

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

October 31, 1985

Dear Mr. General Secretary:

As I told Foreign Minister Shevardnadze in New York October 24, I have been giving careful consideration to your letter dated September 12. The issues you raise are important ones, the ideas you have put forward are in many ways interesting, and I have wanted to study them thoroughly before replying.

Many of the specific points you addressed in your letter have been or will be dealt with by our delegations in the Geneva arms control negotiations or by our Foreign Ministers. In this letter I will therefore focus on what I consider the most significant issues you have raised.

You suggested in your letter that we might reach an understanding on the inadmissibility of nuclear war and other general principles which should guide us. Foreign Minister Shevardnadze has since proposed specific language for our consideration. As I have repeatedly made clear, it is indeed my view that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. I therefore have instructed Secretary Shultz to discuss this matter with Foreign Minister Shevardnadze in their meetings next week.

As we address this and other elements which may figure in any document we may issue in Geneva, I believe it is important to give the most careful consideration to our words. The experience of the past has been that overly vague or rhetorical language has led to expectations which, given the competitive aspect of our relationship to which you referred in your letter, cannot be sustained.

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If we are to avoid subsequent misunderstandings and disillusionment, our own statements should be clear and based on concrete achievements. I am convinced that there is substantial common ground on the range of areas we have been discussing in connection with our forthcoming meeting, and I would hope that this common ground can be expanded during our meeting in Geneva.

You raised several specific areas in the security field where this might be possible. Secretary Shultz will be prepared to discuss all your ideas in concrete terms while he is in Moscow. I believe you will find that we are indeed prepared to go our fair share of the way to ensure our meeting is a productive one.

I do, however, want to address your response to the proposals we had previously made in the Geneva arms control talks, which was foreshadowed in your letter and which your delegation subsequently tabled in Geneva.

We have been carefully assessing your counterproposal over the last month. As I stated in my address to the United Nations on October 24, I believe that within it there are seeds which we should nurture and that in the coming weeks we should seek to establish a genuine process of give-and-take.

In order to foster such a process, I have approved a new and comprehensive proposal designed to build upon the positive elements of your counterproposal and bridge the positions of our two sides. I have asked our negotiators to extend the current round to permit your experts to achieve a full understanding of our approach. This new proposal deals with all three areas under discussion in the Geneva negotiations. Its essence is a proposal for radical and stabilizing reductions in strategic offensive arms and a separate agreement on intermediate-range nuclear missile systems, both of which bridge US and Soviet ideas. We also propose that both sides provide assurances that their strategic defense programs are and will remain in full accord with the ABM Treaty.

Such assurances assume a resolution of our current differences over compliance with the Treaty.

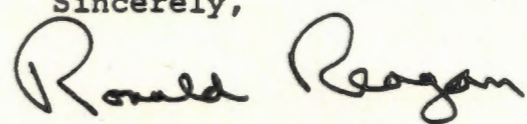
In the area of strategic arms, the United States agrees with the objective of a fifty percent reduction in strategic offensive forces. Our proposal builds on this, applying the fifty percent principle in a manner that is both equitable and can enhance stability. In the area of intermediate-range nuclear forces, we have also looked for elements we find in common. While I continue to firmly believe that the best outcome would be the complete elimination of intermediate-range nuclear missiles on both sides, in our new proposal, we have also moved in your direction. In defense and space we must begin now to establish a framework for a cooperative transition to more reliance on defenses and we would like to see a more developed dialogue on how such a transition could be jointly undertaken.

We have designed our approach to provide for a mutually acceptable resolution of the range of nuclear and space arms issues; to take account of the interrelationship between the offense and the defense; and to address those concerns that you and your negotiators have described as being of great importance to you. I am convinced that this new proposal can provide the basis for immediate and genuine progress on the numerous and complex issues facing us in the nuclear and space area, and I look forward to discussing it with you in Geneva later this month.

We will also have the opportunity in Geneva to discuss the other areas which make up our relationship. Much work remains to be done if we are to be able to announce specific progress on regional and bilateral issues. I hope that Secretary Shultz's Moscow visit will be a stimulus to rapid progress in the weeks ahead.

In conclusion, may I say once more that I am looking forward to our meeting and that I sincerely hope we will be able to set our countries on a less confrontational and more cooperative course in the years ahead. I will personally spare no effort to help bring this about.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Ronald Reagan in cursive script.

His Excellency
Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev
General Secretary of the Central Committee
of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union
Moscow