

DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
DIVISION OF LANGUAGE SERVICES

(TRANSLATION)

LS NO. 118545  
DZ/GT/WH/LB  
Russian

His Excellency  
Ronald W. Reagan  
President of the United States  
Washington, D.C.  
The White House

Dear Mr. President:

I consider your letter important and also value the form you used in writing to me.

I say this to you because I see the desire to continue and to strengthen what we achieved in Geneva. I am glad that we began there -- both in substance and in spirit -- a direct and frank discussion. I attach special significance to the fact that we have been able to overcome the serious psychological barrier which for a long time has hindered a dialogue worthy of the leaders of the USSR and USA.

I have the feeling that now you and I can set formalities aside and can get down to the heart of the matter -- establishing a specific topical agenda for discussion over the next few years on the basis of our understanding, and straightening out Soviet-American relations. I visualize this task very concretely: we have to broaden areas of agreement, strengthen the elements of responsibility in our policy, and make the appropriate practical decisions. In my opinion the ideal situation would be one in which you and I would give impetus to a constant forward movement. I agree with what you said: in the final analysis no one besides us can do this.

The first thing we should do is to take upon ourselves the task of undoing the knot which has been tied around the issues of nuclear and space weapons. I was encouraged by the fact that you, Mr. President, also consider that this is of key significance.

I think you understood from what I told you in Geneva that our decisive opposition to the development of space-strike weapons is dictated by the fact that weapons of this class which, due to their specific nature, possess the capability of being used both for defensive and offensive aims, represent in the final analysis an extremely dangerous build-up of offensive potential, with all the consequences inevitably ensuing therefrom from the point of view of further escalating the arms race.

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You say, Mr. President, that the U.S. has no intention of using the SDI program to obtain military superiority.

I do not doubt that you personally may really have no such intentions. But you must agree that the leadership of one side has to evaluate the actions of the other in the area of developing new types of weapons, not in accordance with intentions, but in accordance with the potential capabilities which may be attained as a result of the development of these weapons.

Examining the SDI program from this perspective, the Soviet leadership comes to the same conclusion every time: given the realities of the current situation, only a country which is preparing for a first (disarming) strike needs a "space shield"; a country which does not base its actions on such a concept should have no need for such a weapons system.

After all, space-strike weapons are all-purpose weapons. The space-strike weapons that are being created in the U.S. are kinetic energy weapons and also long-range, directed energy systems (with a range of several thousand miles and great destructive power). As our experts and scientists and yours confirm, those weapons are capable of destroying in space, as well as from space, within a very short time, in great quantities and selectively, objects which are thousands of miles away. I stress -- thousands of miles away.

For example, how should we regard the space weapons of a country which have the capability of destroying another country's centers for controlling space objects and of destroying its space devices for monitoring, navigation, communication etc. within very short time intervals measured in minutes? Essentially, these weapons can only be intended for "blinding" the other side, catching it unprepared and depriving it of the possibility of countering a nuclear strike. Moreover, if these weapons are developed, the process of perfecting them and giving them even better combat characteristics will begin immediately. Such is the course of development of all weaponry.

How then, Mr. President, should the Soviet Union act in such a situation? I would like to repeat what I already told you in Geneva. The USSR cannot simply reduce and will not reduce nuclear weapons to the detriment of its security, when the SDI program is being implemented in the U.S. Whether we like it or not, we will be forced to develop and improve our strategic nuclear forces and increase their capability of neutralizing the U.S. "space shield." At the same time, we would also have to develop our own space weapons inter alia for the purpose of

a territorial ABM defense. Probably, the U.S. would in turn then take some other additional steps. As a result, we will not get out of the vicious cycle of measures and countermeasures, out of the whirlpool of an ever-increasing arms race. The consequence of such competition for our peoples and for all of mankind is unpredictable.

I am convinced that the only sensible way out is not to engage in this at all. From every point of view the correct path for our countries is negotiation on the prevention of an arms race in space and its cessation on earth. And we need to come to agreement on the basis of equal and mutually acceptable conditions.

You and I agreed to accelerate the negotiations. I took satisfaction in hearing you say that the U.S. would not "develop space-based offensive weapons."

As I see it, some kind of common basis is emerging between you and me for a very significant part of the problem of preventing an arms race in space. Let us have our representatives at the negotiations proceed on this basis to begin working out specific measures to prevent the development of offensive space weapons, i.e., all space-based weapons which can destroy targets in space and from space.

In the spirit of the frankness in which we are talking, I would like to say that this issue has now become very acute: either events will determine policy or we will determine policy. In order not to be governed by events, it is especially important once again to conduct a profound analysis of all aspects of the objective interrelationship between offensive and defensive weapons and to hear each other out on this issue. However, it seems to me that there will be little meaning to such discussions if in tandem with them weapons of war start coming out of the doors of our laboratories, weapons whose influence on strategic stability we must not now miscalculate. Common sense dictates that until we determine together those consequences, we must not permit anything to go beyond the walls of the laboratory. We are prepared to negotiate to reach agreement on this matter as well.

It appears to me this is a practical way to implement the joint accord you and I confirmed in Geneva concerning the inadmissibility of an arms race in space and concerning the ultimate elimination of nuclear arms.

In line with such an approach it would also make sense at the Geneva negotiations to discuss the issue of eliminating the danger of a first (disarming) nuclear strike. I would like to

state to you again very definitely: we are not making a bid for a first nuclear strike, we are not preparing our nuclear forces for one.

I cannot agree with the way you formulate the issue of first strike nuclear forces. This issue, of course, is not merely one of ICBM warheads. For example, there is no difference between U.S. ballistic missile warheads on "Trident" submarines and warheads on modern Soviet land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles as far as their kill capability is concerned, i.e. in terms of such indices as accuracy, power and range. And if one considers this issue from the point of view of warning time, then, for a significant portion of submarine missiles, where the U.S. has a three-fold advantage in warheads, the warning time is significantly shorter.

And can we view the "Pershing II" missiles deployed in Europe with their high accuracy and short flight time to targets on USSR territory as anything other than first-strike weapons?

Please forgive me for dealing with technical details in a personal letter like this. But these are vitally important realities, and we simply cannot get around them.

Believe me, Mr. President, we have a genuine and truly serious concern about U.S. nuclear systems. You talk about mutual concerns. This matter can be resolved only through considering and counting the sum total of the respective nuclear systems of both countries. Let our delegations discuss this matter as well.

Mr. President, I would like to give you my brief reaction to what you said concerning regional conflicts. At the time when we touched on these issues in Geneva, I stressed that it is most important to view things realistically, to see the world as it is. If we recognize the fact that independent states exist and function in the international arena, then we also have to acknowledge their sovereign right to have relations with whomever they wish and the right to ask for assistance, including military assistance.

Both you and we offer such assistance. Why apply a double standard and assert that Soviet assistance is a source of tension and U.S. assistance is beneficial? It would be better for us to be guided by objective criteria in this matter. The Soviet Union is assisting legitimate governments which come to us because they have been and are being subjected to outside military interference.

And, as the facts indicate, the U.S. incites actions against governments and supports and supplies weapons to groups which are inimical to society and which are, in essence, terrorists. Looking at things objectively, it is such actions and outside interference that create regional tension and conflict. If such actions cease, I am convinced tensions will decrease and the prospects for political settlements will become much better and more realistic.

Unfortunately, at present, developments are proceeding in a different direction. Take, for example, the unprecedented pressure and threats which the government of Nicaragua is being subjected to - a legitimate government brought to power through free elections.

I will be frank: what the United States has done recently causes concern. It seems that there is a tilt in the direction of further exacerbation of regional problems. Such an approach does not make it easier to find a common language and makes the search for political solutions more difficult.

With regard to Afghanistan, one gets the impression that the U.S. side intentionally fails to notice the "open door" leading to a political settlement. Now there is even a working formula for such a settlement. It is important not to hinder the negotiations in progress, but to help them along. In that event a fair settlement will definitely be found.

Mr. President, I would like to have you take my letter as another one of our "fireside talks." I would truly like to preserve not only the spirit of our Geneva meetings, but also to go further in developing our dialogue. I view our correspondence as a very important channel for preparing for our meeting in Washington.

The new year will be upon us very soon, and I would like to send you and your wife our very best wishes.

Sincerely,

M. Gorbachev

Moscow, December 24, 1985



F99-051 #385

United States Department of State

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Washington, D.C. 20520

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MEMORANDUM FOR ADMIRAL JOHN M. POINDEXTER  
THE WHITE HOUSE

SUBJECT: Gorbachev's Letter of December 24

Tone: Informal, Upbeat

Soviet General Secretary Gorbachev has sent a lengthy, handwritten response to the letter sent by the President after the Geneva summit. The fact that the President wrote his letter in longhand obviously made an impression. Gorbachev not only answered in kind, but with an unusual lack of formality. In several places, for example, Gorbachev lines out words or inserts new phrases. The style is very much his own -- plain and direct. He asks the President to view his letter as "another of our 'fire side chats'", and describes the exchange of letters between the two leaders as the most important channel in preparing for the 1986 summit.

Gorbachev stresses his appreciation that he and the President "have begun -- both in fact and in spirit -- a direct and frank dialogue". He says it is especially significant that "we have been able to overcome the serious psychological barriers" to dialogue between American and Soviet leaders. He states that "we can set a specific agenda for discussing in the upcoming years how to set straight Soviet-American relations."

Substance: Uncompromising

Gorbachev, however, is characteristically unyielding on substance, whether arms control or regional issues. On the former, he basically reaffirms current Soviet positions, dwelling, as in Geneva, on SDI. On the latter, he attacks U.S. support for resistance movements in various regions of the world, while reaffirming Moscow's right to assist governments which request its aid.

SDI: Common Ground, Soviet-Style

Gorbachev's extensive treatment of SDI is most interesting for his suggestion that the President's earlier assurances that the U.S. will not develop "offensive space-based weapons" might serve as "common ground" for discussion in Geneva. His definition of such weapons -- all space-based weapons capable of destroying targets in space or from space -- would have the practical effect of barring many potentially promising SDI technologies. But his expression of willingness to discuss the offense-defense relationship in detail appears to take the Soviet position beyond its previous refusal of U.S. proposals for a serious dialogue in this area.

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Gorbachev goes to some lengths to avoid accusing the President personally of hostile intentions against the Soviet Union. He states that he is "sure (the President) personally could not have" any intention of developing space-based weapons for offensive purposes. But he makes clear he must be guided by U.S. capabilities rather than intentions, and he goes into some detail to demonstrate the validity of Soviet concerns, referring, for example, to the potential of space-based weapons by one side to blind the other by knocking out its reconnaissance and communication satellites. Gorbachev warns that "realization of the SDI program" would force the Soviet Union both to "perfect" its offensive nuclear forces and to develop a territorial ABM defense including space-based weapons.

Gorbachev also disputes the President's concerns about Soviet first-strike capabilities, and claims that the Soviet Union is not "gambling on" or preparing its arsenal to conduct "a nuclear first strike". He declares that the Soviets "have real and extremely serious concern over U.S. nuclear weapons" such as Trident, other submarine missiles, and Pershing II. He argues that the solution must take into account the "sum total of the corresponding nuclear weapons on both sides", probably a reference to the Soviet demand in Geneva that all U.S. nuclear systems capable of striking Soviet territory (including U.S. LRINF missiles) be defined as strategic forces.

Regional Issues: U.S. at Fault

In a brief discussion of regional questions, Gorbachev rejects alleged U.S. attempts to apply "double standards" in assessing Soviet behavior. He then applies one of his own, affirming Moscow's determination to help "lawful governments which ask us for aid ... because they are being subjected to external armed aggression," while charging us with assisting "in essence, terrorist groups." He complains specifically against "unprecedented pressure and terror" against Nicaragua. In a possible indirect reference to the possibility of direct U.S. assistance to UNITA, Gorbachev claims to see a disturbing "shift" underway in U.S. policy toward "further exacerbation of regional problems." This, he says, has made Moscow "wary."

Gorbachev's treatment of Afghanistan is, by comparison, more upbeat. In responding to the only regional issue specifically raised by the President in his letter, Gorbachev conveys his "impression" that the U.S. is overlooking an "'open door' leading to a political settlement" for which a "working formula" -- presumably that being considered in the

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UN-sponsored Afghanistan-Pakistan "proximity" talks -- already exists. In a somewhat more positive formulation than that normally used by the Soviets in describing the U.N. process, Gorbachev states that a "just settlement will definitely be found" if the "ongoing negotiations are assisted." Gorbachev does not, however, offer concrete suggestions on how the talks can be furthered, and does not deal with the most pressing problem of Afghanistan--Soviet troop withdrawal.

Non-Issues

Gorbachev does not address a number of issues which have figured in post-Geneva correspondence. The most striking is human rights, the subject of a separate letter from the President (delivered by Secretary Baldrige). But Gorbachev also avoids entirely the nuclear testing issue he had raised with the President. Neither of these issues was raised in the President's handwritten letter.

*Dated Here for Nicholas Platt*

Nicholas Platt  
Executive Secretary

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TALKING POINTS

GORBACHEV'S DECEMBER 24 LETTER

General

- Your handwritten letter to Gorbachev made an impression. Gorbachev has responded to your post-Geneva letter in kind, with a lengthy, handwritten note.
- The style is direct, frank and personal. He asks you to consider the letter as an extension of your "fire-side chats". He pointedly notes that he believes that the exchanges of correspondence between you are "the most important" means of preparing for the Washington summit.
- Gorbachev seems to view the Geneva meeting as we do: an important step in breaking down barriers and establishing a dialogue between the U.S. and USSR, and particularly between the two of you. In language that mirrors our own, he talks about expanding areas of agreement and developing a specific agenda for the years ahead.
- On substance, however, Gorbachev is unyielding; there is no real change of position on SDI, on Soviet offensive forces, or on regional issues. There are, however, a few nuances of note.

Security Issues

- Gorbachev takes up your offer for a discussion at Geneva of ways to prevent development of space-based weapons capable of offensive use. He even uses the term "common ground." But he gives an all-encompassing definition to such weapons: anything that can strike a target in or from space. This would, of course, rule out any sort of defensive weapons in space.
- On offensive forces, Gorbachev notes that the Soviets don't intend a first strike, aren't developing such a capability, but are concerned about the first-strike potential of U.S. Trident, other SLBMs, and Pershing II missiles. The passing reference to Pershings is his only allusion to INF.

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- He seems to go beyond past Soviet positions in expressing his willingness to look at the offense/defense relationship. But he implicitly reaffirms the demand in the Soviet September initiative to include in U.S. strategic forces any systems capable of striking Soviet territory.

#### Regional Issues

- With the partial exception of Afghanistan, Gorbachev's approach is uncompromising. He does not directly refer to your regional initiative, but accuses us of arming and assisting "anti-social" and "terrorist groups," and thus exacerbating regional conflicts. He repeats Soviet charges of U.S. pressure on Nicaragua.
- He also seems to hint at displeasure over our plans to aid UNITA in claiming to see trends in our policy toward "exacerbating" regional tensions. He says this makes Moscow "wary."
- Gorbachev states the USSR will continue to help governments who request it when they are subjected to external armed intervention. This is their sovereign right, he asserts.
- As in Geneva, Gorbachev's tone is relatively moderate in discussing Afghanistan. He refers to an "'open door' leading to a political settlement" for which a "working formula" exists. This is presumably a reference to the U.N.-sponsored proximity talks between Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- Gorbachev suggests the U.S. and USSR assist the talks. If so, a "just settlement" would definitely be found. Gorbachev makes no concrete suggestions of how progress could be achieved, however, and does not deal with the pressing problem of Soviet troop withdrawal.

#### Conclusions

- Gorbachev affirms the value of the dialogue, particularly between you and him. He noted at one point the importance of a "painstaking" consideration of the consequences of current policies on both sides. He emphasized the need to listen to each other.
- He also seems to recognize that development of better relations is going to be a process measured in years, not months.

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- His letter makes clear just how slow and difficult that process is going to be. At one point, Gorbachev complains about an American double standard on regional issues, yet he applies a double standard of his own. At another point, he says he has to assess SDI not on the basis of your intentions but on the capabilities of the weapons; but in the next breath, he asks you to accept his assurances that the Soviets aren't developing a first-strike capability with their offensive forces.
- SDI continues to dominate Soviet thinking on security issues. Gorbachev goes into length on the consequences of the program. He saddles his willingness to talk about defensive weapons with a definition that would outlaw any space-based defense. Nevertheless, the discussions might create a greater Soviet awareness over time of the potential benefits of more reliance on defense. In other words, it may be a start.
- On regional questions, Gorbachev seems to be leaving the door open to future movement on Afghanistan, but not giving his hand away at this stage. It seems clear from this letter that near-term progress on the other major regional conflicts is going to be tough going.
- It is worth noting that Gorbachev did not refer to a number of other issues. The most obvious was human rights, where he made no reference to the message Mac Baldrige carried. Nor did he address the question of nuclear testing, which he had earlier written you on, and which the Soviet press has focused on recently. These issues, of course, weren't addressed in your handwritten letter.

#### Next Steps

- There's no need for a quick reply. You will be addressing the Soviet people on January 1. The text for your message is not affected by the content of the letter, although we may want to put in a reference to your continuing exchanges with Gorbachev.
- Our negotiators at Geneva should be prepared for a detailed exchange with the Soviets in fulfillment of your offer to talk about steps to prevent development of space-based weapons with offensive potential. We'll want to make sure their instructions are up to the task.
- We'll also want to see how Gorbachev responds to your letters on human rights and testing.

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- In light of Gorbachev's tough line on regional issues, we'll need to consider how to revise the draft letter on regional issues which is on your desk.
- George Shultz's next meeting with Shevardnadze will be an opportunity to go over regional problems, and especially to probe on Afghanistan (NOTE: the timing is uncertain -- the Soviets owe us an answer on our proposal for a meeting in late January).

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