

Record of conversation

Between M.S. Gorbachev and U.S. Secretary of State J. Baker.

(with delegations)

May 18, 1990

GORBACHEV: Greetings to my colleagues on both sides. We need your help. I think that the importance of Secretary of State's visit is clear. It is determined by the fact that this visit is happening literally on the eve of the summit. We will review what we already have and what still remains to be done. We have time to accomplish more.

Today I would like to hear your information about the state of [negotiations] on the strategic offensive weapons. Maybe we will be able to resolve some issues right now, and on some, we will issue home assignments.

BAKER: E. A. Shevardnadze and I had comprehensive discussions on many issues related to reduction and limitation of armaments, economic cooperation, regional problems, in particular on Afghanistan and Cambodia. Today in the second part of the day we will continue our discussion of regional issues and also we will hear reports of the groups on human rights and transnational problems. I would like to mention the fact that there was some progress on eight out of twenty names on the list, which President Bush gave you on Malta.

GORBACHEV: If we are talking about progress, Ambassador Matlock has created probably the longest line in Moscow in front of his Embassy.

MATLOCK: It is becoming shorter.

[...]

BAKER: I will reply to your question.

I will start with the fact that two weeks ago we had big differences on the [subject of] sea-launched cruise missiles (SLCMs) and air-launched cruise missiles (ALCMs). The main differences concerned three issues.

The question of range of ALCMs. From the beginning you argued for the range limit of 600 kilometers. Marshal Akhromeev even insisted that he reached an agreement on that with P. Nitze several years ago. We don't think so. Our initial position was 1500 km. Before the meeting in Bonn, our position was 800 km., yours—600. In Bonn, I told the Minister that if we find satisfactory resolution on other elements of the package, and in particular, if an exception could be made for the missile Tacit Rainbow, the range of which is over 600 km, then we will agree with your position on the range limits, because you explained to us that your entire anti-air defense system is built on the assumption of precisely that range.

The second issue—the problem of the overall limit on the number of SLCMs. You raised it twice in your conversations with me.

GORBACHEV: And I raised it about ten times before you.

BAKER: In Bonn I said that even though we always rejected that approach, we are ready to establish the limit of 1000 units. But I have to be honest—such a decision does not sit well with many of us.

Third issue—the limit on the number of heavy bombers. In Bonn I said that having met you halfway on two of the three main issues, we expected that you would agree with our position on the third one. However, yesterday we showed flexibility.

[...]

[our] budget is published, and you know how many nuclear and non-nuclear sea-based cruise missiles we produce every year.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize one more time that we made great efforts in order to meet you halfway on the main issues of the SLCMs and ALCMs.

SHEVARDNADZE: If I start listing everything that happened in the course of our negotiations, two days will not be enough to list all our concessions.

GORBACHEV: That's true, the American side should not assign all the credit for achieving the agreement to itself.

SHEVARDNADZE: It would be difficult for us to defend this treaty in the Supreme Soviet. We made the biggest concession to agree to resolve the issue of SLCMs on the basis of a political statement.

GORBACHEV: How can we convince the Supreme Soviet?

SHEVARDNADZE: This will not be easy. Besides, we gave up [our right] of inspection of any submarines and ships with SLCMs. Therefore we have all the right to expect that the United States would move more in the direction of our position, as we have done, taking into consideration the specific concerns about which the U.S. side told us.

GORBACHEV: If your unwillingness to agree to inspections of ships with SLCMs is related to your concern that all your ships would be subject to such inspections, then maybe we could agree on the following: let us establish a minimal quota, let us say, two ships a year, which would be subject to selective inspections. Or does your position consist of the condition that an alien foot should never be able to step on an American ship?

BAKER: We, of course, would prefer precisely this solution. We do not want to start movement down this slippery road.

GORBACHEV: A quota—one or two selective inspections per year—would permit us to tell the Supreme Soviet that some control was envisioned. What is it that bothers you? Tell me honestly.

BAKER: We always held the position that SLCMs could not be controlled and therefore could not be considered in this treaty. And we welcomed your willingness to agree to the resolution of this in the framework of a separate statement.

GORBACHEV: We welcome the appreciation of how serious this issue is for us that you showed. If it is not resolved, there would be no treaty. But we have to do something on the inspections.

BAKER: We agreed to establish an overall limit on the number of SLCMs. It was not easy for us. But if you are saying that the absence of inspections of SLCMs puts the treaty in danger, then the situation truly becomes very different.

You are asking how would you persuade the Supreme Soviet.

GORBACHEV: And ourselves too.

BAKER: We will also have to persuade ourselves and the Congress. For example, the treaty does not envision a prohibition on modernization of the heavy ICBMs, even though we were seeking it actively. You, however, are telling us that there could be no talk about such a prohibition. So we had to meet you halfway, even though in our country very few people are happy about that. This is the logic of compromise.

GORBACHEV: I think that every position about which we are negotiating should presuppose some form of inspection. We agreed to a separate document on the SLCMs. But in order for that to be a serious document, we need a mechanism of control or inspection. You are worried that in that case almost the entire American fleet would suddenly be subject to inspection. OK, we are willing to free you from that [concern], by establishing the quota of two inspections per year. This is an insignificant number, considering the fact that you have hundreds of ships.

BAKER: If we propose to the Congress to approve the limitations on any kind of weapon systems, then the Congress would ask—is that possible to inspect. The SLCMs are not possible to inspect. Neither you nor ourselves can inspect them.

GORBACHEV: We only propose selective inspections. One or two per year. And you are against any inspections. Why?

BAKER: Because the SLCMs are not part of the treaty. And precisely because they cannot be controlled effectively. And as far as it is the fact, we cannot agree to a regime that does not provide an opportunity for an effective control. “Some kind” of control would be a mistake. The Congress would not agree to that, they would say it was a fiction. The Congress would say to us that if the treaty was not limiting the SLCMs and that the issue was resolved by a political statement, then why would you need to establish a system of inspection, which would not be effective anyway.

We made very serious progress in the direction of your position on the SLCMs and the ALCMs. We accepted your position on the range limits of the ALCMs, on the overall limits on the SLCMs on limiting the number of heavy bombers. All these issues, which were left “hanging” during the last five or six years, were resolved in the last two years.

SHEVARDNADZE: If one was to number concessions, then the biggest concession is the agreement by the USSR to resolve the issue of the SLCMs on the basis of a political statement.

BAKER: We admit that.

GORBACHEV: In the treaty on the 50% reduction of strategic offensive weapons the Soviet Union made such a concession that the American side did not even anticipate. I am talking about the agreement to cut the number of our heavy missiles by half. We agreed to that in Reykjavik. Compared to that, American concessions are just sunflower seeds.

BAKER: Tell that to the Congress.

GORBACHEV: Are you inviting me? Seems to me that this is the first time. Seems like members of Congress don't want me to speak there for some reason.

I will continue. If you look at the structure of the Soviet forces subject to reductions, you will see that the Soviet Union is destroying hundreds of very modern missiles. And you will be cutting the old trash, recyclables, which you would be eliminating in any case. As far as submarines are concerned, yes, here you are cutting more modern weapons as well, but on the whole the situation is such that our Supreme Soviet could ask a legitimate question: why does the Soviet leadership agree to such reductions, which weaken the basic units of our arsenal?

If one looks at the prospects of our further negotiations, then what are the consequences of the current American position? The United States are taking out of the strict limitations or strict inspections precisely the kinds of weapons—planes, sea and air-launched cruise missiles—on the development and modernization of which they have been focused, and to which the Soviet Union has been paying less attention. What are the implications of such a position? It would make further negotiations more difficult.

BAKER: I agree with your words that the Soviet Union made a big concession by agreeing to a political [statement] ...

It seems to me that the formulas that both sides would keep to search for a solution to this problem, that were included in the political statement, would help both you and us to avoid many problems in the course of ratification. I would ask you to think about this.

BARTHOLOMEW: Right now we are working on the basis of the Soviet draft of the document. And it did not mention the means of inspection. It only talks about the measures of cooperation.

GORBACHEV: Yes, I know. But please allow President of the USSR to have his own opinion.

The issue of ratification of the future treaty—is an exceptionally important issue. Because if we sign the treaty, and it is not ratified, it would be a trouble, a scandal.

BAKER: That already happened once before.

We will think about your proposal.

GORBACHEV: The issue of limits of heavy bombers with ALCMs. This is an important thing. We proposed the limit of 120 planes, and above that—according to the actual number of

ALCMs. Your proposal—180 heavy bombers. The difference is 60 planes. [This is] a big difference, corresponding to 1,200 units of ALCMs. Maybe we should split that difference in half and establish the limit of 150 planes.

BAKER: I agree. Next issue.

GORBACHEV: Range limits. Here I take your position.

BAKER: Are you ready to make an exception for Tacit Rainbow?

GORBACHEV: Yes, I am ready.

BAKER: The issue that remains is the range limits for SLCMs.

GORBACHEV: We need to agree on the number of nuclear-equipped SLCMs. Let us walk the road halfway toward each other. In other words—800 units.

BAKER: I think we should split the difference between our current position and your current position—760 and 1,000. Then the limit should be 880 units.

GORBACHEV: I agree. But then we need to affirm that both sides would be seeking methods of inspection of SLCMs.

BAKER: This is your proposal.

GORBACHEV: At least it allows us not to step backward. [...]

BAKER: We will consider it. We still have planned conversations today and tomorrow. But I would like to be reassured that you propose to restate the formula that was included in the Washington joint statement. In other words, that you are not proposing that the two sides would announce that they would actually implement the stipulations of the political statement. That they would just be seeking ways to inspect SLCMs. [That] this will be just a statement of intentions.

GORBACHEV: Yes, I propose the Washington formula. It would not be that easy for us to defend this position in the Supreme Soviet, but at least we will be able to say that we have been seeking and will continue to seek a solution for this issue. Otherwise, it might seem that this issue was buried.

BAKER: If we accept your proposal, then you will not raise the issue of distinctive features of nuclear-equipped SLCMs?

GORBACHEV: I think we will accept the formula that at the next stage [of negotiations, both] sides would raise all the issues of concern to them. We can remove them for right now. [...]

SHEVARDNADZE: We tabled a good proposal on this issue. Our former position was 1,000 units. Now we are proposing 1,200. However, the U.S. proposal is 800 units—it is not fair.

BAKER: We met you halfway. Before we had no position at all.

GORBACHEV: We need to find a compromise solution.

BAKER: Between 1,200 and 800.

We also would like to find a solution on the issue of limits on flight testing of heavy missiles. You know our former position on this issue. You rejected it. But we have to show something to Congress.

SHEVARDNADZE: The United States currently proposes to limit the number of flight tests by two per year, and in addition to that the Soviet Union would be required to stop production of such ICBMs by 1993. If the U.S. insists on this proposal, this could negate all our work. As far as the issue of heavy ICBMs is concerned, we have already made all the concessions that we could have made.

AKHROMEEV: This issue was resolved in the Washington statement at the highest level.

GORBACHEV: Our work is not finished with this treaty. The next stage will involve solution of more difficult tasks. And then we would be able to consider many issues, including those related to the heavy ICBMs, MIRVs, mobile ICBMs and so on.

BAKER: If we agree that the treaty does not stipulate limits on the production of the heavy ICBMs, then, probably, we have a right to count on you to move toward our position on the issue of test flights to some extent.

GORBACHEV: This is beyond the limits of this treaty. Right now we are not prepared to tell you anything on this issue. It would only slow down our work. I do not know, maybe to some extent, the statement about future negotiations and strategic stability would "swallow" this issue, would give you something with which you can go back to Washington. But right now we are not ready to solve this issue, it would only complicate everything.

BAKER: I promised you to think about your proposal to restate the Washington formula on inspections in the statement on SLCMs. Maybe you could think of a different version that would move toward our position on the issue of test flights for heavy ICBMs.

GORBACHEV: I think these are two different issues. We are now seeing outlines of a statement about future negotiations and strategic stability, and I think that at the second stage of our negotiations, we could very well discuss heavy ICBMs. I do not see [any] connection with the issue of SLCMs.

BAKER: I did not imply that there was a connection. I would like to hope that before my departure from Moscow we would be able to resolve the two remaining issues relating to SLCMs, and that way the issues of SLCMs and ALCMs would be removed. Without [any] connection with these issues, we have concerns about the issue of heavy ICBMs. I told Minister Shevardnadze yesterday that our initial position, which is still on the table of negotiations in Geneva, presupposed cessation of testing, production and modernization of such missiles. We dropped it. [...]

Translated by Svetlana Savranskaya for the National Security Archive.

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