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THE SECRETARY OF STATE
WASHINGTON

January 29, 1986

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MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT

FROM: George P. Shultz *GPS*

SUBJECT: Responding to Gorbachev's Arms Control Proposal

Gorbachev's proposal goes directly to the fundamental issue you raised with him in Geneva -- whether our two nations can agree on a plan that will let us break the 40-year cycle of steadily growing nuclear arsenals. We should see this as an opportunity to transform Gorbachev's concept so that it matches your own vision for achieving a non-nuclear world. Our response should elaborate our own concept for a process leading to the elimination of nuclear arms, concentrating on the bilateral reductions necessary in the first stage of that process, and positing the conditions that must be met to go further, including intrusive verification, redress of conventional imbalances, a chemical weapons ban, and the need for bold steps towards resolving regional tensions.

Your response should encompass each of the three Geneva negotiating groups, in order to keep the focus on our arms control objectives, not the Soviet agenda. It should provide a framework for deep reductions in offensive nuclear arms, while easing the way to Soviet acquiescence to our SDI program. At the same time, it should position you to best capitalize on whatever answer Gorbachev gives -- either to move forward in negotiations if he is interested in a constructive process, or to counter Soviet efforts to manipulate public opinion if he is not. I believe Option 3 best serves your purposes in a way the others do not.

Option 3 is front-loaded in our favor. It contains constructive moves on START and INF, within the context of our current position, which would fulfill U.S. and Allied objectives. It would represent a demonstrable step on your part to meet Gorbachev's stated concerns about your near-term intentions for SDI and the ABM Treaty, but it would also enable the SDI program to continue as now planned and it would protect the option of a cooperative transition to greater defense reliance. The first stage is designed to be fail-safe. The continuation of SDI would provide us leverage to ensure Soviet implementation of offensive reductions. Likewise, the British and French would be excluded; their systems would also give us a kind of insurance -- the only way for the Soviets to enter negotiations on them would be to carry out the first stage reductions. Our proposal would not be an open-ended commitment that would delegitimize nuclear weapons. Rather, it envisions a continued role for an effective deterrent until the conditions exist where we could contemplate the elimination of nuclear weapons.

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- 2 -

Some will argue that Gorbachev's initiative is cynical propaganda and that any substantive response on your part would somehow be "rewarding his intransigence." Who knows. While Gorbachev is, of course, out to protect his own interests, he has at the same time made concrete proposals to advance the personal dialogue the two of you began in Geneva. A response based on our option would enable you to build upon that dialogue, take the initiative in setting the agenda for Gorbachev's next meeting with you, and challenge him to seize this potentially historic opportunity.

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