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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

REAGAN-GORBACHEV MEETINGS IN GENEVA
November, 1985

Second Private Meeting

DATE: November 19, 1985
TIME: 3:40 P.M. - 4:45 P.M.
PLACE: Pool House, Maison Fleur d'Eau
Geneva, Switzerland

PARTICIPANTS:

United States

President Reagan
William D. Krimer, Interpreter

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

General Secretary Gorbachev
N. Uspensky, Interpreter

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During their brief walk from the villa at Fleur d'Eau to the pool house, the President and General Secretary Gorbachev did not discuss substance, confining their conversation to the President's old movies. In the course of that conversation the President suggested to Mr. Gorbachev that he inform Mr. Arbatov that he had made not only grade-B movies, but also a few good ones. Gorbachev mentioned that he had recently seen "Kings' Row" and had liked it very much.

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INF and SDI

Seated in front of a fireplace at the pool house the President handed Gorbachev some papers and suggested that they might contain the seed of something the two of them could agree upon. He added that he had one copy done in Russian.

Gorbachev devoted a few minutes to reading through the separate documents.

Gorbachev prefaced his reaction by saying that, of course, what he would present now was based on his first impression of what was contained in the formulations. He thought that some of the issues dealt with did contain some substance that merited serious discussion with a view to bringing the positions of the sides closer together.

With reference to space weapons he had some questions to ask and, on the basis of his first reading, some considerations and objections to state. He would first refer to something that could be left for further discussions.

The President interjected to the effect that the material set forth in these papers should be viewed as a seed for possible instructions to the arms negotiators of both sides.

Gorbachev said he understood the President's idea, but still had some objections to state.

With reference to paragraph 1 of the first paper, concerning 50 percent reductions in strategic offensive arms, that was acceptable and he was prepared here to discuss this matter in terms of seeking a mutually acceptable solution. However, he would have to note that during the meeting between Foreign Ministers in Geneva last January agreement had been reached that such reductions would be negotiated together with an agreement halting an arms race in space. In other words, arms reductions must be viewed in their interrelationship with space weapons. That idea had been agreed upon in Geneva in January, but he had to note that here it seems to have evaporated.

The President said that he did not see these defensive weapons as constituting a part of the arms race in view of what he had said just a few moments ago at the table, to the effect that if and when such arms were developed, they would be shared with everyone involved in nuclear weapons. Why could this matter not be set aside in order to see what could be agreed upon regarding the sharing of such things? This would enable the two sides to determine what policies were available that could help all of us to get rid of nuclear weapons.

there would be no need for nuclear missiles, then one might agree that there would also be no need for defenses against them. But he would also urge Gorbachev to remember that we were talking about something that was not yet known, and that if it were known, that would still be years away. Why then should we sit here in the meanwhile with mountains of weapons on each side?

Gorbachev countered by suggesting that they announce to the world that President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev had declared firmly in official statements that both countries would refrain from research, development, testing and deployment of space weapons and that such agreement would be subject to appropriate verification. Thus they could implement the idea of open laboratories and at the same time begin the process of 50-percent reductions in offensive arms.

The President asked if Gorbachev had in mind that Soviet laboratories would be open to visits by our experts and that their experts would be free to visit our laboratories.

Gorbachev replied that the Soviet Union would agree to open its laboratories provided they were used for the purpose of verifying how the agreement on banning and non-use of space weapons was being complied with.

The President said he did not know why Gorbachev kept on speaking of space weapons. We had no idea of precisely what the nature of these weapons would be; however, we certainly had no intention of putting something into space that would threaten people on Earth. Some years ago there had been some talk about putting nuclear missiles into orbit in space, weapons that could be dropped on any point on Earth. This was not what he was talking about: He would recall that in 1925 in this city of Geneva all of the countries that had participated in World War I had met and had reached agreement not to use poison gas warfare. Nevertheless, all had kept their gas masks. What he was saying now was that we should go forward to rid the world of the threat of nuclear weapons, but at the same time retain something like that gas mask, i.e., a shield that would protect our countries should there be an unforeseeable return to nuclear missiles.

Gorbachev wanted to repeat something he had said at the plenary meeting. He had pointed out that the Soviet Government had really carefully considered everything that had been said by the President with regard to SDI, especially all his arguments in favor of SDI. To a certain extent he could understand the President on a human level; he could understand that the idea of strategic defense had captivated the President's imagination. However, as a political leader he could not possibly agree with the President with regard to this concept. He would assure the President that this was not the result of some merely capricious attitude. He was not saying this for some sort of petty reasons.

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On the basis of profound analysis by scientists, Soviet as well as American, he had to conclude that if the Soviet Union were to agree to proceed along the direction of SDI, and this was confirmed by almost all authoritative people, if it were dragged into this new dimension of the arms race, the other side would be bound to lose confidence and would seek to counter SDI in any possible way, including by increasing the numbers of its offensive arms. Thus, it would not make any sense at all for the Soviet Union to help the U.S. in the development of a strategic defense. In addition, he would point out that a defense against one certain level of strategic missiles was one thing, but a defense against a much larger number of such missiles would not be reliable at all. This could only lead to the conclusion that the only possible use of a strategic defense was to defend against a weakened retaliatory strike not against a first strike. It should certainly be realized by the President as well that the great majority of people throughout the world, including scientists, were extremely concerned over the development of space weapons, whatever their avowed purpose. Among such people were a number of U.S. Secretaries of Defense and such experts as Ambassadors Smith and Warnke. Gorbachev knew what they had said about it, he had read their statements and it was clear that strategic defense would only be useful after a first strike by the side deploying such defense. This was a very serious problem today and he would ask the President to reflect on it seriously. The Soviet Union had no desire to harm him as President or to harm the United States as a country. He firmly believed it necessary to do all in his power to prevent this from happening. He would urge the President jointly with him to find a way of formulating guidelines for their negotiators with a view to stopping SDI.

The President thought they had used up a considerable amount of time at this meeting. He thought the plenary meeting was about to conclude in any event, but he would say one thing. He would ask Gorbachev to consider this matter once again. He recognized that both of them had made some strong statements and that it would be difficult for either of them to reverse direction. However, it seemed to him that in his idea of ultimately sharing the results of research there was something that might be of interest to both of them. He had to tell Gorbachev that our people overwhelmingly wanted this defense. They look at the sky and think what might happen if missiles suddenly appear and blow up everything in our country. We believe that the idea of having a defense against nuclear missiles involved a great deal of faith and belief. When he said we, he meant most of mankind.

Gorbachev pointed out that missiles were not yet flying, and whether or not they would fly would depend on how he and the President conducted their respective policies. But if SDI were actually implemented, then layer after layer of offensive weapons,

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Without reacting to the President's latter remark, Gorbachev said that that was his first comment. His second comment regarding the same section of the document he had just read was to note the suggestion that a separate interim agreement be concluded limiting land-based INF missiles with a view to eventual complete elimination of such missiles. This, too, required further clarification. What weapons would be covered in such an agreement, taking into account the existence of not only U.S. but also British and French missiles of that type? This had not been made clear.

Secondly, in the paper mentioning the possible interim agreement only land-based medium-range missiles were mentioned; what about medium-range cruise missiles launched from aircraft or from aircraft carriers? One had to note immediately that under the language contained in the document some nuclear weapons would clearly remain outside limitations; nevertheless, they did exist, they could be fired and naturally should also be covered by any agreement.

Moving on to paragraph 3 of the same document concerning research conducted by each side in the area of strategic ABM defense, Gorbachev wanted to ask precisely what the President had in mind when speaking of such research. He understood that basic research in laboratories was underway (he meant scientific laboratories, of course) but would also note that such research should not include the construction of prototypes or samples, or their testing. He emphasized that it was necessary to clarify the precise meaning of that research. The reason he was asking this question was that he knew that in the President's White House today two different interpretations of the ABM Treaty's provisions were in existence. One was a narrow interpretation which had been contained in a number of documents of the U.S. Congress and of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. That narrow interpretation was always limited to research not going beyond the threshold of laboratory work. Now, however, he was also aware of a broader interpretation, under which the construction of prototypes and samples would be permitted. Under that interpretation one could in no way speak about complying with the provisions of the ABM Treaty. Thus, further clarification was needed here as well.

The President said that we did indeed have more than one interpretation of the ABM Treaty. Under one such interpretation testing would be included in order to know that in practice we did have such a weapon. Just to have a laboratory theory would not be enough. It was his thought that all this could be covered by an agreement under which we as well as others could agree that no country would have a monopoly of such weapons. They would be shared by all. The worst thing that he could imagine was for any one country to acquire a first-strike capability.

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Gorbachev noted that the Soviet Union had declared for all the world to hear, and was now declaring to the United States as well, that the Soviet Union would not be the first to use nuclear weapons. Was this not sufficient if this matter were taken seriously? However, he had to note that the United States did not believe him.

The President interjected that he and Gorbachev might not always be here.

Gorbachev said that when he spoke of not being believed he meant that the United States did not believe the Soviet Union's statement he had just mentioned. In that case, why should the Soviet Union believe the President's statement about sharing results of the research in question, and that the United States would not take advantage of having developed a strategic defense?

The President replied that that was because the negotiators of both sides could set down in a specific agreement that both governments had agreed not to retain a monopoly of defensive weapons, an agreement that he and Gorbachev would sign. He would also point out that our two countries were not alone in the world. There were others, such as Qaddafi, for example, and people of that kind, who would not at all be averse to dropping a nuclear weapon on the White House. He believed in the idea of both our governments agreeing that both conduct relevant research and that both share the results of such research; if one country produced a defensive shield before the other, it would make it available to all.

As for believing the Soviet Union's commitment not to be the first to use nuclear weapons, the President would remind Gorbachev that in Stockholm we had subscribed to the doctrine that countries must not use force against each other.

With some emotion Gorbachev appealed to the President as follows: if the two sides were indeed searching for a way to halt the arms race and to begin to deal seriously with disarmament, then what would be the purpose of deploying a weapon that is as yet unknown and unpredictable? Where was the logic of starting an arms race in a new sphere? It must clearly be understood that verification of such weapons would be totally unreliable because of their maneuverability and mobility even if they were classified as defensive. People would not be in a position to determine what it was that would be placed into space and would surely regard it as an additional threat, thereby creating crisis situations. If the goal was to get rid of nuclear weapons, why start an arms race in another sphere?

The President asked Gorbachev to remember that these were not weapons that kill people or destroy cities, these were weapons that destroy nuclear missiles. If there were agreement that

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Soviet as well as U.S. weapons, would appear in outer space and only God himself would know what they were. In this connection he would note that God provides information only very selectively and rarely. He appealed to the President to recognize the true signal he was conveying to him as President and to the U.S. Administration as a whole that the Soviet Union did indeed wish to establish a new relationship with the United States and deliver our two nations from the increasing fear of nuclear weapons. The Soviet Union had conducted a deep analysis of the entire situation and had come to the conclusion that it was necessary precisely now to proceed on the basis of the actual situation; later it would be too late. This was why the Soviet Union had tabled serious and comprehensive proposals concerning strategic weapons, medium-range weapons and others. This had been the result of a thorough assessment and profound understanding of where the two countries stood today. They now had a chance which they must not fail to take advantage of. He would ask the President not to regard this as weakness on the part of Gorbachev and the Soviet leadership.

During the walk back to the villa Gorbachev noted that this would not be their last meeting. The President expressed the hope that their next meeting would take place on U.S. soil, and said that he would be pleased to accept an invitation to visit the Soviet Union in return. Gorbachev agreed and suggested that dates and modalities be worked out by their respective staffs.

Prepared by:
William D. Krimer

