

Alexander Yakovlev. Memorandum prepared on request from M.S. Gorbachev and handed to him on March 12, 1985

ABOUT REAGAN

Starting positions—they are not so simple.

1. Everything points to the fact that Reagan is trying persistently to capture the initiative in international affairs, to create an image of America as a country that is purposefully striving to improve relations with the Soviet Union and to improve the global political climate.

He would like to solve a number of problems in the context of [his] dream about a “great peace-maker President” and “great America,” although currently the psychological situation is not in his favor.

2. Reagan had outlined and partially carried out the plans to militarize America; and he has given practically everything that he had promised to the military business, therefore, now he can move on to diplomacy “at the highest level,” which in any case would be a prestigious course, which would raise [his] political stock, which is what Reagan needs right now.

3. He is constrained now by the budget deficit, which might lead to economic difficulties. This deficit has to be either justified by an external threat, or decreased.

4. Notwithstanding the appearance of relative solidarity in NATO and among other allies, there is no unity [among them], or it is not all that solid. The USA is trying to hold on to the crest of the centripetal tendency and to prevent the development of the centrifugal tendency by all means.

The invitation for a meeting should, obviously, be understood in this context. A lot of issues can be seen here: the aspiration to confine our relations with the West to the Soviet-American framework (the USA is watching its allies with concern); the awareness of the anti-war mood both in the Congress and outside of it; the desire to feel out the Soviet position on key international issues once again.

Undoubtedly, this action, apart from its political aims, carries a significant propaganda content. He does not lose anything if we refuse to meet [with him] (“you see, I wanted to, but ...”), just the same if the meeting is a failure (“the Russians are uncooperative, as always ...”).

In other words, from Reagan’s point of view, his proposal is well thought-through, precisely calculated, and does not contain [any] political risk.

Conclusion: Meeting with Reagan is in the national interest of the Soviet Union. We should agree to it, but without haste. We should not help create an impression that it is Reagan solely, who pushes the buttons of world development.

Goals of the meeting: a) to get a personal impression of the American leader; b) to give a clear signal that the USSR is genuinely prepared to negotiate, but only on the basis of strict reciprocity; c) to let Reagan know in a very straightforward form that the USSR would not let [anyone] to manipulate itself, and would not yield on [the matters of] its national interests; we should continue to point out in a delicate way that the world does not end with the USA, but at the same time not to lose real opportunities in terms of improving relations with the USA, because in the next quarter of a century the USA will remain the strongest power in the world.

It would be hard to expect any unanticipated changes of a principal character in the American policy. And this is not only due to the anti-Communist dogmatism of Reagan himself; the U.S. harsh policy is dictated by the character of the transitional period for the United States—from its absolute dominance in the capitalist world, to a position of dominant partnership, and subsequently to a relative equality.

The painful nature of this process, even if one ignores the traditional geopolitical claims of the USA, is obvious: it will continue to affect [its] foreign policy for a long time.

It is precisely this transitional period that dictates that we should undertake a certain re-orientation of our foreign policy in terms of gradually and consistently developing relations with Western Europe, Japan, and China.

However, this should not lead to a decreasing attention to U.S.-Soviet relations in their substance, but to the contrary—they should be given increased attention.

Timing. Possibly after the Congress[of the Communist Party]. It would be better [if it took place] after some economic reforms, or other practical initiatives and achievements, which would demonstrate the dynamism of our country. Practical actions are the best to persuade the Americans; they will become more cooperative.

Location. Not in the USA; some place in Europe.

Alternative. As has been mentioned above, we should use all possible factors of possible political pressure on the United States, and first among them all is the interest of the Europeans in a relaxation of tensions, which was clearly felt during the recent discussions in Moscow; [we should] confirm our position of initiative.

For that, we would need a powerful countermove.

For example, in connection with the 10th anniversary of the Helsinki Conference (August 1 of this year), we could put forward a proposal to hold a summit of heads of

states, who put their signatures under the Final Act in the capital of Finland. By promoting this idea, we could focus attention on the need to introduce elements of trust into international relations and to revive the process of détente in the political as well as in the military sphere.

As a first step, this idea could be raised in a personal letter from the General Secretary of the Central Committee to the President of the USA, noting that in Helsinki they could establish personal contact and exchange ideas about the timing and the general framework of a U.S.-Soviet summit.

Regardless of the American reaction, we could inform our allies about the step, which we took, and talk to them about conducting appropriate work with Western European countries. Political efforts in this direction would also enhance the work of the forthcoming session of the Political Consultative Committee of the states members of the Warsaw Treaty Organization. And most importantly—not only would we have confirmed our active approach to reviving the détente processes—but we would have also put our own base under the Soviet-American meeting at the highest level.

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