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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary
(Geneva, Switzerland)

For Immediate Release November 17, 1985

INTERVIEW OF AMBASSADOR PAUL NITZE
BY CNN

Room 714
Intercontinental Hotel
Geneva, Switzerland

11:00 A.M. (L)

Q President Reagan is here in Geneva. Soviet Party General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev arrives Monday. The summit begins in earnest on Tuesday. I'm Charles Bierbauer. Our guest on Newsmaker Sunday today is Ambassador Paul Nitze, who has a long and distinguished career in the field of arms control. Suffice it to say that he was a member of the American Strategic Arms Limitation Talks delegation in Helsinki when it all began in 1969. He was the negotiator for the limited range -- or Intermediate Range Nuclear Force Talks here in Geneva and is now Senior Arms Control Adviser to President Reagan. We are joined as well by CNN's Bernard Shaw.

Mr. Ambassador, we have known for some time that agreement on an arms control treaty or anything of that sort is not really going to happen here in Geneva, but perhaps progress is achievable. What do you consider within the realm of possibility at these talks?

AMBASSADOR NITZE: In part, the meeting today is viewed by the public as a major human interest event. But for those of us who are here trying to negotiate, it is a serious negotiation, a negotiation which deals with, you know, the central issues -- East-West relations, the security interests of both countries and of the world as a whole. And we think that it is possible here to make an incision into those issues, at least into improving the climate for future negotiations, both on the arms control issues -- on the nuclear and space talks that have been going on in Geneva -- but also on other issues as well.

Q Can you make that incision a little bit more precisely? In terms of the arms control approach, what should we look for? There's been some discussion of principles, discussion of guidelines. What does that really mean?

AMBASSADOR NITZE: I don't believe that we've had good -- I know we haven't had good luck with agreements in principle at preceding summit meetings. They deal -- an agreement on principle deals with broad generalities, and then you're disappointed when you find and -- when you get into the detail. We a have different interpretation than the Russians have.

Therefore, I think that is not a good thing to seek for. I think, rather, it would be to get an increased impetus and a sense of direction from the directions that the President and Mr. Gorbachev give to their negotiators in Geneva, one that will produce substantive negotiations there in Geneva -- here in Geneva -- and the continuing negotiations where the negotiators can deal not only with the broad principles, but also button down all the details that are necessary and, in order to have an agreement, work out the way we intend it to work out, the way in which both sides intend it should work out.

Q Mr. Ambassador, this is not a play on words: The

negotiators say they are serious about negotiating. My question is, are they serious about reaching an agreement?

AMBASSADOR NITZE: Yes. Everybody's serious who's dealing with this. On both sides, they're serious about reaching an agreement.

Q When I say that, I'm citing the wide disparity between both sides on the basics.

AMBASSADOR NITZE: -- each side wishes to reach an agreement perhaps with somewhat different intentions as to what that agreement should be. From our standpoint, we wish to reach an agreement which will, in substance and when it's carried out, actually reduce the risk of nuclear war and of war of any kind. That's what we think the purpose of these negotiations is.

Now, in order to achieve that, the agreement has to result in forces which are reasonably balanced and which also are stabilizing rather than destabilizing, so that we think that kind of an agreement will, in fact, reduce the risk of war and increase the security of both sides.

Now, we're not at all sure that that is the intention of the Soviet side. In fact, every indication in the past has been that it is not. So, we have a difficult negotiation before us.

So, let me repeat that the question is -- the issue is not whether one is interested in an agreement and wants an agreement. The question at issue is what kind of an agreement, for what purpose.

Q Mr. Ambassador, we've seen in recent weeks and months first an American proposal, a Soviet counter-proposal, a new American proposal. Some of the numbers have been made public. One that stands out is that both sides talk about a 50 percent cut. But you seem to have very differing views on 50 percent of what. Could you put that in perspective? Where do we differ on this 50 percent thing?

AMBASSADOR NITZE: The Soviet proposal says that they are for a 50 percent reduction in strategic nuclear arms -- is what their publicity says.

You read what they actually propose is 50 percent reduction in what they define as being strategic nuclear delivery vehicles. Then you look at their definition of strategic nuclear delivery vehicles, they count on our side not only the intercontinental systems, which have been the subject of negotiations in our START negotiations up to now, but also what they call the medium-range systems. But they include only our medium-range systems and count them, and they don't count their medium-range systems, those that we were negotiating on in the INF negotiations.

Q Can you bridge this gap, do you think, that you can arrive at a common definition?

AMBASSADOR NITZE: It is easy to arrive at a common definition by going back to where we were for the last 12 years. For the last 12 years, during SALT I, during SALT II, during the INF and START negotiations, the division between the two sets of negotiation is on -- precisely on the distinction between the shorter-range systems, those that they call medium-range systems and we call INF systems, and those that have intercontinental capabilities. That's the ICBMs, the SLBMs and the heavy bombers. And we think that distinction is important and that they should go back to the preceeding definition. That isn't much of a move. It's moved back to where they were for 12 years.

Q All right.

AMBASSADOR NITZE: If we could get them to move back to that, then we'd have a basis for discussion.

Q We will try to move forward. But we'll do that in just a moment. We have to take a short break. Please stay with us.

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Q Mr. Ambassador, in decades past it was always important for the Americans to project to the Russians a united front in dealing with them. Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger back in Washington has overshot the negotiators -- the President -- by having a letter which was leaked to the press, which, in effect, says, "Boss, don't give away the nuclear store." Should Secretary Weinberger be muzzled?

AMBASSADOR NITZE: There's no evidence that I know of that Secretary Weinberger leaked that article -- leaked that letter. But, you know, there are differences of -- points of view, and should be, between the State Department and the Defense Department. Their responsibilities are different. And we do argue these things out. But when we get through, we have -- the President decides, and then we have a unified opinion -- a unified decision -- and then we all support that. And I'm sure that the Defense people will support the President's decision, and intend to. There's no objection to anybody making clear to the President what their viewpoint is. The important thing is that we have a unified approach to the implementation of the President's decisions.

Q But doesn't it embolden the Russians to be adamant at the bargaining table? Can't they say -- point their fingers at you and say, "Ha, even your Pentagon, even your Secretary of Defense doesn't agree with this"?

AMBASSADOR NITZE: They can't say that about this because on -- the things that Mr. Weinberger said do not bear upon those issues that are now under negotiation in any way which would lead to a divison of opinion in the Exeuctive Branch.

Q But nevertheless, this expression comes out at an awkward time for the administration to have the Secretary's letter published in a newspaper when the Secretary is one who always says,

"My private conversations with the President remain that." It does suggest that there is some difference here, regardless of who may leaked it. And what Mr. Weinberger seems to be saying is, "Let's not over-commit ourselves in terms of the SALT II Treaty. Let's not over-commit ourselves in terms of what we can or cannot do in developing a strategic defense. Is there any chance that the President can be hamstrung by making such commitments?

AMBASSADOR NITZE: I think not. I think the important thing is, of course, nobody approves of the leaks that take place. But ours is, after all, a democratic country and we just have to live with these unacceptable things, these leaks.

Q Can you take these two issues, SALT II -- the President's just received a report on Soviet compliance with the unratified, but, nevertheless, essentially observed SALT II Treaty, which came out at the last summit in 1979. To what degree are the Soviets really complying? And to what degree does that suggest the U.S. should stay within the bounds of SALT II?

AMBASSADOR NITZE: Well, the Executive Branch's position on this issue is clear and has been stated frequently. And that is we are continuing adherence to the policy of not undercutting SALT II with three provisos.

The first one is that the Soviets -- we will do this as long as we believe that the Soviet Union is seriously negotiating with respect to meaningful and strategically significant arms reductions.

Second point is that we will abide to this as long as the Soviets also follow a policy of not undercutting it.

But, thirdly, and perhaps the most important point is we will abide to it to the extent that the Soviets do -- continue -- or abide by -- do not conduct, irreversible violations of the SALT II Treaty.

They have, of course, committed one irreversible violation. And that is they've tested a second ICBM -- new ICBM while the SALT II Agreement calls for a limit on each side not to test more than one new ICBM.

Q Does that not, in and of itself, say that they have not gone along -- I mean, you've negated your three principles here. If they have one --

AMBASSADOR NITZE: No, I've said -- I haven't finished my point.

Q -- universal one. I'm sorry.

AMBASSADOR NITZE: I haven't finished my third point. My third point is here in this instance where it is an irreversible violation, there we reserve the right to take off-setting action ourselves.

Q But I'm still left with something of the impression of like kids on a playground saying, "Don't cross this line." "Well, all right. Don't cross that line." That we keep retrenching or -- is that not what you're saying, one irreversible, and then maybe another?

AMBASSADOR NITZE: Well, this is a disturbing thing. It is a disturbing thing. On the other hand, there's a lot of the SALT II Agreement which both sides have adhered to. So that it isn't completely clear as -- you know, that it's just a one-way street, that one just ought to abandon SALT II just because there has been one irreversible violation. There, I think, the better course is the one that the President has adopted. And that is that we reserve the

right to take off-setting action ourselves.

Q What would that be?

AMBASSADOR NITZE: That is to develop the Midgetman, which would be a second ICBM on our part, in addition to the MX.

Q Is it hopeless, or a lost cause, to try to convince the Soviets that SDI does not violate the ABM Treaty?

AMBASSADOR NITZE: No, I think that's not at all a hopeless thing. I think it's entirely clear that SDI does not violate --

Q It's clear to us.

AMBASSADOR NITZE: No, but I think it's also clear to them. They assert the opposite, but they know perfectly well that we're not violating the ABM Treaty. What are the issues that they raise? They raise the issue of intent. They say that we intend to violate it in the future. We don't. We intend to abide strictly by the provisions of the ABM Treaty. There's nothing in the ABM Treaty that even refers to research. The word "research" isn't mentioned in the AMB Treaty. The testimony of Marshal Grechko when -- right after we signed up the ABM Treaty in 1972, before the Supreme Soviet, was that the Treaty strictly limits the deployment of ABM systems, both as to location and as to number. But it permits research of a defense of our territory, so that -- you know, the question of the intent of research, you know, is something that they themselves have said that is something that nobody can tell what the intent of research is. They interpret it as being that they could follow any kind of research that they wanted to. And clearly, so can we. So this question that they raise that, you know, that the intent of our research is deployment is, first of all, not -- is not pertinent to what the Treaty restricts.

But, secondly, it is our intent -- and we so made that clear -- to -- were our research program to demonstrate the feasibility, the cost effectiveness and survivability of such systems. On either side, we would propose to negotiate with them as to how such systems could be introduced into the forces of both sides in a manner which would be phase-by-phase stabilizing. And we've proposed that to them.

And we've further proposed to them the two sides begin discussions right now as to how such a transition could be worked out to the interests of both sides and to -- an increase in stability, not a decrease in stability.

So we've tried to do everything we can to make this whole program work to the interest of the world and to stability.

Q I'd like to pursue that a little bit farther, but we're going to take a short break again. We'll be right back.

* * *

Q Ambassador Nitze, before we took that break, you were talking about actually getting things going on SDI now -- that we should be talking about the President's proposal and in terms of how we would negotiate it when -- if and when it becomes a reality. Are you saying that we're going to sit down with the Soviets and say this is the direction we're taking, here's how we think we can create a -- the defense shield -- as the President has sometimes called it -- for both countries, not just for our side?

AMBASSADOR NITZE: I'd like to make one further point, however. And that is, where we visualize this is that, first of all, there'll be a considerable period before our research, or their research, can demonstrate that such a defense is feasible and could meet these strict criteria.

Secondly, once that has been demonstrated, then it will take some time for the introduction of such a system into the forces of both sides. And finally, if that works during a period where one. phase by phase, increases the reliance upon defenses and decreases one's reliance upon the threat of ultimate mutual destruction, then one can achieve a phase where one approaches and then attains the complete elimination of nuclear weapons. Now, the impenetrable shield idea will not occur until one gets to -- or close to -- the final phase.

Q Hasn't the President sort of muddied the understanding of this by talking about giving it to the Soviets and then about selling it to the Soviets at cost, and also about, well, yes, it will cover Europe as well. From the first place, we don't really know what it is, but is the comprehension of this made all the more difficult by these varying statements about what we're going to do with it?

AMBASSADOR NITZE: No, I don't think so. I think the subject itself is a complex subject and, you know, one can make -- one gets a question on one phase of it and one answers that question. But it is true all these things are pertinent. The main point, I think, is our willingness to begin discussions now with the Soviet Union as to what the two of us might do in the event either their research or our research turns out to be successful and demonstrates the feasibility, according to strict criteria, of a greater component of defense and a lesser reliance upon this horrible threat of mutual destruction.

Today we -- there is no alternative to deterrence through the ultimate threat of mutual destruction. We can't give that up today because it is the basis for deterrence. So, today we have to do that and they as well. So, it is -- the reliance for the peace is, today, based upon this ultimate threat of massive destruction. But if one could move away from that to a greater component of being able to deny any aggressor an ability to successfully gain from the initiation of nuclear warfare, all of us would be way ahead of the game. And that is what the President is saying.

Q Mr. Ambassador, if General Secretary Gorbachev next February 28, when the Party Congress starts in Moscow, if he is not able to report substantial give or progress on arms control based on the summit and what follows, isn't it likely that the Kremlin hardliners would hold him -- Gorbachev -- to more defense spending and thereby wreck his plans to turn the Soviet economy around?

AMBASSADOR NITZE: I don't know the answer to that. That's a question of the internal politics within the Kremlin and within the Moscow community.

Q But --

AMBASSADOR NITZE: -- one does --

Q -- doesn't what happens domestically in Russia have a bearing on how their negotiators and Gorbachev himself performed here?

AMBASSADOR NITZE: Well, you didn't let me complete my sentence.

Q My apology.

AMBASSADOR NITZE: But I started off by stressing the importance with which we view these negotiations and clearly we are trying to get and want to lay the foundations for a meaningful agreement on the reduction of arms -- of nuclear arms whereby there would be an increase in stability and an increase in the security of both sides. Now, that's what we're trying to get and, certainly, that would be the better outcome.

Q If we will negotiate SDI step-by-step to find out where the research is going to lead us, then is the Soviet opposition to SDI merely a tactic to show that it opposes American proposals.

Q We have less than a minute. I'll have to ask you to be short.

AMBASSADOR NITZE: Clearly, they've been working on defense for many, many years -- much longer than we have. They've got a much greater component of their defense program in defenses today than we have. We can't, in any case -- so, they know all about defenses. The problem is whether we couldn't work out a joint approach to this, rather than just a competitive approach.

Q Ambassador Nitze, you've walked in the woods with the Russians, you've been so deeply involved -- do you have a sense of sort of guarded optimism. You seem somewhat more optimistic than others in the Reagan administration.

AMBASSADOR NITZE: Temperamentally, I am -- I don't think one can do serious negotiations without being tempermentally optimistic; one would get discouraged otherwise.

Q All right. I'm going to have to -- well, that's a good point, believe it or not. That's where we will quite. Ambassador Paul Nitze, thank you so much for being our guest on "Newsmaker Sunday." For Bernie Shaw, I'm Charles Bierbauer.

END 11:27 A.M. (L)

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