

MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

INFORMATION

September 21, 1981

MEMORANDUM FOR RICHARD V. ALLEN

FROM: DENNIS C. ~~BIAI~~ RICHARD PIPES

SUBJECT: Press Backgrounder on President's Letter
to Brezhnev, 22 September 1981

BACKGROUND

There are three objectives to accomplish during this backgrounder:

- Put the onus for present world tensions and dangers on the Soviets;
- Demonstrate not only our desire to deal constructively with the Soviets, but our determination to protect our vital interests;
- Discredit the notion that there is no dialogue between the US and the Soviet Union;
- Reinforce the perception that there is a coherent unified Administration approach to the Soviets.

Larry Eagleburger is ready to background the letter in New York, but we consider it important that the main briefing be done by you here: It is the President's letter, and it demonstrates White House/State unanimity. We suggest that the letter be backgrounded both here and in New York.

We suggest that you outline the contents of the letter, then address each of these objectives directly.

THE CONTENTS OF THE LETTER

-- The President decided to send a letter at this time to summarize and clarify for President Brezhnev US policy toward the Soviet Union as we head into such international fora as the United Nations General Assembly, the start of negotiations on Theater Nuclear Forces, and the resumption in Madrid of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

-- The letter states clearly that the United States is "vitaly interested in the peaceful resolution of international tensions and in a more constructive and stable relationship with (the Soviet Union)." The letter closes with the same theme: "The United States stands ready to begin the search for a better U.S.-Soviet relationship. We are prepared to discuss with the Soviet Union the full range of issues which divide us."

-- The letter makes clear that we hold the Soviets responsible for the deterioration of our relationship. Furthermore, the letter reaffirms that if the Soviet Union does not exercise the necessary restraint, the response of the United States to protects its interests will be predictable and firm.

-- The letter points out to President Brezhnev the specific Soviet actions which are of most concern both to the United States and its allies: First, "The Soviet Union's pursuit of unilateral advantage..and its repeated resort to the direct and indirect use of force in regional conflicts." Second, the USSR's "unremitting and comprehensive military buildup over the past 15 years..(which) carries disturbing implications of a search for military superiority."

- Next the letter discusses the various arms control negotiations which are in prospect or progress with the Soviet Union: concerning strategic weapons, concerning theater nuclear weapons, and concerning confidence-building measures in Europe. In each of these negotiations the United States is committed to achieving agreements which will enhance security and reduce tensions.

-- The letter goes on to discuss specific "problems which threaten world peace" which are the result of the Soviets' actions.

-- Poland: The President affirms that it is up to the Polish people to deal with their problems themselves.

-- Afghanistan: The President calls for Soviet "readiness to resolve the problem on the basis of prompt withdrawal."

-- Kampuchea: The President calls on the Soviet Union to exert its influence on the Government of Vietnam for withdrawal.

-- Finally, the President calls for a curb on the "escalating campaign of anti-Americanism and disinformation both inside the Soviet Union and abroad,..which only serves to poison the political atmosphere."

ADDITIONAL POINTS

The President's letter has significance both in what it says and in when and how it is said. At least three important conclusions can be drawn from it.

The cause for present world tensions and danger is the Soviet Union

The Soviets have been talking peace, but the President's letter points to actions: It is the Soviets' direct and indirect use of force in regional conflicts, and its 15-year military buildup which are threatening world peace. Soviet troops occupy Afghanistan, Soviet client states occupy Kampuchea and participate in regional conflicts in Latin America and Africa. The Soviet Union has resisted international efforts to resolve these

situations by peaceful means. The Soviet Union has deployed the SS-20 missiles in Europe, in the context of an across-the-board strengthening of its forces. In view of these actions, Soviet words about desiring peace ring hollow.

Demonstrate desire to deal constructively with Soviets, and determination to protect vital interests.

As the President's letter says, on virtually every issue of joint concern, the United States is already negotiating or plans to enter negotiations. However we have found that to the Soviets, negotiations are not an end in themselves. They have rejected the European initiative on Afghanistan, for example, and at the CSCE meeting this past summer in Madrid they both avoided issues and made outlandish proposals such as including the United States and Canada in the geographical definition of Europe. We will, as the President has said, negotiate in good faith with the Soviets. However, as the President has also made clear, we are prepared to safeguard our vital interests in the event negotiations and agreements are not successful.

There is dialogue between the United States and the Soviet Union; the Soviets simply do not like what they are hearing.

This message from the President marks the third letter he has sent to President Brezhnev, covering the full range of topics of joint concern. In addition, the last time we counted them up, in July of this year, there had been a total of 52 US-Soviet exchanges for the first five months of this administration, an average of over 10 per month. Of these, half took place at the level of ambassador/charge or above. The U.S. took the initiative in 36 of the bilateral exchanges in this period. There is simply no basis for the assertion that we are not talking with the Soviet Union. What is true is that the Soviets do not like what they are being told. We are refusing to accept a double standard in international behavior: U.S. judged by one set of standards and the Soviets by another.

There is a unified Administration approach to the Soviets.

This letter was written by the President to establish at the head-of-state level the context for Secretary Haig's meeting with Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko tomorrow. The subjects discussed in the letter, and the subjects to be raised by Secretary Haig tomorrow, were the result of close coordination within the US national security establishment. They reflect a unified approach by this Administration to the Soviet Union, an approach which enjoys the full support of the President and all those who work for him.

Knowing the White House press corps, we would venture that most of the questions will concern bureaucratic roles and personalities: e.g., "Did the President handwrite this letter?" "Did State or the NSC draft this letter?" "Is this letter part of the

propaganda offensive?" We suggest that you attempt to return the focus to the substance of the letter and to emphasize the contrast between Soviet conduct and words.

You may also be asked why we are not releasing the full text of the letter, but backgrounding it. The answer is that the release of diplomatic communications is not usual, but we consider it important for Western publics to know the existence and general themes of the letter.

We will attend the briefing for any further support you may need.

Tab I Full text of letter
Tab II Haig-Gromyko talks memo

~~SECRET~~

10

DEAR PRESIDENT BREZHNEV:

AS WE BEGIN THE FALL SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND APPROACH THE MEETINGS BETWEEN OUR FOREIGN MINISTERS, I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE USEFUL FOR ME TO DESCRIBE TO YOU SOME OF MY THOUGHTS ON THE FUTURE DIRECTION OF U.S.-SOVIET RELATIONS.

LET ME SAY AT THE OUTSET THAT THE UNITED STATES IS VITALLY INTERESTED IN THE PEACEFUL RESOLUTION OF INTERNATIONAL TENSIONS AND IN A MORE CONSTRUCTIVE AND STABLE RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR COUNTRY. WE HAVE REPEATEDLY DEMONSTRATED OUR WILLINGNESS TO SETTLE DISAGREEMENTS BY NEGOTIATIONS AND TO OBSERVE SCRUPULOUSLY OUR INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS.

I BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT A GREAT DEAL OF THE PRESENT TENSION IN THE WORLD IS DUE TO ACTIONS BY THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT. AS WE AND OUR ALLIES HAVE REPEATEDLY STATED, TWO ASPECTS OF SOVIET BEHAVIOR ARE OF PARTICULAR CONCERN TO US:

-- FIRST, THE SOVIET UNION'S PURSUIT OF UNILATERAL ADVANTAGE IN VARIOUS PARTS OF THE GLOBE AND ITS REPEATED RESORT TO THE DIRECT AND INDIRECT USE OF FORCE IN REGIONAL CONFLICTS. THE ROLE OF CUBA IN AFRICA AND LATIN AMERICA IS PARTICULARLY DISTURBING AND UNACCEPTABLE TO US.

-- SECOND, THE USSR'S UNREMITTING AND COMPREHENSIVE MILITARY BUILDUP OVER THE PAST 15 YEARS, A BUILDUP WHICH IN OUR VIEW FAR EXCEEDS PURELY DEFENSIVE REQUIREMENTS AND CARRIES DISTURBING IMPLICATIONS OF A SEARCH FOR MILITARY SUPERIORITY.

DESPITE THESE TRENDS, WE ARE COMMITTED TO A DIALOGUE WITH THE SOVIET UNION. WE ARE DEEPLY CONCERNED OVER THE THREAT TO MANKIND IN THE AGE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS. I HAVE STATED PUBLICLY THAT THE UNITED STATES IS READY TO ENGAGE IN DISCUSSIONS WITH THE USSR THAT WOULD LEAD TO GENUINE ARMS REDUCTIONS. THE EXISTING STOCKPILES OF THESE WEAPONS AND ONGOING PROGRAMS ARE SUCH THAT ONLY A SERIOUS EFFORT AT ARMS REDUCTIONS WOULD CONTRIBUTE TO THE OBJECTIVE WHICH WE BOTH SHARE, NAMELY, LIFTING THE THREAT OF NUCLEAR ANNIHILATION WHICH HANGS OVER MANKIND.

DECLASSIFIED / RELEASED

NLS M1473 #1

~~SECRET~~ BY AM, NARS, DATE 12/9/02

~~SECRET~~

WHILE THE UNITED STATES IS COMMITTED TO A STABLE AND PEACEFUL WORLD, IT WILL NEVER ACCEPT A POSITION OF STRATEGIC DISADVANTAGE. BECAUSE THE SOVIET UNION HAS, OVER THE PAST YEARS, EMBARKED ON A MAJOR PROGRAM TO IMPROVE ITS STRATEGIC FORCES, THE UNITED STATES MUST ALSO UPGRADE ITS FORCES. WE HAVE NO DESIRE TO TAX OUR SOCIETIES WITH A COSTLY, BURDENSOME, AND DANGEROUS BUILD-UP OF ARMAMENTS. THE UNITED STATES, HOWEVER, WILL INVEST WHATEVER IS NEEDED TO MAINTAIN A SECURE STRATEGIC POSTURE.

THE MEETINGS THIS MONTH BETWEEN OUR FOREIGN MINISTERS WILL, I ASSUME, SET THE TIME AND PLACE FOR NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES ON WHAT WE TERM "THEATER NUCLEAR FORCES." WE ARE DEEPLY COMMITTED TO ACHIEVING A MILITARY BALANCE IN THIS AREA -- A BALANCE WHICH HAS BEEN UPSET BY THE UNPRECEDENTED BUILDUP OF MILITARY FORCES BY YOUR COUNTRY IN RECENT YEARS, ESPECIALLY THE DEPLOYMENT OF THE SS-20 MISSILES. FURTHERMORE, AS WE HAVE STATED AT THE MADRID MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE, WE ARE PREPARED TO PARTICIPATE IN NEGOTIATIONS TO FASHION A COHERENT SYSTEM OF COMMITMENTS ON EUROPEAN SECURITY THAT ARE VERIFIABLE AND MILITARILY SIGNIFICANT.

WITH OUR ALLIES AND OTHER CONCERNED NATIONS, THE UNITED STATES IS WILLING TO PURSUE NEGOTIATED SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEMS THAT THREATEN WORLD PEACE, INCLUDING THE PRESENCE OF OCCUPATION FORCES IN AFGHANISTAN AND KAMPUCHEA. SOVIET READINESS TO RESOLVE THE AFGHANISTAN PROBLEM ON THE BASIS OF A PROMPT WITHDRAWAL WOULD GO FAR TOWARD RESTORING THE INTERNATIONAL CONFIDENCE AND TRUST NECESSARY FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF EAST-WEST RELATIONS. THE VIETNAMESE INVASION AND OCCUPATION OF KAMPUCHEA HAS EARNED WIDESPREAD CONDEMNATION FROM THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AS A BREACH OF ACCEPTED NORMS OF CONDUCT AND A THREAT TO PEACE. I CALL ON YOUR GOVERNMENT TO EXERT ITS INFLUENCE OVER THE GOVERNMENT OF VIETNAM TO WITHDRAW ITS TROOPS FROM KAMPUCHEA.

IN SUM, THE UNITED STATES IS MORE INTERESTED IN ACTIONS WHICH FURTHER THE CAUSE OF WORLD PEACE THAN IN WORDS. WE ARE FULLY COMMITTED TO SOLVING OUTSTANDING DIFFERENCES BY PEACEFUL MEANS, BUT WE ARE NOT WILLING TO ACCEPT DOUBLE STANDARDS OF INTERNATIONAL BEHAVIOR.

~~SECRET~~

18

~~SECRET~~

WORDS AND PUBLIC STATEMENTS ARE, HOWEVER, IMPORTANT. A MAJOR CONTRIBUTION TO THE REDUCTION OF WORLD TENSIONS WOULD BE FOR YOUR COUNTRY TO CURB THE ESCALATING CAMPAIGN OF ANTI-AMERICANISM AND DISINFORMATION BOTH INSIDE THE SOVIET UNION AND ABROAD, A CAMPAIGN WHICH ONLY SERVES TO POISON THE POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE.

MR. PRESIDENT, MY COUNTRY STANDS READY TO BEGIN THE SEARCH FOR A BETTER U.S.-SOVIET RELATIONSHIP. WE ARE PREPARED TO DISCUSS WITH THE SOVIET UNION THE FULL RANGE OF ISSUES WHICH DIVIDE US, TO SEEK SIGNIFICANT, VERIFIABLE REDUCTIONS IN NUCLEAR WEAPONS, TO EXPAND TRADE, AND TO INCREASE CONTACTS AT ALL LEVELS OF OUR SOCIETIES. I AM HOPEFUL THAT THE MEETINGS BETWEEN SECRETARY OF STATE HAIG AND FOREIGN MINISTER GROMYKO WILL START A PROCESS LEADING TOWARD SUCH A RELATIONSHIP.

FOR SUCH A PROCESS TO BEAR FRUIT, YOUR COUNTRY MUST UNDERSTAND THE NEED FOR GREATER RESTRAINT IN THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA. AT THE SAME TIME, LET ME ADD THAT THE UNITED STATES IS FULLY PREPARED TO TAKE YOUR INTERESTS INTO ACCOUNT, IF YOU ARE PREPARED TO DO THE SAME WITH OURS. IF WE CAN SUCCEED IN ESTABLISHING A FRAMEWORK OF MUTUAL RESPECT FOR EACH OTHER'S INTERESTS AND MUTUAL RESTRAINT IN THE RESOLUTION OF INTERNATIONAL CRISES, I THINK WE WILL HAVE CREATED A MUCH MORE SOLID AND ENDURING BASIS FOR U.S.-SOVIET RELATIONS THAN WE HAVE EVER HAD BEFORE.

END TEXT.


~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

THE SECRETARY OF STATE
WASHINGTON

September 18, 1981

MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Alexander M. Haig, Jr. 

SUBJECT: My Forthcoming Meetings with Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko

As you know, I will be meeting with Gromyko in New York September 23 and 28, during his visit for the fall session of the U.N. General Assembly.

Objectives and Basic Approach

I see those talks as a potential contribution to your objective of putting the US-Soviet relationship on a sounder footing by linking improved bilateral relations with increased Soviet restraint. I will put this right up front in an initial one-on-one session before the Delegations convene: I would like in that session to convey on your behalf that we want to work within a long-term perspective based on respect for each other's vital interests, but that this will frankly require new Soviet realism, together with a recognition that the world power balance cannot be changed by violence and force without calling forth a response in kind.

Gromyko will of course resist, and any results will be neither large nor immediate, but we may be able to start a process headed in the right direction. My main purpose will be to drive home to him that our whole approach to East-West policy has fundamentally and durably changed: from now on, the Soviet military build-up and lack of international restraint will be met with an appropriate U.S. military and political response. But I also want to convey to Gromyko that there is something for the Soviets in a more moderate course.

Gromyko is an accurate reporter, and I will be making a sober presentation intended to show the Politburo that we have adopted our new course deliberately and will pursue it deliberately; that there are positive benefits if they adjust to it responsibly; and that the process of serious dialogue we

~~SECRET~~

RDS-3 9/16/11

F99-051 #22
CAS 7/24/00

7

~~SECRET~~

-2-

are ready for can produce an altogether more solid and durable basis for conducting business and living together than the two superpowers have ever had before.

Focus on Interventionism

I plan to deliver this message by hitting hard on Soviet and proxy interventionism in crisis and potential crisis areas: Southeast Asia, Afghanistan, Southern Africa and Central American/the Caribbean. I will also highlight Poland and Iran as two countries where future Soviet intervention would have disastrous effects. In this private meeting, the main accent will be on the Cuban military build-up and Cuban activities abroad. I intend to make clear to Gromyko that we are prepared for improvement in US-Soviet relations, but that progress depends on Soviet willingness to take our concerns into account. To reinforce this argument, I plan to raise the possibility of another round of talks with him some months hence, implicitly conditional on Moscow's responsiveness to our calls for restraint.

TNF Negotiations

The second main purpose of the meetings is to reach formal agreement on the time and place for beginning TNF negotiations later this year, in keeping with your commitment, and to initiate substantive dialogue on TNF issues. I will be making a strong pitch for Soviet cooperation in international efforts to follow up on our evidence of toxin use in Southeast Asia, and warn him of the impact on arms control prospects. But getting TNF negotiations started is vital to us, and it is an objective for the first meeting. The Soviets have been sticky in discussions of the joint statement, and the topic may spill over into the second. We should get the public statement we want that talks will begin on November 30 in Geneva, but we will also be in a position to explain to our friends that it is the Soviets, rather than us, who have been holding back.

Possible Outcomes

I expect stiff rebuttals rather than explicit concessions on geopolitical issues from Gromyko. But it is important to make our points again at the first Ministerial-level meeting with the Soviets since you were elected, and to test Soviet responsiveness at that level. The evidence will probably come back to us only over the next several months.

It is also important to keep our dialogue before the public. This is the main purpose of my suggesting another meeting with Gromyko, and I plan to add one or two bilateral

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

-3-

elements to the same end. I will raise a number of outstanding human rights cases and have Ambassador-designate Art Hartman turn over another full list of such cases. I will also raise the possibility of opening consulates in Kiev, the heart of the Ukraine, and in New York. Again, results are less important than making the point to the public that we are in fact communicating.

In addition, I am trying to reach interagency agreement on two economic issues: approval of the \$300 million International Harvester deal; and closing of the Soviets' Kama Purchasing Commission in the U.S. Informing Gromyko of these two steps -- one positive, one negative -- will demonstrate that we have control over the economic relationship.

Gromyko may hold to a total hard line in these meetings, and we may well emerge with nothing more than agreement to begin TNF and meet again at the foreign minister level. Accordingly, we are keeping public and Allied expectations low. Such a result, however, would not be a disaster: on the contrary, it would keep the onus for delay and lack of good will on the Soviets, where it belongs.

~~SECRET~~