international community. President Bush's proposals are continuing worthily the cause started in Reykjavik." I am convinced that together the measures announced by the leaders of the USSR and the USA ensure a solid basis for a new big breakthrough in the area of arms control and strengthening of strategic stability. The fact that the USSR and the USA are acting in unison here shows a new maturity in Soviet-American relations and that our countries, having thrown off the outdated stereotypes and approaches, are taking the road of cooperation and genuine partnership in the area of security.

The deep transformations in the USSR, which became possible thanks to the decisive victory over the forces of reaction during the August events, undoubtedly contributed to the shift of Soviet-American relations to this new substantive state. We are thankful to the U.S. administration for their support given to us in those difficult days and also for the help in our efforts to create a genuinely democratic society and open market economy in our country.

[...]

R. Bartholomew. President spoke this morning, and I would like to quote what he said: "The Soviet proposals are very positive, and this is how they will be judged in the entire world. Naturally, we need to clarify some details, and the U.S. delegation, which is in Moscow right now is instructed to do it. However, having listened to M.S. Gorbachev's statement and having spoken on the phone with him, I can say already now that the Soviet proposals—are good news for the whole world. Both the USSR and the United States made a great progress in the issues dealing with nuclear weapons, and peoples of many countries express their gratitude to the Soviet Union for the approach that they demonstrated in these issues."

The President's statement along with high marks for the reciprocal Soviet proposals, mentions the need to clarify certain details. At the same time, we would not want to enter negotiations regarding the measures that the USSR and the USA undertake unilaterally. We are only talking about trying to better understand their practical substance.

A.A. Obukhov. The Soviet side appreciates the high assessment of the USSR reciprocal proposals expressed by President Bush. I believe that together the

American and the Soviet initiatives ensure a basis for serious progress in genuine disarmament.

Our main goal today is to help with expert advice in practical implementation of the initiatives put forward by the Soviet and U.S. Presidents. As a result of our work, it will become more clear where unilateral reciprocal steps by the USSR and the USA are sufficient, and which areas would require further actions and which issues would require negotiations or consultations. I propose to start with tactical nuclear weapons.

R. Bartholomew. Do the steps regarding Soviet tactical nuclear weapons announced by President Gorbachev yesterday mean that as a result of their implementation the USSR will no longer possess nuclear warheads for surface-to-surface missiles with range shorter than the range of intercontinental ballistic missiles?

A. A. Obukhov. Yes this is correct. Soviet short and medium-range missiles have already been destroyed in accordance with the INF Treaty. In addition, nuclear warheads for tactical missiles will be liquidated as well. Therefore, the new situation is created where we will not have nuclear warheads for "ground-to-ground" missiles with ranges shorter than that of intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Along with this, of course, we should take into account the procedures for liquidation of these means agreed upon in the framework of the INF Treaty.

R. Bartholomew. As a gesture ensuring a greater transparency and openness, the United States will inform the Soviet side on a regular basis about the schedule and procedures of liquidation of specified tactical nuclear weapons. We start from the assumption that the Soviet side will do the same.

A. A. Obukhov. I believe that it is important for both sides to know when and in which way liquidation of the specified weapons will take place. Allow me to address the question you asked to the U.S. side, namely: will the U.S. possess any nuclear artillery ammunition or nuclear warheads for missiles with range shorter than the ICBM range as a result of implementation of the unilateral measures announced by you?

R. Bartholomew. No, we will not have such weapons. All of them will be eliminated.

[...]

A. A. Obukhov. We would like to ask the U.S. side to comment on our proposals about subsequent liquidation on a reciprocal basis of all naval tactical nuclear weapons and also about pulling all nuclear ammunition from combat units of front (tactical) aviation and storing them at the centralized storage bases.

R. Bartholomew. Our approach to the issue of naval nuclear weapons is formed in the context of the analysis of the situation in the world as a whole, not only through the prism of U.S.-Soviet balance of forces. In other words, in our view, preservation of a part of the naval nuclear forces would contribute to the interests of international stability and security.

As far as your idea regarding the storage of tactical nuclear ammunition for front aviation at centralized storage locations, it looks like it would be received in the Pentagon without much joy. At the same time, I am personally intrigued by this Soviet proposal. I would like to hear additional ideas about this from you.

A. A. Obukhov. There is an obvious similarity between the positions of the sides regarding the naval and the land-based components of tactical nuclear weapons. In essence, we are talking about eliminating it with the exception of the part of the weapons that would be put in centralized storage. In the opinion of the Soviet side, it would be logical to augment the noted measures with a third component—to place tactical nuclear weapons of front air force in centralized storage locations. Such a step would contribute to stability and security.

R. Bartholomew. Your arguments sound quite persuasively. We discussed the issue of the air force component of tactical nuclear weapons in the process of our work on President Bush's initiative. Taking into account the function that they are supposed to serve in Europe, we were not able to envision measures on their reduction. Your proposal would create certain inconveniences in terms of limiting the operative capacity of U.S. Air Force.

[...]

R. Bartholomew. The U.S. side starts from the assumption that the risk of military confrontation between the USSR and the USA has come down substantially, and the danger of a sudden nuclear strike has disappeared. We were guided by this consideration when taking the decision to take the heavy bombers off alert. We see the proposal to limit the location of mobile ICBM within the boundaries of missile bases in the same light. By the way, you did exactly that in the recent past.

A. A. Obukhov. I agree with your notion that new political realities make resolution of many issues related to nuclear weapons much easier. At the same time, they in one way or another bear upon the balance of forces and are directly connected to strategic stability. We should strive for such decisions, which while limiting strategic offensive weapons, would not undermine the balance of forces.

We are aware of the great importance with which the U.S. side treats its sea-based strategic weapons. In this part of strategic balance, the United States has substantial superiority over the USSR. Some time ago I read that in the United States they see the Soviet ICBMs as a certain compensation for this superiority. I am mentioning this here because the aspect of the problem that you touched upon—the mobility of the mobile ICBMs could be discussed at future negotiations on the

nuclear and space weapons and strategic stability with consideration of other factors determining the strategic situation. Because not only mobile ICBMs but also submarines and heavy bomber have to ability to move around.

R. Bartholomew. With one exception that heavy bombers at the altitude of 10000 and submarines at the depth of 300 meters are much less vulnerable to terrorist acts than land-based mobile missiles.

[...]

R. Bartholomew. We see these Soviet proposals as evidence of seriousness of your intentions to go further and further in the direction of reducing strategic offensive weapons. The U.S. side shares this serious approach. At the same time, we believe that the main goal of the future reductions should be ensuring greater stability at the lower levels of strategic weapons, which would be achieved as a result of reductions in the most destabilizing kinds of strategic weapons. This is precisely why we propose to focus our attention on liquidation of ICBMs with MIRV warheads. Quantitative parameters of reductions have a secondary importance in this case.

F. I. Ladygin. We know the philosophical justification of this approach of the U.S. side, your concept of dividing strategic weapons into more and less stabilizing. I don't want to get into a discussion about this. However, the Soviet side believes that all strategic weapons are powerful weapons. Besides, one has to take into account the fact that there exists a substantial asymmetry in the structures of strategic weapons in the USSR and the USA.

The realization of the approach, which was presented by Mr. Hadley here, according to our estimates, would lead to the following consequences. The strategic balance would be violated sharply. Efforts to equalize balance of forces in one component of strategic weapons, while leaving two other components intact, would lead to a substantial destabilization of the strategic situation. Presently, the United States already has 2 to 1 superiority in nuclear warheads on submarines and a 3 to 1 superiority in the number of warheads on the heavy bombers. Even if we take as base number 18 submarines for the USA and 25 submarines for the USSR as proposed by Mr. Hadley, the general ratio of warheads on the naval component of the triad would stay the same: the United States would enjoy the 2 to 1 superiority. Therefore, the ratio of warheads on all strategic carriers in the case if MIRVed ICBMs are liquidated will be 2 to 1 (now it is 1 to 1). It is also not least important that implementation of the ideas, which Mr. Hadley presented here, would require us to undertake substantial additional expenses in order to correct the asymmetries that would emerge as a result.

This is precisely why the approaches of the sides to further reductions of strategic weapons should be determined with consideration of all the factors affecting the stability of the strategic situation.

R. Bartholomew. I would like to note with satisfaction that we consider General Ladygin's comment as very serious and substantive. It emphasizes the pressing need to conduct an exchange of opinions, which I proposed earlier, between our sides about the planned USSR structure of strategic forces, which would result from implementation of the START Treaty.

A. A. Obukhov. Today's discussion shows that the issues of further reductions of strategic offensive weapons would require further intensive dialog.

Participants in the consultations:

From the Soviet side: Deputy Foreign Minister A. A. Obukhov, Deputy Chief of General Staff B. A. Omelichev, RSFSR Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Kolosovskiy, Georgiy Mamedov, MFA  
Yuriy Nazarkin, MFA  
General Ladygin  
Sergey Rogov, USA and Canada Institute  
G.M. Yevstaf'yev, MFA  
Vladimir Belashev, Ukrainian MFA  
Andrey Sannikov, Belorussian MFA  
Rustem Kurmanguzhin, Kazakh Permanent Representation

From the American side:

Undersecretary Bartholomew  
John Gordon, NSC  
Steven Hadley, OSD  
Lt. Gen. John Shalikashvili, JCS  
Victor Alessi, DOE  
Doug McEachin, ACIS  
Reed Hanmer, ACDA  
James Timbie, T  
Douglas Graham, OSD

The conversation was recorded by First Secretary of the US and Canada Desk of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR, M. V. Berdennikov.

[Translated by Svetlana Savranskaya for the National Security Archive]