

Ronald Reagan Presidential Library
Digital Library Collections

This is a PDF of a folder from our textual collections.

Collection: Press Secretary, White House Office of
the: Press Releases and Press Briefings
Folder Title: Press Briefings: #1622A 11/21/1985
Box: 40

To see more digitized collections visit:

<https://reaganlibrary.gov/archives/digital-library>

To see all Ronald Reagan Presidential Library inventories visit:

<https://reaganlibrary.gov/document-collection>

Contact a reference archivist at: reagan.library@nara.gov

Citation Guidelines: <https://reaganlibrary.gov/citing>

National Archives Catalogue: <https://catalog.archives.gov/>

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary
(Geneva, Switzerland)

BACKGROUND BRIEFING
BY
SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL
ON GENEVA SUMMIT

November 21, 1985

Hotel Intercontinental
Geneva, Switzerland

11:20 A.M. (L)

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: John?

Q Do you think that the meeting here and the limited agreements, but nonetheless, agreements that you were able to achieve has helped diffuse the strategic defense obstacle as an obstacle in the relationship to other agreements as well, and was the President in any way able to help achieve his goal of making the Soviet leader understand American motivations in the strategic defense area?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The question is did the exchanges on SDI diffuse that as an issue and foster any better understanding and lessened Soviet concern about it. The discussions were very lengthy and thorough, both with regard to the nature of Soviet concerns as well as the motives behind the President's concept. Soviet concerns were clearly that this system, over time, would encompass offensive systems in space. The President sought to dispell that by pointing out that, first of all, our labs would be open so that they could be confident that the program would not develop in an offensive direction; and, secondly, that over time we could, he believed, work out an arrangement for sharing of the defensive technologies.

From our point of view, the President stressed his very apparent view that reliance upon offensive deterrence would, over time, become less and less stable and that his motive was to move away from that and toward defense. He, as well, pointed out that they could not reasonably expect us to stand idly by given the scale of their own program and also that we faced a military problem which had to be addressed -- that is, the imbalance in offensive nuclear power, that to compensate, defense was essential. But all three of these reasons were absorbed.

I think the Soviet Union did -- finally, to answer your question -- go away with a much better appreciation that this was not some political visionary whim; it was a matter of very deep conviction. And I think that's reflected in what I saw of General Secretary's press conference that's now underway.

Q Was there any agreement to continue briefing one another, such as General Abramson when he briefed the Soviet team here in Geneva? Any agreement to continue exchanging what both sides are doing on strategic defense?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: That offer, which has been made a number of times, was made again and it was acknowledged as well as our openness to a thorough exchange in Geneva on SDI, its relation to offense and, over time, an exchange on the transition arrangements if we believe feasible.

Yes?

MORE

Q Sir, can you tell us if there are any understandings between the two governments or between the two leaders which are of a secret nature and which are not here represented in these documents?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No.

Owen?

Q No, you won't tell us?

Q No, you won't tell us or not there aren't.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Excuse me -- no, there are none.

Owen?

Q Could you share with us --

Q -- question?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Excuse me? The question was were there any secret agreements made not included in what has been made public, the answer is no.

Q Would you share with us some of the personal dynamics of the meeting? How did they get along personally, what was the President's personal assessment of the Chairman and, specifically, did he believe that he was able to reduce some of the mistrust, suspicion and hostility that he had said going in that he hoped to achieve?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The question is could I describe some of the atmosphere, the -- well, texture, if you will, of the rapport and did they succeed in dispelling any of the suspicion and distrust that has existed. This summit, I think, was unique in the extent to which the two leaders spent so much time without subordinates present and in those sessions on very personal level of exchange, each of them seeking to convey

their sense of their country's values and specifically the lack of hostility expressed in those values toward the other country. Citing as backup for that, President Reagan mentioned our history, right after the war, when our own power and prevailing influence throughout the world could have been expressed in an effort in imperialism or to dominate, it wasn't. And talking about the family as an institution, talking about concern for their own children, grandchildren, succeeding generations, but, as well, treating what they thought about the other country and why it was that they were concerned about the appearance of a threat, each -- on the part of -- or each with regard to the other. And then a to-and-fro on that and why our fears of them aren't founded, vice versa. But all of this expressed with a human quality that I won't say you seldom find in diplomacy, you do, but it seemed to me rather to outweigh the policy dimension of the exchanges here. And to the extent that the quality of leadership does effect the thinking of each of the other leaders, this was a particularly rich meeting.

I suppose most of you consider me a cynic, and I guess I am, but I think that this was a very useful outcome of this meeting. There were a number of kind of unique features of this summit. You see, if you stand off and look at this joint statement, that for the first time, in my recollection, going back to '71, '72, you have something that focuses on each of the real dimensions of the relationship, regional issues and human rights and bilateral, as well as arms control. Historically, arms control has been kind of first and foremost, and that's not the case here, really.

Q Follow on that, what is there on human rights and bilateral --

Q Just to follow -- can you say whether the President expressed any change in his attitudes or perceptions about Soviet intentions?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: He acknowledged what the General Secretary had said, said that he found it impressive as a moving statement of apparent conviction, that he had to make decisions as a leader based upon capabilities of the other side, but that he took very seriously what the General Secretary had said and would think about it.

Q Did he teach?

Q -- of philosophical exchange extend into their discussions on Afghanistan and human rights issues? And can you tell us a little bit about those specifically?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Did this quality of the exchange extend into the discussion on human rights and on Afghanistan and can I treat the substance of those issues? With regard to human rights, that quality was very much a part of it, although I won't treat because -- well, the -- the way in which this issue is to be handled is to -- is I think taking on greater seriousness and prospect of success, but I'm afraid I can't talk about it. I -- that's -- and I apologize.

Q How about --

Q -- the Soviet --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Now, on Afghanistan -- just a moment, please. On Afghanistan, this same quality did extend to the treatment of it. And I think, frankly, you may see that issue treated more intensively and yet less visibly than it has been. And I think there is some promise there, but that's a personal view.

Q A change in their position? Some new development coming?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I wouldn't say that. Bill's question is, was there a change in their position made explicit? No, there wasn't. An apparent interest in a political resolution of it? Yes.

Robin.

Q -- spokesman --

Q What about --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Just a moment. I'll get to you in a moment.

Q What about Soviet violations? Was that mentioned and how much was it emphasized and what was Gorbachev's reaction?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The question is, were Soviet violations of arms control mentioned? If so, what was the reaction? How extensively was it treated? Yes, it was treated. In fact that probably more than anything else will express the candor, which is another value of this session. Before, where you do prenegotiate quite a lot in the '72 and '74, '73 summits -- you kind of come and it's all done and this time there really was a very candid expression and that is, I guess, what realism is all about. On this issue, for example, compliance was cast as fundamental if there is going to be any arms control in the future, and that the Soviet Union says it wants arms control, but they should know that politically you cannot sustain it in the United States if you don't comply. That isn't going to be sustained if this record is continued.

Yes, it was very much on the agenda.

Q What was Gorbachev's reaction to that?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, he noted what we had said -- didn't accept or reject really, nor rebut seriously what had been said.

I'll get over here next.

Q On arms control, why shouldn't you be disappointed that you don't have more than a restatement of past positions?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: On arms control, why should we not be disappointed that we didn't have any more than just a reaffirmation of past statements?

Well, first of all, for the two leaders to come, exchange very thoroughgoing presentations by each, get a much better feel for what was important in the several arms control areas -- what were our priorities, theirs, our problems with theirs and vice versa. It was a very solid discussion as a consequence of that. For those two, as distinct from spokesmen or subordinate officials to say, yes, our policy is 50 percent reductions but we two together agree on that and in addition will jointly charge our delegations in Geneva to get serious and accelerate to get what I think is a qualitative change in the importance that each attached to that 50 percent outcome that they wanted. And they wanted to get done quickly.

In addition, the INF agreement as an interim agreement, separated from the other issues, while acknowledged in Paris by the other side, and an objective of ours -- again it was the principals saying, "I join you in committing to this outcome," and record it in Geneva. And it lends an importance to it that it didn't have before, I think.

Q Yes, but there is no change in their position on forward-based systems, there is no change in counting the British and

MORE

French -- in other words, in the substance of the areas that made, you have always said, the 50 percent offer misleading in some ways because it's 50 percent of what? We still have those same definitional problems.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The question is, don't the differing interpretations on each side still exist? Yes, they do. Each side understands better why. And I think that there probably is going to be some evolution in the thinking on their side. But I couldn't pretend to you that we've dispelled some of their misgivings. No, it's -- I think if there is a value here it is in that both sides in November, unlike August, have focused their attention and intend to really engage seriously and try to make some headway.

And I draw your attention, too, to what is not in this joint statement. Does anybody in this room believe that you would come here and find a joint statement that said we commit to the United States agenda without detracting from -- or expressing even -- Soviet judgments about SDI, I think it's a little bit astonishing.

Q Earlier in the questioning on SDI you --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: And impressive, and I've got a lot of other adjectives if you give me a chance.

Q You used the phrase "our labs are open." What do you mean by that, and at what point do you envision a sharing of SDI technology?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: What do we intend by open labs and what do we envision in the way of sharing SDI technology?

The concept of open laboratories is

a concept for exchanging information between those involved and the research programs in each country, so that each side gains an appreciation of the technologies that are being explored, promising avenues, the pace and quality in general of the programs, and some confidence that those programs are as we describe them and they describe theirs, and not going in other directions or at a pace in quality that would facilitate breakout and unilateral advantage.

With regard to sharing of the technology, that's something that will only mature over time, as each side develops its thinking on that. And I think it's premature now because each of these technologies is at a fairly primitive state. And you can't really know yet when, how to do that. But that's why we've been urging; let's start talking about this in Geneva and through this "open labs" concept.

Frank?

Q Do they accept open labs?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I'll get back there next.

Q Do they accept the idea of open labs?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, they acknowledged it. They seemed to find it appealing. They didn't say, yes, we sign on, we'll be there next Thursday -- (laughter) -- but they did seem to find it a credible point of view.

Let me put a plug in here, too. I'm very proud of the people that worked last night all night long on this, and you ought to know. Richard Perle, Bob Linhard, Roz Ridgway, the latter in the chair, really brought this thing together, and they're responsible.

John?

Q Women don't need to know about throwweights.

Q Before the summit began, you said they were going to spend approximately 15 minutes together in private one-on-one sessions. And you have said the personal dynamics of this were very, very important to it. Can you explain the evolution of this, how surprised the staff was? Was it something the President had in the back of his mind from the beginning? Can you give us some background on how it evolved?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Question is: In referring to the length of time and the special importance of the one-on-one sessions and the outcome, I said that we were surprised and that this was unusual for summits -- why did this happen?

Well, I would think that many who have covered the President longer than I would perhaps comment better on it. I have always found that the President has placed an enormous importance upon personal leadership, and sincerity, and persuasion -- his own powers of persuasion -- to be a very important quality in shaping attitudes of other leaders.

And it was kind of interesting -- when George and I came back from Moscow, we did not bring off any significant measure of agreement. And it seemed to me that the President surely wasn't satisfied, but he was kind of saying, well, it's time for the first string and kind of looking forward to this, counting quite a lot on his own ability to carry off by debt of persuasion and grasp of his concepts and facts a qualitative change in the relationship.

Jerry?

Q What did each of the leaders ask the other to do

with regard to Nicaragua? And what did either one of them agree to do?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Question is: What did the two leaders ask of the other with regard to Nicaragua, what they wanted the other to do? And what, if anything, did either commit to do?

The President gave quite a long presentation -- probably 20 minutes or so -- on his view of the Sandinista Revolution and how it had been subverted and the significance for us not only in that country, but regionally for the high visibility of Soviet advisers, as well as the scale of their assistance programs; and that this was intolerable, that the United States position, unlike Afghanistan and other places of Soviet involvement, was no-combat involvement, supporting an outcome of self-determination, pluralism, but believing strongly that those who espouse that outcome in the country deserved our support, freedom, and democracy, and that our goals were -- the four goals we've stated so often publicly -- that the Sandinista government stop exporting revolution, lower the level of its military, discontinue its military relationship with foreign military suppliers -- Cuba and the Soviet Union -- and move toward pluralism.

The General Secretary acknowledged what he had said, and, as was typical in many areas, acknowledged, made one or two points that -- we have differing views on these things -- in that specific instance, did not commit to do anything in particular, went away with a better understanding, I think.

Barry.

Q Yes. Just the day, I think, before Mr. Gorbacnev and the President sat down, you couldn't find a summit in the past that you had anything positive to say about. You went through about a half dozen of them and said they all produced bad results, invasion of Czechoslovakia, etc. What turned you folks around on summitry? Why now are you in favor of three summits in three years?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The question is that within the past week I have been reported as dismissing the significance of summits and being disparaging of their value. I don't think that's true. I acknowledge that there have been good summits and bad summits, and, therefore, the notion of a summit has no intrinsic worth one way or the other.

Q I didn't say you disparaged summits, but I think if you go back to the record, you didn't cite one summit in anything but a negative way. So my question was, a day before the meetings began, you spoke of at least a half a dozen summits and spoke only of Soviet actions subsequent to those summits that you thought were bad, were negative.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICIAL: That's a fair point.

Q And what has turned you around to be in favor of three summits in three years? Is the President now a detentist?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: It's a fair point. The reason that I said what I said was that I think it's fair to judge that expectations coming into a meeting like this -- perhaps it's hope more than expectation -- is that they will produce something worthwhile. My point was simply to say there may and there may not. History doesn't give us much optimism that they necessarily do. This one may.

Now, that said, we have secondly stressed that whether it does or not isn't really measured today or tomorrow, but in whether or not behavior changes over time, and we still feel that way.

Finally, we do believe, however, that there is value in exchanging views at the top between these two countries, and look forward to doing so periodically in the years ahead. That, too, doesn't express that those exchanges will necessarily produce dramatic change, but that there is some value in that, as long as people look at it that way and not expect that it's going to reach the millennium just because of a meeting-qua-meeting.

Q Do you think at future summits you might get a single concrete agreement on even minor issues before these countries?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Do we believe that at a future summit we might get any kind of agreement on anything? Well, I think we might get it without a summit, that we might get them between summits, and the summits might or might not be a factor in that. Again, it isn't the meeting, except in the sense of advancing understanding on both sides, that plays the role.

Now, over time, in this relationship, which is only now once more starting, we may return to the practice in the early '70s -- I don't predict this, I'm saying it's possible -- in which summits were very carefully prepared because you could prepare them. You had a habit of discourse, which we have not had. If we are successful in

starting that now, then between now and the next one we may find it possible to prepare, in the way you imply, with significant outcomes reported at the time.

MR. SPEAKES: Let's give the last question --

Q -- the Soviet spokes --

MR. SPEAKES: Hey, hey. Cool it. Let's give the last question to Mort Kondracke, so you can file.

Q There were four very long sessions between the President and Mr. Gorbachev. Can you tell us what the subject matter was of each of those four sections? Did they -- That's my question.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: There were four, long private sessions, one-on-one, can I tell you what the substance was of each. Short answer is no. The --

Q The subject matter.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Subject matter. Subject matter of the first was this foundation exchange in which they exchanged their views on the President's part of where the United States is, what our international interests are, now we see the Soviet Union and now we should relate to each other in the future.

That foundation then led to exchanges privately that afternoon on strategic deterrence -- the concept as it has been, as it has evolved, and as we think it has been undermined, and the relationship of strategic defense to that. The following day a private session dealt with a couple of things: more arms control, plus human rights. And the final one, I would say, was more a summing up -- that looking back we had had a number of disagreements, that each -- kind of the summary judgments of what had impressed them about this meeting, what had been good and bad, what we ought to think about before we meet again, and some of the human elements that each of them felt, which I wouldn't comment on.

Thanks very much.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END

11:46 A.M. (L)