

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON


~~SECRET/SENSITIVE~~

February 15, 1986

ACTION

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

**SIGNED**

FROM: JOHN M. POINDEXTER   
SUBJECT: Reply to Gorbachev's Handwritten Letter

Issue

Whether to reply to Gorbachev's handwritten letter of December 24, 1985

Facts

Gorbachev answered your handwritten letter with one of his own dated December 24, 1985. You have also received a more formal letter dated January 12 making proposals for a three-stage process for the elimination of nuclear weapons by 1999.

Discussion

The handwritten letter was obviously the more personal one, particularly since Gorbachev immediately announced the content of his letter of January 12 and wrote in the same vein to several other Chiefs of State. Therefore, it would be appropriate to answer the two letters separately, keeping the handwritten exchange more personal, private and direct. I think it is important to give a specific reply to the handwritten letter both to sustain this private exchange and to reply to some of the unacceptable allegations in it. This can be done without getting into the details of his letter of January 12.


The proposed draft at Tab A attempts to achieve the following:

-- It answers the principal arguments advanced by Gorbachev against SDI, implicitly reminding him that Soviet programs are such that his arguments can be turned against him, while still leaving the door open to concrete negotiation of legitimate issues.

-- By separating the reply to his handwritten letter from that to his "public" letter of January 12, the draft indicates clearly, without saying so, that the use of "proposals" for propoganda is not helpful to the negotiating process, and that such "proposals" will not be given the status of private messages.

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Declassify on: OADR

597-001 #117

BY 

10/29/90

-- By devoting special attention to regional conflicts and Afghanistan in particular, it lays the ground for a linkage of restraint in these areas to the reduction of nuclear weapons beyond the initial 50 percent. It also includes a strong statement regarding Soviet involvement with Qaddhafi, based on the danger posed to the Soviet Union by his unpredictability. (This is a factor the Soviets probably worry about, and it will not hurt to play on it a bit.)

You will note that the draft contains no mention of the Washington summit. Given the Soviet delay in suggesting a firm date -- or reacting in any way officially to our proposal made in early December -- I think it is desirable to avoid showing any exceptional eagerness. Also, in his letter, Gorbachev made no mention of the meeting other than to say that he considered the correspondence "a very important channel" for preparing for it.


One other small matter is that Gorbachev did not pick you up on your effort to develop a less formal salutation. (You had written "Dear General Secretary Gorbachev," while his reply was addressed "Dear Mr. President." You may, therefore, wish to revert to "Dear Mr. General Secretary.")

Although the draft reply is longer than I would like it to be, it is only slightly longer than Gorbachev's letter (a translation of which is at Tab B for your reference). Nevertheless, I consider it important to provide answers to Gorbachev's allegations in some detail, and this cannot be done much more briefly. Providing him with a detailed reply does indicate that you take his arguments seriously and have given them careful thought.

If you decide to write out a letter along the lines of the draft, I would recommend that we do a courtesy translation (on very close hold) and send it through Hartman in a sealed envelope, as we did with your previous handwritten letter.

Regarding the letter of January 12, we will be consulting the Allies over the next few days and should have a formal reply ready for you to consider at the end of next week.

Recommendation:

<u>OK</u>	<u>No</u>	
	---	That you write a reply to Gorbachev along the lines of the draft at Tab A.

Attachments:

- Tab A      Draft Reply to Handwritten Letter from Gorbachev
- Tab B      Translation of Gorbachev's Handwritten Letter of December 24, 1985

Prepared by:  
Jack F. Matlock

25

12E/CASED 10/22/97  
NLS597-001 #118877  
CAS 7/2/82

DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
DIVISION OF LANGUAGE SERVICES

(TRANSLATION)

LS NO. 118545  
DZ/GT/WH/LB  
Russian

His Excellency  
Ronald W. Reagan  
President of the United States  
Washington, D.C.  
The White House

Dear Mr. President:

I consider your letter important and also value the form you used in writing to me.

I say this to you because I see the desire to continue and to strengthen what we achieved in Geneva. I am glad that we began there -- both in substance and in spirit -- a direct and frank discussion. I attach special significance to the fact that we have been able to overcome the serious psychological barrier which for a long time has hindered a dialogue worthy of the leaders of the USSR and USA.

I have the feeling that now you and I can set formalities aside and can get down to the heart of the matter -- establishing a specific topical agenda for discussion over the next few years on the basis of our understanding, and straightening out Soviet-American relations. I visualize this task very concretely: we have to broaden areas of agreement, strengthen the elements of responsibility in our policy, and make the appropriate practical decisions. In my opinion the ideal situation would be one in which you and I would give impetus to a constant forward movement. I agree with what you said: in the final analysis no one besides us can do this.

The first thing we should do is to take upon ourselves the task of undoing the knot which has been tied around the issues of nuclear and space weapons. I was encouraged by the fact that you, Mr. President, also consider that this is of key significance.

I think you understood from what I told you in Geneva that our decisive opposition to the development of space-strike weapons is dictated by the fact that weapons of this class which, due to their specific nature, possess the capability of being used both for defensive and offensive aims, represent in the final analysis an extremely dangerous build-up of offensive potential, with all the consequences inevitably ensuing therefrom from the point of view of further escalating the arms race.

20

You say, Mr. President, that the U.S. has no intention of using the SDI program to obtain military superiority.

I do not doubt that you personally may really have no such intentions. But you must agree that the leadership of one side has to evaluate the actions of the other in the area of developing new types of weapons, not in accordance with intentions, but in accordance with the potential capabilities which may be attained as a result of the development of these weapons.

Examining the SDI program from this perspective, the Soviet leadership comes to the same conclusion every time: given the realities of the current situation, only a country which is preparing for a first (disarming) strike needs a "space shield"; a country which does not base its actions on such a concept should have no need for such a weapons system.

After all, space-strike weapons are all-purpose weapons. The space-strike weapons that are being created in the U.S. are kinetic energy weapons and also long-range, directed energy systems (with a range of several thousand miles and great destructive power). As our experts and scientists and yours confirm, those weapons are capable of destroying in space, as well as from space, within a very short time, in great quantities and selectively, objects which are thousands of miles away. I stress -- thousands of miles away.

For example, how should we regard the space weapons of a country which have the capability of destroying another country's centers for controlling space objects and of destroying its space devices for monitoring, navigation, communication etc. within very short time intervals measured in minutes? Essentially, these weapons can only be intended for "blinding" the other side, catching it unprepared and depriving it of the possibility of countering a nuclear strike. Moreover, if these weapons are developed, the process of perfecting them and giving them even better combat characteristics will begin immediately. Such is the course of development of all weaponry.

How then, Mr. President, should the Soviet Union act in such a situation? I would like to repeat what I already told you in Geneva. The USSR cannot simply reduce and will not reduce nuclear weapons to the detriment of its security, when the SDI program is being implemented in the U.S. Whether we like it or not, we will be forced to develop and improve our strategic nuclear forces and increase their capability of neutralizing the U.S. "space shield." At the same time, we would also have to develop our own space weapons inter alia for the purpose of

18

a territorial ABM defense. Probably, the U.S. would in turn then take some other additional steps. As a result, we will not get out of the vicious cycle of measures and countermeasures, out of the whirlpool of an ever-increasing arms race. The consequence of such competition for our peoples and for all of mankind is unpredictable.

I am convinced that the only sensible way out is not to engage in this at all. From every point of view the correct path for our countries is negotiation on the prevention of an arms race in space and its cessation on earth. And we need to come to agreement on the basis of equal and mutually acceptable conditions.

You and I agreed to accelerate the negotiations. I took satisfaction in hearing you say that the U.S. would not "develop space-based offensive weapons."

As I see it, some kind of common basis is emerging between you and me for a very significant part of the problem of preventing an arms race in space. Let us have our representatives at the negotiations proceed on this basis to begin working out specific measures to prevent the development of offensive space weapons, i.e., all space-based weapons which can destroy targets in space and from space.

In the spirit of the frankness in which we are talking, I would like to say that this issue has now become very acute: either events will determine policy or we will determine policy. In order not to be governed by events, it is especially important once again to conduct a profound analysis of all aspects of the objective interrelationship between offensive and defensive weapons and to hear each other out on this issue. However, it seems to me that there will be little meaning to such discussions if in tandem with them weapons of war start coming out of the doors of our laboratories, weapons whose influence on strategic stability we must not now miscalculate. Common sense dictates that until we determine together those consequences, we must not permit anything to go beyond the walls of the laboratory. We are prepared to negotiate to reach agreement on this matter as well.

It appears to me this is a practical way to implement the joint accord you and I confirmed in Geneva concerning the inadmissibility of an arms race in space and concerning the ultimate elimination of nuclear arms.

In line with such an approach it would also make sense at the Geneva negotiations to discuss the issue of eliminating the danger of a first (disarming) nuclear strike. I would like to

state to you again very definitely: we are not making a bid for a first nuclear strike, we are not preparing our nuclear forces for one.

I cannot agree with the way you formulate the issue of first strike nuclear forces. This issue, of course, is not merely one of ICBM warheads. For example, there is no difference between U.S. ballistic missile warheads on "Trident" submarines and warheads on modern Soviet land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles as far as their kill capability is concerned, i.e. in terms of such indices as accuracy, power and range. And if one considers this issue from the point of view of warning time, then, for a significant portion of submarine missiles, where the U.S. has a three-fold advantage in warheads, the warning time is significantly shorter.

And can we view the "Pershing II" missiles deployed in Europe with their high accuracy and short flight time to targets on USSR territory as anything other than first-strike weapons?

Please forgive me for dealing with technical details in a personal letter like this. But these are vitally important realities, and we simply cannot get around them.

Believe me, Mr. President, we have a genuine and truly serious concern about U.S. nuclear systems. You talk about mutual concerns. This matter can be resolved only through considering and counting the sum total of the respective nuclear systems of both countries. Let our delegations discuss this matter as well.

Mr. President, I would like to give you my brief reaction to what you said concerning regional conflicts. At the time when we touched on these issues in Geneva, I stressed that it is most important to view things realistically, to see the world as it is. If we recognize the fact that independent states exist and function in the international arena, then we also have to acknowledge their sovereign right to have relations with whomever they wish and the right to ask for assistance, including military assistance.

Both you and we offer such assistance. Why apply a double standard and assert that Soviet assistance is a source of tension and U.S. assistance is beneficial? It would be better for us to be guided by objective criteria in this matter. The Soviet Union is assisting legitimate governments which come to us because they have been and are being subjected to outside military interference.

And, as the facts indicate, the U.S. incites actions against governments and supports and supplies weapons to groups which are inimical to society and which are, in essence, terrorists. Looking at things objectively, it is such actions and outside interference that create regional tension and conflict. If such actions cease, I am convinced tensions will decrease and the prospects for political settlements will become much better and more realistic.

Unfortunately, at present, developments are proceeding in a different direction. Take, for example, the unprecedented pressure and threats which the government of Nicaragua is being subjected to - a legitimate government brought to power through free elections.

I will be frank: what the United States has done recently causes concern. It seems that there is a tilt in the direction of further exacerbation of regional problems. Such an approach does not make it easier to find a common language and makes the search for political solutions more difficult.

With regard to Afghanistan, one gets the impression that the U.S. side intentionally fails to notice the "open door" leading to a political settlement. Now there is even a working formula for such a settlement. It is important not to hinder the negotiations in progress, but to help them along. In that event a fair settlement will definitely be found.

Mr. President, I would like to have you take my letter as another one of our "fireside talks." I would truly like to preserve not only the spirit of our Geneva meetings, but also to go further in developing our dialogue. I view our correspondence as a very important channel for preparing for our meeting in Washington.

The new year will be upon us very soon, and I would like to send you and your wife our very best wishes.

Sincerely,

M. Gorbachev

Moscow, December 24, 1985