

March 4, 1977

Letter, President Carter to Secretary Brezhnev

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From the Journal

of DOBRYNIN, A.F.

RECORD OF THE CONVERSATION

with Z. BRZEZINSKI

March 5, 1977

This morning Brzezinski handed me (Vance was away) the text of President Carter's letter to L.I. Brezhnev of March 4, 1977.

"To His Excellency

Leonid I. Brezhnev

General Secretary

of the Central Committee

of the Communist Party

of the Soviet Union

Moscow, Kremlin

Dear Mr. General Secretary,

Your letter of February 25 raised in me some concern because of its moderately sharp tone, because in it there was no recognition of my own good intentions, and because it did not contain any positive answer to the concrete proposals which were set forth in my previous letter. Differences between our countries are deep enough and I hope that you and I will never aggravate them with doubts regarding our respective personal motives.

The fact is that neither in Vladivostok, nor during the subsequent negotiations, was any final agreement achieved on the question of cruise missiles and the bomber "Backfire". I am sure that such agreements can be achieved in the future, and I am committed to achieving them. I understand your concern about postponing these questions until future negotiations, yet I believe that we will gain a definite benefit in that we will give an impulse toward a quicker resolution of an agreement, and I want to stress that postponement of these two controversial questions would be aimed only at expediting a quicker agreement, with all its positive political consequences. I am also sure that with a mutual demonstration of good will we should be able to reach an agreement on such questions as conventional weapons, tactical nuclear arms and throw weight.

Not for a minute do I allow myself to underestimate the difficulties which stand in our way. Solving these problems will demand determination, patience and decisiveness. Keeping precisely this in mind, I wanted to make two more suggestions, and both of which aim at resolving the disagreements between us.

First of all, I think it would be extremely useful, if you shared with us your own views on a significant reduction of strategic forces levels which we could achieve in the next four or five years. During previous negotiations on strategic weapons limitation, we were inclined to take small steps in the direction of a vague future; I propose that instead of this we now strive to define a concrete, longer-term goal, towards which we later could advance step by step with a greater guarantee of success.

Second, the quick conclusion of official agreement between us regarding the

problems on which, as it seems, both sides are inclined to agree would facilitate our search for stable mutual understanding. We should use the fact that we have an agreement, or could achieve quick agreement on such questions as:

- a) limiting the number of strategic delivery vehicles to 2400 items (or a mutually acceptable lower level);
- b) limiting the number of launchers equipped with MIRV to the level of 1320 items (or a mutually acceptable lower level);
- c) a resolution on mutually satisfactory verification;
- d) advance warning of missile tests;
- e) a universal test ban, including a temporary resolution regarding the completion of the current peaceful programs;
- f) an agreement not to arm satellites and not to develop a capability to eliminate or damage the satellites;
- g) demilitarization of the Indian ocean;
- h) a limitation on civil defense measures;
- i) mutual restraint in selling weapons to third world countries;
- j) a ban on mobile intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Of course, the above list is not a complete one, and other relatively non-controversial questions could easily be added to it. The main thing is to move forward without delay on those questions on which we can reach an agreement, thus creating the impulse necessary to get down to work on the more intractable issues straight after that.

We are working on these problems with maximum energy, preparing for Secretary of State Vance's talks with you in Moscow.

I hope that you will not base our next correspondence on the mistaken belief that we lack sincerity, honesty or the willpower needed to achieve quick progress towards mutually beneficial agreements. I do not underestimate the difficulties connected with substantive problems or technical details, but I am firmly committed to achieving success in the process of creating a foundation for stable and peaceful relations between our two countries. We do not seek any sort of unilateral advantages.

I do not see our letters as official documents of negotiation, but if we exchange them in private and on a strictly confidential basis, they can very well help us both to gain the necessary understanding of the direction of historic development. It was in this spirit that this correspondence was started and I want you to know that adherence to weapons reduction is the matter of personal faith for me, which at the same time reflects the aspirations of the people of my country. I hope and believe that you and your people are devoted to the same idea.

Sincerely,
Jimmy Carter
White House
Washington, D.C.
March 4, 1977".

Brzezinski said that the letter had been transmitted to Moscow at night over a direct line so that it would be received there during the day.⁵

Brzezinski remarked that they consider the letter to be "positive." "Is it not?"-he asked.

I answered, speaking for myself, that the first impression after a brief reading of such a letter is that it does not much move us forward towards solving that question, which, as L.I. Brezhnev has written to the President recently, is of primary significance, namely-concluding the working out of a new agreement on strategic offensive weapons limitation on the basis of Vladivostok agreement. In the President's letter, in fact, our positions on "Backfire" and on cruise missiles are left out; as far as the latter are concerned, the impression is that the USA wants to have a free hand in both their production and deployment, instead of making them a part of agreement. At the same time some issues are raised, which, though perhaps important, have no direct connection to the mentioned agreement, which thus acquires-in the President's letter-a vague outline, willfully or not leading away from the essence of the issue which is key at the present stage. I can not but mention also that a number of Soviet proposals in the sphere of disarmament are avoided by silence in the President's answer, as are some other questions which were raised in the letter of the General Secretary of the CC CPSU.

Brzezinski said in this regard that he was not ready at that moment to concretely consider the various proposals in the President's letter. [...]

Ambassador of the USSR in the USA

(signature) A. Dobrynin

/A. DOBRYNIN/