

**June 2, 1978**

**Memorandum of Conversation between Soviet  
Foreign Minister Gromyko and US Secretary of State  
Vance, 31 May 1978 (Excerpts)**

**Citation:**

"Memorandum of Conversation between Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko and US Secretary of State Vance, 31 May 1978 (Excerpts)", June 2, 1978, Wilson Center Digital Archive, AVPRF; trans. by M. Doctoroff  
<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/117044>

**Summary:**

Gromyko and Vance discuss the current status of Soviet-American relations and the anti-Soviet sentiment in America. They discuss the common goal of decreasing tension and conflict between the two countries, with disarmament on both sides, moving away from the period of "cold war."

**Credits:**

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

**Original Language:**

Russian

**Contents:**

Translation - English

Secret, Copy No. 1

RECORD OF MAIN CONTENT OF CONVERSATION BETWEEN

A.A. GROMYKO AND

U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE C. VANCE

31 May 1978, New York

Our final meeting with the USA Secretary of State C. Vance took place on May 31. First I met with Vance "eye to eye" (only interpreters from both sides were present).

A.A. Gromyko. Taking advantage of this opportunity to talk to you in private, I want to ask how the explosion of propaganda hostile to the USSR, which we have observed in the USA for some time already, can be explained? Until now we have observed various declarations made by representatives of the American administration, and evaluated them in different ways according to their orientation. Yet we have always tried to stress constructive aspects of those declarations which were put forward by the President, and by you and by other leading American authorities who deal with foreign policy.

But most recently our attention has been more and more attracted to the fact that, beginning with the President (and Brzezinski has already surpassed himself in this), American officials are constantly making statements which are aimed, or so it seems to us more and more, at nearly bringing us back to the period of "cold war."

In Washington, D.C. the other day, I could not but come to the conclusion that the orientation of President Carter's statements is to a great extent determined by the character of the false information which he receives. This can be illustrated by his declarations on the situation in Africa, which are obviously based on wrong, distorted information.

Now I see that the matter is even more serious. Evidently somebody in the United States, some circles, consciously are creating myths, and are then referring to those same myths, and dumping all this on the laps of the President, the Secretary of State, and other American leaders.

So what is the real policy of the USA, and towards what is it directed: to the creation of relations based on mutual respect, on non-interference in internal affairs, and on building relations; or towards aggravating of tension in our relations[?] This is the question, which I would like you to answer.

On returning to Moscow I will report to L.I. Brezhnev and to the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party about the general political situation in the United States today and about the USA's policy towards the USSR. I presume that you, in turn, will inform the President about this conversation.

C. Vance. I will certainly inform the President about our conversation. Actually you have just asked me two questions. First, you asked me to explain the reasons for that which you have called an explosion of hostile propaganda toward the USSR in the United States. Let me try to answer this question with the utmost openness.

There are several facts which provoke concern in regard to the Soviet Union in the United States. These are reflected, naturally, in newspaper articles, materials, TV programs etc. I would like to point out three main areas, in which this concern reveals itself.

Very many people in the USA and in other countries, especially in the West, reveal serious concern in connection with the increase by the USSR of its military forces, especially in Europe, and the fact that the dimensions of this increase significantly exceed the dimensions needed for defense. Looking at the Soviet Union's spending for conventional arms, people picture a dramatically rising curve, at the same time keeping in mind the stable level (of spending) for arms by the USA and other western countries.

The intentions of the Soviet Union sincerely concern many people. A natural question arises: if the intentions of the USSR are to preserve the existing military balance, why does it increase its military forces and weapons on such a scale[?] Doesn't it mean that the Soviet Union, rather than trying to reduce military rivalry in Europe by cutting down the level of weapons and military forces in the region, has more aggressive intentions[?]

As for strategic weapons, we made definite progress in the past: we concluded the ABM Treaty, signed the Temporary Agreement on limitation of strategic offensive weapons and have moved forward on working out a new agreement on SALT. All these can be considered positive elements in the relations between our two countries.

On the other hand, the constant growth by the Soviet Union of its armed forces and modern conventional weapons by the USSR provokes serious concern in many people.

Another major issue which alarms us is Africa, which President Carter and I have already discussed with you in detail. I think we all recognize that elements of rivalry will remain between us in the future. But at the same time there will be areas, in which we will be able to achieve mutual understanding and find a common language. If you look at the situation in Africa today, it seems that the areas of rivalry have developed beyond the limits of normal competition and led to military conflicts, fed by Soviet weapons and equipment and by armed combat detachments provided by Cuba.

I am acquainted with your explanation of the factors which stimulated certain military actions in Africa, and I will not repeat what was already said by both sides. However, in answering your question, I want to set forth the evaluation of the actions of the Soviet Union in Africa which is being formed in the USA and many other countries (not only European). Many people now presume that the Soviet Union sets fires in various regions of Africa instead of preventing those fires in a peaceful way.

The third issue which provokes serious concern is connected with the question of human rights, which has become particularly urgent recently because of actions like [Soviet dissident Yuri] Orlov's trial.

These are the three main issues, which provoke what you call the explosion of emotions directed against the Soviet Union.

The second part of your question referred to what the USA actually wants: to build good relations with the Soviet Union or to return to the "cold war" period, accompanied by permanent confrontation and arguments between us.

I can answer that question quite simply and clearly. The United States does not want to return to the period of tension and confrontation between our two countries. We want to return our relations to their correct path, we want to return to better, tighter, closer relations between the Soviet Union and the USA. We want to reduce tension in the military and other spheres, to find as many more grounds as we can for a common language between us.

There are several means by which it would be possible to move forward in this direction and, maybe, the main way lies in making progress in the negotiations on limitation of strategic weapons. Yet, besides this there is a lot more which we can do.

Most importantly, we must come to a deep mutual understanding of the fact that detente is a two-way street; we have to develop broader links in commerce, cooperation, culture and other spheres. We made some progress in these areas in the past, but unfortunately we have lately backtracked significantly.

I would like to mention some concrete steps, which in our opinion, could make it possible to achieve our aims. First, progress during the negotiations on limitation of strategic weapons. Second, progress in the Vienna negotiations on reduction of armed forces and weapons in Central Europe. Third, progress on a range of other arms control issues in the discussion of which we and you participate. Fourth, a better mutual understanding of the character of detente, and about how to turn this process into a two-way street. Fifth, to come to agreement on other steps which could be undertaken in order to provide broader exchanges between our peoples in the spheres of cultural, scientific, and other activity, as well as in the area of commerce.

In conclusion I must point out that, relating to the fact that detente should be a two-way street, and in the context of the situation in Africa, we must determine how we should act so that all these questions do not continue to be a constant source of confrontation between us.

I tried as I could to set forth more simply some fundamental problems and to express my opinion about those steps which could be undertaken in order to develop our

relations in a correct direction and to improve them.

A.A. Gromyko. I will try to react to your statements as briefly as I can. Thus I will be able to avoid repeating what I already said in Washington, D.C.

I listened with positive feelings to your words to the effect that USA is trying to conduct its affairs so as to allow us to find solutions to the problems that confront us, avoiding tension in Soviet-American relations and not returning to the period of the "cold war." I am sure that all my colleagues in the Soviet leadership, including L.I. Brezhnev personally, will also react to your words positively. This is my response to the constructive part of your statements. It would have been good if the actions of the American government had corresponded with your words, but that is not the case now.

You went on to say that one of the reasons for the explosion in the United States of propaganda hostile to the USSR was that the Soviet Union lately had, apparently, greatly increased its military potential, and that this fact worries the United States and other Western countries.

I must categorically deny this statement. Moreover, it has already been repeatedly denied at the highest level by L.I. Brezhnev. It is not true. It is a myth, thought up in the West with a definite goal in mind - to camouflage the Western program of arms increases. And the facts completely support this.

Our military forces are certainly at their required level. But we do not want to spend on defense any more than is necessary to preserve the security of the Soviet Union in the face of the constant-I repeat, constant-growth of NATO's, and especially of the USA's, armed forces and weapons.

If we had other intentions, why should we, in the U.N. and in other forums, insist every year, every month, every day, on the necessity of disarmament, up to general and complete disarmament? Recall the proposals which were put forward by L.I. Brezhnev at the recent Komsomol Congress. They were devoted to a total ban on the production of nuclear arms, and the subsequent destruction of these weapons and the complete switchover of nuclear energy to purely peaceful uses. Remember the program, adopted at the 25th CPSU Congress, of additional actions in the sphere of the struggle for peace, which we try to bring to life literally every day, though you act in the opposite direction.

We would not have conducted such a policy if we had wanted to constantly increase our armaments. We carry out this policy of peace and detente firmly and consistently, despite the ring of American military bases around the Soviet Union. We are ready to disarm, even radically, but at the same time, it goes without saying that we will never agree to unilateral disarmament. Do not expect this. An equal degree of security must be observed, there must be no loss of security for any of the sides. This is an immutable law which must be observed.

C. Vance. Neither of us is speaking about unilateral disarmament. We believe that both sides are pragmatic enough to understand that unilateral disarmament is impossible. It can take place only within the mutual interests of the sides. The question, however, is whether we will manage to create a situation in which mutually advantageous arms control agreements, which will clearly show everyone that we are striving for disarmament rather than for an increase in arms, can be achieved.

A.A. Gromyko. I will respond to what you have just said later. Now I will continue to express ideas, which I started before. I will touch on the issue of military budgets. Several times we have introduced proposals to reduce military budgets, naming in this regard concrete percentages, corrected our proposal in accordance with counterproposals of other states. Yet, the USA and its allies never expressed any positive attitude to our proposals. They met them with raised bayonets, every time rejecting them at once. We proposed to freeze military budgets at their present level, from which it might later have been possible to begin their reduction. But these proposals, too, were declined without consideration.

At the present special session of the United Nations General Assembly, devoted to questions of disarmament, we decided to propose a new approach to the issue. Earlier, when we had named a definite percent by which to reduce military budgets, Western states had referred to various difficulties related to the allegedly different structures of the military budgets of the Soviet Union and the countries of the West.

We always acted from a belief that these complexities had an artificial character and must not serve as a barrier on in the way of reducing military spending. Now we decided to take another approach: to speak not about percents, but about absolute figures. These figures may not entirely coincide, although, it goes without saying that they must be, as they say, in the same ballpark. There must not be a situation when one great power would reduce its military budget by 1 bln. dollars a year, and the other - by 1 mln. Think over our new proposals. It seems to us that they could make it easier to achieve an agreement.

Both previously and now, American representatives have tried and are trying now to suggest that their military budget is not growing, although in fact USA military spending grows enormously every year. This truth is known to everyone.

C. Vance. Spending is growing, but not in real terms.

A.A. Gromyko. We are speaking about the real budget.

C. Vance. From the point of view of dollars our military budget is growing, but only because of inflation.

A.A. Gromyko. I am afraid that now you will start to throw blame at us for not having inflation in our country. In fact the USA military budget is growing both in real and in material terms. You can not cover this with inflation.

You spoke further on about the situation in Africa. I must say that in this case a total and crude distortion of the real situation is taking place. If I, discussing this topic, behaved like some of your high ranking officials, who let loose with simply insulting declarations directed toward the Soviet Union, I would have been forced to use not those, but sharper expressions. By the way, those American officials who make such declarations should study how to communicate with people, especially with representatives of foreign states.

Who should know better than the USA, with its a far-reaching espionage network, that the Soviet Union had absolutely nothing to do with events in Zaire, Rhodesia, Namibia[?] As for the conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia, when Somalia launched an attack against Ethiopia we, responding to a request from the latter, helped out by sending to Ethiopia a certain amount of weapons and a group of specialists to train them how to use the weapons. At the same time, as I already told you, we would at that time have welcomed any help of this kind from other countries, including the USA, if any such assistance had been requested of them.

But instead of this we face the fiction that Ethiopian troops acted under Soviet command, etc. Why is this done? Being realists, we started to look for reasons for such absurd assertions. We came to the conclusion that it is necessary to search for those reasons in the attempts of some definite forces, particularly in the United States, to create a screen through which it would be more difficult for people to understand the true situation, in order to justify [their] own actions in Africa, which appear as interference in the domestic affairs of the countries on that continent.

An illustration of this statement is the slaughter which took place in [the Shaba Province of] Zaire not long ago. In fact neither the USSR nor Cuba had anything to do with it. As you remember, I told President Carter about this. We were indignant at this slaughter and at the insinuations to our address. I have already said that there is not a single Soviet person in Namibia or in Rhodesia, and in Zaire we have only official diplomatic representatives.

Pass my words on to the President. Tell him that the assertions, which we confront in connection with events in Africa, in particular in Zaire, we can treat only as a pure and deliberate fiction.

As it happened, some individuals and governments themselves threw an explosive ball of lightning into the arena and now are saying: look, how terrible that looks. We are not responsible for somebody else's sins and do not intend to be. Those who sin are responsible.

Touching on the question of so-called human rights, you raised a question of Soviet citizens, giving the concrete name Orlov, and noting that you could give some other names. I will say only that we will not discuss questions like this, neither with you, nor with anybody else, because these are questions in our internal competence, and only in our competence.

And now I respond to your statement that there are other questions on which we do not agree, but which we should discuss in order to find mutually acceptable decisions. You are right: there are such questions. I want, however, to draw your attention to the fact that the USA and some of its allies do not, as a rule, want to discuss the proposals which we put forward. It often happens that you decline our proposals on the basis only of some fragmentary reports in the press, even before you have received the official text. This was the case, for example, when the Warsaw Treaty states proposed that all countries which signed the Helsinki Final Act should agree not to be the first to use nuclear weapons against each other.

You turned this proposal down, but life itself did not reject it because of that. We suggested having a preparatory meeting, at which it would have been possible to consider this proposal, if necessary to sharpen it, to ask each other different questions, etc. You did not want to do this either. We also could follow this same approach, turning down at once any proposal of the Western states at once. But is this how serious people conduct their affairs[?] We would not like to conduct our affairs this way.

C. Vance. First of all I want to say that I fully agree that it is necessary to work out some sort of a mechanism for the discussion of those or other proposals put forward by the sides, which would allow us to hear each other out and to seriously consider those or any other questions. The thing is that sometimes we are faced with divergent interpretations of these or other problems, the consideration of which could have helped to eliminate differences of opinion. That is why it is very important to understand how each side pictures the existing situation. Let us think of the best way to conduct affairs which touch on relations between the Soviet Union and the USA. Maybe it makes sense for the sides to meet more often both on our level and on the level of those who negotiate concrete questions, in order to clarify the positions of both sides? Maybe it follows that we should think of other methods? One thing is clear: something must be done to change the tendency, which has lately appeared in the relations between our two countries.

A.A. Gromyko. This is a very important question.

C. Vance. Let me now respond to your remarks regarding our information about the participation of Cubans in the events in Zaire. According to our intelligence data, Cubans took part in planning and preparation of the intrusion there. As for the sources of our information, it was the Commander of Katang armed forces, General Mbumba, and Cuban sources in East Germany. We considered these sources reliable.

A.A. Gromyko. Oh, then you are simply victims of disinformation. If we were not sure that our information was authentic, we would not have told you about it. We take great responsibility for what we are saying.

C. Vance. But how could we know that information provided to us by Mbumba and Cubans themselves does not correspond with reality? When this information came to us we assumed that it was based on solid evidence.

A.A. Gromyko. But who on Earth knows what kind of General this is? Who does he serve? Is he really the only one to tell the truth, like Jesus Christ of the Bible legend? You have information from us - accept it. Your sources of information are bad if they present lies as truth. You yourself know from experience that you must not believe every report. Man was given his brain in order to analyze information, think, and make realistic conclusions.

Unfortunately, there are officials in the USA who easily, to put it mildly, present lies for truth. But a serious policy cannot be built on this.

C. Vance. I take into consideration what you have said. Yet I want to say that we have to take as serious the information, which we receive from people like the Commander of the Katang forces.

A.A. Gromyko. But maybe the General you mentioned is only saving his skin? You do not know his reasons, who he works for, do you? Many questions arise here.

C. Vance. Evidently it does not make much sense to continue this argument. I mentioned these facts only to illustrate difficulties in receiving trustworthy information. Probably it is one more argument in support of the necessity of having more frequent meetings and exchange of opinions between us.

A.A.Gromyko. Perhaps. But if on the basis of this type of information, known to be false, a broad campaign, hostile to us, is developed in the USA, then it is another kettle of fish. And if, on top of everything, the government takes part in this process and heats up this campaign, then what conclusion should we draw? Really, this is not happening within the four walls of a working study. It is taking place on a national scale.

C. Vance. President Carter asked me to find out your opinion of the expediency of carrying out exchange visits of some senior military officers from the Soviet Union and the USA. I mean, for example, a meeting between the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Head of the General Staff of the USSR Armed Forces. As for selecting questions for discussion, they can agree on them in advance.

A.A.Gromyko. We will discuss this question and inform you about our decision.

C. Vance. We start from a belief that such exchanges could demonstrate to the public our readiness to have contacts on all levels. This could even prove, in a way, that we do not aim at confrontation.

[sections omitted dealing with SALT II negotiations and Cyprus situation-ed.]

During the final meeting with the USA Secretary of State Vance the issue of two Soviet citizens, staff members of the United Nations Secretariat [Valdik] Enger and [Rudolf] Cherniaev, who are being held in a prison in New York City, was discussed. The record of the main contents of this conversation, which took place in the presence of two interpreters only, is given below.

A.A. Gromyko. During this meeting you promised to answer the question we raised about freeing the two Soviet citizens kept in prison by American authorities.

C. Vance. I can do that. At the present time we can not undertake any definite actions as far as these two people are concerned. I specially got acquainted with the case and am afraid that this matter will have to take its normal course.

As for reducing the amount of bail, [State Department official] M[arshall D]. Shulman has already told a representative of the USSR Embassy in the USA that the lawyers of the two mentioned people know how to solve this problem in accordance with American legislation.

A.A. Gromyko. I listened your answer with the feeling of regret. What prospects do you see for solving this problem?

C. Vance. I think that a legal proceeding will take place, and when it's over we will see what we can do.

A.A. Gromyko. I will not repeat what I have already said on this account, not to waste time. You are familiar with everything I said about our attitude to such a development of events and about possible consequences.

I want to inform you that we found and confiscated more than 50 bugging devices which were functioning in different Soviet institutions in the USA - in Washington, D.C., in New York, in San Francisco. I will give you the materials connected with this issue now. We, naturally, have at our disposal many more photographs and, if we wanted, we could have released them long ago. But we have not done it yet, because we have a broader approach to Soviet-American relations. We also took into account the requests of the American side not to publish these materials.

I can tell you, by the way, that many of these devices were established under President Carter's Administration. I do not want to claim that this was sanctioned by him personally, but the fact is that they were put into practice after he came to power.

C. Vance. I do not know anything about these devices and have absolutely no information whether they were installed somewhere or not. I will consider materials given by you but I do not want you to treat my silence as agreement with the fact that we did install such devices somewhere.

A.A. Gromyko. It is necessary to say that here, in New York, there took place many approaches to our workers by staffers of American intelligence services who work for the United Nations Secretariat. According to our estimate, at least 200 agents of American intelligence work in this international Secretariat.

So we have at our disposal very many quite interesting, and I would say, piquant

photomaterials on this subject. They will make a very interesting exhibition, though a pretty big hall would be needed to accommodate it.

Our decision regarding these materials will to a great extent depend on the development of this matter on the whole. You have just said that after the trial you will see what you can do. We also will take a look at what you do.

C. Vance. We do not start a war of intelligence services with the Soviet Union. Yet we are very much concerned by the case of the two mentioned Soviet citizens, especially by the fact that they work for the United Nations Secretariat.

Besides, we are greatly concerned with the case, connected with our Embassy in Moscow. The investigation on this matter is still going on. But the fact that there is a tunnel under the building of the USA Embassy, more than 7 meters of which occupy the territory of the building, which belongs to the United States, disturbs us. We consider this as a rude intrusion into the building of our Embassy.

As far as the issue of two Soviet citizens arrested in the USA is concerned, I will contact you again after the trial is over, and tell you which measures we could undertake.

A.A. Gromyko. We will be waiting for such a report.

As for the incident with the USA Embassy in Moscow, according to the information, which I received, the case is totally different. What your representatives describe as an intrusion into the territory of the US Embassy, belongs, in fact, to the area of our normal economic activity. The goals of these measures actually had a purely protective character. In particular, there also were fire-prevention measures.

And in general it would have been primitive to rely on some sort of tunnels in our age of perfect technology. You and I do not live during the post-war period, when in the middle of the 50s we discovered a tunnel, several hundred meters long, which led from West to East Berlin. It was dug by Americans.

I will be expecting your reports about our two citizens who are detained in the USA, and we will plan our activity according to your decision.

C. Vance. Good.

The conversation was translated and recorded by V. Sukhodrev.

Correct: (signature) [illegible]

2 June 1978.

Original # 1351/GS