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THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

April 16, 1984

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I have carefully reviewed your letter of March 19, together with the views expressed by Foreign Minister Gromyko and Ambassador Dobrynin in recent discussions with Ambassador Hartman and Secretary Shultz. I welcome the fact that you too recognize the value of direct exchanges of views on the important issues in U.S.-Soviet relations.

First of all, I would like to reiterate my congratulations upon your assumption of the new and responsible position of Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet. I look forward to productive working relations with you in your new capacity, to the mutual benefit of our peoples.

In looking at the present state of affairs between our two countries, I believe it will be useful to reflect upon our differing perceptions of one another. You have expressed concern about U.S. actions and military programs which you see as threatening to the Soviet Union. I fully appreciate the priority you attach to the security of the Soviet state, particularly in light of the enormous costs shouldered by your people in helping to defeat Nazi Germany, but I cannot understand why our programs can be considered threatening. On the contrary, in our view there are many Soviet actions and military programs which we and our Allies consider to be threatening to our own vital security interests.

For example, the Soviet Union continues to ship massive quantities of arms to sensitive areas near our borders, and appears bent on promoting instability rather than peaceful change in many areas of the developing world. Your country's large-scale and sustained use of force in Afghanistan,

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in close proximity to one of our closest friends, Pakistan, makes less reassuring your government's frequent avowals of peaceful intent.

Perhaps of greatest concern to us is the enormous increase in recent years in Soviet nuclear forces targeted against the United States and our Allies. This build-up may initially have been designed to attain parity with the United States, yet at some point in the last decade that goal was achieved; we have good reason to question, therefore, why the growth in Soviet nuclear forces has nonetheless continued unabated.

Take strategic offensive forces as an example. Since 1970, the Soviet Union has deployed three new types of intercontinental ballistic missiles, five new types of submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and at least thirteen modernized versions of existing missiles. As you well know, the USSR is now flight-testing two new ICBMs, plus another new type of SLBM. As we see it, you claim to be responding to U.S. programs, yet your new missiles have been deployed years ahead of their U.S. counterparts, not to mention in greater numbers.

In the area of ballistic missile defense, your country has been engaged for many years in a research effort similar to that recently initiated in the United States and, indeed, is the only nation to deploy an active anti-ballistic missile system; moreover, your deployment of a network of advanced radars gives us legitimate grounds to question whether the USSR is laying the basis for a nationwide ABM defense of the USSR. And there are, of course, other aspects of existing arms control agreements where the concerns we have raised with you have not been alleviated.

As you know, your country's deployment of the SS-20 has been of especially grave concern both to the United States and our Allies. Since NATO's December 1979 decision, when your country asserted that a "balance" existed in intermediate-range nuclear forces, the Soviet Union has deployed 238 additional SS-20's with over 700 additional warheads. These missiles constitute a far greater threat to the security of the western alliance --

both in quantitative and qualitative terms -- than previous Soviet missiles, which had fewer warheads and lower accuracy.

These are some of the realities of the international situation as we see it. I recognize that neither of us will be able to persuade the other as to who is to blame for the present poor state of our relations. Nor would it be productive for the two of us to engage in a lengthy debate on this subject. I doubt, however, that we can make progress in reducing the tensions between our countries, or in reducing the high levels of armaments, if either of us is unwilling to take into account the concerns of the other.

As for myself, I am prepared to consider your concerns seriously, even when I have difficulty understanding why they are held. I am willing to explore possible ways to alleviate them. But solutions will elude us if you are unable to approach our discussions in the same spirit, or if you demand concessions as an entry fee for the discussions themselves.

As for the negotiations now underway, I believe the Stockholm conference provides an opportunity for both our countries to take steps to reduce some of the apprehensions about each other's military activities. I was encouraged by your expression of hope for positive results at Stockholm and your support for measures aimed at building confidence between East and West. As you know, we and our Allies have presented a package of specific measures which, if implemented, could substantially reduce the dangers of misunderstanding and miscalculation in Europe.

If the Soviet Union is prepared to negotiate seriously on such concrete confidence-building measures, the United States will be prepared to discuss the question of reciprocal assurances against the use of force and the context in which such an agreement can be reached. You have asked for a "concrete signal" in the area of arms control, and your representatives have specified that U.S. willingness to agree on non-use of force would be considered such a signal. In this connection let me add that I am pleased that our

Ambassadors to the Stockholm conference have agreed to get together soon. This will provide an opportunity to discuss an arrangement that would meet both countries' concerns.

There are many other arms control topics where we hope to move forward in the weeks and months ahead. As I said in my previous letter, the Western countries plan to present new proposals at the Vienna negotiations which will provide a solid basis for progress on the related issues of data and verification. In the Conference on Disarmament, the Vice President will table a draft treaty to ban chemical weapons on April 18. In addition to this step in the multilateral forum, perhaps the time has come when bilateral consultations on the issue could advance the prospects for an effective and verifiable ban.

While the foregoing issues are important, and while there may be other arms control areas -- including those raised in your letter -- where steps forward could be made, we have always considered the central element of our dialogue on arms control to be the limitation and reduction of nuclear weapons. The United States has advanced proposals that would substantially reduce the most threatening nuclear weapons systems on both sides. We have demonstrated considerable flexibility in an effort to respond to the concerns your negotiators have expressed. I must state frankly that I am disappointed that the Soviet Union has not yet shown such flexibility, or taken advantage of the opportunity for private discussions on ways to make progress in the START and INF negotiations.

I am well aware of your views regarding the impasse in these negotiations. You are, I am sure, equally aware of the fact that we and our Allies do not agree with your analysis of the balance in intermediate-range missiles or your assessment of the "obstacles" that supposedly stand in the way of further negotiations. For our part, we are prepared to consider any equitable outcome, and to halt, reverse or eliminate entirely our deployments of Pershing and cruise missiles in the context of an agreement between the two sides.

Experience has shown that neither side can hope to impose its view of the situation on the other as a precondition for negotiations. Rather, what is needed is for our representatives to sit down and devise a formula for nuclear arms reductions that is consistent with the security interests of both our nations. So let us focus on the concrete task of reaching agreements in this spirit, rather than wasting our energies debating further the meaning of "equality and equal security."

I would like to reaffirm once again the readiness of the United States to explore with the Soviet Union possible ways for moving forward on the nuclear arms negotiations. As I have said previously, we have a number of specific ideas to present for overcoming some of the fundamental differences that have divided us in the negotiations. We are prepared to discuss these in private diplomatic channels or between our respective negotiators. If the Soviet side is prepared to match U.S. flexibility, I would hope that, by this means, the way could be cleared to resumption of formal talks on nuclear arms reductions. I would welcome any concrete suggestions you might have on how to proceed.

I am pleased that we agree on the importance of exchanges of views on regional problems. As you state, such exchanges should be directed toward the peaceful settlement of local disputes and the strengthening of peace. Over the past three years, the United States has taken the initiative to discuss a number of regional problems in precisely this spirit. For example, we have initiated formal consultations with your country's experts on Afghanistan and southern Africa. While such exchanges have not been as fruitful as we had hoped, I would like to pursue them, with the objective of establishing a more productive dialogue on regional issues. I believe it would be useful for our experts to hold more detailed discussions of developments in southern Africa -- as Foreign Minister Gromyko has suggested -- because there are promising signs of progress toward a diplomatic settlement. Such a settlement would serve the interests of the states in the area, and of all those who value stability and prosperity there.

The Middle East and Persian Gulf is another area where a further exchange of views would be helpful. In this regard, I was pleased to read of your personal commitment to seeking an end to the Iran/Iraq conflict and to avoiding any actions which might lead the parties to prolong or expand it. I wish to assure you that the United States shares these objectives, and that we will continue making every effort to achieve them.

To improve mutual understanding on this issue, Secretary Shultz has on several recent occasions voiced to Ambassador Dobrynin our concerns about any expansion of the war to other areas of the Persian Gulf. In doing so, we have tried to communicate the importance we attach to maintaining freedom of navigation there for the ships of all nations. We believe our interest in supporting this principle of international law serves all and threatens none, and we regret the misrepresentations of our position which have appeared in the official Soviet news media. Such commentaries cannot serve to calm tensions in the area.

With respect to our bilateral relations, I think we agree that we should seek to enlarge the areas of mutually beneficial cooperation and inject real content into our bilateral agreements. My representatives will continue to present specific proposals in this regard, and I hope that the Soviet side will not put any artificial barriers in the way of progress.

I must add that I am disappointed that you did not respond to the appeal in my March 6 letter concerning humanitarian issues. Steps in this area could have a substantial impact on other aspects of our relations, and I hope that you will continue to give them serious consideration.

To conclude, let me state once again that the United States is ready for a turning point in our relations with the Soviet Union. We have made a concerted effort to put content into our dialogue. We have a number of specific ideas to explore with you on questions of vital importance to both our peoples. We intend to continue our efforts in this direction. Real progress, however, will

require similar efforts on the part of the Soviet Union.

I look forward to receiving your comments on the thoughts I have expressed.

Sincerely,

Ronald Reagan

P.S. Mr. Chairman

In thinking through this letter, I have reflected at some length on the tragedy & scale of Soviet losses in warfare through the ages. Surely those losses which are beyond description, must affect your thinking today. I want you to know that neither I nor the American people hold any offensive intentions toward you or the Soviet people. The truth of that statement is underwritten by the history of our restraint at a time when our virtual monopoly on strategic power provided the means for expansion had we so chosen. We did not then nor shall we now. Our common & urgent purpose must be the translation of this reality into a lasting

His Excellency  
Konstantin Ustinovich Chernenko  
Chairman, Presidium of the Supreme  
Soviet of the Union of Soviet  
Socialist Republics  
Moscow

reduction of tensions  
between us. I pledge  
to you my profound  
commitment to that  
goal.