

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

February 22, 1986

Dear Mr. General Secretary:

The elimination of nuclear weapons has been an American goal for decades, from our proposals at the dawn of the nuclear age to my vision of a nuclear-free world made possible through the reliance of our countries on defense rather than on the threat of nuclear retaliation. In a 1983 speech to the Japanese Diet and on many subsequent occasions, I have advocated the abolition of nuclear weapons. I have done so because I believe this is an objective which reflects the deep yearning of people everywhere, and which provides a vision to guide our efforts in the years ahead. It was for similar reasons that I have sought to develop concepts and frameworks to guide the efforts of our governments in other aspects of our relations -- whether solving the regional tensions that have damaged our relations over the years, or expanding the people-to-people contacts that can enrich both our societies.

It is in this spirit that I have studied with great care your letter of January 14, your January 15 statement to the Soviet people, and your subsequent statements on the prospects for progress in arms control. I believe they represent a significant and positive step forward.

I am encouraged that you have suggested steps leading toward a world free from nuclear weapons, even though my view regarding the steps necessary differs from yours in certain respects. However, having agreed on the objective and on the need for taking concrete steps to reach that goal, it should be easier to resolve differences in our viewpoints as to what those steps should be. Our initial moves are of course the essential ones to start this process and therefore I believe we should focus our negotiating efforts on them.

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Of course, if we are to move toward a world in which the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons will be possible, there must be far greater trust and confidence between our two countries than exists at present. We cannot simply wave away the suspicion and misunderstandings which have developed over the past four decades between our two countries. The process of reducing and eventually eliminating nuclear weapons can by itself nurture greater confidence and trust. But there will be many in my country, and I believe in yours, who will question the wisdom of eliminating nuclear weapons -- which both sides see as the ultimate guarantor of their security -- if they see the other's conduct as threatening. This leads me to three general observations.

First, it will be vitally necessary as we move down this path to ensure the most stringent verification, with measures far more comprehensive and exacting than in any previous agreement. I welcome your recognition of this in your expressed willingness to make use of on-site inspection and to adopt other measures that may be necessary. For our part, we will be proposing verification procedures tailored to the specific weaponry limits which are contemplated. Our negotiators will, of course, work out the details of the measures, but I believe we both will have to pay close attention to this aspect and see to it that our respective governments develop and implement the necessary arrangements. At the same time, it will be essential to resolve outstanding compliance concerns and ensure that all obligations our governments have undertaken are faithfully observed.

My second point is that any sustained effort to resolve our basic security concerns must go hand-in-hand with concrete steps to move ahead in other areas of our relationship -- non-nuclear military issues, regional problems, human rights, and bilateral ties. The buildup of both nuclear and conventional armaments has taken place in recent decades to address perceived threats to security, including conflicts in other regions of the world. Progress on reducing arms should be accompanied by a corresponding effort to deal with these perceptions. The process of eliminating nuclear arms is liable to prove fragile indeed unless we can deal with our competition in a peaceful and responsible way.

I welcome the statement in your January 15 message to the Soviet people, which calls for settlement of regional conflicts as soon as possible. I would urge you again to consider seriously the proposal I made at the United Nations in October for a comprehensive and flexible framework that would permit our two countries to work together, in conjunction with the peoples involved, to solve regional conflicts that have damaged East-West relations over the years and have brought great suffering to the areas affected. We should make every effort to ensure that in the dialogue on regional issues to which we agreed at Geneva, including discussions by our foreign ministers and the meetings of our senior regional experts, our governments take a fresh look at ways to reduce tensions between us over regional matters. I continue to believe that regional conflicts can and should be resolved peacefully, in ways that allow free choice without outside interference.

Finally, as you know, the United States and its allies must rely today on nuclear weapons to deter conventional as well as nuclear conflict. This is due in large part to the significant imbalance that currently exists between the conventional forces of NATO and the Warsaw Pact. As a result, it would be necessary, as we reduce nuclear weapons toward zero, that we concurrently engage in a process of strengthening the stability of the overall East-West security balance, with particular emphasis on redressing existing conventional imbalances, strengthening confidence-building measures and accomplishing a verifiable, global ban on chemical weapons. In addition, our cooperative efforts to strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime would become even more important.

As for the specifics of your proposal, we certainly agree on the goal of eliminating nuclear weapons as soon as we have achieved the conditions for a world which makes that goal feasible. We also agree on the need to get on with the first steps towards creating those conditions now. The pace of progress towards any target date would have to depend on our ability to arrive at mutually acceptable guarantees to ensure that the security of the United States, the Soviet Union and our respective friends and allies is in no sense diminished along the way.

I also agree that the first steps in moving toward this goal involve deep reductions in the existing arsenals of the United States and the Soviet Union. Also, like you, we can envision subsequent steps which could involve the United Kingdom, France and the People's Republic of China, so that all can move to zero nuclear weapons in a balanced and stable manner. Finally, I also share the view that our efforts should now focus on the first steps which the U.S. and USSR can take bilaterally to begin the process.

I can also agree with several of your ideas on how this program would proceed. There are other details, however, that would require modification before I could accept them.

For example, as our two nations reduce our nuclear weapons toward zero, it is imperative that we maintain equal limits on those weapons at each stage along the way. To this end, the United States last November proposed a detailed plan for reduction of U.S. and Soviet strategic offensive forces. I am disappointed that the Soviet Union has not yet responded to this proposal, which builds on your ideas presented to me last fall by Foreign Minister Shevardnadze. As we discussed in Geneva, we agree on the principle of deep reductions, but we cannot agree that certain categories of weapons systems on the U.S. side would be included while like weapons on the Soviet side would be excluded.

Similarly, we must insist that limits be based on system capabilities, not expressed intentions. You made this point very eloquently to me in Geneva. In regard to longer-range INF missiles, this means that we cannot exclude systems from limits merely because of their deployment location, since those systems are capable of moving or being transported in a matter of days between different geographic areas.

I have, however, studied closely, your INF proposal of January 15, 1986, and believe that our negotiators at Geneva should be able to arrive at an equitable, verifiable and mutually acceptable INF agreement. In this regard, I have asked our negotiators during this round to propose a

concrete plan for the elimination of LRINF missiles, not only in Europe but also in Asia, before the end of 1989.

In the defense and space area, your proposal was ambiguous with regard to strategic defense research. I continue to believe that limits on research could be counterproductive and, in any case, could not be verified; therefore, they must not be included in an agreement. Beyond research, as I suggested in Geneva, if there were no nuclear missiles, then there might also be no need for defenses against them. But I am convinced that some non-nuclear defenses could make a vital contribution to security and stability. In any event, our negotiators in Geneva should thoroughly examine how we could make a transition to a world involving the increasing contribution of such defenses.

With respect to nuclear testing, I believe that, so long as we rely on nuclear weapons as an element of deterrence, we must continue to test in order to ensure their continued safety, security and reliability. However, as I wrote to you in December, I see no reason why we should not consider the matter of nuclear testing as we move forward on other arms control subjects. I suggested we establish a bilateral dialogue aimed at constructive steps in this field. I remain hopeful you will take up this offer.

Finally, although your proposal seems to recognize that the crucial first step is substantial bilateral U.S. and Soviet nuclear reductions, it also attaches certain conditions regarding the forces of the United Kingdom and France. As you know, the United States can make no commitments for other nuclear powers, nor can we agree to bilateral U.S.-Soviet arrangements which would suggest otherwise. The negotiations of limitations on third country nuclear systems is solely the responsibility and prerogative of the governments concerned.

The leaders of Britain, France and China have made known their views on this and on the progress necessary in U.S.-Soviet nuclear reductions and in other arms control areas which would establish the

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conditions for them to consider how their security interests would be served by participation in future negotiations. Thus, the important task now before us is to make the necessary progress. When we have done so -- as I noted earlier -- I can envision a process involving the other nuclear powers, so that we all can move to zero nuclear weapons in a balanced and stable manner.

With these considerations in mind, and building upon your proposal, I propose that we agree upon the elements which we hold in common, as outlined above, and that we accelerate work on the first bilateral steps. Implementing details must be worked out by our negotiators in Geneva, Vienna and Stockholm, but our guiding objective should be to reach meaningful, verifiable and balanced arms control measures, each of which can stand on its merits at every stage of the larger process.

In summary, I would propose that the process toward our agreed goal of eliminating nuclear weapons include the following elements:

Initial Steps. I believe that these steps should involve reduction in and limits on nuclear, conventional, and chemical weapons as follows:

1. The U.S. and the USSR would reduce the number of warheads on their strategic ballistic missiles to 4500 and the number of ALCMs on their heavy bombers to 1500 resulting in no more than a total number of 6000 such warheads on strategic nuclear delivery vehicles. These reductions would be carried out in such a way as to enhance stability.
2. In the INF area, by 1987 both the United States and the Soviet Union would limit their LRINF missile deployments in Europe to no more than 140 launchers each, with the Soviet Union making concurrent, proportionate reductions in Asia. Within the following year, both sides would further reduce the numbers of LRINF launchers remaining in Europe and Asia by an additional 50%. Finally, both sides would move to the total elimination of this category of weapons by the end of 1989.

3. Research programs on strategic defenses would be conducted in accord with treaty obligations.

4. The U.S. and the USSR would establish an effective MBFR verification regime and carry out initial reductions in manpower levels along the lines of the recent Western proposal at the MBFR negotiations; they would then begin a process of moving on to a balance of non-nuclear capabilities in Europe.

5. Concrete and meaningful confidence-building measures designed to make the European military environment more open, predictable, and stable would be initiated.

6. An effective, comprehensive worldwide ban on the development, production, possession, and transfer of chemical weapons would be instituted, with strict verification measures including international on-site inspection.

Subsequent steps. Subsequent steps could involve other nuclear powers and would aim at further reductions and increasingly strict limits, ultimately leading to the elimination of all nuclear weapons. We would embark on this process as soon as the steps encompassed in the first stage are completed. The goal would be to complete the process as soon as the conditions for a non-nuclear world had been achieved.

Obligations assumed in all steps and areas would be verified by national technical means, by on-site inspection as needed, and by such additional measures as might prove necessary.

I hope that this concept provides a mutually acceptable route to a goal that all the world shares. I look forward to your response and to working with you in the coming months in advancing this most important effort.

Let me conclude by agreeing with you that we should work constructively before your visit to the United States to prepare concrete agreements on the full range of issues we discussed at Geneva. Neither of us has illusions about the major problems which remain between our two countries,

but I want to assure you that I am determined to work with you energetically in finding practical solutions to those problems. I agree with you that we should use our correspondence as a most important channel of communication in preparing for your visit.

Nancy and I would like to extend to you, Mrs. Gorbacheva and your family our best wishes. It is our hope that this year will bring significant progress toward our mutual goal of building a better relationship between our two countries, and a safer world.

Sincerely,

*Ronald Reagan*

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