

Transcript of Conversation Between Mikhail S. Gorbachev and Francois Mitterand

July 7, 1986

GORBACHEV. The nuclear era requires new thinking from everybody. We all depend upon each other. That is why it is very important to understand each other better. In essence, we have no alternative other than to learn to live in the real world.

The SDI will not be able to defend either the U.S. or Western Europe. If we deploy similar systems, they will not be able to defend the Soviet Union either. At the same time, it is clear that if those plans are implemented, it would speed up the arms race in all spheres. It seems to me that everybody understands this now. It applies to Reagan himself. Of course, he continues to defend the SDI, he gives it a mystical character, pushed it ahead, repeating incantations along the way. But the issue, in general, is clear, I reiterate, even for the U.S. president.

Let me return to one idea, which you have just stated—that it is impermissible that governments should make their policies based on misperceptions. We are informed that Reagan, his government, and some political figures in the West share an opinion that the real Soviet threat does not come from the fact that the Soviet Union has nuclear weapons. I know for fact about the following arguments: the Soviets, they say, know, that if they attack the United States, they would not be able to prevent a nuclear response. In the same manner, the United States knows that if they attacked the Soviet Union, they would get a strike in return. Therefore, only a madman could unleash a nuclear war. The real threat to the United States, and to the Western world, according to those people, would arise if the Soviet Union successfully carries out its plans of acceleration of socio-economic development, if it can demonstrate its new economic and political capabilities. That is why they are betting on exhausting the Soviet Union in the economic sphere, by using some kind, as the U.S. believes, Western technological superiority. Of course, this calculation is mistaken, but it is the basis on which the Americans are building their policy toward the Soviet Union.

We gave Americans this advice—try to get rid of such an approach to our country. However, they still continue to hope that they would be able to use some kind of technological superiority, modern technologies, with the goal to achieve superiority over our country, including in space. It seems that they start from the assumption that the Soviet Union is in a difficult situation, and it needs a breathing spell. Therefore, as Americans believe, they only have to press a little harder, and they would be able to

squeeze everything that the West, and primarily the U.S. itself, wants, out of the Soviet Union. Nothing will come of these plans. In real politics you cannot take the desired for the reality. In light of these arguments many things become easy to understand: the insistence on the SDI, the decision to abandon the SALT II Treaty, satisfying the demands of the military-industrial complex, the efforts to pull the Soviet Union into a new round of arms race. This is not a serious policy. It probably is developed for a certain period of time, and it rests on the known forces and groups that propelled Reagan to power, and which the American President serves so diligently. And the Soviet Union, like a bone in the throat, interferes with realization of the plans designed by those circles.

Reagan's mistake is also in his inclination to see the entire world as the U.S.'s business property. Sometimes Western countries think that it bothers them when the Soviet Union sharply rebuffs encroachments on its national interests, when it takes appropriate measures. But why doesn't it bother them when Americans deny sovereign rights to not just people, but to entire continents. As far as the Soviet Union is concerned, it stands firmly in favor of the right of peoples to choose their way of development independently, whether it is the socialist, or the capitalist way. This is a sovereign affair of each people.

Let me express a couple of other thoughts about how we see the real policy of the U.S., of course, if you judge it not by the official statements, but by the practical actions of the present administration.

The modern world, the diversity of the states that comprise it--is also a new reality that should be taken into account in policy, regardless of whether somebody likes it or not. It dictates the necessity of new approaches, of new thinking. How can one think seriously about normal international relations, if one denies the need to take into consideration not only U.S. interests, but also the interests of France, of the Soviet Union, of other states? If you do not take this into account, there would be no normal relations between states, there would be nothing except international fever. That is why we are calling for a new approach, for a new look. At the same time, we are not making any efforts to put our partners into a difficult situation, or disrupt traditional ties between states. It would be unreasonable to act otherwise.

MITTERAND. As far as the right of self-determination is concerned, I have no comments. We have stood firmly for realization of this right, whether one is speaking about Central America, or about Southern Africa. In short, there are no differences between us on this issue. There could be differences on some specific points. But in a general sense, and as far as "one's business property" is concerned, we have a united

opinion with you. I think you did not fail to notice that this French position was recently expressed in the Libyan problem.

As far as the assessment of the actions of the present U.S. administration, I am not inclined to be so pessimistic as you are. However, the word, pessimism, is probably not appropriate here. You, Mr. Gorbachev, are no pessimist. I would probably put it this way—I do not judge the American administration as harshly as you do. I admit that the U.S. military-industrial complex puts a lot of pressure on the U.S. administration. At the same time, we have to bear in mind that Reagan is a product of his milieu, and he is not without common sense and intuition. The two theses that I described above are being constantly raised in his environment. Therefore, in order to break away from the contradictions in the judgments of his own government, Reagan is moving above them—into the sphere of prophecies.

It is clear that the military-industrial complex of the United States does not want to listen to voice of reason. However, in the political and diplomatic circles, they are more receptive to the Soviet arguments. Therefore, we should regard the present situation as something frozen. It is very possible that it could change.

As far as the basis of policy, I can say that the imperial claims that exist in the assumptions of the present administration fully correspond to the spirit and the mood in the United States. However, in the sphere of concrete steps, the present positions of the administration could undergo some evolution.

In my conversations with Americans, I asked them very openly, what exactly did they want to achieve. Whether they were interested in giving the Soviet Union an opportunity to appropriate more resources for the tasks of economic development by reducing the share of defense expenditures in their budget? Or, to the contrary, whether they wanted to exhaust the Soviet Union with the arms race, to tear the Soviet Union apart from its deep roots, to force the Soviet leadership to direct more and more resources to unproductive expenditures, to armaments?

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Moscow, Russian Federation

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