

February 14, 1977

Letter, President Carter to Secretary Brezhnev

Citation:

"Letter, President Carter to Secretary Brezhnev", February 14, 1977, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Russian Foreign Ministry archives, Moscow; translation by Mark H. Doctoroff. <https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/111269>

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

TOP SECRET

Copy No. 1

THE USSR EMBASSY IN THE USA

Washington, D.C.

From the journal
of DOBRYNIN, A.F.

RECORD OF THE CONVERSATION

with Assistant to the President

Z. Brzezinski

February 15, 1977

Today Brzezinski, Assistant to the President, called me. He said that President Carter had just written a letter in response to L.I. Brezhnev.

Since the White House is preoccupied with meetings with the President of Mexico, he, Brzezinski, asked acting Secretary of State [Warren] Christopher, who was with him at the moment, to give me that letter.

Brzezinski said that he would be ready, should I have any questions, to discuss various aspects of this letter in a couple of days during our next unofficial meeting (we had a previous arrangement with Brzezinski to meet for breakfast this coming Friday, i.e. on February 18).

An hour later Christopher handed me a letter to L.I. Brezhnev, signed by President Carter:

"To his Excellency
Leonid I. Brezhnev,
the General Secretary of the Central
Committee of the Communist Party
of the Soviet Union
Moscow, Kremlin

Dear Mr. General Secretary,

I am very pleased to note that our first exchange of letters has brought us at once to consideration of the central questions of universal peace. Our two great countries share a special responsibility not only for doing everything possible for the lessening of tension, but also for working out a series of mutual understandings which can lead to a more reliable and less dangerous political climate in the world.

I know the history of your country and admire it. As a child I developed my literary taste reading your classics. I also know how much suffering your people endure very recently, during the last war. I know about your own role in this war and about the losses suffered by each Soviet family. That is why I believe that we both are sincere in our declarations about our devotion to peace, and that gives me hope for the future.

The question is how we can turn this devotion into reality. How can we start a process which could widen our cooperation and simultaneously restrain and finally limit our

rivalry. This rivalry--it is real, extremely expensive, and undeniable--can at any moment become very dangerous, which is why we must not allow it to develop without restraint. In my opinion, this demands, at least, first, work to widen where possible our coordinated efforts, especially in the area of limitation of nuclear weapons; and second, to demonstrate highly deliberate restraint towards those unstable regions of the world where direct confrontation could arise between us.

I especially welcome your desire to develop cooperation with the idea of stopping the arms race, and to achieve without delay concrete agreements on disarmament.

It is precisely in the sphere of arms limitation that we must, in my opinion, put the main emphasis. I will as always give it my personal attention and I can assure you that the officials in my administration who are responsible for these matters will consider any and all of your proposals in the most careful way and with the most positive attitude.

It goes without saying that we must have mutual security from successful attack, and we have to use our role as the most mighty states to start a significant reduction of the level of conventional and nuclear arms. We have no definite time limits as such, but it is really necessary for us to achieve some maximum progress without delay.

I agree that in our exchanges of opinion and in the conversations which Secretary of State Vance will have in Moscow at the end of March we must concentrate mainly on the question of achieving an agreement on the second stage of strategic arms limitation, possibly including some significant reductions of the level of forces. Maybe we could bring these negotiations to a successful conclusion if we agree that this is only the first step in the process which could lead to bigger reductions in our respective nuclear arsenals. Regarding this, I wonder if it wouldn't be useful to study the possibility of separating the questions on cruise missiles and "Backfire" from the second stage of the SALT negotiations. We could return to these questions right away during the following negotiations. If we have ambitious enough aims and in particular if we want to achieve real disarmament leaving only the minimum level of armaments sufficient to provide security to both sides, then, it evidently would be easier for us to deal with the technical problems, which now seem very significant and complicated, later.

I hope that our additional private exchanges of opinion and the negotiations of Secretary of State Vance in Moscow will cover the broadest possible range of possibilities. I can assure you that in the analysis of our arms control policy which I am carrying out at the present time, all applicable proposals will be considered. As I said during a conversation with your Ambassador, I hope that we can consider not only the question of possible sharp reductions of the total quantity of nuclear weapons, i.e. the question of the minimum number of missiles which would allow every country to feel secure from a first blow, but also the question of restrictions on throw weights, of the possibility of a ban on all mobile missiles, of refusal to take any long-term preparatory measures in the field of civil defense, and also of such additional confidence building measures as preliminary warning of all missile tests and achieving an agreement on the non-arming of satellites and an agreement to reject development of capability to destroy observation satellites. We also have to study practical means to satisfy our mutual desire that our agreements be observed. Such measures as on-site inspection and uninterrupted observation from space must be the subject of incorrect interpretation. These are the means, which can be used to achieve progress, and to win society's support and understanding of our efforts.

In all these areas our final goal must be to do more than that, as our specialists in technology say, which is perhaps expedient now. If we bear this very far-reaching aim in mind, we will be able to change significantly the level of threat for us and for the rest of the world.

An attempt of one side to gain an advantage over the other during negotiations will yield the opposite result. We will be striving to carry out consultations without tricks or unnecessary delays, but also without pressure and unjustifiable haste.

I welcome your readiness to direct your efforts at achieving the agreement on a universal test ban. I realize that problems remain regarding other countries which continue to conduct testing programs and the possible use of peaceful nuclear explosions in mining industry or construction, but I believe that there are satisfactory ways to consider these problems. I intend to ask the Congress to ratify two agreements which have already been concluded between our two governments, but I treat them only as steps on the way to the common goal of bringing a total halt to nuclear testing. Until then our government will observe these unratified agreements.

As far as I know there were proposals in the past to demilitarize the Indian Ocean, and these proposals were not seriously studied. I asked my colleagues to study the the Indian Ocean question thoroughly, so that we will be ready to speak more specifically about the possibility of reaching an agreement, which could promote universal peace. I ask you to inform me of your concrete ideas on this matter. I presume that in such a situation it makes sense to pay particular attention to the military activity of both countries in this region. This, as it seems, is that obvious case where mutual profit calls for a balanced agreement leading to a general reduction of military efforts in the whole region.

As you know from my public statements, I intend energetically to continue attempts to reduce the sale and transfer of conventional weapons to countries of the third world and I hope that you will join these efforts. It seems to me a senseless competition and we, as the main suppliers, are particularly responsible for placing a limit to such transfers. Obviously other providers should also be involved in these efforts, and we will widen the discussion of the question to include them.

I also welcome your aspiration to move the Vienna negotiations on reduction of armed forces and weapons in Central Europe forward more energetically until they are at the minimum acceptable levels. We are very concerned about what seems to be an extreme increase of your military power in East Europe. At the present time we are reviewing our positions on this issue and at the same time are instructing our delegation to continue to study the data which have been presented by both sides.

These are the questions, which, I hope, Mr. Vance will be able to discuss in more detail after we complete our own analysis. We will, of course, consult with our NATO allies about everything while we conduct this concrete analysis.

I would like to make one observation regarding the four-power agreement. As you know, we think that this agreement applies to all of Berlin, and not just to West Berlin. For us, the observation of both the letter and the spirit of this agreement is very important. We make every effort to avoid sensitive issues, but we must insist that this agreement, which is so vital to our ability to develop peaceful relations in Europe, is observed in full. Recently, it seems, there has been observed a growing inclination to create new aggravations and limits in Berlin, which could upset the delicate political balance which exists there. I hope that you will cooperate in eliminating these tense situations.

We expect cooperation in the realization of further steps toward the fulfillment of the agreements reached in Helsinki relating to human rights. As I said to Ambassador Dobrynin, we hope that all aspects of these agreements can be realized. It is not our intention to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries. We do not wish to create problems with the Soviet Union, but it will be necessary for our Administration from time to time to publicly express the sincere and deep feelings which our people and I feel. Our obligation to help promote human rights will not be expressed in an

extreme form or by means not proportional to achieving reasonable results. We would also welcome, of course, personal, confidential exchanges of views on these delicate questions.

I noted your response to my previous observations relating to the importance of improving trade and economic relations. Your open remarks on this issue correspond to a spirit of directness which I admire, but we have to do something practical in order to remove barriers. From my side, I intend to do everything that I can to achieve mutually beneficial trade, but you are aware of certain restrictions imposed by Congress, which I must take into account.

Permit me to say a few words about our efforts to improve the situation in other areas, where there exists disagreements and potential conflicts. In the Near East, we intend to begin direct negotiations with the sides in that region, and I hope to energetically develop a process of achieving a fair and solid settlement. Mr. Vance will be happy to have the opportunity in his conversations at the end of March to learn your view on this question, including aspects which reflect our direct interest as co-sponsors of the Geneva conference.

In southern Africa, we believe that the Africans should solve their problems without outside interference. It is with this goal in mind that we support a peaceful solution, which corresponds to the will of the majority, and have limited actions which could increase the potential for violence.

We took steps toward opening a dialogue with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam with the goal of creating the foundation for normal relations with that country. In other regions as well we will be guided by our devotion to genuine freedom, self-determination, and economic progress.

I hope that we can continue these exchanges of letters in order to have a clear statement of our views and to undertake the broadest possible review of issues which have such fundamental importance for our two peoples and for peace on earth. From these candid letters we can build a clear and precise basis for the preparation of our personal meeting, which I anticipate with great hopes.

With the best personal wishes and respect,
Jimmy Carter
White House
Washington
February 14, 1977"

Christopher could not comment on this letter at all, referring to the fact that it was prepared in the White House by the President himself.

Ambassador of the USSR in the USA
(signature)
A. Dobrynin
/A. Dobrynin/