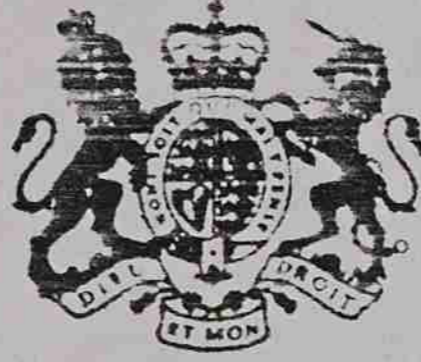


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Ref: [Handwritten initials]  
Date: [Handwritten initials]

10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

12 September 1985

DSG 083/46

RECEIVED  
27 SEP 1985

Dear Ron,

[Handwritten initials]

I promised to let you have my thoughts on your forthcoming meeting with Gorbachev. Since you will be having a first round with Shevardnadze later this month, it may be best to give you my views now. From what I hear, they may not coincide with all the advice you are getting from your own people. But I think you would expect me to give my own views nonetheless!

As we both expected, Gorbachev is showing himself to be a deft operator. He is playing western public opinion skilfully and for all it's worth. The "Time" interview is just one example. And his performance is spoiled only by the arrogance which he cannot always conceal.

His purpose is, of course, to set opinion in Europe against the United States, to give the impression that the Soviet Union is full of initiatives and original ideas while the United States is flat-footed and unimaginative. After years of deadbeat performances by the Soviet Union on the public relations front, we must not under-estimate the vulnerability of our own public opinion to Gorbachev's more skilful tactics. But it is essential that we should not let him make all the running. Otherwise public attitudes to and expectations from the meeting itself will be irreversibly tilted against you: and this in turn will affect the way in which its results are interpreted. We must - and this is

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something for all western governments - counter Gorbachev's campaign.

But that is only part of what is needed. It is even more important that the United States should show that it has appealing proposals of its own on which you will be prepared to begin the process of negotiation when you and Gorbachev meet. This point goes right to the heart of my perception of your meeting and I should like to spend some time on it.

Clearly we must not build up your first meeting with Gorbachev as a climactic event which will at a stroke cut through the main East/West problems. That way lies certain disappointment. The differences are too profound. But it would be no less a mistake, in my view, to approach it with ambitions that are too modest. I am troubled, in particular, by the notion which is gaining ground that you see the meeting as little more than a "getting to know you" session, whose only other task will be to set an agenda for future work.

It is important that you should take the measure of Gorbachev and his style. It is even more important that he should get the full flavour of your sincerity and seriousness of purpose, the West's greatest single asset. But a meeting limited to this will not satisfy public opinion in Europe that the United States has made a really serious effort to achieve forward movement in East/West relations. If the meeting is to be judged a success, it must give a specific and measurable impetus to negotiations on a wide range of issues, above all arms control. This will mean getting into the substance of the issues. This is not just as a matter of presentation. I believe that the pressures, particularly those of resource allocation, on Gorbachev to advance negotiations on arms control are a good deal stronger than he would have us believe. There may be genuine prospects of useful progress provided that we maintain Western cohesion and, at the same time, show that we are serious in seeking balanced agreements. It remains to be seen whether he wants to, or could, deliver

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against the entrenched interests in the Soviet Union. We should put him to the test.

I very much hope therefore that you will feel able to put forward concrete and specific proposals in Geneva. On arms control, you will certainly want to explain to him personally the rationale behind your Strategic Defence Initiative. I would hope that you would also, basing yourself on the four points which we agreed at Camp David, be prepared to put to him proposals on the place of strategic defence in relation to offensive forces and arms control. The key element would of course be deep cuts in offensive weapons. The proposals might also cover the clarification of activities which are permitted and prohibited under the ABM Treaty, commitments not to enter particular phases of defensive programmes before certain specific dates, and a dialogue on the relationship between offensive and defensive forces in the longer term. You might hold out too the prospect of a reaffirmation of the ABM Treaty, incorporating a longer period of notice of termination, as part of a package embracing deep cuts in offensive weapons. Thus in the immediate future both sides would agree to an interim framework of restraint on strategic offensive forces as you have suggested; we would maintain and strengthen the existing arms control regime while building a better one for the future. An approach of this kind would not constrain your longer term freedom of manoeuvre on defensive systems, when the way forward on the SDI will be clearer in the light of the research programme.

I believe that agreement in principle on proposals on these lines would enable your talks with Gorbachev to unlock the door to progress in the detailed arms control talks. But I also believe that progress will be maintained only if there is direction from the top by you and Gorbachev and that, for this purpose, you should be thinking in terms of a further meeting at your level within a reasonable time.

I hope that you would also be able to review prospects in



other arms control negotiations, above all chemical weapons about which you know I am particularly concerned. Even if it is not realistic to expect a breakthrough in these areas, it will be a chance for you to bring home to Gorbachev the importance we attach to serious negotiations leading to results; and to bring home to the public that it is the Soviet Union which is reluctant to control or abolish these weapons.

I am sure you will want to raise human rights. Gorbachev showed in London that when confronted with particular human rights issues (including individual cases) he could get tough. We found he reacted most often by hitting back with allegedly bad features of life in the West. This can too easily lead to an argument about the fundamentals of our two systems, or the trading of particular accusations, neither of which in my own experience is likely to get us anywhere in terms of better Soviet behaviour. I found the best tactic was to concentrate instead on putting across to Gorbachev two parallel convictions.

- that we in the West are not in the business of undermining the Soviet state. As I put it to him, we do not see his system through rose-tinted spectacles, but we know we have to live with it in a single world;
- nevertheless, human rights in the Soviet Union are our business: not just because both East and West have committed themselves to them at Helsinki: but also because justice at home is more likely to produce stability and responsible behaviour abroad. Our people, on whose beliefs our democratic foreign policy is founded, will continue to demand progress on these matters and the Soviet leadership have to reckon with the force of public opinion in free democratic societies.

I welcome your intention to discuss regional issues. I am sure you will stress in particular how strongly we all feel about Afghanistan. It is high time the Russians did their



part now to unblock progress towards a settlement: and a timetable for withdrawing their forces is the key. A gesture here would be highly significant for the whole of East-West relations.

This has become a longer message than I intended. And I certainly don't want you to feel that I am lecturing (perish the thought)! These matters are immensely important and difficult to judge. But I am convinced that we must stop Gorbachev's propaganda bandwagon from gaining too much speed before your meeting by making clear now that the US is utterly serious about making the maximum progress at Geneva; and that we must set clear goals for the meeting itself with which our people on both sides of the Atlantic can identify, and by which they can measure the meeting's success.

I should be very ready to discuss these points more fully with Bud McFarlane if you were able to spare him for a day or so to come over as my guest. In the meantime I send you warmest best wishes and my fullest support in the very demanding tasks which you face. We could not have a better or braver champion.

Warm regards

Yours ever

Ronald Reagan

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The President of the United States of America