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Foreign Policy Studies Program

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MEMORANDUM

To: Academician Evgeny Primakov
Members of the Dartmouth Conference Task Force on
Soviet-U.S. Relations in Regional Conflicts

From: Harold H. Saunders and U.S. Members of the Task Force

Subject: Thoughts on the Focus of Our November 21-23 Meeting

Your American colleagues look forward to welcoming all of you again in the United States. Given rethinking about international relationships in both of our countries, we believe you share the view that together we have an opportunity to move our dialogue to a new level. Given changes in how nations relate today, thinking together about how those changes affect our nations--individually and together--may better enable our two nations to help shape a more peaceful and secure world.

We on the American side would like to propose an approach which combines two elements: (1) the best of what all of us in the task force together have been doing in our concrete discussions of specific conflict situations since 1982 and (2) a more explicit focus on how the regional conflicts we discuss affect the overall Soviet-U.S. relationship and what our interaction there reveals about that relationship. The first is what we have been doing. The second would require renewed effort to look for ways to tie that discussion to the central issue of the evolving overall relationship between our two nations, especially as we interact with and in the Third World.

We are not proposing a dramatic departure from what we have achieved cumulatively together. We are suggesting that we have succeeded in laying a solid foundation and are ready now in the new atmosphere to go on to build the next floor of our structure, while continuing to keep the foundation in good shape.

Americans and Soviets may learn the exact nature of changes in the relationship between our two systems by analyzing our interaction and interests in regional conflicts sooner than in talks about arms reductions or the future of Europe. The sharp lines between the socialist and capitalist systems were first drawn in Europe, and the walls between them will have to be lowered in Europe before a completely normal relationship can exist. That will take time. The arms race is literally vital to

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survival for each of us and will play a critical role in the economic health of each of our nations as well. Bringing the arms race under control will also take time. Without setting those important subjects aside, we recognize the value of a laboratory in regions where interests are intertwined and clear lines do not usually exist and where the two systems compete in grey areas with instruments that change character according to their background.

In that global arena where situations are more fluid, the question may first be answered: Exactly how has the nature of the overall Soviet-U.S. relationship begun to change?

We might take as our starting text a sentence in your July 1987 article in Pravda entitled "New Philosophy of Foreign Policy": "Interstate relations in general cannot be the sphere in which the outcome of the confrontation between world socialism and world capitalism is settled...."

The question that comes immediately to American minds is: If the "confrontation between world socialism and world capitalism" will not be settled in interstate relations, how will it be played out? Put another way: Many Americans believe the current shift in Soviet philosophy is only a tactical shift in which the U.S.S.R. will return to its historic strategy of trying to achieve by other means the broadening influence it could not achieve through the military means used in the 1960s and 1970s. Specifically, many Americans ask whether the U.S.S.R. seeks in Angola and Afghanistan to consolidate by negotiations regimes which it could not solidify by military action. Americans are suspicious of Soviet talk about a "breathing space" to renew its strength so as to renew the confrontation later.

These questions are stated with no intention of prejudging the answer but rather with the purpose of sharpening the analytical issue. Presumably Soviet colleagues will have questions of their own about U.S. objectives and strategy. These questions are stated with the sincere intention of probing exactly what kind of relationship our two nations can realistically expect to have both in the near term and over a longer period of time. That, it seems to us, is the overarching subject which makes our talks unique. We are rooting our study of a very important large subject in detailed discussion of concrete cases.

In the spirit of your statement at Baku that we should begin each meeting where the last one left off, we have also reviewed your opening statement and mine at our meeting last February in Moscow and believe they provide important elements in the basis for our overall agenda. As we on the American side reflected together here last week, we formulated six purposes for our Task Force:

First: American and Soviet members together have committed ourselves now through all our meetings over seven years to the proposition that building a relationship in which Americans and Soviets can discuss common problems analytically is better than bargaining about them. Last February, you contrasted the approach of linking one issue to another--that is,

saying we cannot discuss arms control before human rights and regional conflicts are dealt with--to a different approach of "following all roads" at the same time. Reinforcing that point, I suggested that we have both come to recognize that each issue will affect our overall relationship and our ability to deal with individual issues cooperatively but that we should try to establish an overall relational context within which we can discuss all issues simultaneously and understand exactly how one issue affects another. Clearly, a continuing purpose of our Task Force is to use our meetings to understand what approaches are most constructive in building a productive working relationship--not just between us as Task Force members but between our two nations. Our discussions are a laboratory in which we discover more fully the nature of that relationship--what strengthens it and what undermines it. Achieving this objective requires us both to talk realistically and in depth about each conflict situation but always to focus on the point at which that conflict and the overall Soviet-U.S. relationship intersect.

Second: Over these seven years, we have recognized the importance of using our conversations for learning what each side believes its real interests are in a given situation and how each side goes about defining those interests and priorities among them at a given time. You said last February that it is essential for us to understand in each regional conflict what interests are internal and what interests are external to the conflict. Another way of putting this might be to say that we each need (1) to identify the interests of the regional parties, (2) to identify the individual interests of the U.S.S.R. and the U.S. in that situation, and (3) to identify the interests of the Soviet-U.S. relationship as our two nations interact in that situation. We have recognized in earlier meetings that it is possible with changing circumstances for nations to redefine their interests and their priorities. Both the Soviet Union and the U.S. today are rethinking exactly what our individual interests are in the Third World. Perhaps Soviets are more active in this rethinking at this moment than Americans, but the Americans you are meeting with recognize the need for rethinking on our side too. The continuing and important opportunity we have in our Task Force is to share some of that rethinking--both to see where our interests overlap or compete and to understand what those redefined interests and priorities tell us about the changing relationship between our two nations.

Third: By understanding each side's real interests, we have an opportunity at a minimum for avoiding miscalculation in each situation and for understanding in advance what actions in a crisis would strengthen or damage the overall Soviet-U.S. relationship. This purpose is important in avoiding potential crises between our two nations. It is also important in laying a foundation for possible complementary or common action if regional crises erupt.

Fourth: By understanding where real interests are complementary or common, we enlarge the opportunity for discussing possibilities of cooperation that could produce concrete results. The minimum objective behind this discussion is to understand what factors would affect the

ability to cooperate in a situation where cooperation might serve each side's interests. The larger possible objective flows from the following reasoning: People in both the Soviet Union and the U.S. will look for concrete evidence that the Soviet-U.S. relationship is changing. Words will not be adequate evidence on either side. One kind of evidence could be specific instances in which the two nations cooperate to produce an outcome that serves interests generally seen to be common or complementary. An underlying aim in examining possibilities for cooperation could even be designing experiences for the explicit purpose of strengthening the overall relationship and the consequent ability to deal with more and more difficult common problems together.

Fifth: The Task Force accepts responsibility for translating concepts into concrete actions. In turning to the discussion of each conflict, you in February suggested certain concepts that may have cross-regional applicability in dealing with regional conflicts: national reconciliation and the importance of compromise; multilateral rather than unilateral international efforts to resolve conflict, including renewed emphasis on the role of the United Nations; restraint in international military deployments; limitations on the proliferation of sophisticated weapons; assistance with reconstruction. Soviet members of the Task Force have suggested the possibility of developing a code of conduct built around these concepts. U.S. members have expressed a desire in our meetings to be precise in examining together exactly what each concept would mean as applied in individual conflict situations. We want to avoid a repetition of the misunderstandings that arose from the imprecision of language about our respective policies in the Third World in the 1970s. We want to build the present evolution of the Soviet-U.S. relationship on the solid foundation of clear mutual understanding about exactly what our interests and purposes are.

Sixth: In talking about these issues, we have the purpose of better understanding the political dynamics of foreign policy deliberations on each side. We Americans used to justify our work in the Task Force partly in terms of explaining to the Soviet side the pluralism of American life and the ways in which American reactions to Soviet actions set the stage for our President's action or inability to act. Now we recognize the increased need to listen carefully to Soviet colleagues as they explain the Soviet context in which American ideas and actions will be assessed and Soviet policy directions will be set. As each side develops new concepts for organizing its policy analysis and discussion, each will be testing how to translate concepts into useful courses of action that serve its interests. Whether those concepts produce results consistent with interests will provide a critical test for those who argue for such concepts in policy debate. Understanding how specific actions relate to broad conceptual discussion will enlarge understanding of each side's constraints and choices--and of our ability to work together.

This last point deserves special elaboration. Despite the different Soviet and US political systems, leaders in both countries--increasingly now in the Soviet Union--are influenced or constrained by how their bodies

politic respond to what they perceive the other nation's character, intent, and actions to mean for their interests. To understand the most basic judgments and values on each side concerning the other is an important ingredient in designing policies for removing fundamental obstacles to cooperation. Before policy toward the other nation is changed, citizens will have to identify the issues and values that the relationship brings to the surface and work through with their fellow citizens the hard choices they have to make in terms of those values. That is difficult enough for Soviet or American men and women to do with their fellow citizens. But if there is to be an effective Soviet-US relationship, Americans and Soviets have to do some of that difficult "choice work"--as we call it--together.

One of the opportunities--not the only one--we in the Task Force have is to experience together how each of our viewpoints affects the other. In some ways, the Americans and Soviets separately have the opportunity among themselves in preparing for meetings as do their fellow citizens in other forums to deal with these issues as citizens of our own countries. When we come together, we have the opportunity which exists almost nowhere else of identifying the issues which each of us has to deal with and then trying to work those issues through together. In other words, while we still are citizens of our own bodies politic, we have the opportunity to learn together what happens when we identify the interests of the Soviet-US relationship and the issues posed for those interests by a given situation and then work through together some of those issues.

We do not want to overstress this point. We are groping to formulate it in more concrete ways. But we do believe that it is increasingly important to understand how each of our nations plays a role in threatening or helping to fulfill values which the other cherishes as part of its very identity. This may sound abstract, but I think you understand, for instance, that the phrase, "The Russians are coming," reflects--logically or irrationally--real American fears which determine how members of Congress vote on the ratification of arms control treaties. We're sure there are examples on the Soviet side.

We recognize that we have outlined a complex agenda and that it is not possible to discuss all issues raised above each time we discuss a particular conflict. Stating the agenda this way for your reflection and further comment does, however, seem a useful way of consolidating what we have achieved and of sharpening our focus in the future. It does seem to us useful in helping to assure that we are working together toward shared goals in our Task Force. If we could agree that something like the above as amended to reflect your thoughts describes our purposes, we would have described for ourselves a purpose and a methodology which no other group has.

Our strong advantages in Dartmouth are that (1) members of the Regional Conflicts Task Force now have a unique experience together in discussing the most difficult regional conflicts and (2) the overall Dartmouth Conference has also recognized by establishing the Political Relations Task Force that we do not discuss either arms control or regional

conflicts for their own sakes alone but rather to discover what we can learn in discussing them about the overall Soviet-U.S. relationship.

When we, the U.S. members of our Regional Conflicts Task Force, met in Washington October 13 to talk about how best to use our time together in November, we drafted the attached papers as possible starting points for discussion. We will let them exemplify our approach concretely. But before encouraging you to turn to them, we want to underscore two points:

- We offer these papers for your thought as possible starting points for our discussion. We wanted to let you know what is on our minds as you and your colleagues meet to collect your thoughts before coming to the United States. In offering discussion papers for the first time, we are not suggesting that we spend time presenting the papers, discussing the papers, or trying to produce common drafts. It may be in some cases that developing these papers as "rolling drafts" could serve the useful working purpose of sharpening our focus between meetings, but we are not pressing that thought. Our interest is in offering these only as aids to focusing our thinking as much as possible before we meet so we can spend our time together getting right to the key questions.

- Our purpose is not to set aside the approach we have taken in past meetings of basing our talks on discussion of specific conflicts. Our purpose is to develop more precise ways of building on those discussions to understand how our interaction in these areas will affect our overall relationship. For instance, we may be able to explain to each other what factors will influence each side's definition of its interests and priorities in these areas and to develop shared analytical frameworks within which to understand the possibility for complementary or even joint actions. We have always regarded the framework set out in Leningrad for working toward an Arab-Israeli peace a useful start, although it was very general and we have never really fleshed it out. Our hope is that discussion focused in these precise ways might provide us a concrete framework within which to handle everything from the predictable evolution of a situation to unexpected crises in ways that will avoid damaging and might strengthen the Soviet-U.S. relationship. In any case, we would hope that the discussion will take us closer and closer to understanding the nature of that relationship in these areas.

Following this memo are specific draft discussion papers on Afghanistan, Southern Africa, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and Central America. We wrote these starting from some common thoughts about format and approach, but each author has adapted the approach to the needs of his or her particular subject. We will welcome your thoughts on the allocation of our time among these subjects when you arrive. Our proposal is to discuss these subjects in the order in which they are mentioned above,

reflecting recent progress in efforts toward resolving these conflicts. But we will welcome your thoughts.

Finally, let me offer a personal word from each of us to each of you. As always, we offer our thoughts and eagerly await yours. We offer them with the conviction that our two peoples are living in the midst of historic changes--both within our nations and in the world at large. At such a moment of transformation, we have a solemn obligation to base our actions in the soundest thinking possible. We in this Task Force have built a foundation of such thinking when we were almost alone. Now we have an unrivaled opportunity--for the sake of ourselves, our children, and our grandchildren--to build on that foundation and to work with others who are committed to testing on the eve of a new century whether our two nations can put confrontation behind us and learn to cooperate while respecting and protecting what is best in our individual national identities. We look forward to welcoming you as colleagues and friends in Dayton in this spirit.

Attachments: Arab-Israeli Conflict
Afghanistan
Southern Africa
Central America