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THE "LAUNCH ON WARNING" QUESTION IN THE FIRST PHASE OF SALT

At the plenary SALT meeting of April 27, 1970, Deputy Foreign Minister Semenov argued for a ban on MRV production and denied that MRVs would insure more effective deterrence:

> ...Such arguments can be uttered only by those interested in a further race.
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> They reason as if land-based fixed launchers with precisely established coordinates were the only systems in existence. But after all, there are also missile-carrying submarines. Also in existence and continuously being improved are early-warning systems, owing to which the silos containing ICBMs may be empty at the moment when the enemy attempts to strike a blow against them, while the ICBMs themselves, that had been in these silos, would already be in flight. Neither can aircraft be discounted.[1]

In a plenary statement of May 12, ACDA Director Smith noted this passage and asked:

> ...Do we understand this statement to suggest that a government should plan to launch its ICBM force solely on the possibly fallible reading of signals from its early-warning systems, and before it had any further evidence that an attack had in fact been started?

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[1]From USDel Salt, tel. 36, Apr. 27, 1972, Secret/Limdis.

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This would seem inconsistent with any real concern for the problem of accidental or unauthorized launch. One of the reasons for the U.S. emphasis on survivability was "precisely to avoid having to resort to such a launch-on-warning policy which would be very dangerous and would increase the risks of unwanted war between our two countries."[1]

The American delegation noticed that General Ogarkov advised Semenov not to reply immediately to Smith's statement but to await the next meeting. Later, General Ogarkov privately expressed resentment to Allison that the United States had raised this question. As a military man, he said, General Allison should know the answer. When General Allison denied this, General Ogarkov claimed that the Soviets had been applying operational training doctrine from American manuals.

The American delegation believed that the Soviets might mistakenly believe that the United States had a "launch on warning" policy. It considered that Soviet misapprehensions should be corrected:

> If, in fact, Soviet delegation (and government has been under misapprehension that launch on warning represented U.S. doctrine, could explain some aspects of Soviet SALT delegation stance, including lack of readiness accept at full value U.S. statements of concern over growing vulnerability of land-based missile force. There may, of course, be some deterrent value in Soviet uncertainty over U.S. policy in this regard, but there also could be risk and danger in such mistaken view. There may be some bargaining leverage in noting that /in/ unconstrained or ineffectually constrained strategic arms competition there might be incentive to turn to a

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[1]Statement by Ambassador Smith, May 12, 1970, Secret/Limdis; from USDel Salt, tel. 63, May 12, 1970, Secret/Limdis. The draft statement was revised on instruction in order to avoid any "implication of possible establishment of joint systems" on accidental or unauthorized launch (from USDel Salt, tel. 60, May 8, 1970, Secret/Exdis; to USDel Salt, tel. 71111, May 11, 1970, Secret/Exdis).

> launch on warning policy. On balance, we assume it appropriate to reaffirm that /the United States/ considers it highly desirable to avoid a situation in which either side would feel compelled to rely on a launch on warning doctrine...[1]

At the plenary meeting of May 15, Mr. Semenov said that his statement was unrelated to the question of accidental, unauthorized, or provocative launches. The Soviets were thinking of various American statements in the context of MIRVs and ABMs, and they noted that Secretary of Defense Laird had indicated on May 12 that the Administration had considered a "launch on warning" policy in the previous year.[2]

Speaking to the Jackson subcommittee of the Senate Armed Services Committee on May 12, Secretary of Defense Laird had said:

> ...The suggestions made last year that we either increase our offensive forces or assume a posture of "launch-on-warning" are examples in the first case of the hard and difficult decisions the fiscal year 1971 program is designed to postpone, and, in the second case, of a situation which no President would want to face as the only course of action available in an impending crisis.[3]

In the plenary meeting of May 19, Mr. Smith explained that there had been suggestions along this line by private individuals and members of Congress but that they had not been considered by the Administration. In response to questions from the Jackson subcommittee, Secretary Laird had specifically said:

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[1]From USDel Salt, tel. 65, May 12, 1970, Secret/Exdis.
[2]Semenov Statement, May 15, 1970, Secret/Limdis; from USDel Salt, tel. 73, May 15, 1970, Secret/Limdis.
[3]*Documents on Disarmament, 1970*, p. 209.

> This strategy that has been advocated by some, to launch our missiles on warning, I believe is a very dangerous strategy and should not be followed by our country.
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> . . . . . .
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> I would hope that that kind of strategy would never be adopted by any Administration or by any Congress.

Mr. Smith said that this made the U.S. position clear and that he would welcome a similar Soviet statement.[1] Mr. Semenov thanked him for clarifying the question and said that this was of value in understanding the American position.[2] Later, Mr. Grinevsky (USSR) told Garthoff and Akalovsky of the American delegation that the Soviets considered the question closed.[3]

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[1]Statement by Ambassador Smith, May 19, 1970, Secret/Limdis; from USDel Salt, tel. 76, May 19, 1970, Secret/Limdis.

[2]US/USSR Salt Meeting 9, May 19, 1970, Secret.

[3]From USDel Salt, tel. 105, May 28, 1970, Secret/Limdis.