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NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20508

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: The President
 Chief of Staff Howard H. Baker
 Colin L. Powell, Assistant to the President
 for National Security Affairs
 John D. Negroponte, Deputy Assistant to the
 President for National Security Affairs
 Suzanne Massie
 Lisa Jameson, NSC Staff (Notetaker)

DATE, TIME March 11, 1988, 9:55-10:15 a.m.; Oval Office
AND PLACE:

The President greeted Mrs. Massie warmly, for he has talked with her on several previous occasions.

Mrs. Massie delivered an oral message to the President that she received in Moscow from Central Committee Secretary Anatoly Dobrynin. She understood that the message actually had originated "even higher," presumably from the General Secretary. The message, tendered several days before Secretary Shultz' arrival in Moscow for his February ministerial with Shevardnadze, began with a statement of the Soviet belief that the Administration's overall perception of Soviet international behavior has not changed--that the President still thinks of the USSR as an evil empire whose social and political positions have placed it on the ash heap of history. The Soviets request that, if this in fact is not the President's perception, i.e. the President believes there have been changes or could be changes in Soviet international policies, then it would be important for the President to state this prior to the Moscow Summit. The Soviets ask what concrete steps they could take over the next few months to prompt such a statement by the President. An answer could be sent via Mrs. Massie, who plans to return to the USSR on March 31st. (She will accompany a group of eleven senators who plan to stay in the Soviet Union over Easter).

The President said that one thing came immediately to mind: stopping the large-scale supply operations to Nicaragua the Soviets recently resumed. General Powell interjected that we will consider a range of possible responses to the Soviets' message, if appropriate. We have a few weeks before Mrs. Massie departs to think it over.

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Mrs. Massie described her conversations with Soviet officials about religious freedom. She stressed important reforms such as permitting religious instruction for children and allowing churches to engage in charitable activities. The President said this echoed what he had told Gorbachev during the last Summit. Gorbachev had complained about the brain drain from so many emigrants. The President had retorted that if everyone in the Soviet Union had freedom of religion and conscience, then, perhaps, they wouldn't want to leave. Letting hundreds of thousands out was not the only answer, the President had told the Soviet leader. It was also to make life within the USSR worth living. Gorbachev had then criticized the fence on our border with Mexico, to which the President had pointed out the basic difference between a fence that keeps people out and one that keeps them in!

Mrs. Massie related some of her most recent experiences and impressions of the USSR. She suggested the President visit Leningrad as well as Moscow, especially the Piskarev Cemetery where tens of thousands of World War II dead are buried. "This would be an important gesture after Bitburg," Mrs. Massie said, explaining that the Bitburg visit had been very poorly received in the Soviet Union.

Mrs. Massie said that, especially since the Washington Summit, ordinary Soviet citizens' opinion of the President had risen to a high level. She recalled how one Soviet remembered the President's comment about a young Chinese defector (Hu Na?), that he would "adopt her" if necessary. Another Soviet, having seen the President on television, remarked about his "elegantnost'" (elegance). Still another Soviet citizen, obviously ignorant of the American system, lamented, "Can't the Reagans stay on?"

Mrs. Massie perceived a feeling of malaise among the Soviets she talked to, mostly educated persons and intellectuals. Rising expectations borne of Gorbachev's reforms were tempered by the realization of the basic inertia of the working force -- nothing seemed to be happening. "Soviet society is undergoing an agonizing reappraisal," she said, likening the Soviet people to someone breaking out of concrete. With regard to nationality problems, she believes Armenia is only the beginning. "We're looking at a historically repressive system forced upon a basically irrepressible people," she said.

Mrs. Massie volunteered to help the President and the First Lady in any way she can, before, during, or after the Moscow Summit.

The meeting concluded very cordially, with friendly good-byes all around.

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