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RECORD OF THE CONVERSATION
with the Secretary of State of the USA
C. Vance

March 21, 1977

I met with Vance on his invitation.

The Secretary of State said that in view of my forthcoming departure for Moscow on the eve of his arrival there he would like in the most general terms to describe their approach to a new agreement with the Soviet Union on the limitation of strategic weapons. In this regard he underlined several times that the observations which he would make continue to be subject to review by the President, that they are still not set, and that they may be susceptible to certain changes. This applies also to numerical data, which also does not reflect the final position of the USA.

Vance said that in their opinion, two variants of an agreement on the second stage of SALT are possible: one is comprehensive, which they prefer, another is more limited and will be introduced in case the first one is not agreed on.

The first variant--the more complete agreement, according to Vance--could consist of the following parts.

1. The American side believes that it would be good already at this stage to agree on certain reductions from the levels of strategic arms established in Vladivostok. This would reflect the intention of the sides to begin real arms reduction, instead of merely adapting to the approximate actual levels of weapons which [the sides] have or plan to have. In this context,

in their opinion, the limitation of the levels could have the following character:

- up to 2000 total strategic delivery vehicles;
 - up to 1200 MIRVed launchers.
2. The Soviet side, taking into consideration its advantage in throw weight, must agree to a certain limit on launchers for heavy intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM), which it is building or reequipping to accommodate the kind of missiles called "SS-18" in the USA. (He commented in this regard that it would be desirable to have, say, 150 missiles of this kind instead of 300).
 3. Both sides agree to a freeze in the creation and deployment of new types of ICBM, with a corresponding limit on the number of atmospheric tests of missiles.
 4. Creation and deployment of mobile ICBMs are prohibited. In this regard the United States would take an obligation to stop development and deployment of its mighty mobile ICBM "M-X".
 5. All cruise missiles with a range of more than 2500 km are banned.

In the event that the Soviet side agrees to this proposal the American side will be ready to accept the Soviet position concerning the "Backfire" bomber, by agreeing not to ascribe intercontinental capability to this plane. The USA will be also ready to take into consideration Soviet data about the radius of operation of this bomber.

This, said Vance, is, in general, the structure of the possible first variant of the agreement.

As an alternative to this agreement (if it is not achieved), Vance continued, President Carter's already well-known proposal--to conclude a limited Vladivostok agreement, including into it all items on which the sides had reached agreement, but deferring unresolved questions (i.e. first of all the cruise missiles and "Backfire") to the next, third stage of SALT negotiations--could serve.

After I heard what Vance had to say, I told him that if I may speak frankly, none of these American proposals give a real basis for achieving a mutually acceptable agreement in Moscow.

I said further that upon first consideration the "comprehensive" variant actually looks even worse than the limited variant, the shortcoming of which was convincingly shown in L.I. Brezhnev's last letter to the President. The fact that American side is striving, judging by the expressed considerations, toward a one-sided advantage, is completely obvious. I asked Vance, what, in the opinion of the administration, the Soviet Union would get in exchange for all that.

If I may summarize, in the subsequent discussion Vance, justified the American position with the following:

A decrease in the overall level of delivery vehicles from 2400 to 2000 would impact, in his words, not only the Soviet Union, but also the USA, which currently has 2150 strategic delivery vehicles. Although he had to recognize that the reduction would have a stronger impact on the Soviet side, he added that a reduction in MIRVed launchers would have more of an impact on the USA than on the USSR, since the USA had moved far ahead in the MIRVing of rockets.

The inclusion of their suggested limits on our heavy rockets--as a reflection of the problem of the Soviet advantage in throw-weight which has long worried them--Vance argued that the USA, in its turn will be prepared not to develop and not to manufacture MX, its own new heavy mobile ICBM with increased accuracy. This, in his opinion, would be, from the point of view of the future, sufficient compensation for the Soviet side in the context of a compromise decision on the problem of throw-weight.

Speaking about the elimination of cruise missiles with a range of more than 2500 km, Vance asserted that the remaining missiles (i.e. those with a range of less than 2.5 thousand km) are medium range rather than intercontinental. In this regard, he tried to make an analogy with our Backfire, which has a range of 2200 km and is therefore characterized by the Soviet side as a tactical, rather than strategic type of weapon.

I made points consistent with our proposed agreement on the second stage of SALT, using arguments contained in the communications of L.I. Brezhnev and our position in previous negotiations with the Americans.

In reply to my observation that the preparation of an agreement cannot be accelerated if we set aside issues which had already been jointly worked out, and begin to consider some new questions which hinder the achievement of an agreement, Vance characteristically retorted that the new administration does not consider itself completely committed to the approach of the former administration and that the Carter government strives toward a real, and not just a superficial reduction in strategic weapons.

I noted in this regard in conducting such important negotiations we start from the fact that we are dealing with the government of the USA, and that the reevaluation by every new administration of agreements reached by its predecessor does not strengthen the basis for international agreements.

Overall, I said, in my personal opinion both of the proposed variants are not only not directed toward achieving a mutually advantageous SALT agreement, but to the contrary significantly weaken the chances for a quick conclusion of the second stage of negotiations. I appealed to Vance to take into account everything that had already been said by the Soviet side, especially the points made in the letters from the General Secretary of the CC CPSU about the possible paths to resolution of the problems of strategic arms limitation, during the final review of their positions.

Vance said that the position he had expressed is not final, but that their position "also must be understood" -- the USA cannot consider accept in full a Soviet approach according

to which, in his words, the American side should accept in full the Soviet position on remaining questions instead of a search for mutual compromise.

I repeated to Vance that in my view the considerations he had expressed in no way can serve as a basis for the compromise he had mentioned.

Vance said that most probably the President will convene two more sessions of the National Security Council to work out the final American position for the negotiations in Moscow.

In conclusion, Vance requested that I convey to the Soviet leadership that he is coming to Moscow with a serious task from President Carter to try and come to an agreement on the central issue of his trips, and that if necessary he will be prepared, to stay over for a day or two to finish a detailed consideration of possibilities for the quickest conclusion of a new agreement on the limitation of strategic weapons.

Ambassador of the USSR in the USA

(signature)

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