

Gorbachev Letter to Reagan, October 28, 1987

Dear Mr. President,

I am sure that you have already received information about the negotiations that took place in Moscow between our foreign ministers, and also about my rather long conversation with Secretary of State G. Shultz and your National Security Adviser, F. Carlucci.

I will tell you frankly, we have here a unanimous opinion—these discussions were business-like, constructive, and most importantly, productive. I think you would agree that both the Washington and the Moscow stages of the dialogue that is developing between us, have genuinely moved us closer to the final stage of preparation for the Treaty on the Elimination of Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles. We derive satisfaction from the fact that we, together with your envoys, have succeeded in overcoming perhaps the most important obstacles and in achieving compromise formulas and understandings, which will allow our delegations in Geneva to work out the text of the treaty in the next two or three weeks if the political will on both sides can be preserved.

You, I believe, noticed that on the final day of negotiations the Soviet side undertook additional efforts, including in the areas of inspection and control. We hope that the American side will respond with adequate reciprocal efforts.

The Moscow negotiations, in my view, presented new evidence that our relations have entered a dynamic period, the origins of which were our meetings in Geneva and Reykjavik. I have in mind not only the growing tempo of contacts between our countries but also the fact that we undertook the practical resolution of the issue that we see as the key to stopping the nuclear arms race, and to stabilizing Soviet-American relations. The task of a deep reductions of strategic offensive forces—by half—has moved to the center of our conversations in Moscow.

And that is not by accident—because you and I are in the same frame of mind—[we want] to shift the negotiations on strategic offensive weapons to the plane of practical decisions. As I have already written to you, we should speed up the tempo of the negotiations, in order to make it possible as early as next month to reach full-scale agreements in this sphere.

With that in mind, on the eve of U.S. Secretary of State's visit, we in the Soviet leadership have once again seriously weighed the possibility of giving additional impetus to the negotiations on strategic offensive weapons. I presented in detail to Mr. Shultz the concrete results we arrived at.

In particular, we took into account that the American side—which announced this to us repeatedly, including at the political level—attaches special importance to establishing concrete limits on the concentration of warheads in each separate element of the strategic

triad. We undertook a thorough calculation of the different scenarios for the development of the situation along with the prevailing tendencies of a technological and military-strategic order, and came to the conclusion that we could move in the direction of your position. It is not difficult to observe that individual combinations of proposed numerical limits present a picture close to the one that was outlined to us recently by American representatives at different levels.

I would add that the new formula we have proposed contains internal flexibility: each side would have an opportunity to compensate for the lower number of delivery vehicles of one kind by increasing the number of delivery vehicles of another kind within the overall limit.

I hope that these proposals will be considered carefully by your experts and that both sides will now have a wider basis for reaching a mutually acceptable agreement.

Of course the work on the agreement to reduce strategic offensive weapons should be accompanied by efforts directed at further compliance with the ABM Treaty. Besides, we are not asking here for anything more than what we spoke about in Washington, namely that the right we enjoy to withdraw from this treaty should not be exercised for ten years.

The words you wrote in one of your letters to me are deeply imprinted in my memory—that our representatives at the negotiations should “concentrate on measures to prevent the erosion of the ABM treaty and on strengthening the role this Treaty might play in preserving stability as we progress toward a world where there are no nuclear weapons.” In the same letter you added that “if we act in this manner, we could avoid fruitless discussions of a general nature, and open the way toward finding concrete, practical solutions that take into account the concerns of both sides.”

In this sense, we were encouraged by the exchange of opinions in Washington in September of this year, where your side confirmed that our positions coincided on the point that in the context of an agreement on 50% reductions in strategic offensive weapons there arises a period during which we should renounce certain rights, in particular the right to withdraw from the ABM Treaty and strictly carry out our obligations under that treaty.

Therefore, we share a common ground on this issue as well. What is left, in essence, is to agree on the period during which there is to be no withdrawal from the ABM Treaty. Is that an impossible goal? This is what the conversation comes down to now. We have to seek a resolution here. We are ready for it.

I repeat, I am talking about compliance with the ABM Treaty, and we have explained to you the way we see it—including very recently in Washington.

In order to keep the discussion on this set of problems within the framework of such reasonable notions, and not to let it slip into either a thicket of overly complex technological argumentation or on the contrary into more generalized concepts, I propose

that along with the Geneva negotiations we open up a channel through which we would continually be able to check the progress of negotiations as well as more freely express concerns and alternative proposals. This channel could employ contacts specially designated for this topic: the USSR Foreign Minister, the U.S. Ambassador in Moscow and the U.S. Secretary of State, and the USSR Ambassador in Washington. However, we could consider some other alternative.

Here it is important to act with an awareness of the limited amount of time available to us for working out an agreement on strategic offensive weapons, which it would be desirable to finalize in the first half of next year, and to sign during your return visit to Moscow.

Obviously, we need to clear the road to this treaty of natural complications, among which are issues of verification—and here I agree with the suggestion expressed by Shultz on your behalf, to concentrate in this direction right now—as well as complications artificially introduced into the treaty (such as the inclusion of our mid-range Backfire bomber in the treaty, the demand for a complete ban on mobile ICBMs, and the unwillingness to resolve the issue of limitations on sea-launched cruise missiles).

I am convinced that it is realistic to achieve an agreement on strategic offensive weapons under conditions of compliance with the ABM Treaty. Besides, the experience that we accumulated at the negotiations on intermediate and medium-range missiles could be useful for us here to a large degree.

After all, we were able to agree to start full-scale negotiations on nuclear testing, even though just several months ago it looked like an impossible endeavor.

I think we should show the necessary mutual persistence in resolving the problem of banning chemical weapons (even though I must say that I am deeply disappointed with your position on binary weapons), and on the issue of reducing conventional weapons, which is of interest not only to us but also to our allies and to other European countries.

Back in April, in my conversation with Mr. Shultz, I outlined my understanding of our next meeting. I am still convinced that besides signing the INF Treaty we should seriously discuss the issue of strategic offensive weapons and the ABM Treaty. I want our ministers and our delegations in Geneva not to stand aside but to do everything possible in order to make your work and mine as easy as possible.

If we want to crown your visit to the Soviet Union by concluding an agreement on strategic offensive weapons, then we cannot avoid at least an agreement in principle on it at this coming meeting. What form that agreement assumes in the end is not so important. It could [take the form of] some key elements of a future agreement, if we follow the idea you expressed personally in spring 1985. Or it could be, let us say, instructions and directives, which we could give to [our] delegations for the speedy preparation of the aforementioned document.

As I understand it, the Secretary of State, when he was in Moscow, spoke about developing instructions for the delegations. The main thing is to achieve a common understanding at the highest level of the goals to which we aspire, and of the means of realizing them in the shortest possible time.

If we have sufficiently coordinated our intentions on this issue, then we will be able to enrich our upcoming conversations in Washington with a substantive agenda.

I am passing this letter to you through E. A. Shevardnadze, who is fully informed about my thoughts regarding the future paths of development of Soviet-American relations, and the concrete plans for their potential fulfillment. He possesses all the necessary authority to coordinate with you all the main aspects of the forthcoming summit, including the agenda, the length of my stay in the U.S., and the exact dates of my visit. I would like you to take into account that if it suits your availability, then according to my schedule of events before the end of the year, the first 10 days of December would be the most preferable period for my trip to Washington.

I hope you take advantage of the visit of our Minister to discuss and decide all the necessary issues, as they say, on site.

Respectfully,
[signature]
M. Gorbachev.

28 October 1987

[Source: Ronald Reagan Library, Simi Valley,
Translated by Svetlana Savranskaya for the National Security Archive]