

July 11, 1978

**Political Letter of Soviet Ambassador to the United
States Anatoly F. Dobrynin**

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USSR Embassy in USA 11 July 1978
Washington Issue No. 667

TO THE USSR MINISTRY OF
FOREIGN AFFAIRS
To Com. GROMYKO, A.A.

I am sending a political letter, prepared by the Embassy, in which are reviewed the basic elements of contemporary Soviet-American relations.

Attachment: the letter mentioned above, Secret, on 8 pages, to the addressee and to the file.

USSR AMBASSADOR IN THE USA /s/ A. DOBRYNIN
[attachment]

USSR EMBASSY in the USA
Washington

SECRET, Copy No. 2
11 July 1978
Attachment to Issue No. 667

SOVIET-AMERICAN RELATIONS
IN THE CONTEMPORARY ERA
(Political Letter)

Almost eighteen months ago--20 January 1977--the new, 39th President of the USA, J. Carter, stepped across the threshold of the White House. Since that time, a definite policy has been conducted by his administration, the basic elements of which are the subject of the review in the present political letter.

I. As has already been noted by the Embassy, Soviet-American relations during the Carter Administration have been characterized by instability, major swings, which to a great extent are due to its calculations of the state of affairs in both its internal and external dimensions. In the middle of April of this year, Carter, as is well known, conducted in his country residence, Camp David, a meeting of the members of his cabinet and closest advisors, at which was taken a decision to carry out a regular reevaluation of Soviet-American relations. The initiative for this affair came from Brzezinski and several Presidential advisors on domestic affairs, who convinced Carter that he would succeed in stopping the process of worsening of his position in the country if he would openly initiate a harsher course vis a vis the Soviet Union.

Africa (events on the Horn of Africa, and then in the Shaba Province of Zaire) was chosen as the pretext around which the Administration would begin earnestly to create tension in Soviet-American relations. In fact, in connection to these African events it was decided to attempt a review of the entire concept of the policy of detente, subordinating it to the needs of the Administration, not stopping even before publicly putting under threat the chances of concluding a new agreement on the limitation of offensive strategic weapons (by artificially linking it with other issues).

In the country, however, by the way pretty unexpectedly for Carter, this "harsh"

course, which had been firmly and clearly rejected by the Soviet Union, caused a reaction in which was evident a clear apprehension among broad strata of the American population regarding the long-term condition and fate of Soviet-American relations. There was expressed the depth of the American mood in support of the policy of detente, which had developed in the course of the last few years and which in the minds of the unsophisticated residents of this country is associated with a simple thesis: detente mitigates the threat of confrontation with the Soviet Union, and thus, of nuclear war with it. Characteristically, there were such apprehensions even in the Congress, the representatives of which began to demand explanations of the Administration, where anyway the matter of relations with the Soviet Union is heading and wasn't the Administration trying to bring about some sort of big changes in these relations without the consent of the Congress.

And so, Carter became convinced that detente is not a "faucet" which he can turn on and off whenever he feels so disposed. The Administration was obliged to quickly make some adjustments in its position (particularly in light of the speech of L.I. Brezhnev, and also our answer in Pravda to Carter's speech in Annapolis, which he had found to be unexpectedly firm). The President, having let Vance go out front, decided to restrain Brzezinski a bit. Vance usually stresses the positive accomplishments in Soviet-American relations without leaving out, however, the negative things which are associated with Carter himself (for example, the notorious policy of "defense of human rights" or "dissidents").

2. Consequently, insofar as it is possible to judge on the basis of information which the Embassy has at its disposal, the Carter Administration has come to its own variety of a selective, half-hearted conception of detente (of which Brzezinski himself first accused us). Detente in its current concrete application by the White House is, as if, being partitioned. It is seen as important and necessary--in support of the national interests of the United States itself and the corresponding formation of public opinion--regarding problems associated with nuclear weapons, issues of war and peace (limitation of strategic weapons, a total ban on nuclear tests, certain other disarmament-related issues). As far as the majority of other questions is concerned, as in the past it is applied subject to the "behavior" of the Soviet Union in Africa, in the Middle East, in relation to "human rights," and so on. The reaction of the Administration to the recently-begun Shcharansky process is in this regard sufficiently instructive.

The Carter Administration variously denies that it is supporting a return to the "Cold War." It seems that it fears a decline of relations with the Soviet Union to a level when the threat of a serious, to say nothing of a military, conflict with us would be interpreted by the American people, and also in other countries of the world, as something real. Carter, evidently has come to realize that this would cause deep alarm among the population of the country and would for him be a political loss, and maybe would represent a catastrophe in the 1980 presidential elections. In this regard the choice--"cooperation or confrontation"--which he tried to pose for us in his speech in Annapolis, seemed in its essence directed in the USA itself to him personally; the heartland is expecting from Carter himself an answer to that choice, and he--thanks to the adherence to principle in our position--has turned out to have not quite as free a choice as he tried to present it.

Overall, having moved to an obvious lowering of the level of relations with the Soviet Union, the Carter Administration has shown lately a desire to smooth them out a little. This however, should so far be understood like this, that although it is not generally averse to improving them, the White House at the same time does not want to sacrifice such irritants to our relations as efforts to interfere in our internal affairs or actions like Carter's planned visit to the "Berlin Wall." In a word, the Administration itself has imposed a definite barrier to the possible improvement in our relations (which coincides with the tasks of strengthening NATO, the arms race, the game with China, and so forth).

A lot depends, of course, on how the President himself will behave in the future. His views on Soviet-American relations, as in the past, are inconsistent, they contain plenty of dribs and drabs of this and drabs of that. Flirting with the conservative moods in the country (the strength of which he at times clearly overestimates), Carter frequently resorts to anti-Soviet rhetoric in order to, as they say, win cheap applause. The danger is found in the fact that such rhetoric is picked up and amplified by the means of mass communication, in Congress, and so forth. Ultimately, as often happens in the USA, the rhetoric is transformed, influences policy, and sometimes itself becomes policy.

It would be incorrect, however, to speak about some sort of hopelessness or irreconcilability in our relations with the USA and, in particular, with the current Administration, personally with Carter, although this issue is extremely complex. In the USA other things are also going on, which, together with the noted-above general attitudes in the country, require Carter and the Administration to maintain relations with the Soviet Union at a certain level, regardless of all the vacillation of the current President. The following are included among these things:

- A general recognition in the USA of the primacy of Soviet-American relations (in its early days, the Administration--this was Brzezinski's doing--tried to reduce their significance, but had to stop doing this when it collided with the realities of the international situation.)

- The firm and principled line of the Soviet leadership on relations with the USA, which is finding here a growing response. - In the ruling circles of the USA there is not by any means a united negative approach to relations with the Soviet Union. Influential political and business circles continue to support a search for agreement with us in various areas, understanding from experience that the paths of confrontation with us are hopeless.

- The Administration cannot but take into account the fact that the main Western partners of the USA--to say nothing of the majority of developing countries--speak more or less consistently in support of a policy of detente.

- Carter has to realize the vulnerability of his position in the 1980 Presidential elections, if he goes into those elections as a President who caused a strategic arms agreement with the Soviet Union to fail, and who led Soviet-American relations to the edge of Cold War. Under conditions of an erosion of Carter's mass base in comparison to his standing in 1976, the issue of relations with the Soviet Union really could be decisive for Carter in the next Presidential elections.

- Under conditions of the serious economic difficulties facing the USA, the possibility of decreasing military spending by limiting the arms race is proving more and more impressive to average American taxpayers. For the population of the USA (and for Carter), inflation has become problem number 1.

Among Americans, as in the past, a strong mood "not to allow another Vietnam," particularly in Africa, continues to hold. In the same way, the Administration's interference in African affairs is causing growing suspiciousness among the Negro population of the country, which is feeling a sense of solidarity with the Africans in their conflict with the racist regimes. For Carter, who defeated Ford with the support of a majority of Negro voters, the views towards him of this category of Americans subsequently may become critically important.

3. On a practical level, the Carter Administration, based on everything, intends to continue the search for an agreement with the Soviet Union on those issues which are perceived by the public to touch directly on the problem of the prevention of nuclear

war. It goes without saying that it is necessary to use this in our interest. On other issues, so far no Administration desire to review its position or to cease the anti-Soviet rhetoric to which it resorts from time to time is visible. This applies particularly to the "defense of human rights" in the Soviet Union, NATO military preparations, opposition to the Soviet Union in Africa, in the Middle East, and in other regions of the world. In this regard, special attention has lately been assigned to the Administration's policy towards China, which according to all signs bears witness--if not formally, then in essence--to its yearning for a plot with China against the interests of the Soviet Union. The danger of this course to our interests is self-evident. Brzezinski, whom Gus Hall named "the Carter regime's Rasputin," continues to play a significant role in all of this.

Our firm reaction to the recent blast of anti-Soviet rhetoric by the Carter Administration forced it to noticeably soften its tone. We have to assert that this type of action will be effective in the future too. However, it would not be in our interests to pass by specific positive aspects of Carter's approach to relations with the Soviet Union--in the first place his great personal interest in a meeting with L.I. Brezhnev, his support in principle for a treaty on SALT, and others. Appropriate positive reactions from our side, apart from anything else, would strengthen the positions of those individuals and circles which are trying to influence the President from the perspective of the need for the development of Soviet-American relations over the long term.

A.A. Gromyko's meetings with Vance and Carter, and also L.I. Brezhnev's reception of Vance, have great significance in this regard.

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We consider the following approach to be expedient along the most important lines of our relations with the Carter Administration.

Continue to energetically pursue the working out of agreements on SALT and a total ban on nuclear tests, having in mind to create by these steps the political prerequisites for a Soviet-American summit meeting which could have decisive significance for normalization and then for improvement of our relations.

Taking into account the importance of the European path for the deepening of the policy of detente and from the point of view of counteracting the opponents of that policy in the USA, it is very important to work even more actively toward making progress on the Vienna negotiations on the limitation on conventional forces and armaments in Central Europe on the basis of our last proposals. It is necessary to maximally activate this line, which was noted in the L.I. Brezhnev's recent speeches, particularly in Minsk. It would be extremely important to achieve via the Vienna negotiations such a psychological situation, when in the minds of broad masses of American they would become as real and as necessary to reach a decision as the current Soviet-American SALT negotiations. Here is a significant area for our propaganda in the USA.

- Regarding a Middle East settlement: As the Americans try, with the assistance of "artificial respiration," to extend the life of the Sadat "initiative," it is expedient, along with the indisputable continuation of our principled course, which has demonstrated its correctness, to once again, at the proper moment, publicly raise the issue of a resumption of preparations for the Geneva Conference, and in the presence of the Americans as co-chairmen, of fulfilling the joint Soviet-American communique of 1 October 1977. By doing this we will soundly throw a wrench into the Administration's current game. We should continue to reveal the hypocrisy of the USA in trying to show that it is equally close to the interests of the Arabs and Israel. At the same time

we must more actively use the contradiction between the American imperialistic interests in the Middle East (oil, investment in Saudi Arabia, etc.) and Israeli-Zionist interests (open territorial expansion at the Arabs' expense).

- On the Chinese issue, we should continue to actively, publicly advance to the USA our thesis, that the Carter Administration's formation of a bloc with Beijing on an anti-Soviet basis would preclude to it opportunities for cooperation with the Soviet Union in the matter of a decrease in the threat of nuclear war and of arms limitation, particularly as regards SALT. We should support the growing feeling among Americans of anxiety regarding the possible consequences of the current course of the Administration vis a vis China. This became, according to our observations, especially noticeable here after Com. L.I. Brezhnev's warning in Minsk, since it has begun to occur to many Americans that the Administration's playing of the "Chinese card" carries with it potentially dangerous elements of confrontation with the Soviet Union which, which are detrimental to the USA, but in China's interests. Without the constant support and nurturing among Americans of these feelings of anxiety and preoccupation, as is now taking place in the USA in relation to SALT, the Administration's current covert move toward a deal with China may assume an even more open and dangerous character.

The immediate future, in any case the next month or month and a half, will be an extremely complex period in Soviet-American relations, and it will be difficult to count on any sort of noticeable positive shifts. More possibly, we can expect regular anti-Soviet outbursts about Shcharansky, [Aleksandr] Ginsburg, and others.

Later, however, with the achievement of a SALT agreement, which in itself will be a significant event, and when the Administration will have to more actively try to justify that agreement in Congress and before the public, it is possible to expect an improvement in the political climate in our relations. About that time an election campaign will be going on here, with its usual outburst of chauvinistic demagoguery and anti-Soviet propaganda.

On this issue it is indicative that our expression of firmness in relation to the prosecution of renegades like Shcharansky played its own role. The Carter Administration, despite all its rhetoric, was forced to retreat and to announce its intention to continue the Soviet-American negotiations on SALT aimed at the achievement of concrete results, and to declare that that agreement meets the interests not only of the Soviet Union, but also the national interests of the USA. "The Russians won this mini-confrontation;" such is the conclusion of the local political observers.

Finally, a Soviet-American summit may become the most important landmark from the point of view of a turn in our relations with the USA, taking into account the great political charge which such meetings carry.

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Overall, it is important, as always, to consistently adhere to our principled line on the development of relations with the USA, to the achievement of concrete decisions and agreements wherever it coincides with our interests, and at the same time to give a decisive rebuff to unacceptable manifestations in the policy of the Carter Administration.

[A. DOBRYNIN]