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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary
(Geneva, Switzerland)

For Immediate Release

November 18, 1985

INTERVIEW OF AMBASSADOR ARTHUR HARTMAN
BY INDEPENDENT NETWORK NEWS

Hotel Intercontinental
Geneva, Switzerland

9:55 A.M. (L)

Q Mr. Ambassador, are there any profound changes in the Soviet Union that suggest that a new spring is dawning between the United States and the Soviet Union as far as diplomatic relations are concerned?

AMBASSADOR HARTMAN: Well, I think the profound changes that have taken place is that you've got a new leader who has every possibility of being around until the year 2000. And that's a big change. You've gone through the leaders who have essentially come out of the wartime period. And that is the big change, not so much the change of talking to the United States or not talking to the United States.

Q Are there pressures on Mr. Gorbachev to come back with substantial agreements? What are the pressures on him --

AMBASSADOR HARTMAN: No. It's wrong, I think, to think of them having pressures on them in that sense. I think he wanted before his Congress, which comes up -- and that is, after all, the meeting that's going to confirm him in the leadership -- he wanted before that time to show that he was capable of dealing with outside problems. So, he's had a series of meetings: Eastern Europe, India, France, and now the United States. And that will -- he will be able to come back and say, "I am a leader of this country who is able to deal with great foreign powers."

And if he can make some progress in the kinds of things that he's going to be talking about, all the better. But the main thing is that Congress and getting his own people in place and getting new policies in the country.

Q The major emphasis before the meeting is on how this will change relations between the U.S. and the USSR for the better. But isn't there the possibility that it could, in fact, intensify distrust and suspicion?

AMBASSADOR HARTMAN: It could. It could. But I think what we're all looking for is the possibility not of any great breakthroughs, but just the possibility that we can give some little impulse to these negotiations that have virtually been stalemated on very important matters from arms control to regional problems to some of our bilateral matters; and in the process perhaps have a little better understanding of each other's position and have some direct talks between leaders.

Our President has wanted very much to see Soviet leaders for some time. Three Soviet leaders have died during his term of office. Now, he has an opportunity to meet someone who has come to power who's now just beginning to make his policies. And I think the President wants to have a good talk with him and see if he can't influence him in a more positive direction.

Q Would you expect that this will be the first of two

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or several meetings between Mr. --

AMBASSADOR HARTMAN: Normally, I would expect that this would be the first of a series, yes. It's hard to say. We're not going in with any specific proposal, but it makes sense. The President, even before this, wanted the meeting to take place in the United States. We've left the United States five times since the last Soviet leader has come to the United States for such meetings.

And I think it particularly important that Mr. Gorbachev has some direct exposure to our country because in the conversations that we've had with him, I think, he exhibits a lack of knowledge about our country.

Q In what way? What does he say about the United States?

AMBASSADOR HARTMAN: Well, I think some of the things that he says about the United States sound as though he believes the propaganda, you know, that we're a nation of bums sleeping on grates, and tremendous unemployment, and an economic system that's not functioning. And I think it'd be a good idea for him to see our country, warts and all.

Q Mr. Ambassador, my final question: You've spent some time with Mr. Gorbachev?

AMBASSADOR HARTMAN: Yes, not alone; I only go in with him when world leaders are there with me.

Q Well, once the meeting between Mr. Gorbachev and the President is over, what kind of man do you think President Reagan will think he has seen? How will Gorbachev present himself?

AMBASSADOR HARTMAN: Well, I think he will see him as a very vigorous man; fairly conservative, orthodox man in terms of the Soviet system; a man who has a sense of humor on occasion.

Q Easy to talk with?

AMBASSADOR HARTMAN: I would say so, yes. Argumentative -- he shows his lawyer background, I think, at times. But I think the President will enjoy talking to him.

Q Mr. Ambassador, thank you.

AMBASSADOR HARTMAN: You're welcome.

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