

Unofficial translation

September 20 , 1988

Dear Mr. President,

I take advantage of the visit by Minister of Foreign Affairs Eduard A. Shevardnadze to Washington in order to continue our private discussion.

In one of our conversations in Moscow it was suggested that we might have a chance to meet once again this year to sign a treaty on drastic reductions in strategic offensive arms in the context of compliance with the ABM Treaty. Regrettably, this goal that both of us share has been set back in time, although I continue to think that it can still be attained, even if beyond this year.

I take some consolation in the awareness that still in effect is our agreement to do the utmost in the remaining months of your presidency to ensure the continuity and consistency of the fundamental course that we have chosen. As I recall, you said you would do your best to preserve the constructive spirit of our dialogue, and I replied that in that respect our intentions were quite identical. And so they are indeed, which is a source of great hope for our two peoples.

Four months have gone by since the summit talks in Moscow-- a short period of time given the dynamic and profound developments in international affairs and those that fill the political calendar in the Soviet Union and the United States. Still, a great deal has been accomplished in putting into effect the jointly agreed platform for the further advancement of Soviet-US relations. For the first time in history, nuclear missiles have been destroyed, and unprecedented mutual verification of the just begun process of nuclear disarmament is becoming an established and routine practice. In several regions of the world, a process of political settlement of conflicts and national reconciliation has got under way. The human dimension of our relations, to which we have agreed to give special attention, is becoming richer. Ordinary Soviet people continue to discover America for themselves, marching across it on a peace walk, and right now, as you are reading this letter, another public meeting between Soviet and US citizens is being held in Tbilisi.

His Excellency
Ronald W. Reagan,
President of the United States of America
Washington, D.C.

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NLS F99-051 # 525

Someone might object that in the past, say in the 1930s or 1970s, Soviet-US relations also had their upturns. I would think, however, that the current stage in our interaction is distinguished by several significant features. The four summit meetings over the past three years have laid good groundwork for our dialogue and raised it to a qualitatively new level. And, as we know, from high ground it is easier to see the path we have covered, the problems of the day, and the prospects that emerge.

A unique arrangement for practical interaction has been established, which is supported by fundamental political affirmations and, at the same time, filled with tangible content. This has been facilitated by the principal approach on which we agreed already in Geneva, i.e. realism, a clear awareness of the essence of our differences, and a focus on active search for possible areas where our national interests may coincide. Thus, we gave ourselves a serious intellectual challenge -- to view our differences and diversity not as a reason for permanent confrontation but as a motivation for intensive dialogue, mutual appreciation and enrichment.

Overall, we have been able to achieve fairly good results, to start a transition from confrontation to a policy of accomodation. And this is, probably, not just a result of a frank and constructive personal relationship, although, obviously, personal rapport is not the least important thing in politics. Paraphrasing a favourite phrase of yours, I would say that talking to each other people learn more about each other.

And yet, the main thing that made our common new policy a success is, above all, the fact that it reflects a gradually emerging balance of national interests, which we have been able in some measure to implement. We feel, in particular, that it is favorable to the development of new approaches, of new political thinking, first of all in our two countries -- but also elsewhere. The experience of even the past few months indicates that an increasing number of third countries are beginning to readjust to our positive interaction, associating with it their interests and policies.

Ironically as it may sound, it is our view that the strength of what we have been able to accomplish owes quite a lot to how hard it was to do.

It is probably not by a mere chance that the jointly devised general course in the development of Soviet-US relations is now enjoying broad-based support in our two countries. So far as we know, both of your possible successors support, among other things, the key objective of concluding a treaty on 50 percent cutbacks in Soviet and US strategic arsenals. In the Soviet leadership, too, there is a consensus on this.

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And yet it has not been possible to bring the Geneva negotiations to fruition, a fact about which I feel some unhappiness. It is our impression that we have to tango alone, as if our partner has taken a break.

In another letter to you, I have already addressed the matter which you raised in your letter of August 12 regarding compliance with the ABM Treaty. I think you would agree with me that it would be unforgivable if our mutual complaints of violations of the ABM Treaty resulted in undermining what we have been able to accomplish to rectify Soviet-US relations through the efforts of both sides.

I would like Eduard Shevardnadze's visit to the United States and his talks with you and Secretary Shultz to result in reviving truly joint efforts to achieve deep cuts in strategic offensive arms. Our Minister has the authority to seek rapid progress on the basis of reciprocity in this exceptionally important area.

Today, the process of nuclear disarmament is objectively interrelated with the issues of deep reductions, and the elimination of asymmetries and imbalances, in conventional arms and complete prohibition of chemical weapons. In these areas too, there is a good chance of making headway toward agreements.

I am confident, Mr. President, that you and I can make a further contribution to the emerging process of settlement of regional conflicts, particularly to a consistent and honest compliance with the first accords that have already been concluded there.

In Moscow we also reinforced the foundation for a dynamic development of our bilateral relations and helped to open up new channels for communication between Soviet and American people, including young people and artists. All these good endeavours should be given practical effect, and we stand ready to do so. I am aware of your deep personal interest in questions of human rights. For me too, it is a priority issue. We seem to have agreed that these problems require an in-depth consideration and a clear understanding of the true situation in both the United States and the Soviet Union. Traffic along this two-way street has begun and I hope that it will be intense.

Our relationship is a dynamic stream and you and I are working together to widen it. The stream cannot be slowed down, it can only be blocked or diverted. But that would not be in our interest.

Politics, of course, is the art of the possible but it is only by working and maintaining a dynamic dialogue that we will put into effect what we have made possible, and will make possible tomorrow what is yet impossible today.

Sincerely,