

Excerpts from Conversation between Mikhail Gorbachev and George Bush
June 1, 1990
White House

GORBACHEV: One has to make a choice. [...] If today supporting Lithuania is more important for the U.S. President, I am taking it into account.

BUSH: Maybe tomorrow we can talk about that in a more relaxed atmosphere. By the way, I heard that the new President of the RSFSR [Russian Federation] is calling for new relations with Lithuania. Of course, this is your business, but this is a special case, considering the history of the Lithuanian problem. Nonetheless, we want a trade agreement, and we have never been so close to it [as we are now]. I don't know what I can propose here. But I don't want to enter into public debates on this issue, because we might create an impression that I dictate to the Soviet Union on an issue, which is its internal affair. In terms of diplomacy it is bad. We need some kind of a flexible formula here. Otherwise, it does not make sense to present this agreement to an unfriendly Congress—they would just tear it apart.

GORBACHEV: OK, I see that you have made a decision and it is unlikely that we will make any progress on this issue today. After all, we lived for decades without a trade agreement, and we will survive now as well, it is not a life and death issue. I am only concerned about one thing—it is known both in the U.S. and in the USSR that our package for this meeting included two elements—strategic offensive weapons and the trade agreement. One element falls out. Here we will have to do some explaining—where and why [it does].

BUSH: Yes, I am aware of that. And I was already subjected to criticism—because in the United States all these issues are widely discussed. I want our meeting to be successful.

GORBACHEV: I already told you everything on this issue and I emphasized the importance of your political gesture—a gesture of the U.S. President. Now everything is in your hands. [...]

BUSH: I will keep looking for a way out of this situation. Maybe we will find something.

GORBACHEV: I am confident that we will find some [solution] in the fresh air at Camp David.

Plenary session.

BUSH: We are not that far from each other. Maybe only on the issue of non-circumvention and on some other issues, like heavy ICBMs and Backfire [bomber].

Therefore, I propose that these issues should be considered again today in the afternoon. In the statement about future negotiations, we should give a push to

negotiations, point to their future positive results. All this will not only encourage further creation of positive atmosphere between our countries, but also will be received positively in the entire world. [...]

GORBACHEV: Mr. President, I share what you just said, that we have done great work and have traveled a long way. But here I would like to make a statement that we have a firm intention to reach a signing of this treaty already in this year. This is the most important [thing]. [...]

This is what makes me worried. We had an understanding that there was collaboration between the U.S. and Great Britain on nuclear issues. And suddenly we discovered that our partners had a different understanding. [...] We had an agreement from Reykjavik that until a certain moment we would not include the issue of British and French nuclear weapons. This was our concession, which opened the door for the negotiations. At the same time we established our understanding that at a certain stage, when we begin deep reductions of nuclear weapons, these members of the nuclear club would join us. By the way, we can also find a corresponding statement by Thatcher that when the U.S. and the USSR sign an agreement on the 50% reductions, then Great Britain would be ready to join the discussion of issues of nuclear weapons. In his characteristic manner, Mitterrand also expressed this idea and even China responded. Today we are approaching the treaty on 50% reductions, and now all other members of the club should participate too. But suddenly, we see that instead of joining the [discussion in the] nuclear club, they propose an idea, which, if implemented, would allow [them] to increase the number of nuclear weapons on the [other] side. This is illogical.

Translated by Svetlana Savranskaya for the National Security Archive.

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