

TELEGRAM

INCOMING

Foreign Service of the
United States of America

AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

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Classification

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SUBJECT

SUBJECT FOBS

1. ON 3 NOVEMBER SECRETARY MCNAMARA ANNOUNCED THAT THE SOVIETS APPEAR TO BE DEVELOPING A FRACTIONAL ORBITAL BOMBARDMENT SYSTEM (FOBS). DEFENSE CABLE 1993 (BEING REPEATED TO ALL ADDRESSEES) QUOTES THE SECRETARY'S STATEMENT WHICH PROVIDED DETAILS OF THE SYSTEM. TRANSCRIPT OF SECRETARY MCNAMARA'S PRESS CONFERENCE WAS TRANSMITTED IN USIA WIRELESS FILE EUF 135 AND 138 AND EPF 110 AND 114 DATED 3 NOVEMBER 1967. SINCE THE ANNOUNCEMENT THERE HAS BEEN WIDESPREAD PUBLIC INTEREST IN THIS DEVELOPMENT. SOME OF THE MORE FREQUENT QUESTIONS THAT HAVE ARISEN ALONG WITH RELEVANT FACTS AND US VIEWS WHICH MAY BE DRAWN ON WHERE RESPONSE IS NECESSARY ARE LISTED BELOW:

A. DOES THE SOVIET FOBS VIOLATE THE SPACE TREATY ?

1. ARTICLE IV OF THE TREATY REQUIRES THAT "STATES PARTIES TO THE TREATY UNDERTAKE NOT TO PLACE IN ORBIT AROUND THE EARTH ANY OBJECTS CARRYING NUCLEAR WEAPONS OR ANY OTHER KINDS OF WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION, INSTALL SUCH WEAPONS ON CELESTIAL BODIES OR STATION SUCH WEAPONS IN OUTER SPACE IN ANY OTHER MANNER." THE WORDING OF THIS ARTICLE MAKES IT CLEAR THAT THE TREATY IS CONCERNED WITH "THE CARRYING OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS"; THE TREATY DOES NOT PROHIBIT THE DEVELOPMENT OR EVEN TESTING OF SYSTEMS CAPABLE OF CARRYING NUCLEAR WEAPONS. THERE IS NO EVIDENCE OR REASON TO BELIEVE THAT NUCLEAR WEAPONS ARE ASSOCIATED WITH ANY OF THE SOVIET FOBS TESTS. MOREOVER THE FOBS IS A LAND-BASED SYSTEM WHICH ACTS ESSENTIALLY AS AN INTERCONTINENTAL MISSILE AND DOES NOT GO INTO A COMPLETE ORBIT AROUND THE EARTH BEFORE LANDING ON TARGET (HENCE THE NAME "FRACTIONAL ORBITAL BOMBARDMENT SYSTEM") FOBS IS AN ORBITAL BOMBARDMENT SYSTEM ON THE OTHER HAND WOULD INVOLVE WEAPONS BASED ON DEPLOYED IN SPACE FOR LONGER PERIODS OF TIME.

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2. BOTH THE LANGUAGE AND THE INTENT OF THE TREATY HAVE THE PURPOSE OF PREVENTING THE STATIONING OF MASS DESTRUCTION WEAPONS IN SPACE. THE DEVELOPMENT AND DEPLOYMENT OF ANY SPACE WEAPONS AT GROUND INSTALLATIONS ARE NOT RPT NOT PROHIBITED. WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THE SOVIETS WOULD TEST FOBS WITH A LIVE NUCLEAR WARHEAD. HOWEVER, EVEN IF THEY WERE TO DO SO, IT WOULD NOT BE A VIOLATION OF THE TREATY SINCE THE WARHEAD WOULD NOT COMPLETE AN ORBIT AROUND THE EARTH.

3. WE HAVE THEREFORE CONCLUDED THAT THE SOVIETS HAVE NOT VIOLATED THE TREATY.

5. WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF FOBS ?

1. FOBS TRAVEL AT ALTITUDES MUCH LOWER THAN THE HIGH PORTION OF ICBM TRAJECTORIES AND BECAUSE OF THEIR GREATER RANGE THEY COULD ATTACK TARGETS FROM DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS. A SOVIET FOBS FOR EXAMPLE COULD ATTACK THE US FROM THE SOUTH. THESE CHARACTERISTICS MIGHT ENABLE A FOBS TO AVOID SOME OF OUR RADARS SUCH AS THOSE OF THE BMEWS. THE US HOWEVER HAS RECENTLY DEPLOYED OVER-HORIZON RADARS WHICH CAN DETECT FOBS LAUNCHES. SOME ARE ALREADY IN OPERATION. WARNING TIME OF A FOBS ATTACK FROM THESE RADARS WOULD ACTUALLY BE GREATER THAN THE WARNING TIME OF AN ICBM ATTACK FROM THE BMEWS.

2. ON THE DEBIT SIDE, THE FOBS HAVE TWO SEVERE DRAWBACKS. THE ACCURACY OF ICBMS MODIFIED INTO A FOBS WOULD BE SIGNIFICANTLY LESS THAN ICBMS AND THEIR PAYLOAD WOULD BE CONSIDERABLY REDUCED. THUS THERE ARE PENALTIES IN BOTH PAYLOAD AND ACCURACY THAT EXACT A HIGH PRICE FOR USE OF THIS WEAPONS SYSTEM.

C. DOES THE US PLAN TO DEVELOP A FOBS ?

1. SOME YEARS AGO THE EXAMINED THE DESIRABILITY OF THE SYSTEM AND DECIDED THAT THE DISADVANTAGES WERE OVERRIDING. WE HAVE NO INTENTION OF REVISING THIS DECISION BUT WE WOULD IN NO WAY FEEL OURSELVES CONSTRAINED BY THE SPACE TREATY FROM SUCH DEVELOPMENT AND DEPLOYMENT IF WE CONCLUDED THAT IT WAS IN OUR INTEREST.

D. IN VIEW OF THE DRAWBACKS WHY ARE THE SOVIETS DEVELOPING THIS SYSTEM ?

1. THEY MAY OF COURSE COME TO THE SAME CONCLUSION THAT WE HAVE AND NEVER DEPLOY THESE WEAPONS. OFF SOME YEARS AGO THEY MAY HAVE CONSIDERED THAT THIS SYSTEM

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1. THEY MAY OF COURSE COME TO THE SAME CONCLUSION THAT WE HAVE AND NEVER DEPLOY THESE WEAPONS.

2. SOME YEARS AGO THEY MAY HAVE CONSIDERED THAT THIS SYSTEM OFFERED A MEANS OF ATTACKING ELEMENTS OF THE US BOMBER FORCE BY SURPRISE BY AVOIDING THE US RADAR WARNING SYSTEM WHICH WOULD OTHERWISE ALERT THE BOMBERS ALLOWING THEM TO BECOME AIRBORNE AND SO REACH SAFETY. OUR NEW RADARS OBVIATE THIS POSSIBILITY. IF THEY DO DEPLOY IT, IT WILL SIMPLY BE A LESS EFFECTIVE USE OF THE RESOURCES EXPENDED THAN WOULD A COMPARABLE INVESTMENT IN THEIR ICBM FORCE. RUSK
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