

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

April 30, 1985

Dear Mr. General Secretary:

As I mentioned in my letter of April 4, delivered by Speaker O'Neill, I have given careful thought to your letter of March 24 and wish to take this opportunity to address the questions you raised and to mention others which I feel deserve your attention. Given the heavy responsibilities we both bear to preserve peace in the world and life on this planet, I am sure that you will agree that we must communicate with each other frankly and openly so that we can understand each other's point of view clearly. I write in that spirit.

I had thought that we agreed on the necessity of improving relations between our countries, and I welcomed your judgment that it is possible to do so. Our countries share an overriding interest in avoiding war between us, and -- as you pointed out -- the immediate task we face is to find a way to provide a political impetus to move these relations in a positive direction.

Unfortunately, certain recent events have begun to cast doubt on the desire of your government to improve relations. In particular, I have in mind the public retraction of the commitment made earlier by a responsible Soviet official to take steps to make certain that lethal force is not used against members of the United States Military Liaison Mission in Germany.

Mr. General Secretary, this matter has importance beyond the tragic loss of life which has occurred. It involves fundamental principles which must be observed if we are to narrow our differences and resolve problems in our countries' relations. For



this reason, I will give you my views in detail. The principles are those of dealing with each other on the basis of equality and reciprocity. The current Soviet position recognizes neither of these principles.

Now, I can understand that accidents occur in life which do not reflect the intention of political authorities. But when they do, it is the responsibility of the relevant political authorities to take appropriate corrective action.

For decades, members of our respective military liaison missions in Germany operated pursuant to the Huebner-Malinin agreement without a fatal incident. That encouraging record was broken when an unarmed member of our mission was killed by a Soviet soldier. Our military personnel are instructed categorically and in writing (in orders provided to your commander) never to use lethal force against members of the Soviet Military Liaison Mission, regardless of circumstances. Our forces in the Federal Republic of Germany have never done so, even though Soviet military personnel have been apprehended repeatedly in restricted military areas. In fact, some Soviet officers were discovered in a prohibited area just three days before the fatal shooting of our officer and were escorted courteously and safely from the area.

The position which your Government most recently presented to us, therefore, is neither reciprocal in its effect nor does it reflect a willingness to deal as equals. Instead of accepting the responsibility to insure that members of the United States Military Liaison Mission receive the same protection as that we accord members of the Soviet Military Liaison Mission, what we see is the assertion of a "right" to use lethal force under certain circumstances, determined unilaterally by the Soviet side, and in practice by enlisted men in the Soviet armed forces.

Now I will offer no comment on the desirability of allowing subordinate officials -- and indeed even rank-and-file soldiers -- to make decisions which can affect relations between great nations. If



you choose to permit this, that is your prerogative. But in that case, your Government cannot escape responsibility for faulty acts of judgment by individuals acting in accord with standing orders.

I hope that you will reconsider the position your Government has taken on this matter, and take steps to see to it that your military personnel guarantee the safety of their American, British and French counterparts in Germany just as American, British and French military personnel guarantee the safety of their Soviet colleagues. If your Government is unwilling or unable to abide by even this elementary rule of reciprocity, the conclusion we will be forced to draw will inevitably affect the prospects for settling other issues. The American people see this tragedy through the eyes of the widow and an eight-year-old child. Consequently it will remain a penetrating and enduring problem until it is properly resolved.

Your letter mentioned a number of other important principles, but here too our agreement on the principle should not be allowed to obscure the fact that, in our opinion, the principle cited has not been observed on the Soviet side. For example I could not agree more with your statement that each social system should prove its advantages not by force, but by peaceful competition, and that all people have the right to go their chosen way without imposition from the outside. But if this is true, what are we to think of Soviet military actions in Afghanistan or of your country's policy of supplying arms to minority elements in other countries which are attempting to impose their will on a nation by force? Can this be considered consistent with that important principle?

Mr. General Secretary, my purpose in pointing this out is not to engage in a debate over questions on which we disagree, but simply to illustrate the fact that agreement on a principle is one thing, and practical efforts to apply it another. Since we seem to agree on many principles, we must



devote our main effort to closing the gap between principle and practice.

In this regard, I am pleased to note that we both seem to be in agreement on the desirability of more direct consultation on various regional issues. That is a healthy sign, and I would hope that these consultations can be used to avoid the development of situations which might bring us to dangerous confrontations. I believe we should not be discouraged if, at present, our positions seem far apart. This is to be expected, given our differing interests and the impact of past events. The important thing is to make sure we each have a clear understanding of the other's point of view and act in a manner which does not provoke unintended reaction by the other.

One situation which has had a profoundly negative impact on our relations is the conflict in Afghanistan. Isn't it long overdue to reach a political resolution of this tragic affair? I cannot believe that it is impossible to find a solution which protects the legitimate interests of all parties, that of the Afghan people to live in peace under a government of their own choosing, and that of the Soviet Union to ensure that its southern border is secure. We support the United Nations Secretary General's effort to achieve a negotiated settlement, and would like to see a political solution that will deal equitably with the related issues of withdrawal of your troops to their homeland and guarantees of non-interference. I fear that your present course will only lead to more bloodshed, but I want you to know that I am prepared to work with you to move the region toward peace, if you desire.

Above all, we must see to it that the conflict in Afghanistan does not expand. Pakistan is a trusted ally of the United States and I am sure you recognize the grave danger which would ensue from any political or military threats against that country.

Turning to another of your comments, I must confess that I am perplexed by what you meant by your observation that trust "will not be enhanced



if, for example, one were to talk as if in two languages...." Of course, this is true. And, if I am to be candid, I would be compelled to admit that Soviet words and actions do not always seem to us to be speaking the same language. But I know that this is not what you intended to suggest. I also am sure that you did not intend to suggest that expressing our respective philosophies or our views of actions taken by the other is inconsistent with practical efforts to improve the relationship. For, after all, it has been the Party which you head which has always insisted not only on the right but indeed the duty to conduct what it calls an ideological struggle.

However this may be, your remarks highlight the need for us to act so as to bolster confidence rather than to undermine it. In this regard, I must tell you that I found the proposal you made publicly on April 7 -- and particularly the manner in which it was made -- unhelpful. As for the substance of the proposal, I find no significant element in it which we have not made clear in the past is unacceptable to us. I will not burden this letter with a reiteration of the reasons, since I am certain your experts are well aware of them. I cannot help but wonder what the purpose could have been in presenting a proposal which is, in its essence, not only an old one, but one which was known to provide no basis for serious negotiation. Certainly, it does not foster a climate conducive to finding realistic solutions to difficult questions. Past experience suggests that the best way to solve such issues is to work them out privately.

This brings me to the negotiations which have begun in Geneva. They have not made the progress we had hoped. It may now be appropriate to give them the political impetus about which we both have spoken. Let me tell you frankly and directly how I view them.

First, the January agreement by our Foreign Ministers to begin new negotiations was a good one. The problem has not been the terms of reference on the basis of which our negotiators met, even though each side may in some instances



interpret the wording of the joint statement somewhat differently in its application to specifics. The problem is, rather, that your negotiators have not yet begun to discuss concretely how we can translate our commitment to a radical reduction of nuclear arsenals into concrete, practical agreements.

A particular obstacle to progress has been the demand by Soviet negotiators that, in effect, the United States agree to ban research on advanced defensive systems before other topics are dealt with seriously. I hope that I have misunderstood the Soviet position on this point, because, if that is the Soviet position, no progress will be possible. For reasons we have explained repeatedly and in detail, we see no way that a ban on research efforts can be verified. Indeed in Geneva, foreign Minister Gromyko acknowledged the difficulty of verifying such a ban on research. Nor do we think such a ban would be in the interest of either of our countries. To hold the negotiations hostage to an impossible demand creates an insurmountable obstacle from the outset. I sincerely hope that this is not your intent, since it cannot be in the interest of either of our countries. In fact, it is inconsistent with your own actions -- with the strategic defense you already deploy around Moscow and with your own major research program in strategic defense.

In this regard, I was struck by the characterization of our Strategic Defense Initiative which you made during your meeting with Speaker O'Neill's delegation -- that this research program has an offensive purpose for an attack on the Soviet Union. I can assure you that you are profoundly mistaken on this point. The truth is precisely the opposite. We believe that it is important to explore the technical feasibility of defensive systems which might ultimately give all of us the means to protect our people more safely than do those we have at present, and to provide the means of moving to the total abolition of nuclear weapons, an objective on which we are agreed. I must ask you, how are we ever practically to achieve that noble aim if nations



have no defense against the uncertainty that all nuclear weapons might not have been removed from world arsenals? Life provides no guarantee against some future madman getting his hands on nuclear weapons, the technology of which is already, unfortunately, far too widely known and knowledge of which cannot be erased from human minds.

This point seems, at one time, to have been clearly understood by the Soviet Government. I note that Foreign Minister Gromyko told the United Nations General Assembly in 1962 that anti-missile defenses could be the key to a successful agreement reducing offensive missiles. They would, he said then, "guard against the eventuality ... of someone deciding to violate the treaty and conceal missiles or combat aircraft." Not only has your government said that missile defenses are good; you have acted on this belief as well. Not only have you deployed an operational ABM system, but you have upgraded it and you are pursuing an active research program.

Of course, I recognize that, in theory, the sudden deployment of effective defenses by one side in a strategic environment characterized by large numbers of "first-strike" weapons could be considered as potentially threatening by the other side. Nevertheless, such a theoretical supposition has no basis in reality, at least so far as the United States is concerned. Our scientists tell me that the United States will require some years of further research to determine whether potentially effective defensive systems can be identified which are worthy of consideration for deployment. If some options should at some time in the future be identified, development of them by the United States could occur only following negotiations with other countries, including your own, and following thorough and open policy debates in the United States itself. And if the decision to deploy should be positive, then further years would pass until the systems could actually be deployed. So there is no possibility of a sudden, secretive, destabilizing move by the United States. During the research period our governments will have ample time to phase out



systems which could pose a "first-strike" threat and to develop a common understanding regarding the place of possible new systems in a safer, more stable, arrangement. If such defensive systems are identified that would not be permitted by the

Treaty on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems, the United States intends to follow the procedures agreed upon at the time the Treaty was negotiated in 1972. In particular, Agreed Statement D attached to that Treaty calls upon the party developing a system based upon other physical principles to consult with the other party pursuant to Article XIII, with a view to working out pertinent limitations which could be adopted by amendment to the Treaty pursuant to Article XIV. I presume that it continues to be the intention of the Soviet Union to abide by Agreed Statement D in the event the long-continuing Soviet program in research on directed energy weapons were to have favorable results.

I hope this discussion will assist you in joining me in a search for practical steps to invigorate the negotiations in Geneva. One approach which I believe holds promise would be for our negotiators on strategic and intermediate-range nuclear systems to intensify their efforts to agree on specific reductions in the numbers of existing and future forces, with particular attention to those each of us find most threatening, while the negotiators dealing with defensive and space weapons concentrate on measures which prevent the erosion of the ABM Treaty and strengthen the role that Treaty can play in preserving stability as we move toward a world without nuclear weapons. Proceeding in this fashion might avoid a fruitless debate on generalities and open the way to concrete, practical solutions which meet the concerns of both sides.

I believe we also should give new attention to other negotiations and discussions underway in the security and arms control field. We know that some progress has been made in the Stockholm Conference toward narrowing our differences. An





agreement should be possible this year on the basis of the framework which we have discussed with your predecessors. Specifically, we are willing to consider the Soviet proposal for a declaration reaffirming the principle not to use force, if the Soviet Union is prepared to negotiate agreements which will give concrete new meaning to that principle. Unfortunately, the response of your representatives to this offer has not been encouraging up to now. I hope that we may soon see a more favorable attitude toward this idea and toward the confidence-building measures that we and our allies have proposed.

One pressing issue of concern to us both is the use of chemical weaponry in the Iran-Iraq war. This situation illustrates the importance of curbing the spread of chemical weapons, and I suggest that it might be useful in the near future for our experts to meet and examine ways in which we might cooperate on this topic. A verifiable complete global ban on these terrible weapons would provide a lasting solution, and I would ask you therefore to give further study to the draft treaty we have advanced in the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva.

Steps to improve our bilateral relationship are also important, not only because of the benefits which agreements in themselves can bring, but also because of the contribution they can make to a more confident working relationship in general.

Several of these issues seem ripe for rapid settlement. For example, we should be able to conclude an agreement on improving safety measures in the North Pacific at an early meeting and move to discussions of civil aviation issues. We are ready to move forward promptly to open our respective consulates in New York and Kiev. Our efforts to negotiate a new exchanges agreement have, after six months, reached the point where only a handful of issues remain to be resolved. But if I had to characterize these remaining issues, I would say that they result from efforts on our side to raise our sights and look to more, not fewer, exchanges. Shouldn't we try to improve on past practices in this area? I am also hopeful



that the meeting of our Joint Commercial Commission in May will succeed in identifying areas in which trade can increase substantially, but it is clear that this is likely to happen only if we succeed in improving the political atmosphere.

Finally, let me turn to an issue of great importance to me and to all Americans. As the Vice President informed you in Moscow, we believe strongly that strict observance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and of the Helsinki Final Act is an important element of our bilateral relationship. Last year we suggested that Ambassador Hartman meet periodically with Deputy Foreign Minister Korniyenko to discuss confidentially how we might achieve greater mutual understanding in this area. I am also prepared to appoint rapporteurs as you suggested to the Vice President, perhaps someone to join Ambassador Hartman in such meetings. Whatever procedures we ultimately establish, I hope we can agree to try, each in accord with his own legal structure, to resolve problems in this area. If we can find a way to eliminate the conditions which give rise to public recrimination, we will have taken a giant step forward in creating an atmosphere conducive to solving many other problems.

I was glad to receive your views on a meeting between the two of us, and agree that major formal agreements are not necessary to justify one. I assume that you will get back in touch with me when you are ready to discuss time and place. I am pleased that arrangements have been made for Secretary Shultz to meet Foreign Minister Gromyko in Vienna next month, and hope that they will be able to move us toward solutions of the problems I have mentioned as well as others on the broad agenda before us.

As I stated at the outset, I have written you in candor. I believe that our heavy responsibilities require us to communicate directly and without guile or circumlocution. I hope you will give me your frank view of these questions and call to my attention any others which you consider require our personal involvement. I sincerely hope that



we can use this correspondence to provide a new impetus to the whole range of efforts to build confidence and to solve the critical problems which have increased tension between our countries.

Sincerely,

*Ronald Reagan*

His Excellency  
Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev  
General Secretary of the Central Committee  
of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union  
The Kremlin  
Moscow

