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Comments on U.S. Discussion Papers: On Definitions in the Discussion of De-Alerting*

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(In cooperation with General Viktor Esin and General Viktor Koltunov)

Comments presented at the seminar on “Re-framing De-Alert: Decreasing the Operational Readiness of Nuclear Weapons Systems in the U.S.-Russia Context” in Yverdon, Switzerland, 21-23 June 2009.

Re-framing De-Alert:
Decreasing the Operational Readiness of Nuclear Weapons Systems in the U.S.-Russia Context
21-23 June 2009
Hotel La Prairie
1400 Yverdon-les-Bains, Switzerland

**The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the conference sponsors.*

Comments on U.S. Discussion Papers: On Definitions in the Discussion of De-Alerting

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Terms “*launch on warning*”, “*launch under attack*” (in English papers) and “*otvetno-vstrechnyi udar*” (in Russian papers) are frequently used in literature devoted to de-alerting. However, the meaning of these terms often varies substantially from one paper to another. Moreover, there is a confusion in translation of these terms from English into Russian and vice versa.² In order to avoid misunderstanding in forthcoming discussions and prevent unnecessary disputes caused by such misunderstanding, in the beginning it would be desirable to work out mutually agreed definitions.

Terms in English

The U.S. Department of Defense defines “launch under attack” (LUA) as “*execution by the President of Single Integrated Operational Plan forces subsequent to tactical warning of strategic nuclear attack against the United States and prior to first impact.*”³ The definition of LUA given by Walter B. Slocombe (*a responsive attack ordered after confirmation that a major attack is actually in progress*)⁴ has essentially the same meaning.

Walter B. Slocombe defines the term «launch on warning» (LOW) as *an attack ordered on the basis of a determination that an adversary was committed to a nuclear attack on the US, but before that attack had actually started.*⁵ For the sake of brevity this definition is further designated as LOW-S.

One should note that the term LOW is often defined differently in English literature: “*ordering and carrying out U.S. missile launches after early warning sensors indicate an incoming nuclear missile strike but before enemy missiles hit their targets on American soil.*”⁶ We’ll further refer to this definition as LOW-B.

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² In particular, this fact is mentioned in: Alan Phillips and Steven Starr, Eliminate Launch on Warning, Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, September 2004 (see footnote 1);

http://www.wagingpeace.org/articles/2004/09/00_phillips_eliminate-launch-warning.htm

³ <http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/doddict/>

⁴ Walter B. Slocombe, De-Alerting: Diagnoses, Prescriptions, and Side-Effects, Paper prepared for the conference “Re-framing Dealert», June 22-23, 2009, Yverdon, Switzerland

⁵ *Ibid*

⁶ See, for example: Bruce G. Blair, Keeping Presidents in the Nuclear Dark, Bruce Blair’s Nuclear Column, February 16, 2004; <http://www.cdi.org/blair/launch-on-warning.cfm>

As can be seen from these definitions, there is a strict discrimination between LUA and LOW-S. At the same time LOW-B and LUA are almost close. However, there is a barely visible but significant difference between them. The information basis for conducting LUA is wider, than that for LOW-B. The latter is usually limited by technical information from space and ground based sensors of the Early Warning system only, while the former includes other indicators of an incoming nuclear attack as well.⁷

Terms in Russian

The Strategic Rocket Forces define the term “*otvetno-vstrechnyi udar*” (OVU) as:⁸

*a form of a responsive measures of Strategic Nuclear Forces, ordered after analysis of **all reconnaissance** and early warning data, so that transmitting launch orders to a major part of delivery means and launch of these means are conducted before the first impact.*

It is straightforward to see that this definition is similar to LUA, but it differs from LOW-B. The meaning of LOW-S corresponds to the Russian “*uprezhdayuschii udar*” (pre-emptive strike).⁹

Nevertheless, sometimes OVU is also used in Russian literature in the same sense as LOW-B,¹⁰ so that translation from English into Russian and back does not always reflect the author’s point entirely correctly.

Finally, one should note that, unfortunately, in Russian literature LOW and LUA terms are translated differently than those considered above, so this fact creates even more confusion.¹¹

⁷ Proponents of de-alerting usually consider space and ground sensors of the Early Warning system as sole indicators of an incoming attack, and focus on their deficiencies. Other indicators are usually beyond of consideration. At the same time those indicators may play a greater role in making launch decision, especially in a situation, when the Early Warning system is not reliable enough.

⁸ *Kratkii terminologicheskii slovar’ po yadernomu oruzhiyu* (Short Terminological Dictionary on Nuclear Weapons), Edited by N.N. Radayev, the SRF, Moscow, 1996

⁹ “*Uprezhdayuschii udar*” is defined as a strike that was carried out before an adversary conducted active measures. See, for example, *Voyenno-Enciclopedicheskii Slovar’* (Military Encyclopedic Dictionary), Ed. by A.D. Gorkin, vol.2, Ripol Classic, Moscow, 2001, p.685

¹⁰ See, for example: Alexei Arbatov and Vladimir Dvorkin, *Othod ot vzaimnogo yadernogo sderzhivaniya* (Moving Away From Mutual Nuclear Deterrence), In: *Yadernoye Oruzhiye Posle “Holodnoi Voiny”* (Nuclear Weapons After the Cold War), ed. by Alexei Arbatov and Vladimir Dvorkin, Carnegie Moscow Center, M., ROSSPEN, 2006, p. 110; S.M. Rogov, V.I. Yesin and P.S. Zolotaryov, *Mogut li Rossiya i SShA Otkazat’sya Ot Vzaimnogo Yadernogo Ustrasheniya?* (Can Russia and U.S.A. Abandon Mutual Nuclear Frightening?), *Vestnik RAN*, vol. 75, 2005, N 2, pp. 103-116.

¹¹ As an example, a following fragment from Sergei Rogov’s interview can be presented (Vadim Solovyov, *Matryoshki v Boksyorskih Perchatkah* (Nesting Dolls in Boxing Gloves), *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, February 18, 2005): “...Let me give two American terms that correspond to the Russian “*otvetno-vstrechnyi udar*”. People in the States say “launch on warning” and “launch under attack”. The first term means a responsive strike after national means detected a launch of missiles by an adversary, and the second one – after missiles of an adversary began hitting their targets...”