

March 15, 1977

Letter, Secretary Brezhnev to President Carter

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From the Journal
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RECORD OF THE CONVERSATION
with the USA Secretary of State C. VANCE
March 16, 1977

I. I visited Vance and transmitted through him to President Carter the following letter from L.I. Brezhnev.

Dear Mr. President,

Having become acquainted with your letter of March 4, I would like once again to set forth the essence of our understanding of the situation regarding the preparation of the agreement (for the period until 1985) on limitation of offensive strategic weapons and in more detail to explain our position on the concrete questions which so far remain unresolved.

Let me start with several general considerations. We, it goes without saying, are in favor of concluding an agreement as quickly as possible, without delay. But an effort to do that on the basis of some sort of artificial, simplified variant will hardly accelerate the matter, if we have in mind the goal which we have posed for ourselves, that is: to genuinely limit strategic weapons, guided by the principle of not inflicting any loss on either of the contracting sides. In exactly the same way, the preparation of an agreement would not be accelerated if while setting aside those questions on which a lot of work had been done, we took up some sort of new questions, particularly those which have no direct relation to the subject of the given agreement.

The conclusion of a new strategic arms limitation agreement between our countries, of course, would have great political significance both for Soviet-American relations and in a wider context. However, this will become possible only in the event that the agreement represents a genuine step towards limiting strategic weapons. In the contrary event, there would be an opposite effect.

And so it would be if the issue of cruise missiles was left outside the agreement. This question is not only tied to the heart of a new agreement, but, and this is vitally important, much has already been worked out. Even certain concrete formulas have already been agreed. To propose now to leave cruise missiles outside the framework of the agreement would not only mean returning to initial positions but would also leave open the path for the development of the arms race in a new and dangerous direction.

I don't think that this is in any way consonant with the goals of a quick conclusion of a strategic arms limitation agreement. Therefore we confirm our concrete proposals on the whole complex of cruise missiles, including:

-to view heavy bombers equipped with cruise missiles with a range of 600 km. to 2500 km. as delivery vehicles equipped with MIRV with individual placements, and accordingly to count them under the ceiling (depending on the type of heavy bomber) established for that type of delivery vehicle-1320 items; cruise missiles ALCM (trans. i.e. "Air to Ground") with a range of more than 2500 km. will be banned completely;

the equipping with cruise missiles with a range of between 600 km. and 2500 km. of other types of flying apparatus besides heavy bombers will likewise be forbidden.

-all cruise missiles based at sea or on land with a range of more than 600 km. also should be entirely banned.

Once again, I would like also to remind you that our agreement to count under the ceiling for MIRVed missiles (1320 items) all missiles of those types, of which at least one missile was tested with MIRV, was and remains conditional on achieving final agreement on the issues related to cruise missiles.

As for the Soviet intermediate bomber which you call "Backfire," we provided official data about the range of this plane (2200 km.) and expressed readiness to reflect in the negotiating record this data as well as our intention not to provide this plane with the capability to cover intercontinental distances-all this under the condition that the question of "Backfire" once and for ever will be completely withdrawn from further negotiations. We continue to maintain this position.

The question of mobile launchers for ballistic missiles of intercontinental range, naturally, must find its solution in the current agreement. Earlier we proposed an agreement by which during the period covered by this agreement the sides should restrain from deployment of mobile launchers for ground-based ICBMs. Our approach to the question of possible further strategic forces reductions by the USSR and the USA is laid out in my letter of February 25 of this year. I repeat, we will be ready to start discussing this question immediately following the signing of the agreement. Yet in that case we must take into consideration factors about which I have already written to you on February 25, such as: the difference in the geographic positions of the sides, presence of American means of nuclear forward basing and an operation of air-based delivery vehicles near the territory of the USSR, the fact that the USA NATO allies nuclear weapons and other circumstances, which must not be ignored.

Taking into consideration the facts and ideas laid out above regarding cruise missiles, it could be possible for the sides not only to limit the level of strategic nuclear means delivery vehicles (2400 and 1320), but also to discuss the number of such vehicles, which are subject to reduction even before expiration date of the current agreement.

Ideas, expressed above, represent our official position, which we intend to maintain during the coming negotiations with Secretary of State Vance. It goes without saying that the additional questions, which you, Mr. President, mentioned in your letter also demand attention. We will be ready to set forth our preliminary ideas on these questions. Special negotiations would be carried out on those questions where we note a chance of finding a mutually acceptable solution. Should we make some progress, corresponding agreements could be signed simultaneously with the agreement on strategic weapons limitation.

In conclusion, I would like to point out, Mr. President, that I do not quite understand the meaning of your statement about the tone of my letter of February 25. Its tone is usual -businesslike and respectful. If you mean the directness and openness, with which our views are expressed in it, my reasons were and are that this very character of our dialogue coincides with the interests of the matter. But if you mean our principle attitude to the attempts to raise questions which go beyond the limits of interstate relations,-there can be no different reaction from our side.

I believe that our private correspondence will serve the interests of constructive development of relations between our countries.

With respect, L. Brezhnev, March 15, 1977".

Vance said that it [the letter] will be reported to the President.

The Ambassador of the USSR in the USA (signature)

/A. DOBRYNIN/