

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

March 24, 1985

Dear Mr. President:

Let me first of all express gratitude for the sympathy shown by you personally on the occasion of a sad event for the Soviet people - the death of K.U. Chernenko.

We also appreciate the participation in the mourning rites in Moscow of the Vice-President of the United States Mr. George Bush and the Secretary of State Mr. George Shultz. I think that the conversation we had with them was - though it had to be brief - mutually useful and, one might say, even necessary under the current circumstances.

We value the practice of exchanges of views between the leaders of our two countries on the key issues of Soviet-American relations and the international situation as a whole. In this context I attach great importance to the exchange of letters, which has started between the two of us.

First of all I would like to say that we deem improvement of relations between the USSR and USA to be not only extremely necessary, but possible, too. This was the central point that I was making in the conversation with your representatives in Moscow.

For your part, you also expressed yourself in favor of more stable and constructive relations, and we regard this positively. We have also taken note of your words about the new opportunities which are opening up now.

This being the case, the problem, as we understand it, is to give - through joint effort on the level of political leadership - a proper impetus to our relations in the direction the two of us

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are talking about, to translate into the language of concrete policy the mutually expressed willingness to improve relations, with account taken of the special responsibility borne by our two countries, of the objective fact that the Soviet Union and the United States of America are great powers and that relations between them are of decisive importance for the situation in the world in general.

Our countries are different by their social systems, by the ideologies dominant in them. But we believe that this should not be a reason for animosity. Each social system has a right to life, and it should prove its advantages not by force, not by military means, but on the path of peaceful competition with the other system. And all people have the right to go the way they have chosen themselves, without anybody imposing his will on them from outside, interfering in their internal affairs. We believe that this is the only just and healthy basis for relations among states. For our part, we have always striven to build our relations with the United States, as well as with other countries, precisely in this manner.

Besides, the Soviet leadership is convinced that our two countries have one common interest uniting them beyond any doubt: not to let things come to the outbreak of nuclear war which would inevitably have catastrophic consequences for both sides. And both sides would be well advised to recall this more often in making their policy.

I am convinced that given such approach to the business at hand, on the basis of a reasonable account of the realities of today's world and treating with a due respect the rights and legitimate interests of the other side, we could do quite a bit to benefit the peoples of our countries, as well as the whole world having embarked upon the road of a real improvement of relations.

It appears to us that it is important first of all to start conducting business in such a manner so that both we ourselves and others could see and feel that both countries are not aiming at deepening their differences and whipping up animosity, but, rather, are making their policy looking to the prospect of revitalizing the situation and of peaceful, calm development. This would

help create an atmosphere of greater trust between our countries. It is not an easy task, and I would say, a delicate one. For, trust is an especially sensitive thing, keenly receptive to both deeds and words. It will not be enhanced if, for example, one were to talk as if in two languages: one - for private contacts, and the other, as they say, - for the audience.

The development of relations could well proceed through finding practical solutions to a number of problems of mutual interest. As I understand it, you also speak in favor of such a way.

We believe that this should be done across the entire range of problems, both international and bilateral. Any problem can be solved, of course, only on a mutually acceptable basis, which means finding reasonable compromises, the main criterion being that neither side should claim some special rights for itself or advantages, both on subjects between the two of them and in international affairs.

No matter how important the questions involved in our relations or affecting them in this or that manner might be, the central, priority area is that of security. The negotiations underway in Geneva require the foremost attention of the two of us. Obviously, we will have to turn again and again to the questions under discussion there. At this point I do not intend to comment on what is going on at the talks - they have just started. I shall say, though, that some statements which were made and are being made in your country with regard to the talks cannot but cause concern.

I would like you to know and appreciate the seriousness of our approach to the negotiations, our firm desire to work towards positive results there. We will invariably adhere to the agreement on the subject and objectives of these negotiations. The fact that we were able to agree on this in January is already a big achievement and it should be treated with care.

I hope, Mr. President, that you will feel from this letter that the Soviet leadership, including myself personally, intends to act vigorously to find common ways to improving relations between our countries.

I think that it is also clear from my letter that we attach great importance to contacts at the highest level. For this reason I have a positive attitude to the idea you expressed about holding a personal meeting between us. And, it would seem that such a meeting should not necessarily be concluded by signing some major documents. Though agreements on certain issues of mutual interest, if they were worked out by that time, could well be formalized during the meeting.

The main thing is that it should be a meeting to search for mutual understanding on the basis of equality and account of the legitimate interests of each other.

As to a venue for the meeting, I thank you for the invitation to visit Washington. But let us agree that we shall return again to the question of the place and time for the meeting.

Sincerely,

M. GORBACHEV

SYSTEM II
90336THE SECRETARY OF STATE
WASHINGTON

March 25, 1985

SECRET/SENSITIVE
EYES ONLY FOR THE PRESIDENT AND NSC ADVISOR MCFARLANE**NEW HAS BEEN**

MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT

FROM: George P. Shultz *GPS*

SUBJECT: Letter from Gorbachev

Soviet Chargé Oleg Sokolov delivered to Rick Burt today the attached letter to you from Gorbachev. Dobrynin had called me earlier with a preview. The tone of the letter tracks closely with Gorbachev's comments to the Vice President and me, and could therefore reflect his personal touch.

I draw your attention in particular to the final paragraphs of the letter, in which Gorbachev says he has a "positive attitude" to the idea of holding a summit. He indicates that it would not be necessary to sign documents at such a meeting, although agreements on issues of mutual interest which had been previously worked out could be "formalized" during the meeting. He defines the main purpose of a meeting as a "search for mutual understanding on the basis of equality and taking account of the legitimate interests of each side." Gorbachev thanks you for your invitation to Washington, but asks that you agree to return to the question of timing and venue for a summit at a later point. The Soviets may be thinking of suggesting a summit in Helsinki in August, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the CSCE Final Act. In a meeting last week with Art Hartman, Gromyko pointedly asked for our plans on attendance at Helsinki.

Gorbachev's letter is also notable for its non-polemical tone. In fact, his message seems to be that we should both tone down public rhetoric and do business in a calm way that avoids "deepening our differences" and "whipping up animosity." Predictably, he also stresses the priority he attaches to arms control and my January agreement with Gromyko on the "subject and objectives" for Geneva. Here too he picks up themes he used with George and me in Moscow.

I am holding the text of the letter very closely, and will be sending you a suggested draft response for Gorbachev in the next few days. In answering press inquiries about a Soviet response to your summit invitation, I suggest we reply simply that our two governments are in touch, but that as the media knows, we do not intend to discuss our confidential diplomatic exchanges in public.

Attachment: As stated.

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