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THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

REAGAN-GORBACHEV MEETINGS IN GENEVA  
November, 1985

First Private Meeting

DATE: November 19, 1985  
TIME: 10:20 - 11:20 A.M.  
PLACE: Maison Fleur d'Eau,  
Geneva, Switzerland

PARTICIPANTS:

United States

President Ronald Reagan  
Dimitri Zarechnak, Interpreter

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary, Central Committee,  
Communist Party of the Soviet Union  
Yuri D. Uspensky, Interpreter

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After the official photographers and the rest of the staff left the room, President Reagan began the conversation by telling the General Secretary that the two of them could really talk now. The President indicated that he approached this meeting with a very deep feeling and hoped that both of them could realize its importance and the unique situation that they were in.

The President indicated that both he and the General Secretary had come from similar beginnings which were quite different from their current positions. He, Reagan, was born and began his life in a small farming community, and now the two of them were here with the fate of the world in their hands, so to speak. The U.S. and the Soviet Union were the two greatest

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countries on Earth, the superpowers. They were the only ones who could start World War III, but also the only two countries that could bring peace to the world.

The President said that the two of them would talk about many things, including arms, in the main meeting, but he wondered if the primary aim between them should not be to eliminate the suspicions which each side had of the other. The resolution of other questions would follow naturally after this. To talk about arms while such suspicions exist is an empty exercise as both sides are defensive at the various negotiations because of these suspicions. Countries do not mistrust each other because of arms, but rather countries build up their arms because of the mistrust between them.

The President expressed the hope that in their meetings they could get at the sources of the suspicions which exist. The Soviet Union did not approve of the U.S. system of government, and the U.S. did not approve of the Soviet system, and each could follow its own way, but with peaceful competition.

General Secretary Gorbachev said that he would like to return to the beginning, and thank the President for receiving him. He agreed with the President that this meeting was important in itself and he was glad that it was taking place. There had been no meetings between the U.S. President and the General Secretary of the USSR for six years, and many problems had developed in U.S.-Soviet relations and in the world in that period. He would also speak of these issues at the larger meeting, but would now like to avail himself of the opportunity which such a private meeting affords. He had met with members of the U.S. Congress and representatives of the U.S. Administration, but the Soviet side recognized the importance of a meeting with the President, and he, Gorbachev, would like to talk quietly, with respect for the United States and for the President, about many issues.

Gorbachev indicated that the Soviet side had prepared many months for this meeting, and he had tried to get a better understanding of the U.S. from Soviet and American sources. He had familiarized himself with all of the President's statements, and had paid special attention to the most recent ones. The main conclusion he had come to was that he was convinced that he and the President could not ignore each other. Nothing good would happen if the two sides took a different approach. But he was convinced that he could begin to change our relations for the better. This was his main theme, and the starting point for the meeting. After he had come to this conclusion, he had reviewed it a thousand times: perhaps it was too simplistic, bearing in mind the tremendous differences between the two

countries? This was, of course, so, but on the other hand the two countries were so interrelated.

Gorbachev continued that in the Soviet Union it was considered that serious measures ought to be undertaken to improve U.S.-Soviet relations. This would demand political will at the highest levels. A veritable avalanche of information was descending upon Gorbachev and the President, both internally and from all around the world. Gorbachev was convinced that there was not only the fear of mutual destruction, although this did exist, but a realistic evaluation showed that the U.S. and the Soviet Union could cooperate, and they had done so in the past, without changing their political systems, culture or ideologies. They had cooperated in the area of economics, trade and culture while respecting the choices made by the U.S. people, and, obviously, the Soviet people as well.

Gorbachev said that there had sometimes been squalls in the bilateral relationship which had been severe, perhaps extremely so, but he could definitely state that in the USSR there was no enmity toward the United States or its people. The Soviet Union respected the U.S. and its people. The Soviet people and the leadership of the Soviet Union recognized the role of the U.S. in the world, and wished it no harm. They realized that international relations could not be built on a desire to harm American interests.

At this point Gorbachev indicated that he would like to pause to permit the President to speak, and then he would like to say a few things about the Soviet side's understanding of the present international situation and what he thought should be changed in our policies in order to have a more constructive relationship based on greater realism.

The President replied that there was no question but that the Soviet and American peoples, if they learned more about each other, would find that they had many things in common, and that friendship between them would grow. Unfortunately, it was not people but governments that created arms.

The President continued that prior to this meeting there had been a wave of good wishes from the people of the United States, primarily expressing the desire to have peace. He knew something about the Soviet Union and its concern about war because of the suffering which the country had undergone in the Second World War -- the courage, the sacrifices and the fact that 20 million people had been lost. People do not like war. Americans hate war. America is too good a place to be when there is no war.

The President continued that people did not get into trouble when they talked to each other, but rather when they talked about each other. There has been too much of the latter on both sides, and not enough of talking to each other. In the meeting with the larger group, where he and Gorbachev should soon move, the sides could explain why there is mistrust between them, but could make a beginning to try to eliminate this mistrust.

Gorbachev replied that they would discuss specific questions during their Geneva meetings, but he wished to give his evaluation of the present international situation as the Soviet side saw it, while they were still in their one-on-one meeting. He thought that a new policy was needed which would be adequate for the present international situation. The first thing that was needed was a policy aimed at resolving the central issue of the present time, that is, the question of war and peace. In the Soviet Union, in the United States, and in the whole world this was the question which was in the minds of everyone, even ordinary people, not to mention those who were more familiar with international processes.

Gorbachev continued that if the two sides reached a substantive agreement in Geneva, which would increase people's hope and would not destroy their view of the future with respect to the question of war and peace, this would be a great accomplishment. The question of ending the arms race was of critical importance in international politics, and we needed to say something to the world about this. The Soviet side is in favor of this. The U.S. side says that nuclear war cannot be permitted, and that it is for peace. We need to find a formula at this meeting which would give impetus toward moving towards resolution of the more important issues. This was the first thing.

Gorbachev continued that he would not like to seem irresponsible vis-a-vis the President, vis-a-vis his own country and vis-a-vis the world with regard to this main issue. Young people were wondering about whether they would be alive or not, and the older generation, that had suffered so much, was also thinking about this. Yes, we have a meeting in Geneva, and we need to create an impetus. If no such impetus is created, there will be great disappointment, and no statements or press announcements will justify the meeting. People will say that we are irresponsible. And the two sides should not subject themselves to such a fate.

Gorbachev said that he would like to say two brief things about what realities Soviet and U.S. foreign policy should take into account. There were many problems in the world, involving capitalist countries and socialist countries, not to mention third-world countries, where the problems were the greatest. The problems involved questions of economics, structural change, ecology, sociology, etc. All of these issues demanded our

attention and required solutions based on cooperation rather than confrontation. This was the second thing that Gorbachev wished to say.

Gorbachev continued that the third thing was that the two countries had had conflicts, both openly and privately, with regard to regional, third-world issues. But there was a great number of developing countries, and dozens of newly-created ones. They had great amounts of natural and human resources, but they were not only behind the developed countries, but the gap between them was growing greater. There was hunger, illiteracy and disease, causing a great deal of turmoil. We need to take a new political approach to these issues in order to resolve them. This was the basis for Gorbachev's approach to foreign policy, as well as that of his colleagues.

Gorbachev indicated that the issue of national interests had arisen. The Soviet Union had its national interests and the U.S. had them as well. Other countries also had their national interests. In the international context, we could not speak of advancing some of these interests at the expense of suppressing others. Without such an approach it would be difficult to act in the international arena. He had spoken sincerely about these three things. The Soviet Union was not playing a two-faced game. If it were playing such a game with regard to the United States, if it harbored secret intentions, then there could be no improvement in the relationship. He was sincere about this, and this applied to both countries.

Gorbachev apologized that he had taken so long, and said that he would be ending shortly. Perhaps the President was aware that a slogan had been used during the time of this meeting in Geneva which said that Reagan and Gorbachev should bear in mind that the world did not belong only to the two of them.

The President replied that he had not heard about such a slogan, but he wished to reply briefly to what Gorbachev had said, and then he thought it would be better for them to join with the rest of the group. He agreed that the two countries could mutually help the developing countries, but one of the things that created mistrust of the USSR by the U.S. was the realization of the Marxist idea of helping socialist revolutions throughout the world and the belief that the Marxist system should prevail. The U.S. felt, however, that the most important thing for a country was its right to self-determination. The U.S. and USSR could help these countries, given our advanced technologies. We could help them to improve their standards of living. But the U.S. felt that the Soviet Union attempted to use force to shape the developing countries to their own pattern, and that such force was often used only by a minority of

the people of the country. The U.S. believed that if the competing factions would settle their social and other differences themselves, the U.S. and USSR could then be ready to assist them in improving their economies. Both our countries should eliminate the mistrust which exists between them by discussing the causes of this mistrust. The U.S. had a very firm belief that people in all countries had the right of self-determination and the right to choose their own form of government.

The President indicated that when he and Gorbachev would go into the main meeting, he would greet the members of the Soviet Delegation, and Gorbachev should greet the members of the U.S. Delegation, after which there would be a photo opportunity next to the fireplace before they sat down at the table.

Gorbachev replied that they would continue to discuss these issues in the larger meeting, but he would like to say some more before they left the room. There had been those who considered that the American Revolution should have been crushed. The same applied to the French Revolution and to the Soviet Revolution. Over a long period of time millions of people had engaged in such struggles -- in India, Indonesia, in Algeria (where one-and-a-half million people had died in their struggle for freedom). The Soviet Union did not consider that a way of life could be imposed if a society were not ready for it. These were only empty phrases. All these things which happen in the world have their national roots. The U.S. should not think that Moscow was omnipotent and that when he, Gorbachev, woke up every day he thought about which country he would now like to arrange a revolution in. This was simply not true. Gorbachev indicated that after his interpreter had translated what he had just said, he would like to convey some confidential information to Reagan, after which they could move to the next room.

Gorbachev said that before leaving for Geneva he had received some information from the Soviet Academy of Sciences, specifically the Institute for Earth Studies, where the scientists have become convinced that there would be a major earthquake in the area of California and Nevada within the next three years. Soviet scientists had always worked with U.S. scientists on these issues, and Reagan probably had knowledge of such information already, but this information was in addition to what had already been known. The Soviet scientists considered that the probability of an earthquake of a magnitude of 7 or 7.5 on the Richter scale was two-thirds and the probability of one of 6 or 6.5 was three-fourths. The Soviet side was ready to have its scientists give all the details to U.S. scientists. They have not yet been published.

The President replied that he realized that such an earthquake was considered to be overdue. He mentioned that an entire.

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area along the Pacific, Asia, South America, and North America was considered to be a "ring of fire" because of the volcanoes there. This had recently been demonstrated in Colombia, before that in Mexico and in the U.S. with Mount St. Helen: these volcanoes were showing greater activity. Because of faults in the earth and shifting plates, we know that such an event is overdue. A great deal of tension has been created along the San Andreas fault, and this tension had not been released by little quakes. The President indicated that he had not heard any specific time frame mentioned of the type that Gorbachev had spoken of, but all of our scientists knew that this was overdue and could happen at any time.

Prepared by:  
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