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THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

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September 17, 1985

Dear Margaret,

On the day your letter arrived, I was about to ask your counsel in the runup to my meetings with Shevardnadze and Gorbachev, so the timing of your letter was perfect. As always, your views captured not only the immediate challenges and opportunities, but expressed as well how these meetings can set us on a course toward long-term stability.

I have given a great deal of thought to the importance of these meetings and of the necessity of considering the public climate throughout this period. In the United States and Europe, these meetings are a symbol both of difficulties and of hope for a better future. While we must be careful not to build up unreasonable expectations, we cannot approach these meetings unprepared to achieve as much as is possible. We are prepared, and we must let that be known.

Thus far, the Soviet Union has been conducting a propaganda campaign designed to place great pressures on the Western Democracies to make concessions. In particular, they have been saying that they are prepared to offer deep cuts in strategic offensive forces if only we will give up our SDI program. In reality, they have made no concrete proposals for deep and stabilizing reductions, and they have been continuing a massive ABM and SDI program of their own. Not all of their efforts are in compliance with the ABM Treaty.

For our part, we have put forth sound, concrete proposals for nuclear arms reductions in the Nuclear and Space Talks in Geneva. We have done a great deal of work on how these negotiations might progress. I have given our negotiators broad authority and flexibility to try to reach agreements with the Soviet negotiators -- agreements that are in the interest of both sides and of our Allies and friends as well.

I would welcome a serious and specific proposal from Moscow that would provide for deep reductions and greater stability. I have been thinking about how we might bring this about. Rest assured that we are confident and ready for active negotiations. The Soviet Union is making a great deal of noise in public, but they are making themselves vulnerable to the challenge that played a central role in the nomination battle for the Democratic Presidential Nomination last year -- "Where's the beef?" The time is coming when the Soviet Union is going to have to make good on their promises.

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Throughout all of this, we must remember that the Strategic Defense Initiative is vital to our arms control efforts and to our hopes for a better, safer future. I cannot, and will not, endanger this research program which means so much to all mankind. During these difficult months ahead, I trust that I can count on your support and that of our Government. Our ability to negotiate effectively and achieve our objectives is dependent upon a sound SDI program.

I believe we are in a strong negotiating position, and I share your view that Gorbachev has many incentives to try to reach an agreement. At the same time, the Soviet system does not encourage its leaders to compromise easily in arms control negotiations, especially a leader who may not yet have completely consolidated his position or who may owe great debts to the most hardline elements. He will be firm, but so will I. I am confident and ready. We will, of course, not solve the great differences between East and West, but I am optimistic that we can make some progress and set in motion the resolution of specific problems. However, nothing could more undercut our prospects for success than for Gorbachev to sense that we are divided or that mere propaganda will be sufficient.

On human rights, like you we will not shy away from raising these issues with the Soviets. I understand your point that this is an extremely sensitive issue with Gorbachev, but we must make clear to him the necessity of living up to the obligations assumed at Helsinki. And I will make clear to him that we have legitimate concerns about Soviet activities in many parts of the world. In particular, I will talk to him about Afghanistan. We must make certain that he has absolutely no doubts about how strongly we feel.

I approach this November meeting with confidence. The General Secretary understands that we Americans, united with our European Allies, have rebounded from a period of demoralization in earlier years. Then we failed to confront Soviet and Moscow-sponsored aggression throughout the Third World. Then we allowed our defense to lag behind. Today, we are experiencing renewed economic growth, we are stabilizing the military balance, and, most importantly, we have renewed our sense of purpose. The steadfastness we as an Alliance showed in 1983 as we deployed the NATO missiles will pay off. Gorbachev, I suspect, is coming to realize that he will have to deal with us in realistic terms. If so, we may be able to reduce global tensions and establish a productive East-West dialogue.

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In the months ahead, we must maintain the closest communication. I welcome your invitation to have Bud McFarlane come to London. I have discussed this with Bud. He is prepared to come on about the 28th or 29th of September.

Sincerely

*Ron*

Ronald Reagan

Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher

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