

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

Dear Secretary General Herberich

Now that we are both home & facing the task of leading our countries into a more constructive relationship with each other, I wanted to waste no time in giving you some of my initial thoughts on our meetings. Though I will be sending shortly, in a more formal & official manner, a more detailed commentary on our discussions, there are some things I would like to convey very personally & privately.

First, I want you to know that I found our meetings of great value. We had agreed to speak frankly, and we did. As a result, I came away from the meeting with a better understanding of your attitudes. I hope you also understand mine a little better. Obviously there are many things on which we disagree, and disagree very fundamentally. But if I understand you correctly, you too are determined to take steps to see that our nations manage their relations in a peaceful fashion. If this is the case, then this is one point on which we are in total agreement -- and it is after all the most fundamental one of all.

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As for our substantive differences, let me offer some thoughts on two of the key ones.

Regarding strategic defense and its relation to the reduction of offensive nuclear weapons, I was struck by your conviction that the American program is somehow designed to secure a strategic advantage -- even to permit a first strike capability. I also noted your concern that research & testing in this area could be a cover for developing & placing offensive weapons in space.

As I told you, neither of these concerns is warranted. But I can understand, as you explained so eloquently, that these are matters which cannot be taken on faith. Both of us must cope with what the other side is doing, & judge the implications for the security of his own country. I do not ask you to take my assurances on faith.

However the truth is that the United States has no intention of using its strategic defense program to gain any advantage, & there is no development underway to create space-based offensive weapons. Our goal is to eliminate any possibility of a first strike from either side. This being the case, we should be able to find a way, in practical terms,

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to relieve the concerns you have expressed.

For example, could our negotiators, when they resume work in January, discuss frankly & specifically what sort of future developments each of us would find threatening? Neither of us, it seems, wants to see offensive weapons, particularly weapons of mass destruction, deployed in space. Should we not attempt to define what sort of systems have that potential and then try to find verifiable ways to prevent their development?

And, can't our negotiators deal more frankly & openly with the question of how to eliminate a first-strike potential on both sides? Your military now has an advantage in this area — a three to one advantage in warheads that can destroy hardened targets with little warning. That is obviously alarming to us, & explains many of the efforts we are making in our modernization program. You may feel perhaps that the U. S. has some advantages in other categories. If so, let's insist that our negotiators face up to these issues & find a way to improve the security of both countries by agreeing on appropriately balanced reductions. If you are as sincere as I am in not seeking to secure or preserve one-sided advantages, we will find a solution to these problems.

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Regarding another key issue we discussed, that of regional conflicts, I can assure you that the United States does not believe that the Soviet Union is the cause of all the world's ills. We do believe, however, that your country has exploited and worsened local tensions & conflict by militarizing them and, indeed, intervening directly & indirectly in struggles arising out of local causes. While we both will doubtless continue to support our friends, we must find a way to do so without use of armed force. This is the crux of the point I tried to make.

One of the most significant steps in lowering tension in the world - & tension in U. S. - Soviet relations - would be a decision on your part to withdraw your forces from Afghanistan. I gave careful attention to your comments on this issue at Geneva, and am encouraged by your statement that you feel political reconciliation is possible. I want you to know that I am prepared to cooperate in any reasonable way to facilitate such a withdrawal, & that I understand that it must be done in a manner which does not damage Soviet security interests. During our meetings I mentioned one idea which I thought might be helpful & I will welcome any further suggestions you may have.

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These are only two of the key issues on our current agenda. I will soon send some thoughts on others. I believe that we should act promptly to build the momentum our meeting initiated.

In Geneva I found our private sessions particularly useful. Both of us have advisors & assistants, but, you know, in the final analysis, the responsibility to preserve peace & increase cooperation is ours. Our people look to us for leadership, and nobody can provide it if we don't. But we won't be very effective leaders unless we can rise above the specific but secondary concerns that preoccupy our respective bureaucracies & give our governments a strong push in the right direction.

So, what I want to say finally is that we should make the most of the time before we meet again to find some specific & significant steps that would give meaning to our commitment to peace & arms reduction. Why not set a goal - privately, first between the two of us - to find a practical way to solve critical issues - the two I have mentioned - by the time we meet in Washington?

Please convey regards from Nancy & me to Mrs. Gorbachev. We genuinely enjoyed meeting you in Geneva & are already looking forward to showing you something of our country next year.
Sincerely yours, Ronald Reagan