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Dear Pief:

I believe your draft letter to Ivanov and Velikhov is much too strong and at any rate highly premature.

In my very strong opinion, we cannot at this point responsibly make the central allegation of the letter, that is, -- "As the recently revealed facts now indicate, these presentations appear to be deliberate disinformation designed to cover the one source of the incident." It may come to that and someone may have to say it eventually, but the basis for doing so now is simply not there.

What we have are press articles that are disturbing to be sure but also replete with spectacular allegations subsequently corrected. It was alleged at one point, for example, that the head of the Sverdlovsk installation had committed suicide, but then later that he died naturally of cancer.

We also know that Yeltsin speaks impulsively. I have no doubt that what he said is significant and will prove to have important implications, but the details matter. We do not yet have definitive settled details.

It seems to me that the way to proceed is to have Josh Lederberg raise the issue with Ivanov in a polite non-confrontational way. He can explain that the recent reports, though still informal, are too serious to be ignored and too inconsistent with the account we received to be able to proceed with the exchange without understanding how the discrepancies occurred. If that soft, quietly consultative line does not work and if the on-going government to government dialogue on the subject produces detailed evidence of deception in the Academy exchanges, then you and Frank Press will have to become firmly involved.

Again, I strongly believe it is too early for your demarche and that proceeding with it at this point would be harmful to the hopes for a constructive resolution of this episode.

Sincerely,

John