

**Memorandum of Conversation between M. S. Gorbachev and U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz
April 14, 1987**

(In the beginning of the conversation G. Shultz handed M. S. Gorbachev a personal letter from President of the United States Ronald Reagan)

Gorbachev. I had a brief look at the contents of the letter. I welcome it. As I understand it, this letter, so to speak, is in the nature of an invitation.

Shultz. Yes, and in addition, it represents the personal contact which, the President believes, has been established between him and you.

Gorbachev. I see it as a certain stimulus for us. I want to say that notwithstanding all the difficulties and all the upheavals, we are continuing to strive for cooperation with the Reagan administration. We have already accumulated a certain experience in communication, and we have some results. And most importantly—the United States will remain the United States, regardless of which party and which administration is in power. The United States remains a country with its national interests. And we start from that assumption.

Shultz. This is a reasonable approach.

Gorbachev. It is part of the new thinking, which we are developing right now. And we are calling on you to join the campaign to spread this new thinking.

Shultz. This morning I had one of the most interesting conversations of all my meetings with Soviet leaders. I have in mind my meeting with Mr. Ryzhkov about issues of the economy.

[...]

Shultz. Yes. And besides, in Reykjavik, you and the President emphasized the importance of verification. I repeatedly quoted your statements from Reykjavik to that effect, and I noted your Friday speech in Prague as well. We presented a draft of the treaty, which contains detailed proposals on verification. You, for your part, informed us that you agree with all the principles of verification proposed by us, and maybe even wish to go further. The key here, of course, is to agree on concrete details, therefore we are waiting for a detailed response to our proposals. We believe that the INF treaty should become a model for the future in terms of verification.

We hope that subsequently it will lead to agreements on strategic weapons, which, as you said in your speech on Friday, represent the core problem. By the way, from the perspective of verification, there are very strong arguments in favor of a complete zero version on INF. It would be substantially better, from the point of view of trust, to have the ability to verify the end result. We hope that you will still consider arguments in favor of global zero.

But I repeat, on the two central issues of the treaty, we are clearly on the way to an agreement. What emerges here is the question about shorter-range missiles. We have studied your proposal, which your Minister explained to me in detail yesterday. I would like to focus on the principles, which, in our view, must determine our decision on this issue. Generally speaking, they do not contradict the concrete stipulations of your new proposal, although I have to say that we have not yet analyzed all of these concrete proposals fully. The first of these principles is that we need to start from an understanding regarding a ceiling on these missiles.

[...]

Shultz. [...] additional work will be required only for coordinating the quantitative parameters of this agreement. Here are the principles: first of all, to establish the ceiling at your present level minus the missiles being withdrawn from the GDR and Czechoslovakia. But the ceiling is necessary. Secondly, this ceiling or zero [missiles] (depending on what we agree on) will be applied on a global basis.

Gorbachev. What do you mean by “a global basis?”

Shultz. That we would not have such missiles at all, or we would have some number of them on a global basis.

Gorbachev. Deployed in the USA, in Asia, or on bases?

Shultz. Zero on a global basis, or some number regardless of where they are deployed.

The third principle is a principle which we consider important in our relations in general—the principle of equality. Today we do not have such missiles. Therefore, we need to have the right to a level equal to you, regardless of whether we would use this right or not.

Gorbachev. But we want to eliminate these missiles.

Shultz. However, that will not happen overnight and would require a certain amount of time while the negotiations take place.

Gorbachev. If in this agreement the Soviet Union undertakes an obligation to eliminate tactical missiles within some defined period of time, for example within a year, then why would you want to increase your armaments?

Shultz. We want to have the right to have an equal level.

Gorbachev. I think we should search for some formula here.

[...]

Gorbachev. [...] There should not be any obstacles for verification. There should be guaranteed access for inspections of industrial enterprises, whether private or state-owned, of bases, including those in third countries, places of storage, plants, depots and so on, regardless of whether any particular company has contracts with the Pentagon or not. Concrete proposals on this issue should become the subject of negotiations.

Regarding the related issue of the shorter-range missiles. We are willing to start and hold negotiations on such missiles simultaneously with negotiations on the INF. If you think that an agreement on the INF would be achieved before an agreement on operational-tactical missiles, then it could include the principles governing shorter-range missiles. In that case, we would withdraw and eliminate a part of those missiles in the context of the INF agreement. Simultaneously, we would conduct negotiations on the remaining missiles. And besides, we are in favor of their elimination, and such a decision would remove all our questions about equality, global basis and ceilings, i.e. it would satisfy your principles. We could resolve the question of Asia in the same way we resolved the INF question.

Shultz. What do you have in mind?

Gorbachev. We would have an equal level for both the USSR and the USA outside of Europe, or a zero level. In other words, we are in favor of a global decision.

Shultz. We think that it does not make any sense to discuss geographical location in connection with these missiles at all because they are highly mobile.

Gorbachev. In any case, we are in favor of a global zero level.

[...]

Shultz. I think we have a basis for a possible agreement. First of all, the issue of the shorter-range weapons would be represented in the treaty on intermediate-range missiles. I think it is clear to us which weapons we are talking about.

Gorbachev. As we understand it, about the SS-23 missiles and other missiles of this class.

Shultz. The issue of the shorter-range missiles will be resolved on the basis of a global ceiling. The initial ceiling will be determined by subtracting from your current level the number of missiles now deployed in the GDR and Czechoslovakia. Then additional negotiations will be conducted about the remaining missiles. During that period, the United States will have the right to have an equal level with the Soviet level on these missiles. At the same time, the Soviet Union would announce in advance (although it is up to you to decide), that its position at the forthcoming negotiations would presuppose elimination of the remaining missiles. We have not decided yet what our

position would be at these negotiations. But we will be talking about some quantity; I cannot say precisely how many right now. Therefore, the question of what the final equal level would be—zero, or some other [level]—would be decided at the negotiations.

Gorbachev. You obviously are defending the position you came here with and which you formulated before we proposed elimination of all shorter-range missiles, not only those deployed in the GDR and Czechoslovakia, but all the rest of them. You did not know when you were formulating your position that we would agree not just to freeze but to conduct negotiations and eliminate the shorter-range missiles within a short time-period. Why then would you need to increase your armaments—I simply do not understand. There is no logic in that at all, with the exception maybe of a purely legalistic interpretation of the right to equality. But this, it seems to me, is just casuistry.

[...]

Gorbachev. [...] we should look at the issues in their entirety. And naturally, we should also consult with our allies.

Shultz. I still think that the complex of issues relating to the INF and shorter-range missiles is one thing, and other issues constitute another complex.

Gorbachev. I would not link tactical missiles with the INF and the shorter-range missiles. We will still get to them.

And now I propose to take a break, after which we could discuss the issue we first considered in Reykjavik: strategic offensive weapons.

(After the break)

Gorbachev. As I understand it, yesterday you and E. A. Shevardnadze had an exchange about strategic weapons. Maybe we could now briefly summarize the positions of each side?

Shultz. I will say honestly that I was somewhat disappointed. It seemed to me that we made good progress in Reykjavik. However, we have not moved any further.

We agree now, as we agreed in Reykjavik, to have the ceiling on the number of warheads on strategic offensive weapons at 6,000 units, and of strategic delivery vehicles at 1,600 units. We also agreed in Reykjavik that the reductions would affect all the main elements of the nuclear potential of both sides, the entire triad. I remember your gesture during the meeting at Hofdi, so to speak, to cut all currently existing quantities by half.

Gorbachev. We came to a good agreement then—to reduce all components by half. Mr. Nitze, it seems, does not agree with me, because that agreement was reached without him.

[...]

Shultz. [...] from the point of view of our Air Force, it is quite a firm limit. In particular, on the number of planes with air-launched cruise missiles. The quantity of these cruise missiles is definitely limited at a level of 1,200 units, or, if that limit is exceeded, it would be necessary to reduce the number of ballistic missiles, and our Air Force has quite far-reaching plans. They believe that they have good “Stealth” technology, cruise missiles and so on. The proposed version also limits the allowed number of SLBMs, of which we now have a considerable quantity. Besides that, if we keep our ICBMs in the modernized version, the number of SLBMs would be even more strictly limited. Therefore, it was not easy for us to squeeze into all these limits, but we believe that it could be done. We thought that it would be acceptable in principle for you, too. That is why we, in particular, consider the sub-level of 4,800 within the overall level of 6,000 warheads important.

Gorbachev. But in Reykjavik, we specifically walked away from all these sub-levels. There, as you remember, we talked about the fact that the structure of strategic offensive weapons on each side has its own historically developed special features. The relative weight of each of the three elements of the triad is different for you and us. And then, as I see it, we came to the understanding that the problem hides precisely in those sub-levels, that they are the reason for the dead end to which the negotiations came because in the discussion of those sub-levels each side tries to ensure its own security interests and insists on certain things that are unacceptable for the other side. This is how the dead end emerges. That is why we proposed to take the triad as it exists now, and to cut it all in half in five years. The triad would remain, but at a different level—reduced by half. The formula is simple and clear. But now I am starting to suspect that you don’t want to stand by what you personally, Mr. Secretary of State, called acceptable in Reykjavik. Maybe Mr. Nitze does not like this formula, but it is a simple and realistic one.

Shultz. In our view, it is ineffective because it does not ensure stability and does not ensure the necessary equality. In principle, we agree with the idea that in the process of reductions we need to respect the existing structure of strategic forces. But at the same time, our goal is to achieve equal levels and stability. This is the main idea that was passed to the Nitze-Akhromeev group for consideration, so that they would be able to translate it into concrete parameters. A purely mechanical reduction by half will not, in our view, produce a reasonable, appropriate result. I repeat—the general idea is to subject all elements of the triad to reductions and at the same time to take some of the concerns of the other side into account.

Gorbachev. Mr. Secretary of State, do you think that it would be fair to say that strategic parity exists between our countries today?

Shultz. You have more ballistic missiles than we do. We have a different structure of forces, and I have to say that in the framework of your structure you have colossal ICBM forces, far exceeding ours. Also you undertook quite impressive steps in other spheres. In general, in our view, you have a very impressive arsenal.

Gorbachev. So what do you mean—we do not have strategic parity?

Shultz. Of course I would very much like to feel confident in this respect and to believe that everything is in order. However, we witnessed a powerful process of modernization in the development of your forces, and an increase in the number of missiles and warheads, and that caused great anxiety among us. This is precisely why under President Reagan you saw such a stepping up of U.S. efforts in this sphere.

Gorbachev. And yet the fact remains that we have an approximate equality between us, a parity in the quantitative sphere, in the sense of power and potential of our strategic forces. And even though it exists at a very high level [of armaments], and disarmament is needed, we do have stability today. You are saying that you feel especially threatened by our ICBMs. We feel even more threatened by your side's SLBMs because they are less vulnerable, equipped with MIRVs, and very accurate. And even though you have undermined the last mechanism limiting the strategic arms race—the SALT II Treaty—we abide by its limits. As is known, we reduced the number of our missiles before. I still think that we do have a common understanding that strategic parity exists between us. Therefore, if today strategic parity is ensured within the framework of the existing structure and quantity of offensive strategic weapons, then we will preserve the balance when we reduce them by 50 percent, but at a level twice as low. Isn't that so? And that way we would avoid all of these calculations, confusion, mutual suspicions and accusations of bad intentions, which emerge when we start talking about sub-levels. It seems to me that we found a simple and clear mechanism for resolving this issue in Reykjavik, and I thought that you agreed with it, you personally, Mr. Secretary of State. That is why I am so surprised today.

[...]

Gorbachev. [...] I think here the Administration got caught in a trap of its own making. Large contracts have already been placed, entire sectors of industry were engaged, you are placing your bets on a breakthrough in information technology systems. Do you really think that, as President Johnson used to say, whoever controls space controls the entire world? If this is your policy, then it is based on a misconception, on a serious misconception. And that is bad for you, and for us, and for the entire world.

In Reykjavik I said that if the U.S. Administration was so attached to SDI, then we could give our agreement to the continuation of laboratory research, and then you could say that SDI was preserved as a research program. We thought through this issue once again. We thought about what could be done to untie this knot that had been tied by the administration. We can talk about it with you. We thought through the issue of what would constitute laboratory research that would not contradict the ABM Treaty, what would “laboratory” mean in that context. We are explaining to you now for the first time what laboratory research would mean. We believe that it should mean research in laboratories on the ground, in research institutes, at production plants, at testing grounds and fields. Maybe we could look for compromise on the basis of such an approach. We

could discuss during negotiations precisely which components would be barred from deployment in space.

This is what we can propose. Frankly speaking, we are making our “final efforts” because the position of the U.S. administration is one of very real extortion from its partner, it is a position of treating its partner disrespectfully. One cannot do business like this. And think about how our descendants will remember us. [...]

[Source: the Archive of the Gorbachev Foundation, Moscow
Translated by Svetlana Savranskaya for the National Security Archive.]