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The White House  
Washington

March 15, 1962

Dear Professor Thirring:

The President has asked me to thank you for your letter of January 12 and to pass on to you answers to the questions on current world problems which you directed to him.

Q: Do you agree with the basic idea that peaceful coexistence is the only sound alternative to nuclear annihilation and would you recognize as a basis of coexistence between the two presently conflicting systems the mutual understanding that each of these systems has the right to exist and persist in a country without military or other interference from outside as long as it fulfills well the material and mental demands of its people?

A: The United States has always been prepared to live at peace and work out mutual problems peacefully with the Soviet Union. Our wholehearted wartime cooperation with the Soviet Union and our readiness to collaborate with the Soviet Government on the problems of post-war reconstruction reflected this determination on our part. It was in this context that we made our wartime agreements to unify and disarm Germany while providing for free elections in Central and Eastern Europe; it was on this basis that we envisaged a crucial peacemaking role for the Security Council of the United Nations; it was for this reason that we undertook the extraordinary demobilization of our armed forces in the years after the war. Many of our hopes of 1945 have been disappointed; but we continue to hope that the democratic and the Communist states will live at peace.

If I may comment with candor, the formulation of your question introduces an element which gravely complicates the problem of coexistence. You suggest that non-intervention is excluded as long as a regime "fulfills well the material and mental demands of its people". This stipulation is what is known in the American idiom as a "joker"; in effect, it renders the whole question nugatory. A devout Communist would assert that by definition all non-Communist regimes were incapable of fulfilling the material and mental demands of their people and must therefore be, in terms of your question, wholly eligible for "military or other interference from outside". That this is indeed the Communist view is shown by the elaborate apparatus at the Communist disposal, from Hanoi to Havana, for precisely



such interference. From the Communist viewpoint, this intervention is wholly consistent with their notion of peaceful co-existence. It is our view that peaceful co-existence, thus defined, is no aid to the cause of peace. But we are all for the real thing.

Q: Are you ready to accept the challenge of peaceful competition without military pressure between Western democracy and communism and do you agree with the standpoint indicated in Mr. Khrushchev's letter that "the people themselves will judge which of the two systems proves better"?

A: We are, of course, delighted to transfer the competition between the democratic and the communist states from the military to the non-military realm. We are delighted too to accept chairman Khrushchev's proposal that "the peoples themselves will judge which of the two systems proves better." We would even suggest certain devices to enable people to register their judgment - for example, the razing of the wall which prevents the people of East Berlin from crossing to West Berlin; or the carrying out of free elections, as pledged at Yalta, in the countries of Eastern Europe. The fact is that a Communist state offers its people no effective way of expressing their judgment between the two systems.

Q: Would you consider it a proper objective test of the outcome of the competition when, after an adequate period of probation, all countries should be pledged to open their frontiers to free emigration so that migration statistics could reveal the ratio between attraction and repulsion of the ruling system?

A: Yes, we would accept freedom of migration as one objective test. Nor do we have any doubt what would happen if the Communists opened their frontiers. The Berlin wall answers this question. Everywhere the flow of peoples is from Communism to democracy, never from democracy to Communism.

Q: What proof would you demand from, and offer to, your opponent that the proposal to turn the fight into peaceful competition is sincere and that the promise will be kept without mental reservations?

A: The proof that the commitment to turn the fight into peaceful competition is sincere must be (a) the acceptance by both sides of a system of general and complete disarmament guaranteed by international inspection and control; and (b) the readiness to extend the peaceful competition to the most important area of all - that is, to the realm of ideas. Today one can buy Pravda, Izvestiya and other Communist publications in London, Paris and New York. But one cannot buy democratic books, newspapers or magazines in the newsstands and bookshops of Moscow. Only the other day, Mr. Suslov reaffirmed this policy, saying that, while the co-existence of competing social systems was possible, co-existence with democratic ideas - ideological co-existence - was "impossible and unthinkable". It would amount, he said, to Communist ideological disarmament.



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Until democratic ideas are permitted the same circulation in Communist countries that Communist ideas have in democratic countries, it will be difficult to take very seriously Communist professions about their desire for peaceful competition.

Q: What steps can be taken to disprove the communist propaganda contending that the Western military bases around the Soviet Union and particularly the forces in Western Berlin, are instruments of aggression intended to wipe out communism?

A: So far as the forces in West Berlin are concerned, Chairman Khrushchev himself has taken cognizance of the fact that these few men, located in the midst of hostile surrounding territory, are primarily a symbol of the democratic determination to protect the people of Berlin and their freedom, although I have no doubt that these forces would give a good account of themselves if challenged. In general, perhaps the most persuasive evidence we can offer the Communists that we do not intend an attack upon them is the extraordinary effort we have made, costly both in resources and in the use of scientific talent, to create what we call a second-strike force; that is a nuclear force capable of surviving an initial attack and retaliating against the attacker. If we intended to initiate an attack ourselves, we would have mounted a quite different and far less expensive nuclear force.

Q: What could be done to win the sympathy and confidence of the millions of Soviet citizens who have been indoctrinated to fear and hate the leaders of Western democracy as potential aggressors?

A: Whatever their indoctrination may have been, I strongly doubt whether Soviet citizens "fear and hate the leaders of Western democracy as potential aggressors." Though the information available to them is severely limited, Soviet citizens, perhaps because of a certain cynicism about what they read in the Soviet press or hear over the Soviet radio, remain generally friendly toward Americans - a feeling which is widely reciprocated. It has been and remains American policy to increase the range and intimacy of contacts with Soviet citizens and to improve exchanges between the United States and the Soviet Union at all levels.

Q: Can you disprove the communist allegation that the main obstacle against disarmament is the fact that your economy would be ruined by stopping the armament business?

A: Many Communists - including Chairman Khrushchev - have abandoned the allegation that disarmament would ruin the American economy. The simplest refutation of this allegation lies in an examination of what happened to the American economy in 1945/46. From 1945 to 1946, the total government purchases of goods and services in the United States declined, with the end of World War II from \$82.9 billion to \$30.8 billion. This was a drop of over \$50 billion at a time when



the total gross national product was only a little over \$200 billion. The decline in government spending then was, in short, about 25 per cent of the gross national product - and our economy rose to take up the slack.

An equivalent decline today would be over \$130 billion - which is almost three times the size of our defense budget and half again as large as our total Federal budget. The American economy would thus in no circumstances have to meet a decline in public spending comparable to that which it survived in 1945/46.

And if all present defense spending should cease tomorrow, the American economy, which survived a decline in public spending amounting to one quarter of the gross national product in 1946, could certainly survive a drop in public spending amounting to one eleventh of our gross national product today. The argument that the American economy requires the cold war is thus demonstrably erroneous.

Q: What practical sequence of disarmament steps and control measures could you propose answering Mr. Khrushchev's repeated declaration that he would be ready to accept any reasonable Western terms of control as soon as the basic agreement on general and complete disarmament were reached?

A: The United States presented a concrete and comprehensive plan for movement toward general and complete disarmament in the last session of the United Nations General Assembly. I attach a booklet setting forth the main elements of this plan. Our representatives at Geneva are prepared to continue these negotiations without interruption until a total disarmament program is agreed. We have no illusions about the ease of reaching agreement, especially because of Soviet fear of international inspection (though, if there is, as you suggest in your letter, an asymmetry with respect to the vulnerability of retaliatory systems to espionage; it is only because past Soviet espionage has been so successful in locating and identifying Western military bases). But we are convinced that it is to the interests of all nations to abolish the overhanging threat of nuclear war.

The hard problem remains the problem of control. Chairman Khrushchev offers effective control only when general and complete disarmament is achieved. During the process of disarmament, he would accept control only over arms being destroyed. The remaining forces and weapons at any given stage would not be subject to control, and it would consequently be impossible to be sure that destroyed arms were not simply being replaced out of new production. Since the achievement of general and complete disarmament may be a rather long process, that process requires the existence of the sort of mutual confidence which, in view of the ideological gap, can only be established by an effective inspection and control system. No responsible democratic statesman could delay the introduction of comprehensive measure of inspection and control to the end of the process.



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I would conclude with a final comment on the conditions of coexistence. I have said that peaceful competition, if it is to be genuine, must include not only competition in the social and economic realms but also in the realm of ideas. Only regimes fearful that their ideas could not survive free discussion and debate would recoil from such competition.

The basic issue, however, in our judgment, is the ultimate vision of the world's future. The Communist view has always been that, under Marxist law, all societies are evolving along the same predestined road to the same predestined conclusion; they have a monolithic vision of the world. Our belief, on the contrary, is in the pluralistic world - a world in which a diversity of nations will solve their own problems according to their own values and traditions within a framework of respect for individual dignity and loyalty to world community. The tension which today divides the world will come to an end when - and only when - the absolutists renounce their determination to make the world over in their single image, only when they accept a pluralistic destiny for mankind. We are confident that history and human nature are both on the side of pluralism, and that it is the world of free choice which will best fulfill the needs, nourish the spirit and affirm the dignity of man.

Sincerely yours

Arthur Schlesinger jr.

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Enclosure