

Politburo February 26, 1987

On Soviet-American Relations and Negotiations on Nuclear and Space Armaments

Gorbachev. Geneva is coming to a dead end. And we need to move to a new level of conversation. We should invite Shultz to come here. First of all, to cut off the broad interpretation of the ABM [treaty]. By continuing the Geneva negotiations in their present form, we are pretending that nothing has happened and that we are willing to tolerate all the American insolence. This borders on a betrayal of principles. And if they keep dragging it out, [we should] shut down rounds 7 and 8 and begin new negotiations on [the basis of] our proposals.

Gromyko. Maybe we should tear the SS-20s from the package? Of course, it would be a step backwards but it [will be undertaken] under new conditions. And to achieve a partial agreement. It would take a lot of brains for America to agree to a comprehensive settlement.

Dobrynin. We weren't counting on that either.

Ligachev. What if we employ our reserves at once—the medium-range missiles?

Dobrynin. The main aspect here is political, but also [matters for] propaganda.

Gorbachev. Reagan's political game is very clear to us—to give political sanction to SDI after he leaves office, and at the same time to preserve some impression that they are searching for something, for some resolution. We could respond with two actions at once—give them a sharp rebuke, and negotiations. But that would satisfy them. They will tangle our reins and at the same time pretend that they are in favor of an agreement but we are the ones undermining it. Meanwhile, they will win time for developing their SDI.

The biggest step that would make an impression on the outside world, on public opinion, would be if we untie the package and agree to cut 1,000 of our most powerful missiles.

Ligachev. If we agree to cut medium-range missiles right now, we will win right now. And our defense will not be weaker as a result. We would win a lot in public opinion.

Gorbachev. Yes, we need to smooth out the negative consequences of withdrawing from the moratorium. I support Yegor Kuzmich's proposal plus a 1,000-unit cut. Without that, Western Europe will not agree to remove the American intermediate-range missiles (the Pershings). In the arena of public opinion, we will put pressure on the United States by showing that we are in favor of mutual trust. And do it after the 7th round, go straight to the administration, above the heads of the negotiators. Or invite Shultz to Moscow.

Ligachev. What losses do we incur if we take the SS-20s out of the package?

Gorbachev. We need SS-20s to delay the deployment of SDI.

Ligachev defends his position.

Marshal Sokolov reminds about the French and British missiles.

Gorbachev. Here you are losing the political perspective? There will be no war with Britain or France. It is not possible. And the mid-range missiles, if we remove them, would change absolutely nothing here.

Shevardnadze. I am also in favor of making a decision on the mid-range missiles because after the French test explosion and our [explosion] we have to compensate with

something ... Regardless of how we justify our explosions, they weaken trust. And we should not delay this decision.

Ryzhkov. But the Europeans supported it ... (the renewal of testing).

Shevardnadze. France—yes ... And one more thing: we still do not have a final position on weapons in space: what is permitted and what is not.

Gorbachev. Could we sell the medium-range missiles for an agreement on Afghanistan?

Dobrynin. No, this will not work. The Americans do not want either one.

Shevardnadze. We should continue the course respectfully, patiently. When Armacost comes, we will talk to him.

Gorbachev (concludes). This was a useful discussion. We start from the assumption that as difficult as it is to conduct business with the United States, we are doomed to it. We have no choice. Our main problem is to remove the confrontation. This is the central issue of our entire foreign policy. But we should not build our policy on illusions. We should not count on capitalism suffering an economic crisis. It will find a way out, as it has done before. We should not think that we would have a militarily weaker opponent if arms reductions succeed because the sole interest of that state (USA) is power. Thus, competition will continue in any case. And it is a very serious [competition]. However, modifications will be taking place in all directions in the world arena, and we should not feel doomed. The process is underway in the United States as well. But we should not work only in the direction of America. We need to carefully select other main directions besides the American one.

The renewal of tests is working against us. There will be major [negative] impact ... Therefore, let's untie the package. Let the comrades prepare [materials]—when and at what level this should be done. But we have to do it before the 8th round of negotiations begins and before Shultz comes to Moscow.

Maybe a statement by me? ... Before the whole world? ... It was difficult to go for the test ...

Let's make the statement regarding untying the package some time in mid-March. This will be our response to public opinion. And this would ameliorate the negative reaction to the renewal of nuclear tests to some degree. But we had no other options.

We should respond to all the hints from those who want to work with us. Such hints are coming, directly or implicitly, from Thatcher, Kohl, and Mitterrand. We should be more assertive in pulling them all out of their "American complex" and pulling them toward us.

We should give answers as well on the issues of cutting 1,000 heavy missiles, on the imbalance in conventional arms, on offensive weapons in Europe, on the nuclear-free corridor, on reconsideration of our doctrine, on the principle of reasonable sufficiency—i.e. on all the issues that are now being discussed at the negotiations and by the general public. We have to work on the Chinese direction. [We should] try to entice Deng Xiaoping to come to Moscow. Shevardnadze should go to Austria. We should remove Rajiv Gandhi's concerns about Pakistan. We should request from our institutes—from Primakov and Arbatov—that they provide us with an objective scholarly analysis once per quarter, every 100 days. Let's entrust Arbatov to "convene" it.

[Source: the Archive of the Gorbachev Foundation, Moscow]

Translated by Svetlana Savranskaya for the National Security Archive]