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THE WHITE HOUSE

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

REAGAN-GORBACHEV MEETINGS IN GENEVA  
November, 1985

Fourth Plenary Meeting

DATE: November 20, 1985  
TIME: 2:45 P. M. - 3:30 P.M.  
PLACE: Soviet Mission,  
Geneva, Switzerland

PARTICIPANTS:

United States

President Ronald Reagan  
George Shultz, Secretary of State  
Donald T. Regan, Chief of Staff, White House  
Robert C. McFarlane, Assistant to the President for National  
Security Affairs  
Arthur Hartman, Ambassador to the USSR  
Paul H. Nitze, Special Advisor to the President and Secretary of  
State on Arms Control Matters  
Jack F. Matlock, Jr., Special Assistant to the President for  
National Security Affairs  
Mark Parris, Director, Office of Soviet Union Affairs, Department  
of State  
Dimitri Zarechnak, Interpreter

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev  
Eduard Shevardnadze, Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Georgy M. Korniyenko, First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Anatoly F. Dobrynin, Ambassador to the United States  
Aleksandr Yakovlev, Chief, Propaganda Department, Central  
Committee, CPSU  
Leonid M. Zamyatin, Chief, International Information Department,  
Central Committee, CPSU  
Andrey M. Aleksandrov-Agentov, Assistant to General Secretary  
Gorbachev  
Sergey P. Tarasenko, Assistant to Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Soviet Interpreter

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Gorbachev opened the meeting by remarking that just days before the two leaders had been moving toward Geneva. They were now moving toward the completion of their meeting. Gorbachev understood that this would be their last official session. He invited the President to start the session.

The President began by noting that he would like to summarize his discussions with Gorbachev over the previous two days. He had a few points to make and would be interested in seeing if Gorbachev could agree.

There had been two days of candid conversation on a wide range of issues. There were clear differences on such questions as nuclear weapons, on the political philosophy of the two countries. It was important to be realistic and to have no illusions regarding our differences.

But there were some common concerns as well. Both sides had expressed their commitment to deep reductions in nuclear armaments and their hope to eliminate such weapons entirely some day. Both would like to intensify discussions on how to increase strategic stability and reduce the dangers to either side.

The President repeated his conviction of a need for a shift from deterrence based on strategic arms to a greater reliance on defensive systems. If our research was borne out it would be necessary to discuss how to introduce defensive systems. There was also a need for greater mutual trust through compliance with obligations under bilateral and multilateral agreements from arms control to the Helsinki Final Act.

In addition to creating a safer strategic environment, it was necessary to end tragic regional conflicts. The two sides differed on the causes of regional tensions, but the President believed both saw the need to intensify the consultative process on local conflicts. As he had said in his October UNGA speech, the United States was prepared to associate itself with bold initiatives to resolve conflicts which had damaged U.S.-Soviet relations and aggravated international tensions. This was behind our proposals for military disengagement and to end outside involvement in regional struggles. The people of the various regions must be able to solve their own problems.

There were a number of bilateral questions which could be resolved if the necessary political will was there. The two sides should be able to agree to a fundamental expansion of exchanges in the areas of culture, science, and athletics as a means of promoting greater mutual understanding.

The President described his discussions with Gorbachev as rich and constructive. He was pleased that the two leaders would

continue the process by visiting each others' countries. He looked forward to the pleasure of Gorbachev's visit to the U.S. in 1986, and to his own visit to Moscow in 1987. The results of the Geneva meetings would be clear only in the months and years ahead.

The President then read the following statement on the Nuclear and Space Talks (NST) for the Soviets' consideration as a joint statement of what might be accomplished in those discussions:

"The President and the General Secretary discussed the negotiations on nuclear and space arms. They agreed that work on these negotiations should be accelerated with a view to accomplishing the tasks assigned in the Joint US-Soviet Agreement of January 8, 1985, specifically to prevent an arms race in outer space and to terminate it on earth, to limit and reduce nuclear arms and enhance strategic stability. Offensive nuclear arms will be significantly reduced applying the general concept of 50% reductions to equal ceilings on specific, comparable categories. There will be a separate interim agreement resulting in reductions and limitations on land-based, intermediate-range nuclear missile systems as a step toward the total elimination of this class of missiles. To insure effective verification of compliance, meaningful measures to this end will be negotiated concurrently with limits on weaponry and incorporated in all agreements resulting from these negotiations."

After first confirming that the President was finished, Gorbachev indicated that he would like to sum up the meeting from the Soviet perspective.

Gorbachev felt that the very fact of the meeting should be considered a positive development, since it demonstrated a joint understanding of the significance of U.S.-Soviet relations and of the two sides' responsibilities and role in the world. He agreed with the President that the meeting had taken place in an atmosphere of frankness, which permitted the two leaders to outline in detail their positions on the full range of bilateral and international questions.

Gorbachev concurred further that the discussions had revealed deep differences in the two sides' assessments of the causes of certain bilateral and international differences. The talks had allowed both sides to understand one another better; this was of some importance, even major importance. Gorbachev felt, however, that the discussion had shown that the two sides were unable to build a joint concept for dealing with the broad range of bilateral and international questions. Nonetheless, they had agreed to continue their political dialogue. It was in this context that the two leaders had agreed on an exchange of visits at a time to be arranged.

For its part the Soviet side would have to say in describing the meeting that questions of war and peace had been at the center of the meeting in one way or another both during private discussions and in plenary sessions. He felt that the people of both countries, as well as the world as a whole, were concerned by the number of nuclear weapons and the need to stop the arms race and to proceed to disarmament. Unfortunately, it was impossible to report to our peoples and to the world that there had been a rapprochement of positions.

The Soviet side had tried in the meetings to make an extra effort to explain its views. Discussions had been held, but it would be a distortion of the truth to say that there had been progress. Such progress as had been achieved was limited to a detailed discussion and exchange of positions. Gorbachev hoped that this was not the last word. Both sides would take into account the frank discussions which had taken place. Joint efforts should be continued.

The Soviet Union was in favor of continuing negotiations on the basis of the January 1985 Joint Statement on stopping the arms race on earth and preventing it in space. Serious work lay ahead. Gorbachev felt that movement was possible. The Soviet Union was committed to the spirit of the January 1985 understandings and prepared to act in accord with them, on the clear understanding that it was against the arms race on earth. The USSR was prepared as a first step to seek to implement the idea of a 50% reduction of offensive nuclear forces on the basis of both sides' proposals. But this was based on the understanding that neither side would take steps which would open up an arms race in space. On the basis of this understanding the Soviet Union was open to further movement toward deep reductions in nuclear arms.

Gorbachev agreed that it was possible to intensify bilateral relations. This would contribute to greater trust between the two countries. The USSR would be ready to work to expand exchanges in the economic, cultural and scientific fields.

On regional problems (which he at first forgot to mention), Gorbachev acknowledged that both sides attached importance to the problem and shared a desire to seek political settlements of regional disputes to relieve tensions on the basis of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. He agreed that bilateral regional expert consultations should be continued.

Noting that the President had raised the possibility of a statement summarizing the results of their discussions, Gorbachev asked if this would be justified. The President indicated that we had hoped to get to the subject, and called on Secretary Shultz to outline the options as we saw them. Gorbachev commented that the Soviets did not insist that there be a statement. If there

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was nothing to report, it was better to say so. The President felt nonetheless that it would be useful to share views on how to handle the question of reporting the results of their meetings.

Secretary Shultz outlined a number of options, noting that one could envision an outcome involving all, some, or none.

-- First, there could be a written compilation of all items which had been agreed during the leaders' meetings or in the preparations for their meetings. There were quite a number of these, of varying importance. There was a possibility of developing joint language on certain arms control questions: e.g., on the Stockholm conference and chemical weapons proliferation. Agreed language existed on nuclear non-proliferation. The President in the statement he read had raised the possibility that NST might be treated, although that morning's conversation had shown the depth of differences on that set of issues. There could also be agreement on a range of regional and bilateral questions, and on a process for the future. In this connection the Secretary had been struck by Gorbachev's references the day before to a mechanism for regulating U.S.-Soviet relations. Thus, it might prove feasible to develop a package which would register areas of agreement reached in Geneva. Disagreements would not be registered except to acknowledge that they existed.

-- A second possibility would be to sign some sort of document. The general exchanges agreement was already agreed at the technical level and could be signed if the leaders wished.

-- A third element would be separate statements by leaders at a common site. While each leader would say what he wished, the U.S. felt there should be some coordination to avoid surprises. The Secretary speculated that statements could refer to differences but could also include parallel language where appropriate. For example, on NST there were issues on which U.S. and Soviet views coincided, and others where they did not. The kind of statement he had in mind would make clear both areas of agreement and disagreement.

- A fourth option would be to release a short joint report saying, essentially, that the leaders had met and agreed to meet again. Both sides could then issue statements of their own.

- Finally, the two sides could make individual statements at different sites. The Secretary speculated that both leaders would, in any case, be reporting publicly to their peoples in their meetings.

The Secretary concluded by noting that the U.S. would be willing to consider some sort of joint ceremony on the next morning, but was prepared to go in a variety of ways. He was aware of the

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great responsibility each leader had before their own people and the world to report on their discussions. A dignified ceremony at which areas of agreement could be reported and differences laid out in a modulated fashion would seem to be an appropriate way to proceed. In such a context, the President's statement on NST could be either included in a joint statement or used unilaterally.

Gorbachev, noting that the issue required some thought, indicated that he was nonetheless prepared to respond. If he understood correctly, both sides wanted to continue the dialogue that was begun in preparations for the Geneva meeting, which had been expanded in Geneva, and which would be continued in the future. Even if one were subjectively against such dialogue, objectively it was necessary to continue contacts and exchanges, and to deepen the process of searching for solutions in the interests of U.S. and Soviet peoples and of the people of the whole world. The Soviet Union, therefore, welcomed Secretary Shultz's expression of willingness to continue work in the future.

On how to document the Geneva meeting, Gorbachev indicated that the Soviet Union would be prepared to accommodate a U.S. desire for a joint document, whether a communique or simple statement. Noting that the Soviet Union had originally advocated a communique, but had dropped the idea when it appeared the U.S. was not interested, he outlined his assessment of how to proceed. If a communique incorporated the fundamental results of the meeting, there would be no need for separate statements. If such a communique were impossible, the Geneva program should end with the present meeting.

Gorbachev felt that it would be inappropriate to seek simply to list minor agreements in a joint document. This would not be understood in our two countries or internationally. A more substantive statement would be necessary. Gorbachev wondered whether the two leaders should reassess the problem and perhaps deputize senior members of their staffs to propose a solution. He joked that he and the President might take a walk, leaving Secretary Shultz and Foreign Minister Shevarnadze to work on the problem.

More seriously, Gorbachev recalled that the Soviets had always been prepared for a communique; indeed at one point they had thought the U.S. had agreed to such a document. He felt that there was still time to work out an acceptable document if both sides were willing. He repeated his suggestion that the Foreign Ministers should study the problem and present their findings to the leaders.

The President observed that he might have been to blame for any confusion the Soviets had felt with respect to a communique. In considering the question before the Geneva meeting, the

President had been concerned about how a prearranged communique might be perceived. He had been similarly uncomfortable early in his presidency with the practice at the OECD summit meeting of having one leader read a pre-cooked document on behalf of the others. His concern for Geneva was that a document emphasize that the meeting was part of an ongoing process. In this context, a document might be worthwhile. The President felt, however, that such a document should include bilateral issues already worked out.

Gorbachev said he shared the President's view. After seven years without a U.S.-Soviet summit, the President was probably right in being somewhat apprehensive about how the meeting would develop. Now that the meeting had taken place, it might be possible to compile "a joint approach in a fundamental way." Gorbachev again suggested that the Secretary and Shevardnadze consult and report to the leaders.

The Secretary commented that U.S. and Soviet representatives had been at work since 11:30 that morning to explore possibilities of developing acceptable joint language. It would be necessary to check with them before he and Shevardnadze could begin work. Gorbachev agreed. He proposed a break and quipped that the most important task facing the Foreign Ministers now was to find their subordinates.

Secretary Shultz confessed jocularly that he and Shevardnadze had agreed in a September dinner conversation that they should let their leaders carry as much of the burden in Geneva as possible. Until Gorbachev had given the Foreign Ministers their current assignment, they thought they had succeeded. Gorbachev suggested that the Secretary was simply trying to turn his joke about a walk around on him. The Secretary told him not to worry, that he (the Secretary) had a thick skin.

The President and Gorbachev agreed to adjourn the meeting and, after a ten minute conversation in the Mission reception room, retired to a separate area for an extended private conversation.

Prepared by:  
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