he did not know where the fault lay. In any case he was prevented from discovering it not only by his own internal arsenal of anti-communist clichés but by the narrowness of his own close advisers, who would be the last to come up with concrete recommendations for improvement. He had to look somewhere else, and as it turned out, he turned to the one person whose self-confidence and determination had guided his political career from the start—himself.

III. "More Deeds, Less Words"

A Personal Discussion with Reagan, at Last

At 5 P.M. on February 15, 1983, I arrived at the State Department for what I assumed would be a routine talk with Shultz. He informed me that President Reagan wanted to talk with me in person at the White House right away. I was certainly mystified but accepted at once.

It was a frosty, foggy evening and Washington was still recovering from a huge weekend snowfall. My visit was utterly shrouded in secrecy. We went in Shultz's car from the basement garage to the White House, entering through the East Gate, where official visitors are rarely received. From there we were conducted not to the president's office in the West Wing but to the second floor of the White House and the president's private apartment, which was nicely decorated and comfortable, and where Reagan preferred to hold informal chats. Only the three of us were there, and Shultz confined himself to occasional remarks.

We exchanged the usual greetings. Coffee was served. The president had been fully briefed on Shultz's conversations with me and especially on Andropov's statements to the U.S. delegation at Brezhnev's funeral, and he wanted to continue with me along those lines. First of all, he said, it would be useful to establish a personal and confidential channel of communication with the general secretary, over the heads of "the bureaucracy," in order to conduct a frank exchange of views. The channel could operate through contacts between Shultz and the Soviet ambassador as it had under past presidencies in a way that he understood had been worthwhile.

The president went on to say that while Andropov had told Bush and Shultz that he favored good relations with the United States, and "you, Mr. Ambassador, have also told Shultz about that on behalf of the Soviet leadership, please tell Andropov that I am also in favor of good relations with the Soviet Union. Needless to say, we fully realize that our lifetime would not be long enough to solve all the problems accumulated over many years. But there are some problems that can and should be tackled now. Probably, people in the Soviet Union regard me as a crazy warmonger. But I don't want a
war between us, because I know it would bring countless disasters. We should make a fresh start."

"I noted," continued the president, "that Andropov is clearly committed to the maxim: 'More deeds, less words.' It is easier for a newcomer, who is not burdened with the load of the past, to make the first step even if it is a symbolic one."

Reagan suggested a small gesture that was to figure with unusual symbolism in the turn in our relations. He asked the Soviet Union to grant exit visas for seven Pentecostal Christian fundamentalists who had been living in the basement of the American Embassy since 1978, when they had pushed their way past the guards and taken sanctuary there. If these people were allowed to emigrate, the American public would welcome the Soviet move with greater enthusiasm than any other bilateral agreement, said the president. "It may sound paradoxical, but that's America." (President Reagan was right in his own way, given the very special way American public opinion focuses on individual stories.) Reagan also said the Jackson-Vanik amendment linking Jewish emigration with trade was wrong, but it had been passed by Congress and he could not cancel it. If Congress revoked it, he would not stand in the way.

Reagan paused as if inviting me to express my opinion. I said that since the president and the American government were prepared to improve our relations, they could rely on reciprocity from us. But we believed it important to know exactly how the American side was going to go about it.

The president replied by raising his fundamental point about security and American benevolence, which he had raised in his first handwritten message to Brezhnev. He asked me if the Soviet Union indeed believed the United States posed a threat to the Soviet Union—could the United States attack the Soviet Union and start a nuclear war? He went on to recall the time after World War II when the United States had a monopoly on nuclear weapons, its military industry was prepared for war, and everything was in place for America to dominate the world. Who then could have stopped us? But America did not take the opportunity.

When Brezhnev replied to those questions, he reminded Reagan the Soviet Army had dominated the whole European continent right after the Americans went home at the end of World War II, yet the Soviet Union had honored its commitments to its wartime allies and did not consider expansion into Western Europe. I enlarged on that in my reply by asking Reagan to look at things from our angle: the numerous American military bases around the Soviet Union, their new nuclear missiles, and the arms race now being pursued by the American government. "As to the question of whether we believe that the United States poses a military threat to the Soviet Union," I said, "let me put it bluntly. We regard the huge rearmament program in the United States now under way amidst political tension between the two countries as a real threat to our country's security. Do the American people want a war? The answer seems clear to us: it does not, no more than any other people. As for us, every family in the Soviet Union knows what a war is like and what disasters it can bring to us all. We proceed from the belief that the American president clearly realizes that."

Reagan said he certainly did, but speaking frankly, the American people regarded as its main threat the principal political idea of the Soviet Union, which was based on the fundamental Marxist-Leninist teaching that the world would surely become communist. The Soviet Union therefore justified its encouragement and support for revolutions in any country, especially if they affected American interests. In short, the Soviet Union proceeded from the assumption that the future belonged to it exclusively, while the United States had no future, even though its social system was supported by a majority of its population and its standards of living were the highest in the world.

"We believe in our future, and we will fight for it," the president said.

I told Reagan that he sounded sincere but unrealistic. We were not going to impose our views and convictions by force of arms. Let history be the supreme arbiter of our competition in the conditions of peaceful coexistence. "We are not proclaiming a world crusade against capitalism," I said. "We are ready to accept the verdict of history without making wars or any rash moves that might lead to a disastrous war, particularly between the United States and the Soviet Union. It is in the two countries' interests to avert it. To achieve that we should work jointly with a view to normalize our relations."

Reagan remarked that the subject required more than one discussion and joked that he had received quite a rap across the knuckles for reciting a so-called series of ten commandments of world conquest ascribed to Lenin after reading them in a California newspaper and using them in a speech. It turned out that they did not exist, and had less to do with Lenin than with Reagan's habit of borrowing dubious quotations to support his political assessments, to the intense puzzlement of the public, the press, and his own White House officials, to say nothing of the Kremlin.

I told the president I wanted to seize this surprise opportunity of talking with him to present a practical approach to the future that could be continued with the secretary of state. Reagan was ready to hear me out, and I spoke in detail on nuclear disarmament, both the strategic arms lim-
iteration talks and dispute about nuclear arms in Europe. Reagan reiterated the American position on Euromissiles, where clearly his attention was focused.

"Let the delegations keep on working," he said succinctly. "I should like to repeat in conclusion that, like Andropov, I favor good relations between our countries. I want to remove the threat of war in our relations. I want a positive turn. Please communicate this to the general secretary and the whole Soviet leadership."

The meeting lasted almost two hours, unusually long for him; his attention span was notoriously short, but not this time. Shultz and I returned to the State Department to continue our detailed review.

This was not only my first private meeting with Reagan, but it was his first substantive conversation as president with any senior Soviet representative and—as far as I know—at any time in his long career as an aggressive opponent of communism and the Soviet Union. The very decision to hold our meeting was remarkable, as Reagan made it only in the third year of his presidency, which showed his personal desire finally to examine Soviet-American affairs more closely.

Shultz writes in his memoirs that except for his wife Nancy, Deaver, and Shultz himself, the president's entire entourage opposed the meeting, but Reagan decided to go ahead nevertheless. For him this first attempt at face-to-face diplomacy with a representative of the "evil empire" was evidently of major significance. For the first time Reagan was trying to be a negotiator with the Soviet Union. The very fact of the meeting was kept as a secret by the White House. It was of principal importance to Shultz, as he told me, because once the president himself began a dialogue with the Soviet ambassador, the secretary of state could more confidently tackle Soviet-American affairs, regardless of the opposition from inside the White House and elsewhere. The meeting thus provided the crucial opening that Shultz had been seeking.

I sent Moscow my report about the conversation, recommending that we continue working patiently to bridle Reagan's extremist views. I pointed out that small, inch-by-inch steps toward establishing a personal relationship with Reagan could, at the initial stage, play a more positive role than any major projects for which I believed he was as yet psychologically unprepared. As a first step, I recommended that we clear up the problem of the Pentecostals, which was long overdue anyway.

A month later, Shultz told me that the American Embassy in Moscow reported the Soviet government had made its first step toward letting the Pentecostals emigrate, although it would take some time to complete things. But more important, Reagan had expressed his satisfaction when Shultz passed on the news. This episode, however small, was interesting from a psychological point of view. For President Reagan, his request was a sort of personal test of the Soviet government's goodwill: Were the Communists in Moscow prepared to respond to his appeal even about small matters? For the Soviet leadership, Reagan's request looked distinctly odd, even suspicious. After almost three years in office and at his first meeting with the Soviet ambassador, the president actually raised only one concrete issue—the Pentecostals—as if it were the most important issue between us. This request was rather disappointing to them and was not welcomed enthusiastically in Moscow. But it was a matter of attitude and psychology.

For months afterward, high American officials, including Bush and Shultz, repeatedly cited this case as the first symbolic breakthrough in the president's conviction that it was impossible to deal with the Russians. During my long stay in Washington I came to consider psychological factors a very important part of the relations between the leaders of both countries. Unfortunately, the leaders themselves did not pay enough attention to psychology, preoccupied as they were with geopolitical and ideological conflicts, and often extremely dogmatic ones.

It was evident from Shultz's behavior during our White House conversation and long afterward that Reagan was the real boss, and the secretary of state carried out his instructions. Shultz hardly intervened in the conversation and ostensibly agreed with Reagan throughout. I even had the impression, perhaps an erroneous one, that the secretary of state was somewhat afraid of the president. From Shultz's memoirs, it is clear that at the start of his tenure he did not meet with the president often in private but contacted him through his aides. When I observed Reagan and Shultz during the meeting, I did not sense any personal rapport between them, in contrast to the relationship between Brezhnev and Gromyko.

As for the confidential channel, I think Reagan simply had no idea at the moment about how to use it or even how it functioned. He knew from Nixon that the channel played a considerable role in ensuring a private dialogue between the leadership of the two countries. Shultz echoed the president's words during our White House conversation but he, too, showed little interest in the confidential channel and did little to put it into operation. There seemed to be several reasons for this. Shultz probably feared the channel might be commandeered by one of the president's aides. But he also was reluctant to manage it single-handedly, since it really worked only if the private talks within the channel were used by each side to sound out the other on concrete issues for compromise solutions, and Shultz was not prepared for that kind of exploration. Unlike Kissinger, Shultz, especially at the begin-
ning, was kept on a short leash and had to consult the president in advance about nearly every conversation with me. Besides, Shultz had not yet mastered the detailed nuances of the disarmament talks, which was one of the principal subjects that kept the channel going in the past.

Whenever Shultz wanted to discuss the state of the arms negotiations with me, he always had competent officials and experts by his side even when he had already mastered the material. No confidential dialogue was possible under such circumstances. I had far fewer private conversations with him than with Vance, Kissinger, or Rusk, although I dare say my personal relationship with Shultz was friendly enough. On the whole, he was certainly a true representative of the Reagan administration and defended its positions consistently and stubbornly.

Looking back now and reading Shultz’s memoirs, it is clear that he had much stamina and perseverance, patiently pushing against Reagan and his entourage to promote his ideas of compromise. He sought cautiously to develop a long-term policy toward the Soviet Union. It was not an easy task, given Ronald Reagan’s essential ambivalence and shifting moods about the Soviet Union and the endless disputes about Soviet policy within his administration. It was difficult for them to create an integral policy. Fragmentary actions that were approved from time to time by the president prevailed. The policy acquired a more solid basis only when Gorbachev came to power in Moscow two years later and when Reagan with the support of Shultz was prepared to impart a new dynamism to Soviet-American relations.

**Did the Soviet Union Fear an American Nuclear Attack?**

One of the elements of Reagan’s rhetoric was his air of injured innocence about whether the United States posed a military threat to the Soviet Union. Could anyone even imagine that the United States could launch a nuclear attack on the Soviet Union? He posed this same question at our White House meeting and thus raised an important matter of principle.

I can testify that the possibility of a nuclear war with the United States was considered seriously indeed by Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Andropov, and Konstantin Chernenko, who was the last leader of the old school. All these leaders and their associates proceeded from the assumption that the United States did pose a real military threat to our country’s security in the long term. Hence our military planning was keyed to an overwhelming strategy of defense based on the possibility of retaliating by inflicting unacceptable damage. But with the probable exception of Andropov, they did not believe an attack could take place unexpectedly at any moment, like Hitler’s attack on the Soviet Union or the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. Such apprehensions were minor on our side, because we knew that the existing political and social structure of the United States was the best guarantee against an unprovoked first strike against us. We knew that the two superpowers had no history of confrontations that led to military clashes, with the possible exception of the Cuban crisis of 1962, and that crisis itself helped define the limits that actually prevented open warfare. In any case I personally never believed that any president was ever planning a nuclear attack on the Soviet Union; this conviction settled in me as I lived for years in the United States.

Moscow’s apprehension of military confrontation grew less out of the fear of sneak attack that seems to sit in the American historic consciousness and more from what happened in Cuba—some tense political conflict that might develop and escalate unpredictably at some unforeseen time in the future. Considering the continuous political and military rivalry and tension between the two superpowers, and an adventurous president such as Reagan, there was no lack of concern in Moscow that American bellicosity and simple human miscalculation could combine with fatal results. Andropov once said to me in a very private conversation: “Reagan is unpredictable. You should expect anything from him.” All in all, the Kremlin leaders took Reagan seriously—perhaps far more so than he took his own antics—and they therefore watched him with increasing vigilance. Our intelligence services were also more on alert than during other presidencies to pick up any advance signals of U.S. military action.

While still head of the KGB, Andropov did believe that the Reagan administration was actually preparing for war, and he was joined in this belief by Ustinov, the defense minister. They persuaded the Politburo to approve the largest peacetime military intelligence operation in Soviet history, known by its code name of Operation Ryon, an acronym of the Russian words Raketno-Vyderovoye Napadenie—Nuclear Missile Attack. In 1983 all KGB residents received urgent and detailed instructions to collect any evidence of plans for an American first strike. Only in the following year, when Reagan’s policy began to turn, did Moscow give a less paranoid interpretation to the evil empire, Star Wars, and the like. The Foreign Ministry did not inform our ambassadors about this operation, leaving it to the KGB. I learned about it from the KGB resident in Washington. We both remained skeptical but he forwarded what he could get (mostly rumors and guesses) to Moscow.

The Soviet political leadership and military high command felt they had no choice but to reckon with the possibility of a nuclear war because they were certain that a serious military conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States, if it ever were to happen, would inevitably lead to the use of nuclear weapons. For all their patriotic propaganda, they did not really
believe that a nuclear war might be winnable, and they profoundly hoped that the supreme military leadership in Washington believed as they did. But they were by no means confident that their potential opponents really felt the same way, and the incessant American attempts to attain strategic superiority made them fear otherwise. Hence our determination to make irreversible the nuclear parity we had achieved.

The American public reacted to the threat of nuclear war somewhat more strongly than the Soviet people; Americans were continuously reminded of it by the mass media and Hollywood reveling in the horrors of nuclear war. But the Soviet people experienced a deeper and persistent feeling of danger, having personally endured terrible suffering during World War II. If you had been able to poll the Soviet populace at that time and asked who they thought was more likely to push the nuclear button first—Brezhnev and Andropov or Reagan, the answer would probably have been practically unanimous—Reagan. If you asked the same question of the American people, most would have said Brezhnev—but more than a few would have been just as apprehensive about their own president. That certainly was my impression, and although I never took any poll I talked to plenty of Americans.

A prime and literally strategic example of this anxiety was provided by Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev, the chief of the General Staff of the Soviet Army during the 1980s. He was one of the most intelligent and knowledgeable military leaders I knew, and impressed his opposite numbers in the Pentagon when he later visited the United States. During one of my visits to Moscow, he suggested to me that we review our relations with the United States together. I welcomed the idea because I was curious about the military aspects. The conversation took place in his impressive office, with all kinds of maps covering the walls.

I asked the marshal to give me a short summary of our military situation vis-à-vis the United States. He ran his pointer along our borders, particularly in the West where the Soviet Union was close to the NATO countries. In this sector, he said as he pointed, we had enough forces, but in another we needed three or four divisions for reinforcements and additional fortifications would have to be built. At some points our forces ought to be reinforced with tanks, aircraft, mechanized infantry, and so forth. “You can't do that overnight,” he said, “and we are short of funds. We'll have to ask the Politburo again. The General Staff believes we should be prepared along all our lines.”

I asked him straight out, “Do you indeed believe the United States and NATO could attack us some day?”

“It's not my mission to believe, or not to believe,” he replied emphatically. “I can't depend on you diplomats and all your conferences or whatever you call them. You seem to agree with Washington on some point today, but a new outbreak of hostility in the world or in Soviet-American relations tomorrow can put the clock back to the time of the Cold War or even cause a military conflict. Suffice it to remember the Arab-Israeli conflict of 1973, when the United States put its armed forces on high combat alert against us. Incidentally, that happened in the period of detente under Nixon. Now, does President Reagan inspire more confidence? That is why my motto as chief of General Staff is ‘National military security along all azimuths.’ We proceed from the worst conceivable scenario of having to fight the United States, its West European allies, and probably Japan. We must be prepared for any kind of war with any kind of weapon. Soviet military doctrine can be summed up as follows: 1941 shall never be repeated.”

It was also interesting to hear his response to my question about why we needed to have large concentrations of our mechanized units stationed in Central Europe, which was the subject of long controversy at the Vienna negotiations on conventional arms reduction. Akhromeyev sketched out the historical background. Our relations with the United States were strained under President Truman right after World War II. Reports coming to Moscow said that Truman considered using nuclear weapons in case of a serious conflict with the Soviet Union, and at that time the United States had clear nuclear superiority. Under the circumstances the Soviet military designed a doctrine of retaliation, which was approved by Stalin. In the center of Europe (where our armies were still present), we created a powerful force of armored divisions capable of delivering a lightning blow crushing America’s European allies and occupying their territory all the way to the English Channel and the Atlantic coast of Western Europe. Stalin believed that armored threat would counter the American nuclear threat, and that is what it was doing there—although in Western eyes it was seen as a potentially aggressive spearhead always ready to be launched for conquest. Soviet troops continued to be positioned in this way even after the Soviet Union had reached nuclear parity with the United States, partly because of pure inertia, but also to maintain stability in Eastern Europe, where democratic movements had begun to develop.

Akhromeyev remarked in strict confidence that he believed it feasible to reduce our troops and arms in Central Europe. A year later, he submitted his proposals to Gorbachev, stressing that we should insist on adequate concessions from the American side in return. When Gorbachev and his foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze were actively seeking rapprochement with the West, the marshal often engaged in interdepartmental debates arguing against being too hasty in making concessions to the United States at disad-
mament talks. He stressed measured steps in that direction, which turned him against Gorbachev; he supported the coup of 1991, and when it failed he committed suicide. His tragic death was the result of his sincere conviction that the policy of the then Soviet rulers drained the strength and dignity of our army.

I have no doubt that our marshal’s American counterparts in the Pentagon also proceeded from “the worst conceivable scenario.” One can hardly imagine what would have happened to humanity if these scenarios had actually been played out, although Thomas Watson, who served as U.S. ambassador to Moscow, confided to me that he once looked into the American military mind and found it similarly bleak.

When Watson headed IBM, President Carter asked him to serve on a panel of American industrialists studying American preparedness for nuclear war. They studied all aspects of the U.S. nuclear triad and the command structure of the Pentagon. At the final meeting with the Pentagon generals, he asked them to tell him how they would wage a nuclear war against the Soviet Union. With huge maps and lighted charts lining the walls, they showed him more than a thousand targets on Soviet territory marked for destruction during the first hours of war. Soviet casualties would be more than one hundred million.

“And what about our casualties?” Watson asked.

They replied that about eighty million Americans and many major industries would be destroyed, just as in the Soviet Union.

“And what would you do after almost everything was destroyed?” Watson persisted.

The generals looked at each other and did not have much to say.

Several days later Watson presented his report to the president with the principal conclusion that questions of nuclear war should not be left to generals. They could wage such a war, he explained, but they do not consider it their business to be concerned about what humanity—or what would be left of it—would do afterward.

*The Evil Empire and Star Wars, the Elections, and the Summit*

What seemed most difficult for us to fathom were Reagan’s vehement public attacks on the Soviet Union while he was secretly sending—orally or through his private letters—quite different signals seeking more normal relations. On March 8, less than a month after our first White House conversation when he seemed to be trying to open a working relationship with the Soviet leadership, he publicly described the Soviet Union, in a phrase both memorable and notorious, as the evil empire. It came straight from Hollywood—the Star Wars series by the master filmmaker George Lucas, whose film title would shortly enter international politics but with a sarcastic edge. The venue was an address to the National Association of Evangelical Christians at Orlando, Florida, which included many die-hard conservative supporters. The speech was not designed to be a history-making event in foreign policy, and according to Shultz no one outside the White House, including him, had a chance to review the text in advance, but the phrase quickly spread throughout the world.

The entire episode demonstrated a certain paradox about Ronald Reagan: contradiction between words and deeds that greatly angered Moscow, the more so because Reagan himself never seemed to see it. In his mind such incompatibilities could coexist in perfect harmony, but Moscow regarded such behavior at that time as a sign of deliberate duplicity and hostility. The Soviet leadership was at times extremely thin-skinned, forgetting that they also engaged in the same kind of propaganda against the United States from time to time. He was giving them a dose of their own medicine.

Next came Star Wars itself, formally known as the Strategic Defense Initiative when proposed by the president. It so happened that I called on Shultz on March 23 to give him a message from Andropov urging Reagan to speed up the Vienna talks on the reduction of conventional arms in Central Europe. As the conversation was about to close, Shultz unexpectedly handed me the text of a speech Reagan was shortly to deliver on television. I was still reading it when he said he was in a hurry to get to the president, who in his speech intended to give the world “hope against the threat of nuclear weapons” in the form of a long-range research program that would eventually be able to develop laser-guided and other sophisticated defensive weaponry to neutralize missiles by shooting them out of the sky.

I asked Shultz at once if that meant that the American government was ready to break the agreement between us limiting our antiballistic missile installations. He reassured me “officially” that the American government would observe its obligations under the agreement and the American research and development program would be conducted within the framework of the ABM agreement. I replied that although I still had to read through the text, it looked to me that the United States was launching another round of the arms race in a new field, namely, in space. Reagan announced the research program in a characteristically dramatic speech on national television.

*The Star Wars program—it got its name from critics who thought it was all science fiction—had been outlined by American military scientists led by the prominent physicist Edward Teller and the Pentagon’s top officers,
who gradually sold the president the idea. Characteristically, the State
Department and Shultz himself were informed about the speech and its sub-
ject only a couple of days before. They had not been consulted in advance
and barely managed to include a mention of the ABM agreement in the pre-
pared text, since the White House and Pentagon speechwriters simply forgot
about its existence.

Some American historians wrote that this new initiative was the prod-
uct of Reagan's imagination, but the more important point was that he sim-
ply could not accept the fact that the United States—with all that money
they had spent for all that military equipment—had no defense against
Soviet missiles. He was easily convinced that American ingenuity could over-
come great technological obstacles. Hence Reagan's mistaken assumption
that the United States could protect itself from nuclear attack. Missile de-
fense became one of the few issues that actively engaged Reagan once he was
in the White House.

Reagan's speech aroused a controversy in the country and the world.
Most Americans welcomed it, although scientists and some in Congress were
skeptical. Europeans feared that if the United States could eventually hide
behind an SDI shield it would sacrifice European interests for its own pro-
tection—exactly the fear of "decoupling" that the planting of new American
Pershing missiles was supposed to avoid. In terms of military competition
and stability, the SDI represented the most radical challenge to existing or-
thodoxies in arms control since negotiations had begun almost three decades
before. It became a principal bone of contention between the United States
and the Soviet Union, and our relations were deeply affected by it.

Moscow regarded Reagan's decision primarily as a move designed to
destabilize the strategic situation and create a large-scale antimissile defense
system for American territory, in order to deprive the Soviet Union of the
chance to retaliate in case of a nuclear war. Andropov immediately declared
that the new concept would extend the arms race to outer space and warned
that the United States was embarking on a very dangerous road. Moscow of
course could not immediately evaluate all the military and political conse-
cquences of the SDI but feared that the United States had achieved a techno-
logical breakthrough. It goes without saying that our own military designers
quickly pressed their own claims for permission to catch up, with the vigor-
some support of Defense Minister Ustinov. Our physicists, headed by
Academician Yevgeny Velikhov, were as skeptical as many of their American
counterparts, but their views hardly carried much weight at that emotional
moment. Our leadership was convinced that the great technical potential of
the United States had scored again and treated Reagan's statement as a real
threat.
not concede him a single point, however trifling it might be, Bush said. “It may sound bizarre to the Soviet government, but Reagan attaches great significance to the Pentecostals’ case. It has advanced somewhat, but not completely. To Reagan, it has become a kind of a litmus test of the Soviet leadership’s attitude to his personal request. I recommend that you solve this question once and for all. It is not all that important, but it probably could help shift Reagan from his fixed position in relation to the Soviet Union.”

The vice president felt that the most important thing was to make Reagan revise his notions, the almost unimaginable ideas and prejudices he brought to the White House from his past. When Bush got closer to him in the initial months of his presidency, he was simply amazed to see to what extent Reagan was dominated by Hollywood clichés and the ideas of his wealthy but conservative and poorly educated friends from California. Unfortunately, many deep-seated stereotypes remained in the president’s head, and they were reinforced by the conservatives in Reagan’s White House entourage.

“Well, he’s hard, very hard indeed,” Bush repeated of Reagan. “But I think he wouldn’t be altogether hopeless if Soviet-American relations came to be the focus of the election campaign.”

In April Indira Gandhi made a public proposal for a meeting of heads of government at the United Nations to discuss the arms race. In a private message, Andropov declined because, although he favored a Soviet-American summit, the Reagan administration was obviously unprepared for real discussions and he feared Reagan might turn it into “small talk” for his own political purposes, which would only open up the Soviet Union to criticism by the Soviets for favoring the president. Prime Minister Gandhi received this message with understanding.

But Reagan tried to maneuver Andropov to the UN by saying in public that he was ready to meet with him, without privately asking us. Moscow remained silent. After a long break Reagan unexpectedly decided to send a private letter to Andropov. I find it hard to say whether the gesture was prompted by electoral considerations or a genuine desire to improve relations, but it was written in his own hand, put in a sealed envelope, and was handed to Clark, the president’s assistant for national security affairs. It contained the initial months of his presidency, he was simply amazed to see to what extent Reagan was dominated by Hollywood clichés and the ideas of his wealthy but conservative and poorly educated friends from California. Unfortunately, many deep-seated stereotypes remained in the president’s head, and they were reinforced by the conservatives in Reagan’s White House entourage.

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Reagan’s letter sought to convince Andropov that various American proposals already advanced on a number of issues made sense. It was a typical message, outwardly benevolent, without his customary public attacks, but again without any new proposals or possible compromises, save for a generally expressed readiness to conduct confidential exchanges from time to time.

Reagan’s original draft, I learned later, had proposed talks leading to the elimination of all nuclear weapons, a goal that his horrified advisers made him delete. Here was a characteristic Reagan paradox: starting a huge new military program while considering huge cuts in nuclear arms. The final version concluded with this peroration:

“We both share an enormous responsibility for the preservation of stability in the world. I believe we can fulfill that mandate, but in order to do so, it will require a more active level of exchange than we have heretofore been able to establish. There’s much to talk about with regard to the situation in Eastern Europe and South Asia and particularly this hemisphere as well as in such areas as arms control, trade between our two countries and other ways in which we can expand East-West contacts.

Historically our predecessors have made progress when they communicated privately and candidly. If you wish to engage in such communication you will find me ready. I await your reply.

The letter met with a mixed reception in Moscow, where there was a controversy over its motives, but Andropov decided to respond in the same tone. His response on August 1 also was sent in a sealed envelope, and was handed to Clark, the president’s assistant for national security affairs. It

I did not seek to raise many questions in this letter, but only selected what I believe to be the ones on which we could focus. I shall welcome a concrete and frank exchange of views with you on these and other questions. I agree to conduct it confidentially if our dealings require it. For my part I propose to do this through the Soviet ambassador in Washington and any person you choose to appoint for the purpose.

There was a handwritten phrase below: “I sincerely hope, Mr. President, that you will give my ideas your most serious attention and respond in a constructive spirit.”

Andropov’s attempt to revive the confidential channel arose from a conversation we had in Moscow during my regular trip home for my summer vacation. He asked what I thought about the prospects for reopening these secret contacts, and I replied that the Reagan administration did not seem to care because it had no intention of working out any agreements with us. And in any case who exactly could work their end of the channel? Nearly all the White House assistants knew little of what we might achieve, Clark had nothing to suggest, and while I said Shultz was “not hopeless,” he “won’t stick his neck out,” although he was not opposed to better relations. I sug-
gested cooperating with him more closely if possible, although he was very different from his predecessors, Kissinger and Vance. The key was Reagan himself.

Andropov found Reagan a puzzle. "Is he just playing his game and being a hypocrite, or does he really realize that for all our ideological disagreements, you just cannot bring about a confrontation in the nuclear age?" Because of the president's contradictory behavior, I could not venture a definite answer. Andropov summarized the discussion by saying: "We should keep on persistently working with Reagan. We should be vigilant, because he is unpredictable. At the same time we ought not to ignore any signs of his readiness to improve our relations. We should make the confidential channel operate, but we should not press the matter too hard."

Diplomatic Oxymoron

For me, the real litmus test of the administration was to be found in the debate about Euromissiles and arms control. These questions represented the only familiar and available ground from which to plumb the genuine intentions of the president, even after all the private expressions of goodwill that began in his upstairs living room back in February.

The genesis of the Euromissile debate lay not only in Washington or Moscow but in Europe itself. The American Pershings and cruises really were not primarily military but political weapons and were offered to America's allies, first by Carter then by Reagan, as an earnest expression of America's will to defend them. Under the Reagan administration's policy of confrontation, Europe's willingness to accept the missiles on its soil became a political touchstone of whether it had the backbone, like Reagan's America, to stand fast against the Soviet Union. But Reagan's own behavior provoked a broad pacifist wave across Europe which made his task of winning popular support that much more difficult and our efforts to counter him correspondingly easier.

The Reagan administration's negotiating position of the zero option was an attractive phrase, but after it was rejected by us, Reagan proposed something called the intermediate option in a speech in Los Angeles at the end of March 1983. Assuming a more flexible stand to deflect criticism, the president offered a new scheme providing for equal numbers of nuclear warheads carried by medium-range missiles on both sides in Europe, but no exact figure. In explaining it to the European NATO ambassadors in Washington, Reagan said that Moscow was unlikely to agree to anything before NATO's December deadline for deployment, so it would probably go ahead, at which point Russians, being stubborn but realistic, would accept his half-way deal in 1984 in order to prevent full deployment of the American missiles—and that agreement might lead to a summit. (In this, he proved correct.)

But to us, the proposal boiled down to the same thing: we would dismantle some of our missiles while the United States was entitled to deploy its own—and neither the U.S. air bases nor the British and French nuclear weapons would be counted. I told Shultz it really meant that the United States was supposed to arm and the Soviet Union to disarm.

The episode illustrated a characteristic feature about the proposals on nuclear arms reductions made by both sides during that period. They would be made public with great pomp, fanfare, and explanation to allies, media, and the like by the leaders themselves rather than being discussed through the confidential channel or during working meetings of the two delegations where they could be subjected to a discreet examination. The Soviet-American arms control debate turned into a personal and public battle between the two supreme leaders—the exact opposite of the main idea of a summit, which calls for a mutual and confidential quest for agreement publicized only after it has been reached.

I must admit that the Kremlin found itself dealing with something new and deeply disturbing, a transparently one-sided set of objectives that were put straightforwardly enough by President Reagan: arms control must result in nothing less than a top-to-bottom overhaul of the Soviet arsenal to accomplish changes in the nuclear balance that the United States had not been able to bring about through its own defense programs. In Soviet eyes, arms control was a means of regulating military competition and codifying parity, a process combining continuity with quiet diplomacy. We therefore believed Reagan was not serious about arms control, and many in the West and even in the United States shared that impression. The administration was of course eager to dispel it, and Shultz became especially active in his contacts with us.

On April 17, I went to the State Department for a very unusual meeting. Apart from Shultz himself, all his senior assistants were present: Lawrence Eagleburger, Kenneth Dam, Richard Burt and—the real surprise—Weinberger, who had come over from the Pentagon. I was accompanied by Oleg Sokolov, my embassy counselor. We were definitely outnumbered.

Weinberger first took the floor and made a number of concrete and practical proposals: modernizing the hot line, linking both war departments so they could keep abreast of each other's maneuvers and missile launches, exchanging information on terrorist activity, particularly the seizure of nuclear material, and establishing more effective communication between American and Soviet embassies with their capitals. Weinberger was concise,
but having presented his proposals, he took practically no part in our conversation, as if he was not very much interested in it.

Shultz then proposed that while their Geneva arms negotiators were in Washington during recess I should meet with them. Gromyko having already rejected the latest American proposals, I immediately asked, "What exactly are they supposed to discuss with me? Go over it again? Or are they prepared to discuss fresh ideas?" Shultz gave no concrete reply and raised the possibility of improving the provisions in the 1976 and 1979 agreements—which had been signed long ago. He suggested consultations on South Africa, Afghanistan, the Middle East, but also did not elaborate.

Then he turned to Reagan's favorite subject, the Pentacostals. Moscow had already given permission for one to leave for the United States. Shultz hinted that as more were given exit visas the American government would extend the 1976 fishing agreement by another year and conclude a long-term grain agreement (thus lifting the embargo imposed by Reagan himself in 1981 after martial law was declared in Poland).

In Moscow there was a mixed reaction to this unusual meeting. On the one hand, they were impressed by the presence of two leading ministers, but on the other they could not avoid noting that the discussion itself centered on minor questions and carefully avoided anything of substance on the key issues of arms limitation. The Politburo decided to string along with the procedure, hoping for a change for the better. It also agreed to begin consultations on two of Weinberger's suggestions, upgrading the hot line and counterterrorist exchanges. The other two were blocked by the conservatism of our secret services, whose members were acutely conscious of the higher quality of American equipment.

But when on April 14 Shultz invited me for a long discussion on reducing strategic weapons, it got nowhere because there were no signs of compromise on his side. Similarly fruitless meetings followed on Euromissiles, and meanwhile the American public relations machine—the administration described it with a virtual oxymoron, "public diplomacy"—went into operation. Reports about private meetings between the secretary of state and the Soviet ambassador were leaked to the Washington press and diplomatic corps, creating the impression of a genuine effort by both sides to overcome the impasse. But the confidential channel actually had stalled, and I said as much to Shultz's disappointed deputy Kenneth Dam at one point, explaining that his boss had used the channel essentially for raising the same questions that had been discussed repeatedly in Geneva, rather than searching out new solutions as we had during previous administrations.

Shultz must have gotten the message, in form if not in substance, because a fortnight later he invited me to a private meeting. It took place on May 19 and was our first unwitnessed talk. He said he needed to talk in private to reassure the Soviet side that President Reagan fully realized the great importance of Soviet-American relations, but he wondered whether Moscow really believed that. I said the public in the United States, in the Soviet Union, and the world over was deeply convinced that Reagan was the most anti-Soviet American president for twenty years and his views bordered on fanaticism. Shultz argued that Soviet-American relations were not as dangerous as they might appear. Yes, I agreed sarcastically, things could be worse, and more dangerous, too, but I wondered what changes for the better he could cite in the administration's first two years. Upon reflection he could cite only two: our decision on the Pentecostals and an agreement to resume negotiations on grain sales to the Soviet Union. He could not remember anything else. These were hardly world-shaking events. For all his efforts, it was evident that there had been no essential change.

On June 18 we went through another ritual meeting designed and conducted with President Reagan's consent in three stages: a private conversation on Euromissiles; a second stage at which we were joined by his principal assistants (Dam, Eagleburger, and Burt) and my counselors (Victor Isakov and Sokolov) on human rights, arms control, and bilateral agreements; and finally a return to face-to-face on the Middle East and Central America, while his three assistants gave my two counselors additional information concerning our bilateral relations. The two principal arms negotiators in Geneva also joined the second stage, so we were quite a crowd.

This epidemic of diplomacy evidently was meant to demonstrate a more flexible, carrot-and-stick policy and was an innovation of sorts for an administration which up to then had aimed at confrontation. But the latest meeting looked like a three-act diplomatic play and left me perplexed. The secretary of state did not outline a basic strategy or select any basic directions. He merely presented, and without much discussion, a set of proposals and issues of varied importance and mixed chances of agreement. I was nevertheless encouraged by all the activity, and perhaps that was one of its purposes. Unfortunately, U.S.-Soviet relations soon reached a new low that had nothing to do with this elaborate diplomatic minuet.

The KAL007 Incident: Bitter Memories

Around midnight of August 31, Soviet chargé d'affaires Oleg Sokolov received an urgent telephone call from Assistant Secretary of State Richard Burt, who told him that a South Korean airliner, Flight 007, from New York en route to Seoul with 269 passengers on board including an American member of Congress, was lost somewhere in the region of Sakhalin Island.
Burt said the plane had probably violated Soviet airspace accidentally and made an emergency landing. No other information was available to American surveillance services at the moment.

The events were developing as fast as in a movie. It so happened that Shultz was the only high-ranking official in Washington at that time, while Reagan with his aides was in California, where he was on vacation at his ranch. At 6:30 in the morning of September 1, Shultz was called up at home and informed that the South Korean airliner was missing, probably shot down by the Soviets. Shultz immediately got busy. He talked with American intelligence and with Japanese officials. (A secret installation in the north of Japan intercepted Soviet radio messages and was run jointly by the Americans and the Japanese.)

At 10:45 A.M. Shultz called a press conference and made an emotional announcement describing the reaction to the Soviet attack as one of revulsion. There was a heavy toll of human lives, he said, and nothing could justify the horrible massacre. Shultz knew nothing yet about the Soviet official reaction and had no conclusive evidence. Although he was normally cautious and phlegmatic, this time he was in a hurry. His emotional press conference set the tone for the American official reaction and uproar in the mass media.

On September 2, Sokolov visited Eagleburger to hand over a Soviet government note accusing the South Korean plane of a “gross violation of the state border of the Soviet Union” and complaining of “the slanderous campaign against the Soviet Union launched in the United States” with the participation of American officials.

In this counteraccusation the Soviet government made, in my opinion, a very serious blunder. It did not have enough courage to recognize publicly and immediately with deep regret that it had been shot down over Soviet territory by a tragic mistake. Moscow tried to produce an impression that the Soviet Union knew nothing about the missing plane—and this was simply not true. The government waited until October 6, when a Tass statement finally acknowledged that the passenger plane had been mistakenly shot down by a Soviet fighter. But by that time a great deal of damage had already been done to the long-term interests of the Soviet Union. The seeds of an anti-Soviet campaign, always present in the West, immediately sprouted and rapidly took on new life.

President Reagan was quick to join in. Speaking on television, he claimed the Soviet pilot had known it was a passenger plane but shot it down anyway. This was not true, because our pilot really thought it was an American reconnaissance aircraft. The Soviet government issued a statement which went: “In spite of the false claims made by American president . . .”

First Reagan and later Andropov found themselves unnecessarily and personally involved in a heated campaign of public recrimination.

In short, it grew into a major crisis in American-Soviet relations. At first glance the matter might seem out of proportion, since the plane was not an American one and it was indisputably over Soviet territory and off course. But it proved a catalyst for the angry trends that were already inherent in relations between Washington and Moscow during the Reagan presidency. It also illuminated the difficult relations and lack of communication between our civilian leaders and our military establishment, the generals being even more isolated from the rest of the world than politicians.

I was on vacation in the Crimea, and Andropov urgently called me to Moscow. When I entered his office, he looked haggard and worried. He said my vacation had to be cut short and ordered: “Return immediately to Washington and try to do your utmost to dampen this needless conflict bit by bit. Our military made a gross blunder by shooting down the airliner and it probably will take us a long time to get out of this mess.” He phoned Defense Minister Ustinov in my presence and ordered him to arrange a briefing for me.

In the course of the conversation with me Andropov cursed “those blockheads of generals who care not a bit for grand questions of politics” and put our relations with the United States on the verge of a complete break. “Just think of all the effort we have put in to improve them, and there they are making a mess of the whole thing,” Andropov said. At that point he sincerely believed the incident had begun with an attempt by the American secret services to assess our radar installations in the area—and he was angry with President Reagan for publicly defending what Andropov saw as a provocation. But even that, he said, was no excuse for our air force command shooting it down instead of forcing the plane to land at one of our airfields. Andropov was actually ready to admit the mistake publicly, but my colleague Georgi Kornienko, who was Gromyko’s deputy, later told me that Ustinov talked the general secretary out of it. It is possible that Andropov’s indecision was at least in part the result of his poor health, but it was also unusual at that time for the Soviet government to accept it had made any kind of error. This would have meant admitting the government and high command had acted irresponsibly.

When I arrived at Ustinov’s office in the Ministry of Defense, I found him strongly scolding the top generals who had been summoned from the Far East. His anger was caused, among other things, by a hole in our own radar defenses. A complex radar system for tracking foreign aircraft was under construction on the Kamchatka Peninsula and Sakhalin Island, to the
West across the Sea of Okhotsk. Despite Ustinov's urgent orders, construction had been delayed, and it so happened that the South Korean jet passed undetected over the unconnected radars and flew for almost an hour in the dead zone not covered by them. Hence the Far Eastern air command was edgy as the plane headed past Kamchatka for neutral waters toward Sakhalin and ordered it held because it had overflown a specially forbidden zone. Our fighter pilot in his report claimed that in poor visibility at night he mistook the airliner for an American reconnaissance plane because their silhouettes were identical. My visit to our own Pentagon did not leave me with a favorable opinion of our high command. Ustinov himself was confused and very angry.

The next day I returned to Washington. I thought both sides had gone slightly crazy in the way they were handling the incident and what they were saying. Shultz had gone out on an emotional limb; he made his charges without any detailed investigation.

On September 8 Eagleburger officially informed me of American sanctions as "punishment" for shooting down the Korean airliner: the Aeroflot offices in Washington and New York would be closed by government order. In the private conversation that followed Eagleburger wondered who exactly had taken the decision to destroy the plane. Had the situation been reported to Andropov as general secretary? I replied that the regulations stipulated that decisions on preventing violations of Soviet borders were to be made by the Air Defense Commands of the local military districts without prior consultation with Moscow, especially if time was short. So this violation had not been referred to the Kremlin in advance.

Eagleburger was curious, asking "strictly personally"—we had known each other well for years and had frank conversations in better times—about the general mood of the Soviet leadership in Moscow and its view of the prospects of our relationship with the Reagan administration. I told him frankly that Moscow was growing increasingly convinced that, as the Russian saying goes, "one can't cook porridge together." That certainly would be true for the next several months because of the KAL007, he said, but he was still hoping for a better future.

As a witness to those events I can testify that the Soviet leadership was convinced that the invasion of Soviet airspace by the South Korean airliner was a thoroughly planned American reconnaissance operation; the only thing that was unclear to us was whether Reagan or Schultz knew about it beforehand. The Korean airliner's black box was later fished from the ocean by Soviet divers but their discovery was kept top secret. It was not until 1993 that the government of Russia gave the flight recorder to the International Civil Aviation Organization for an expert investigation sponsored by the governments of Russia, the United States, Japan, and South Korea. Ten years after the tragic disaster, the ICAO findings were published and failed to establish conclusively why the South Korean passenger airliner, with up-to-date navigation equipment and well-trained pilots, mysteriously deviated from its course between Anchorage and Seoul and strayed into Soviet airspace for several hours. No evidence was found that the Soviet fighter pilot actually knew he was attacking a passenger plane when he fired on KAL007 at night over the Soviet territory.

Yet, it was exactly the idea of a premeditated Soviet attack against a civilian passenger plane that was at the basis of the public accusations made by high American officials. On what grounds did they make these hasty and dangerous accusations?

The whole grievous event left a lasting and bitter memory in our relations with the United States and with President Reagan personally. Our leaders were convinced that he deliberately and disproportionately used the incident against them, and that American secret services were involved one way or another. Andropov considered Reagan's reaction "hysterical." In September, the first meeting between Gromyko and Shultz took place at the final stage of the Madrid Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. The atmosphere was explosive and left a deep impression on me. Shultz in his prepared speech made hostile attacks on the Soviet Union. Gromyko publicly rebuffed him. Following the two speeches, tension at the Madrid conference reached its peak.

On the next day Shultz and Gromyko held a personal meeting that had been arranged before the KAL007 incident. It began in a narrow circle, and Shultz started talking on the subject of human rights in the Soviet Union. Gromyko refused to discuss it, insisting as always that it was an internal matter. Nevertheless, Shultz repeated his piece almost word for word. To make it sound more convincing, he added that the president had entrusted him with making that statement at the beginning of the meeting. Gromyko declined to take up the subject again. So they had to go to another room where the conversation proceeded in the presence of the two delegations.

No sooner had Shultz got to the table then he began to speak loudly about the plane crash, conscious of the broader audience. Ignoring Gromyko's proposal to arrange for the order of business, he spoke at length about the incident, again referring to the president's instructions. There was a sharp exchange of accusations. At one point Gromyko even lost his invariably cool and flung his glasses on the table, almost breaking them. There was neither time nor inclination left for other problems.

The exchange, Gromyko wrote in his memoirs, was the most intense of
all he had conducted with fourteen secretaries of state during his years of diplomatic service. To us, his closest associates, Gromyko said after the meeting that he believed Shultz had probably tried to provoke him to please Reagan. I cannot confirm that guess, but I can testify that the emotional behavior of the secretary of state went beyond the normal limits at a ministerial meeting and far beyond the limits of self-control he usually set for himself, though the truth may simply be that he was really angry.

The complications persisted. On September 18, Moscow announced that the American authorities offered no guarantee of Gromyko's safety when he came to New York for the UN General Assembly session. The governors of New York and New Jersey refused to accept his special plane at their airports on the pretext that he could just as well travel on a regular passenger plane. The Politburo canceled Gromyko's trip, and although he looked angry, I presume that deep down he welcomed the cancellation because the auguries for a trip to the United States at that point certainly were not good.

**Andropov: Illusions Dispelled**

On September 29, Pravda published a statement by Andropov sharply criticizing Reagan's policies on nuclear arms in Europe and attacking the administration's anti-Soviet campaign following the shooting down of the Korean airliner. The key phrase was that "if anybody ever had any illusions about the possibility of an evolution to the better in the policy of the present American administration, these illusions are completely dispelled now." The word "completely" was emphasized. The Soviet leadership had collectively arrived at the conclusion that any agreement with Reagan was impossible. Andropov himself initiated a Politburo review, probably because his own illusions had vanished. But for the whole of the Politburo, the statement incorporated an attitude that had been gathering momentum for some time.

Of course, Andropov's statement drew the immediate attention of the Reagan administration and others. On October 1, Kissinger told me that he had been invited to the White House for consultations. They had taken special note of Andropov's remark about his vanished illusions, so they obviously got his point. Kissinger recommended to Reagan that unless he wanted to aggravate relations even more, he would have to show the utmost restraint and moderate the anti-Soviet attacks in his speeches. At the White House, he likened the Soviet Union to "a heavy fly-wheel, hard to turn at first; but even harder to stop after gaining momentum."

Eagleburger later told me privately that the White House and the president himself had drawn the conclusion that the Soviet leadership, for some reason or other, was unwilling to deal with Reagan by making practical agreements on major issues, particularly on nuclear arms. Prospects for our relations therefore were bleak. I replied that this seemed to have been prompted by the desire to shift blame on us; Andropov's statement made it clear we wanted to relax tensions and curb the arms race—"But what about President Reagan?" Eagleburger said that some time ago Kissinger had told Reagan he was deeply convinced that quiet diplomacy and the confidential channel were very useful with the Soviet leadership, and Reagan seemed willing to try. But the idea "got lost somewhere midway between Shultz and Clark."

Reagan's unique view of the world continued to blanket policy. The Saudi Arabian ambassador, Prince Bandar bin Sultan, met with Reagan on behalf of the Saudi Arabian king, who mediated a cease-fire between the armed factions in Lebanon. The ambassador was amazed to find that Reagan saw all events in the region only through the prism of Soviet-American rivalry. Reagan believed that everything done by Syrian President Hafez Assad in Lebanon was prompted or even dictated by Moscow—all but by Andropov himself," Prince Bandar said. Even disputes between the Arabs were seen by Reagan as Moscow's intrigues or as a chance for the Soviet Union to profit at America's expense. Other ambassadors assessed White House policy likewise.

On October 28, I was invited to lunch with Shultz. He observed that this was the first time that he had lunched alone with a foreign ambassador. (It would have been undiplomatic and bad mannered for me to have mentioned that I had had dozens of lunches like this with his predecessors for twenty years.) He wanted to talk about our relations "from a philosophical angle." Both sides were pursuing an ideological struggle and would continue to do so, he said, but the president nevertheless believed we should look for common ground wherever possible.

I asked the secretary of state to tell me frankly who was doing his best, publicly and officially, to poison our relations. The truth of it was not even denied in the United States. I cited the speech made by the president only the previous day on national television accusing the Soviet Union of causing trouble in Lebanon and Grenada. What made him try to fool the American people into believing in the myth of a sinister role played by the Soviet Union in both countries? We were not even present there.

Finally he launched into a "philosophical discourse" about the confidential channel and its significance, but saying nothing definite about how he would use it. He asked my opinion. I replied that the question for us remained quite simple: everything depended upon the contents of the channel—that is, what was communicated through it and whether both sides saw it the same way.
really used it for compromise. Shultz said he would talk with Reagan about the confidential channel during their trip to the Far East from November 9 to 15.

I wondered why he should postpone the conversation until the trip rather than clear up the matter with Reagan right away. The secretary of state said rather unexpectedly that he normally had more unobstructed opportunity to discuss policy with the president during foreign trips when they were not distracted by pressing domestic problems and the White House staff. I was quite surprised to hear Shultz confess that his opportunities to talk with the president in Washington about vital political issues were somewhat limited—and that he had to wait for the most convenient time to obtain the president's approval of his ideas, especially in the crucial field of Soviet-American relations.

I wrote in my report to Moscow that although Shultz had been secretary of state for over a year, he was still not fully prepared to discuss important questions authoritatively. It was not so much his ignorance of detail as the fact that Reagan apparently had not decided yet to permit practical discussion. I added that the election year was approaching in the United States, and although campaign considerations had not yet been felt, they undoubtedly would in due course, and we should watch the behavior of the administration for opportunities. Maybe it would start playing a more flexible game.

The deployment of American nuclear missiles in Europe and the impasse reached at the negotiations confronted Moscow with a dilemma. If we continued the talks on limiting the European-based weapons, it would hold out to the public the illusory hope of an agreement. But if we walked out, there would be nothing left to prevent Washington from stationing the full complement of missiles. It was clear that the Soviet strategy of blocking the deployment by negotiation and political and public pressure had not worked. Needless to say, the Kremlin's resentment of Reagan reached a crescendo, and in any case the Soviet leadership had already come to the basic conclusion that there was no way it could reach agreement with him.

After a heated debate, the Politburo decided to withdraw from the European missile talks and simultaneously to launch a huge propaganda campaign to persuade Europeans that the new American missiles only raised the level of nuclear threat. The day after the first American missiles arrived in Europe on November 23, the Soviet media published a statement by Andropov accusing Washington of declaring a crusade against socialism. In order to preserve the military equilibrium, he said, Soviet intermediate-range missiles would be deployed in European Russia, and tactical missiles of intermediate range in the German Democratic Republic and Czechoslovakia. He added that if NATO pulled back the missiles, the Soviet Union would follow suit. Nobody in Moscow expected NATO to reverse its course, but that was put in for public consumption.

I am convinced that our most serious mistake was not seizing the opportunity to reach a mutual compromise before the NATO decision was taken to deploy the American missiles. In the two years before the decision, a window of opportunity had existed, and as late as the summer of 1979, West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, who was en route to Tokyo, made a little known special stop in Moscow for an airport meeting with Kosygin to signal a possible compromise: the European members of NATO would not agree to deployment of the new American missiles on their soil if the Soviet Union would assure the West that the number of warheads on new SS-20 missiles would not exceed the number of warheads on the old SS-4 and SS-5 missiles, which the Soviet Union intended to withdraw.

Kosygin reported to the Politburo that Schmidt's idea was worth considering, but Ustinov actively opposed it. The defense minister did not want to reveal to the West the number of SS-20 missiles he planned to deploy, to say nothing about possibly reducing that number. As a rule Brezhnev sided against Kosygin's proposals, but this time he was not quite sure. He looked at Gromyko. But the foreign minister was silent. He had no desire to quarrel with Ustinov and he was not sure whether Schmidt's compromise would work. That was the missed opportunity. In the absence of a Soviet reply to Schmidt's probe, NATO went ahead with its decision in December of 1979.

On December 8, 1983, the Soviet side announced another decision in Geneva. The Soviet Union declined to fix a date for the next round of arms negotiations; Moscow was still cautious not to speak of actually breaking off the negotiations. The Soviet representatives claimed that the American proposals were aimed at more than doubling American superiority in the number of strategic nuclear charges (counting submarine ballistic missiles and cruise missiles) and at destroying the very backbone of Soviet strategic forces by reducing the number Soviet heavy missiles, which was frozen under SALT II. This situation fostered rearmament rather than disarmament, which suited Reagan perfectly because Congress was voting him huge increases in military spending.

The Soviet government's decision to suspend for the first time the nuclear arms limitation talks was, if anything, the lowest point in our relations with the Reagan administration. And in general, the year of 1983—the year of Andropov—turned out to be as difficult a year for him personally as for Soviet foreign policy.