

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

May 7, 1982

Dear Mr. President:

I am writing to address a question of critical importance to our two countries and to the world -- negotiations to reduce the threat of nuclear war and the burden of nuclear armaments. It is entirely appropriate that this question has been one of the central issues in the U.S.-Soviet relationship throughout the post-war period. Indeed, the awesome destructive power of nuclear weapons imposes on our two countries both the practical necessity and the moral imperative to do everything in our power to reduce and even eliminate the possibility of their use in war. This has been the thrust of my country's approach to nuclear arms control negotiations over the past thirty-five years.

As we look back over almost three decades of U.S.-Soviet negotiations on nuclear arms control, we can identify a number of notable achievements, such as the Limited Test Ban Treaty, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and the ABM Treaty. These agreements have laid the basis for new efforts in the nuclear arms control process. We can take considerable inspiration from the statesmanship of leaders in both countries, which made these agreements possible. At the same time, we must also recognize that certain international events, such as the invasions of Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan, have undermined prospects for reductions of nuclear arms.

We now stand at another historic juncture in the effort to reduce the threat of nuclear war and the burden of nuclear armaments. One of the highest priorities of my Administration has been to undertake a thorough review of these issues in order

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to ensure that our approach to the problem of strategic arms reductions is fair, equitable, and understandable to the American people. We have proceeded deliberately to avoid the mistakes of the past. We are now prepared to move forward. Therefore, I propose that U.S.-Soviet negotiations on reductions of nuclear arms begin in Geneva by the end of June, and that we immediately begin exchanges in diplomatic channels to fix an exact date.

Our objective in the negotiations will be substantially to reduce the numbers and destructive potential of strategic nuclear weapons, in the framework of equal and verifiable limitations on both sides. As you know, it is my view that our previous efforts at limiting strategic offensive arms did not adequately meet the standards of reductions, equality, and verifiability. I am particularly concerned by the failure of previous agreements sufficiently to limit the deployment of those systems that, because of their capability to destroy the other side's land-based systems, heighten the risk of nuclear war. An important task in START must be to address more effectively the problem of these destabilizing systems.

In pointing out these deficiencies, I do not mean to suggest that there is nothing positive that can be learned from previous SALT agreements. It does mean, however, that we must go well beyond those efforts in START. If we set our sights too low, we will fail to make a meaningful contribution to the goals of enhancing strategic stability and reducing the risk of nuclear war. In such circumstances, it will be difficult to obtain the support of the American people and Congress for a new strategic arms agreement. We owe it to both our peoples, and to the World at large, to do better.

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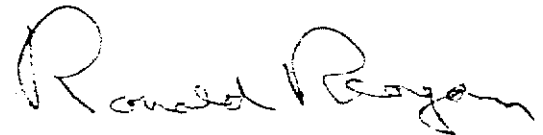
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I believe that the goals set forth above provide a positive and constructive basis for progress in the forthcoming negotiations. At the same time, the lessons of the past teach us that the arms control process cannot be insulated from the overall state of relations between our two countries and the international atmosphere in general. This is a reality of political life.

Our two countries have begun a dialogue on a number of sensitive regional problems. What is now needed, if we are to move toward resolution of these problems, is concrete action on the part of the Soviet Union indicating that it is prepared to exercise restraint. Only in this way can an environment conducive to progress on strategic arms reductions be created and sustained.

In closing, I would like to reiterate that my Administration has no higher priority than reducing the threat of war. I will personally spare no effort to achieve this objective, and I hope that I can count on a similar personal commitment from you. Nothing less will meet the obligations imposed upon us by the responsibilities of leadership in the nuclear age.

Sincerely,



His Excellency
Leonid Ilich Brezhnev
President of the Presidium of the
Supreme Soviet of the Union of
Soviet Socialist Republics
Moscow

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