

Memorandum of Understanding Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics Regarding the Establishment of a Direct Communications Link (With Annex)

The need for assuring quick and reliable communication directly between the heads of government of nuclear-weapons states first emerged in the context of efforts to reduce the danger that accident, miscalculation, or surprise attack might trigger a nuclear war. These risks, arising out of conditions which are novel in history and peculiar to the nuclear-armed missile age, can of course threaten all countries, directly or indirectly.

The Soviet Union had been the first nation to propose, in 1954, specific safeguards against surprise attack; it also expressed concern about the danger of accidental war. At Western initiative, a Conference of Experts on Surprise Attack was held in Geneva in 1958, but recessed without achieving conclusive results, although it stimulated technical research on the issues involved.

In its "Program for General and Complete Disarmament in a Peaceful World," presented to the General Assembly by President Kennedy on September 25, 1961, the United States proposed a group of measures to reduce the risks of war. These included advance notification of military movements and maneuvers, observation posts at major transportation centers and air bases, and additional inspection arrangements. An international commission would be established to study possible further measures to reduce risks, including "failure of communication."

The United States draft treaty outline submitted to the ENDC¹ on April 18, 1962, added a proposal for the exchange of military missions to improve communications and understanding. It also proposed "establishment of rapid and reliable communications" among the heads of governments and with the Secretary General of the United Nations.

The Soviet draft treaty on general and complete disarmament (March 15, 1962) offered no provisions covering the risk of war by

¹Eighteen-Nation Disarmament Committee, which met at Geneva from 1962 on. In 1969, with the addition of new members, the name was changed to Conference of the Committee on Disarmament (CCD). A yet larger group, the Committee on Disarmament, was established in 1978-79.

surprise attack, miscalculation, or accident; on July 16, however, it introduced amendments to its draft that called for (1) a ban on joint maneuvers involving the forces of two or more states and advance notification of substantial military movements, (2) exchange of military missions, and (3) improved communications between heads of governments and with the U.N. Secretary General. These measures were not separable, however, from the rest of the Soviet program.

The Cuban missile crisis of October 1962 compellingly underscored the importance of prompt, direct communication between heads of states. On December 12 of that year, a United States working paper submitted to the ENDC urged consideration of a number of measures to reduce the risk of war; these measures, the United States argued, offered opportunities for early agreement and could be undertaken either as a group or separately. Included was establishment of communication links between major capitals to insure rapid and reliable communication in times of crisis. The working paper suggested that it did not appear either necessary or desirable to specify in advance all the situations in which a special communications link might be used:

... In the view of the United States, such a link should, as a general matter, be reserved for emergency use; that is to say, for example, that it might be reserved for communications concerning a military crisis which might appear directly to threaten the security of either of the states involved and where such developments were taking place at a rate which appeared to preclude the use of normal consultative procedures. Effectiveness of the link would not be degraded through use for other matters.

On June 20, 1963, at Geneva the American and Soviet representatives to the ENDC completed negotiations and signed the "Memorandum of Understanding Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics Regarding the Establishment of a Direct Communications Link." The memorandum provided that each government should be responsible for arrangements for the link on its own territory, including continuous functioning of the link and prompt delivery of communications to its head of government. An annex set forth the routing and components of the link and provided for allocation of costs, exchange of equipment, and other technical matters. The direct communications link would comprise:

- (1) two terminal points with teletype equipment,
- (2) a full-time duplex wire telegraph circuit (Washington-London-Copenhagen-Stockholm-Helsinki-Moscow),
- (3) a full-time duplex radiotelegraph circuit (Washington-Tangier-Moscow).

If the wire circuit should be interrupted, messages would be transmitted by the radio circuit. If experience showed the need for an additional wire circuit, it might be established by mutual agreement.

The "Hot Line" agreement, the first bilateral agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union that gave concrete recognition to the perils implicit in modern nuclear-weapons systems, was a limited but practical step to bring those perils under rational control.

The communications link has proved its worth since its installation. During the Arab-Israeli war in 1967, for example, the United States used it to prevent possible misunderstanding of U.S. fleet movements in the Mediterranean. It was used again during the 1973 Arab-Israeli war. The significance of the hot line is further attested by the 1971 agreement to modernize it.

Memorandum of Understanding Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics Regarding the Establishment of a Direct Communications Link

Signed at Geneva June 20, 1963

Entered into force June 20, 1963

For use in time of emergency the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics have agreed to establish as soon as technically feasible a direct communications link between the two Governments.

Each Government shall be responsible for the arrangements for the link on its own territory. Each Government shall take the necessary steps to ensure continuous functioning of the link and prompt delivery to its head of government of any communications received by means of the link from the head of government of the other party.

Arrangements for establishing and operating the link are set forth in the Annex which is attached hereto and forms an integral part hereof.

DONE in duplicate in the English and Russian languages at Geneva, Switzerland, this 20th day of June, 1963.

**FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:**

CHARLES C. STELLE

Acting Representative of the United States of America to the Eighteen-Nation Committee on Disarmament

**FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF THE
UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST
REPUBLICS:**

SEMYON K. TSARAPKIN

Acting Representative of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to the Eighteen-Nation Committee on Disarmament

(SEAL)

Annex

To the Memorandum of Understanding Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics Regarding the Establishment of a Direct Communications Link

The direct communications link between Washington and Moscow established in accordance with the Memorandum, and the operation of such link, shall be governed by the following provisions:

1. The direct communications link shall consist of:
 - a. Two terminal points with telegraph-teleprinter equipment between which communications shall be directly exchanged;
 - b. One full-time duplex wire telegraph circuit, routed Washington-London-Copenhagen-Stockholm-Helsinki-Moscow, which shall be used for the transmission of messages;
 - c. One full-time duplex radiotelegraph circuit, routed Washington-Tangier-Moscow, which shall be used for service communications and for coordination of operations between the two terminal points.

If experience in operating the direct communications link should demonstrate that the establishment of an additional wire telegraph circuit is advisable, such circuit may be established by mutual agreement between authorized representatives of both Governments.

2. In case of interruption of the wire circuit, transmission of messages shall be effected via the radio circuit, and for this purpose provision shall be made at the terminal points for the capability of prompt switching of all necessary equipment from one circuit to another.

3. The terminal points of the link shall be so equipped as to provide for the transmission and reception of messages from Moscow to Washington in the Russian language and from Washington to Moscow in the English language. In this connection, the USSR shall furnish the United States four sets of telegraph terminal equipment, including page printers, transmitters, and reperforators, with one year's supply of spare parts and all necessary special tools, test equipment, operating instructions, and other technical literature, to provide for transmission and reception of messages in the Russian language.

The United States shall furnish the Soviet Union four sets of telegraph terminal equipment, including page printers, transmitters, and reperforators, with one year's supply of spare parts and all necessary special tools, test equipment, operating instructions and other technical literature, to provide for transmission and reception of messages in the English language.

The equipment described in this paragraph shall be exchanged directly between the parties without any payment being required therefor.

4. The terminal points of the direct communications link shall be provided with encoding equipment. For the terminal point in the USSR, four sets of such equipment (each capable of simplex operation), with one year's supply of spare parts, with all

necessary special tools, test equipment, operating instructions and other technical literature, and with all necessary blank tape, shall be furnished by the United States to the USSR against payment of the cost thereof by the USSR.

The USSR shall provide for preparation and delivery of keying tapes to the terminal point of the link in the United States for reception of messages from the USSR. The United States shall provide for the preparation and delivery of keying tapes to the terminal point of the link in the USSR for reception of messages from the United States. Delivery of prepared keying tapes to the terminal points of the link shall be effected through the Embassy of the USSR in Washington (for the terminal of the link in the USSR) and through the Embassy of the United States in Moscow (for the terminal of the link in the United States).

5. The United States and the USSR shall designate the agencies responsible for the arrangements regarding the direct communications link, for its technical maintenance, continuity and reliability, and for the timely transmission of messages.

Such agencies may, by mutual agreement, decide matters and develop instructions relating to the technical maintenance and operation of the direct communications link and effect arrangements to improve the operation of the link.

6. The technical parameters of the telegraph circuits of the link and of the terminal equipment, as well as the maintenance of such circuits and equipment, shall be in accordance with CCITT and CCIR recommendations.

Transmission and reception of messages over the direct communications link shall be effected in accordance with applicable recommendations of international telegraph and radio communications regulations, as well as with mutually agreed instructions.

7. The costs of the direct communications link shall be borne as follows:

a. The USSR shall pay the full cost of leasing the portion of the telegraph circuit from Moscow to Helsinki and 50% of the cost of leasing the portion of the telegraph circuit from Helsinki to London. The United States shall pay the full cost of leasing the portion of the telegraph circuit from Washington to London and 50% of the cost of leasing the portion of the telegraph circuit from London to Helsinki.

b. Payment of the cost of leasing the radio telegraph circuit between Washington and Moscow shall be effected without any transfer of payments between the parties. The USSR shall bear the expenses relating to the transmission of messages from Moscow to Washington. The United States shall bear the expenses relating to the transmission of messages from Washington to Moscow.