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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

March 6, 1984

Dear Mr. General Secretary:

I have given careful thought to your letter of February 23 and welcome your desire for a turn toward better relations between our countries. I agree with you that an improvement in United States-Soviet relations is feasible.

I am also pleased to see how quickly you have been able to pick up the burdens of your heavy responsibilities. My letter carried by the Vice President was intended to ensure that the occasion of your meeting would be used for our continued dialogue. Our tasks of leading the world's two most powerful nations are not easy and perhaps we two are the only ones who have the full understanding of these burdens of maintaining world peace. It is for that reason that I want you to know, Mr. General Secretary, how much I value the importance of communicating with you directly and confidentially.

It seems to me that our dialogue has reached a point where, as you said in your letter, we should look for specific areas in which we can move our relationship in a more positive direction. As for some of the principles you address in your letter, let me reiterate what I wrote to the late General Secretary and have stated publicly: the United States has no desire to threaten the security of the Soviet Union and its allies. Nor are we seeking either military superiority or to impose our will on others. I agree with you that we have an obligation to our peoples and to the world not to allow a nuclear conflict to occur and that this requires restraint in our actions.

You wrote also of "attempts to upset the balance of forces and to gain military advantages to the detriment of the security of the other side." I

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agree that such attempts are dangerous. Yet, in our view, many actions of the Soviet Union in recent years would represent just such attempts.

But it is not my purpose to debate these matters here. Our views are well known. We should, instead, move beyond mutual recrimination and attempts to assess blame and find concrete steps we both can take to put our relations on a more positive track. To move this process forward, I would like to re-state once again our position on certain fundamental questions and then to make some specific suggestions as to what we might do concretely.

I think that we both begin with the premise that our strategic nuclear relationship lies at the center of our concern for future peace and stability in the world. I have the feeling that the significance of what I have tried to say recently on this subject is not appreciated by your side. Therefore I would like to explain some of these concepts and suggest a way to achieve a better understanding of our mutual positions.

The strategic arms talks have always had as an important stumbling block the fact that our forces are not constructed -- for understandable reasons of history and geography -- along the same lines. We are concerned about the current imbalance in large, MIRVed, land-based systems in favor of the USSR, which we consider to be the most destabilizing category of nuclear systems. You have criticized our proposals as one-sided and an attempt to restructure your forces without any attendant change in our forces. This is not our intent.

Our purpose is to achieve significant reductions in the strategic systems of both sides. Such reductions need not result in identical force structures. The balance we seek must obviously take account of the interests of both sides. That is why in my earlier communications I suggested that we explore what types of reciprocal concessions might bring our interests into better balance.

In my letter presented by the Vice President I went further and suggested that we have ideas on concrete ways to narrow differences between our

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respective positions. The trade-offs we are prepared to discuss would, I believe, bridge the proposals of both sides and provide, as I said, a more stable balance at lower levels.

The question of intermediate range nuclear arms also continues to be one that should be addressed by our two governments. We have put proposals forward that could form the basis for agreement on this question and we believe it would be in the interests of both of us and the world to return to those negotiations. If your side has new ideas on how to proceed, we are ready to give them serious consideration.

Beyond questions involving strategic and intermediate range nuclear forces, you and we have a broad agenda of arms control issues which offer opportunities for concrete progress. We are prepared to discuss in diplomatic channels our views on each of the areas you mentioned in your speech of March 2. As you know, our view is that a central problem in these areas is ensuring that any agreements are verifiable. We will take a serious attitude towards exploring possibilities in a constructive dialogue.

In several arms control fields, we have specific ideas for your side to consider. During the next round of the discussions in Vienna on MBFR, we will have ideas for moving the process ahead. On chemical weapons, we will have ready soon a draft treaty providing for a global ban on the production and stockpiling of these weapons. I also believe that the CDE Conference in Stockholm offers possibilities for concrete progress.

You have expressed concern about new American defense programs, particularly those related to ballistic missile defense. One of the reasons we believe it is important to resume discussions of strategic weapons issues in Geneva is that this would provide us an opportunity to discuss ballistic missile defense questions as well. You will recall that we suggested such an approach last year. Our offer remains in force.

Both sides also have expressed concerns about the other's military build-up, the threat we each perceive and the necessity to put in place measures which could help in time of crisis. Should we consider more direct consultations between those responsible for our defense?

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One specific area that offers an opportunity for early agreement is improvement in our hotline. The discussions among our experts have gone well. We will deliver to your side technical information in the next few weeks, and anticipate another round of discussions early this spring.

In addition to arms control, I believe that regional issues are also an important topic for our dialogue. You underlined the importance of these issues in your meeting with Vice President Bush. Secretary Shultz and Ambassador Hartman have taken the initiative in recent months to give you our thinking on a number of critical regional questions. We are prepared to intensify these regional consultations. One area of immediate concern to both sides is the conflict between Iran and Iraq.

Another major objective of mine is to develop a better working relationship in areas of practical interest to both our nations. I believe our governments can agree on the mutual benefits of establishing consulates in Kiev and New York, as well as negotiation of a new exchanges agreement. And we can benefit from developing a package of measures to facilitate travel and the work of our diplomats through resumption of consular review talks. We are prepared to move ahead in all three of these areas.

We are also prepared to reinvigorate a number of existing agreements and to review seriously those coming up for extension. There are steps that we can take to increase activity under our agreements for cooperation in the fields of agriculture, environmental protection, housing and health.

I am pleased that our representatives at the International Civil Aeronautics Organization in Montreal are discussing specific measures countries can take to enhance the safety of civil aviation. Agreement on such measures would be a significant step forward.

There are other areas where I believe we could usefully work together. For example, I would like to reiterate our offer to conduct a simulated space rescue. This is the kind of practical cooperation which our two governments should be seeking to build a basis of greater confidence.

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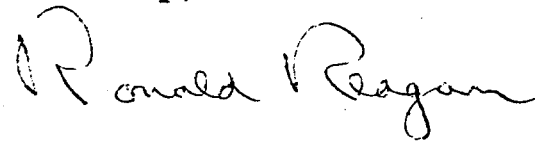
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Mr. General Secretary, following his visit to Moscow, Vice President Bush conveyed to me your message that we should take steps to ensure that history recalls us as leaders known to be good, wise and kind. Nothing is more important to me, and we should take steps to bring this about. For example, last year the agonizing situation of the Vashchenko and Chmykalov families was resolved. I was touched by this gesture. In my view, this shows how quiet and sincere efforts can solve even the most sensitive problems in our relationship. Similar humanitarian gestures this year also would touch the hearts of all Americans.

Therefore I conclude, as you did, that "a turn toward steady and good relations between our two countries" is desirable and feasible. I am determined to do my part in working for that end.

Sincerely,



Konstantin Ustinovich Chernenko
General Secretary of the Central Committee
of the Communist Party
of the Soviet Union
Moscow, U.S.S.R.

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