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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with General Secretary
Mikhail Gorbachev of the USSR (U)

PARTICIPANTS: US
The President
Vice President
Secretary of State George P. Shultz
Howard H. Baker, Chief of Staff
Colin L. Powell, Assistant to the
President for National Security Affairs
Mark Parris, Department of State (Notetaker)
Fritz W. Ermarth, NSC Staff (Notetaker)
Dimitry Zarechnak (Interpreter)

USSR
General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev
Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze
Aleksander Yakovlev, Member of the Politburo
and CPSU Central Committee Secretary
Anatoly Dobrynin, Secretary of the CPSU
Central Committee
Sergei Tarasenko, Head, General
Secretariat (Notetaker)

Pavel Palazhchenko (Interpreter)

DATE, TIME December 8, 1987, 10:45 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
PLACE: Oval Office (U)

Following the welcoming ceremony, the President and General Secretary Gorbachev arrived at the Oval Office at 10:45 a.m. and exchanged pleasantries during a 15-minute photo-op. One-on-one discussions began at 11:00. (U)

The President opened by giving the General Secretary a pair of cuff links, made by an American jeweler, on which was the symbol from Isaiah, the beating of swords into ploughshares. The General Secretary responded that this was indeed an appropriate symbol on a day in which the two leaders would truly be beating swords into ploughshares by signing the first treaty that did this. (S)

The President then said he would like to start with a particular request that the General Secretary consider a list of names of Soviet citizens, a list involving separated families and other cases. He handed Gorbachev a card listing the names of Soviet

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citizens to whom he wished the Soviet government to grant exit visas. The President then asked that no notes be taken on the American side because he wanted to make a purely personal suggestion in the area of human rights. (S)

Responding to the President's off-the-record point, the General Secretary said he wanted the President to understand that the Soviet government considered human rights a priority issue. He said it had not been easy to create unity among the Soviet people after the revolution in a country made up of so many diverse ethnic and national groups. But this had been done. He noted that the USSR was comprised of 15 national republics, each with its own national language, government, press, literature, and culture. And there were, additionally, 38 lesser ethnic groups with autonomous governmental structures, able to develop their own institutions and culture. The question of assuring human rights to a multiethnic population was an important question permanently on the Soviet agenda. There were always problems. Perestroika is dealing with all kinds of problems, not just economic but cultural as well, and the situation was steadily improving. (S)

Turning to emigration, Gorbachev said that the USSR was taking a realistic approach to the problem. The President would have noticed this. Some cases were being refused "for a time." But Gorbachev wanted the President to understand that the Soviet government would do its utmost to remove this problem from the agenda. He added that he always appreciated the tact with which the President addressed this delicate and sensitive issue; the Soviets react, he said, with great sensitivity when it becomes the subject of political declarations. He repeated his assertion that the human rights situation was improving and that it was a top priority for his government, which was made up of elected bodies representing all nationalities, workers, farmers, intelligentsia, women, young people, all of whose rights were important. (S)

The President noted that the United States was a unique nation whose population all derived from foreign origins. Gorbachev said he understood this. The President went on to note that some Americans had ties to the Soviet Union. He mentioned that, on the question of religion, while there were different philosophies, even primitive African tribes had some idea of God and worship. He noted that some one-half million Jews sought to leave the USSR for religious-cultural freedom. Gorbachev said these figures were completely unconfirmed. (S)

Gorbachev then challenged the President whether there were any human rights problems in the United States. The President admitted we had our problems because people are people, but that

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our Constitution protected basic human rights. Gorbachev proposed a seminar of experts to debate the matter, adding that he could not share the President's positive assessment of the human rights picture in the United States. The President responded that anybody can leave the US, and Gorbachev, in turn, that this was not the only human right. The Constitution protects freedom of worship, said the President. But what about episodes of anti-Semitism in the United States, queried Gorbachev. The President observed that individuals have their prejudices, to which Gorbachev agreed. (S)

But, the President said, over the previous weekend 200,000 individuals had gathered to demonstrate on human rights in the USSR. Gorbachev acknowledged this and repeated that the USSR considered the matter to be serious and important, which is why it had decided to discuss it with the US government. He repeated his proposal to convene a joint seminar on it, and suggested that this discussion be closed. Responding to another reference from the President to freedom of worship, Gorbachev proposed that the President visit the USSR in June 1988 when the Millennium of Christianity in Russia would be celebrated. Representatives of many religious denominations would come. The President could visit churches of numerous Christian denominations in the USSR and see for himself what was happening. However, Gorbachev said, he would not sit as the accused before a prosecutor. (S)

The President said he meant no threat by his line of argument. The General Secretary said he felt no threat, but that all countries had laws regarding immigration and emigration. The President responded that few restricted the right to leave their country. Many peoples wanted to come to the United States and we could not receive them all, but governed their entry under a system of quotas. Gorbachev said if quotas on immigration are acceptable, why not quotas on emigration? Why, he asked, does the United States guard the border with Mexico with fences and guns? What kind of democracy is this? (S)

The US-Mexican border was completely the reverse of the situation on Soviet borders, replied the President. Because of poor living conditions in Mexico many wanted to come to the US; we could not absorb them all. The President reiterated that the fundamental point was that the USSR prevented people from getting out, that it compelled them to stay. (S)

Gorbachev said he was willing to continue discussing these and other problems, but not today. He and the President agreed to move on. (S)

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Gorbachev observed that the two leaders had covered a long road from their first to this third meeting between them, a road marked by important and difficult issues. During that time, their dialogue had become much more profound, had begun to contain elements of trust between the two parties. There was an improved ability to address questions quietly and productively, a greater willingness to deal with political responses on each side, and political will to move ahead. (S)

The President recalled an episode in Geneva when staff experts who had been working in another building came to the two leaders to report roadblocks in their efforts. Gorbachev continued the recollection by reminding the President how the leaders had urged progress by pounding their fists on the table; the President recalled this too. Gorbachev noted that this had been an important political moment illustrating how bureaucrats, sometimes very intelligent ones, forget who is really in power. People elect leaders, while officials are merely appointed. (S)

Gorbachev said it was not oversimplifying to claim that there had been a true change for the better in US-Soviet relations. Exchanges and discussions resolving important problems were underway. We would now sign the first agreement ever eliminating nuclear weapons, a fact of historic importance. We recognized, he said, that the process was not easy, that we had different views. Questions were being asked about prospects for ratification. The General Secretary said he was himself being asked to explain why the Soviet Union was to dismantle four times the number of weapons NATO and the US side would. He said he would succeed in explaining the value of the treaty to the Soviet people as the President would to the American people. He then referred to a letter from a student pleading that he and the President not become captives of emotion. (S)

The President suggested that ministers be invited to join the meeting at this point. The General Secretary agreed. The President said that he and the General Secretary were doing something very important for the future of the child who had written the letter. Gorbachev said he personally felt that a very important aspect of the current steps being taken in the US-Soviet relationship was the mental or psychological change being made in the minds of men, which he deeply felt. The President agreed. This had somehow to be captured, responded the General Secretary. (S)

The President expressed gratitude to Gorbachev for his efforts in improving a relationship that was far from easy. Gorbachev agreed that striving for cooperation was not easy, but that we should not be afraid to do it. He expressed pleasure at the President's remarks at the welcoming ceremony. He expressed the

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view that, if there was no gap between what the President said and the actions that were taken, then there would be practical progress and he would find the Soviet side to be a good partner. (S)

The President mused that, were we confronted with a hostile threat from another planet, then our differences would disappear and we would be totally united. Gorbachev recalled having discussed this idea before. At this point Shultz, Shevardnadze, Baker, Yakovlev, Powell, and Dobrynin joined the meeting. Launching into a general statement on next steps in arms control, the General Secretary expressed thanks to the people who had worked on the INF Treaty. He said the signing of this treaty radically changed the whole situation, activated the discussion, and increased international pressure for new progress. The momentum had to be maintained and, along with the experience gained, to be applied to the problem of reducing strategic offensive forces. In this context, he noted that the two sides had agreed at Reykjavik on a 50% reduction of strategic offensive forces and on nonwithdrawal from the ABM treaty for period of 10 years. After Reykjavik the US side raised the issue of sublimits within the framework of 6000 strategic nuclear warheads. The Soviet side had sought to accommodate, accepted the concept of sublimits, and had offered proposals on the distribution of forces among the various legs of the triad. The US side had special concerns, specifically regarding Soviet heavy ICBMs. For its part, the Soviet side had concerns about US SLBM forces. Both sides were taking account of each others' concerns. Secretary Shultz had been given a new Soviet proposal on sublimits in Moscow and had been asked to respond in Geneva. The General Secretary turned to Secretary Shultz and asked again what was the US position. (S)

The President stated that he wanted to react to one of the General Secretary's points, namely, the 10-year delay regarding defenses both sides were planning. The President said he would like to see that period shortened a bit. He did not have in mind a sharp cut because there were technical limits to what is possible, but the US side felt it might be able to push defensive research to permit deployment a few years earlier. He felt, however, that the differences between the two sides on this and on sublimits could be negotiated. (S)

Secretary Shultz asked to review the range of arms reduction problems which the sides would try to resolve during the visit of the Soviet leader. He began by noting, as Gorbachev had, areas of agreement following Reykjavik: A reduction to 6000 strategic nuclear warheads, 1600 launchers/delivery vehicles, and a limit of 154 heavy ICBMs with 1540 warheads. Gorbachev interjected that the latter figure was a 50% cut when the US had originally only asked for 35%. Secretary Shultz noted that the US welcomed

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this, adding that these limits would include a 50% cut in Soviet throwweight. Gorbachev again interjected his agreement. Secretary Shultz said that these areas of agreement should now be incorporated in a treaty with the understanding that Soviet missile throwweight would fall 50% and not go back up. ~~(S)~~

Secretary Shultz continued, observing that bomber counting rules had been agreed by Nitze and Akhromeyev at Reykjavik. We had now to devise necessary counting rules for other weapons -- warheads on missiles, cruise missiles on aircraft, etc., subjects on which we had proposals which working groups could address. Gorbachev interjected that there were some related questions of principle to discuss. ~~(S)~~

Secretary Shultz said that, regarding vital issues of verification, we should advance using the principles established in INF and instructing our negotiators on the basis of those principles. Gorbachev agreed. Then, the Secretary continued, the various sublimits had to be addressed, among which the most important was the ballistic missiles sublimit within the 6000 allowed warheads. In Moscow, the Soviet side had stated a proposal for 800-900 ALCMs. The other side of this idea from the Soviet side was Marshal Akhromeyev's proposal of 5100 warheads on strategic ballistic missiles. The Secretary said the US thought this too many; 4800 was a better level, but the concept was important and we seemed to be agreeing on that. Gorbachev interjected that the Soviet side had a compromise proposal. Secretary Shultz noted that this was an important statement. Gorbachev objected laughingly that the Secretary had not even heard the Soviet proposal yet, but could be assured that the Soviet side was looking for a compromise. The Secretary suggested 4803 as a good compromise. In the same jocular fashion, the General Secretary responded that this number would be capitulation, not compromise; whereupon he turned to the President to take up his earlier remark about a 10-year period of nonwithdrawal from the ABM Treaty being too long. Why was the US side moving away from the 10-year period discussed at Reykjavik, asked Gorbachev. So much had been agreed there and then the US side retreated. Why? ~~(S)~~

Secretary Shultz reminded Gorbachev that US acceptance of a 10-year nonwithdrawal period was conditioned at Reykjavik on total elimination of ballistic missiles in the same period. The President recalled that even elimination of all nuclear weapons was discussed at Reykjavik. But these approaches were no longer a factor in our discussions, concluded Shultz. We could work on defining the period of nonwithdrawal. Gorbachev asked what period the US was now proposing. That, replied the Secretary, would depend on other aspects of the negotiation. General Secretary Gorbachev agreed to set these subjects (START and ABM) aside for the moment, but noted that there was a linkage between them and that this remained an issue of principle for the Soviet side. ~~(S)~~

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The President asked the General Secretary to humor him a bit by letting him see the deployment of advanced strategic defenses in his lifetime. Gorbachev replied by observing how healthy the President was and opined that he had many active years ahead of him. If we made the right decisions, he continued, we would see good results in our lifetime and our children would see them beyond us. But if we continued in the manner of the past 45 years, there would be no such progress. ~~(S)~~

Gorbachev noted that Secretary Shultz had raised the issue of SLCMs, which had been discussed at Reykjavik in a special framework outside the 6000 warhead limit. Now that our positions were coming closer on a whole range of issues, the matter of SLCMs became particularly significant. It was not settled yet, but to prevent circumvention there would have to be a limit, something like 400 would be worthy of discussion. The nature of SLCMs and the problems they posed had changed considerably in the years since the SALT negotiations addressed them. Gorbachev asked what particularly bothered the US side in coming to grips with the SLCM problem. ~~(S)~~

Secretary Shultz replied that the verification problems posed by SLCM limits were very difficult, particularly distinguishing between those with nuclear and those with conventional warheads because the two looked exactly alike. But the US side was prepared to discuss this because it recognized the importance of the matter. The Secretary knew that Akhromeyev had some thoughts on the subject of verifying SLCMs and the US was prepared to hear them. ~~(S)~~

The General Secretary said that to focus things he wanted to introduce some new points about SLCMs. First, he repeated, there had to be a limit on their numbers. Second, the Soviet side had insisted that they had to be restricted to two types of submarines only. But, because the US had so many types of surface ships that could carry SLCMs, the Soviets were prepared to agree that they also could be deployed on two types of surface ships as well. Third, Gorbachev would address verification. Both sides, he insisted, had the technical means to verify SLCMs, the equipment that would allow determination of whether nuclear weapons were aboard a ship and what yield they were, without actually boarding the ship. This was what Akhromeyev had alluded to. Now either the US was concealing its capability, continued Gorbachev, or it lagged in such capability to verify nuclear weapons aboard ships. If the former, this would be bad; if the latter, then the Soviet side would sell the technology to the US -- if the price were right. In any case, the technology existed to permit identifying the presence and yield of nuclear weapons aboard ships, said Gorbachev. Thus, we could work out limits on SLCMs, establish that they would be deployed only on two types of

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submarines and two types of surface ships, and work out technical details of verification. ~~(S)~~

Secretary Shultz repeated the interest of the US side in hearing what the Soviets had to say, but wanted to register considerable skepticism about verification of SLCM limits. Gorbachev offered to conduct a demonstration to prove the verifiability of such limits by technical means, to which the Secretary responded that it was too easy to switch warheads on SLCMs to make such a demonstration really convincing. Gorbachev repeated his insistence that suitable technology was indeed available, a matter that had been discussed with Paul Nitze. Both sides had verification concerns, but they were resolvable. Again Shultz noted the willingness of the US side to listen but advised that not just Paul Nitze, but a lot of skeptical admirals had to be convinced. ~~(S)~~

In approaching these questions, the General Secretary said, we had to involve scientists more in our work, to provide a broad basis for realistic policy. He said that Western scientists had complained that their knowledge was not being adequately used in these areas. He had a letter from a British Nobel prize winner proposing an East-West commission of scientists to advise both the President and the Soviet leadership more reliably. Without scientists there could be no solutions to our problems. ~~(S)~~

The President noted the late hour, and Secretary Shultz remarked that it might be time for a larger meeting in the Cabinet Room. But first the Secretary wanted to make another point or two to guide working group activity. With regard to mobile missiles, he said, the US had no problem in principle with allowing them. But the verification problems were exceptionally difficult and the working group had to focus on them. ~~(S)~~

Gorbachev agreed with the President that it was about time to break off this part of the meeting, but he too wanted to add one more point, on nuclear testing. He noted that we were now negotiating about new limits on testing as part of a process leading to nuclear disarmament. This was good; we had momentum. We had already decided to exchange visits of monitoring experts and to conduct experiments in yield measurement. He had an idea he wanted the President and others to think about. Since the negotiations now underway were aimed at the ultimate result of a total prohibition on all nuclear testing, why not, now, declare a bilateral moratorium on testing for the duration of these negotiations. This would be an act of enormous importance the whole world would support. He asked that the President and his colleagues not respond immediately to this idea but think it over carefully. Then noting that time was short and the matter of forging instructions to negotiators for future arms talks para-

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mount, he passed to the President a Soviet paper containing the tentative proposals of the Soviet side, as discussed at the last ministerial in Geneva. The President passed to the General Secretary a comparable US document covering START and Defense and Space issues. ~~(S)~~

At the close of the meeting the two sides agreed that there would be two basic working groups, one on arms control chaired by Nitze and Akhromeyev and one on other parts of the agenda chaired by Ridgway and Bessmertnykh. Further, Secretary Shultz proposed that, in briefing the press, both sides stick to general statements about the atmosphere and topics of discussion. Gorbachev agreed, noting some concern as to whether the US side would stick to this. The Secretary insisted that we always did. ~~(S)~~

The meeting concluded with the President giving the General Secretary a tour around the Oval Office. The Soviet party departed at 12:30 p.m. (U)

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