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2011-0766-MR
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March 1, 1989

INFORMATION

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: BRENT SCOWCROFT *B*

SUBJECT: Getting Ahead of Gorbachev

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This memorandum lays out the premises that I believe should guide the way we go about developing an overall strategy for U.S.-Soviet relations.

Gorbachev presents us with major challenges but also with opportunities. As you know, he is a skilled leader whose diplomatic activities have significantly altered the international community's view of the Soviet Union. He is very good; we have to be better.

Getting and staying ahead of Gorbachev is less a question of a few early and dramatic proposals than a requirement that we develop a sound strategy. Trying to match Gorbachev headline for headline, given our need for domestic and allied consensus, will lead us down the wrong path. Rather, we need to put forth considered and consistent positions while negotiating from strength. We will be creative, but should seek a steady pace that can lead to real and sustainable progress.

Gorbachev's adroit diplomacy is rooted in an understanding of international politics that far outstrips his predecessors' in breadth and sophistication. Not satisfied to number only weak and dependent states like Vietnam and Ethiopia among Soviet partners, Gorbachev is determined to improve relations with all of the global power centers, including China, Japan and our Western European allies. Gorbachev wants to turn adversaries into potential sources of support, smoothing points of friction that drain his all too scarce political and economic resources.

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cc: Vice President
Chief of Staff

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The rhetoric of his peace offensive has been accompanied by a willingness to make dramatic "concessions" in the military arena. Gorbachev possesses a refined understanding of the role of military power. He will sometimes conduct a tactical retreat, surrendering military advantages in order to gain the upper hand politically. Weakening NATO remains his prime international objective.

If the troop cuts in Eastern Europe are carried out as reportedly planned, they will be militarily significant. The political impact will be even greater. The pictures on the day that Soviet boys begin to leave Hungary, the GDR and Czechoslovakia will do more to promote the image of a changed Soviet Union than four decades of Soviet proclamations of peaceful intent.

The bold activity on the international front complements his domestic reforms. Yet the pace of change is slow in the U.S.S.R. Economic, nationality and social problems are mounting. Gorbachev enjoys the support of intellectuals but most workers are suspicious of the reforms and many bureaucrats are hostile. But whatever the reception at home, perestroika and glasnost' are having an impact on the Soviet Union's image abroad.

Some of Gorbachev's rhetoric (and some of the initiatives) could unsettle the postwar status quo. You may face major upheavals in Eastern Europe or in the Soviet Union itself during your Presidency. As uncertainties grow, we must preserve the traditional pillars of American postwar strength: military power, economic resilience, firm alliances and skillful diplomacy.

We must continue to stress the fact that Soviet flexibility is, in large part, a response to Western, especially U.S., policies. Clearly, it would be unwise to walk away from a successful strategy which has brought us to this point. This is our agenda, not his, and we need to recapture credit for it.

Yet in the current environment we cannot afford to be naysayers. Gorbachev's "new foreign policy" cannot be dismissed as propaganda. It is often backed up by action. And we do not want to miss opportunities to improve the relationship and move to our own vision of the future.

Our review of policy has begun and we will proceed with dispatch. But the worst thing that we can do at this critical juncture is make policy precipitously or in a piecemeal fashion. This is an especially bad time to put forth flashy proposals on the assumption that Gorbachev cannot accept them. He has surprised us before.

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I suggest the following strategic approach: -

First, we should work on the domestic side to strengthen the image of America's foreign policy as driven by clear objectives. The appeal of Gorbachev is his decisiveness. We cannot meet him head on if we do not appear confident about our purposes and agenda. Attending to the economic problems that weaken us abroad, including the trade and budget deficits, will reinforce our global image as strong and vital. And the spirit of bipartisanship that you have rekindled gives us an opportunity to present a united American policy for the first time in a generation. We may, at last, be able to concentrate on our core goals instead of warring over the details of implementation.

Second, we need to send a clear signal that relations with our allies are our first priority. Jim Baker's trip to Europe was a good start in this direction. Perhaps as we approach a NATO summit, you should make a major speech dealing with Europe. One of the aims of Soviet policy is to distance us from our friends. We can counter Gorbachev's "common European home" theme by pointing out that we remain in that home as welcome guests, not as with the Soviets in Eastern Europe, as occupiers.

In the European security realm, our first priority is to underscore the credibility of NATO's nuclear deterrent through modernization. With regard to conventional arms control, the alliance must develop a political strategy soon concerning conventional force reductions and where we want them to lead. We might be able to offer an innovative proposal for a more extensive troop inspection regime and other confidence building measures. These measures should be announced as building on Gorbachev's troop cut to reduce the possibility of "surprise attack" through our own proposals to increase transparency.

Similarly, we will need to prepare carefully for bilateral arms control, including START. Arms control is not the only issue on the U.S.-Soviet agenda, but it is the one watched most closely by the world community. If we perform competently in arms control, confidence in our ability to manage the broader relationship will soar.

Third, after our review of policy, we may wish to undertake initiatives with Eastern Europe. The East Europeans, to varying degrees, are taking advantage of Gorbachev's invitation to exercise greater control over their own affairs. Eastern Europe is a weak link in Gorbachev's strategy. We should exploit this but must do so in a prudent way.

Our best lever is economic assistance to the East. But the management of East-West economic relations poses special

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challenges for us. For political and economic reasons, Japan and Europe are more sympathetic than we to East European and Soviet requests for Western investment. They are pressing for a weakening of COCOM procedures and restrictions. The Administration needs to establish acceptable boundaries for East-West economic cooperation and then coordinate them with our allies.

Fourth, the recent settlements in Afghanistan and Southern Africa have raised hopes that U.S.-Soviet cooperation will spur agreements in other parts of the world. We should work aggressively to promote regional stability, aware that the Soviet Union can be an important asset in some but not all regions. In Central America, for instance, multilateral efforts may be more effective if the Soviet Union is excluded.

Finally, you will, in due course, need to lay out a vision of American power as a global stabilizing force in its own right. Whatever the state of U.S.-Soviet relations, America will continue to have interests abroad to defend. In the Persian Gulf, for instance, our military commitment provided the stability that supported the UN search for a peaceful settlement. We need to establish the principle that American power is not simply a reaction to Soviet military capability. This will be important over the next few years because Gorbachev may succeed in diminishing the sense of an overt Soviet threat in a number of areas of the world.

"Getting ahead of Gorbachev" is a complicated and enduring task. The American people, our allies and the international community are looking to you for steady and confident leadership. The time that you take now to set a sure course is a good investment, one that will pay dividends throughout your Presidency.

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