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THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

BACKGROUND BRIEFING
BY A SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL
ON THE PRESIDENT'S MEETING
WITH THE SOVIET FOREIGN MINISTER AT THE UN
September 21, 1984
The Briefing Room

2:25 P.M. EDT

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I thought for just a few moments I'd start off with the President's perspective on the meeting next week with the Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union to discuss briefly the preparations for it and the President's views of what can be accomplished.

The President believes that this meeting provides an opportunity for the United States and the Soviet Union to renew high-level dialogue that can lead to a re-engagement between us and a serious discourse devoted to the resolution of problems, problems across the board, resolution of disagreements on regional issues, importantly, on arms control issues and in bilateral issues.

Surely, from our side as well, it will be an opportunity to stress our continuing concern over the individual rights as they are restricted in the Soviet Union.

In preparing for this session, the President has spent quite a long time in reviewing the record of U.S.-Soviet relations in the post-war period, but particularly in the past 15 years.

He expects that, similarly, the Soviet Union has probably examined this same history and reached their own set of conclusions.

For his own part, he has reached several conclusions, again, about what has happened and how we have been successful, the reasons for when we have been unsuccessful and has applied those into forging the way in which he will deal with the Foreign Minister when he's here.

For example, he believes that there has been a fundamental change in the United States that has taken place in the past 10 years. There has been for two centuries a very deep and enduring sentiment for isolationism in this country. But he believes that, for many reasons, on the one hand our growing appreciation in this country of the importance of overseas markets for our own prosperity; separately but related, our reliance upon overseas resources, that we have important interests overseas, consequently, that it will be necessary for the United States to sustain an activist role in international affairs for the foreseeable future and that to do so requires a sustained investment of part of our national treasure and a steadiness which the American people are willing to support over time.

The acceptance that we have important interests leads to, he believes as well, an acceptance of how we can best promote those interests, specifically, that we are best served by associating with other like-minded countries in maintaining

MORE

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strong alliances and we intend to do so. In addition, that we have an important interest in seeking to foster the stable development of less developed countries and that we must be prepared to invest a certain amount of our treasure in that, more than we have.

He believes as well that there are, clearly, fundamental differences between ourselves and the Soviet Union, that their purposes are not the same in the international community, that for their part, they seek to expand their influence beyond their borders and will continue to do so.

In short, that we face in the coming years a competition between ourselves and the Soviet Union and that as a responsibility of the leaders of the United States, now and in the years ahead, to assure that this is a peaceful competition.

He has a number of ideas as to how right now we can begin to put in place mechanisms for us and approaches on each of the several issues that separate us to assuring that this will remain a peaceful competition.

Now, these are a few of his own conclusions. He expects the Soviets have drawn their own. And he has ruminated with us in the past few weeks on what he believes is the Soviet perception of us, or what may be.

For example, he thinks that it's likely that the Soviet Union looked at the history of this same period, particularly that in the 1970's, as a period of considerable decline by the West in general, the United States in particular. He imagines that they focused upon such events as the way that we emerged from Vietnam and all that did to call into question the reliability of the United States and its ability to define an interest, define a strategy and pursue it to a successful conclusion.

He expects that separately, they probably looked at the dramatic change in the strategic balance that occurred over the past twenty years, but which, by the mid-'70's, resulted in a condition of approximate parity and saw that as a sign of declining health of our society generally. And probably, he thinks, that they examined the history of the late '70's and saw that our economic decline was demonstrative of our inability to solve problems and, as well, promised that our ability to sustain an activist role overseas was weakening.

Q -- Reagan campaign speech.

Q -- Kissinger --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The President believes that in the past four years they have seen the substantial renewal which has gone on in the country, but probably that they doubt we can sustain it. And that probably they believed it was worth, and they could afford, an investment of four years or so in seeking to change that policy and that that is what has been at the foundation of their confrontational approach.

At any rate, whether they believe these things or not, he believes it important that he give them his perspective of this country's intentions in the years ahead, that is, that he is confident this country can sustain an activist role overseas, that it will sustain effective deterrence, that this is

MORE

a society which is now prepared for leadership in the world and peaceful competition.

And then, we'll get to really the second part of the meeting, which is, how do we do that? The President, as I said, has a number of ideas about how we can get started. You'll recall that by this time the Foreign Minister will have met with the Secretary of State and they will have gone over the pending agenda of disagreements on regional issues from Afghanistan to southern Africa, Central America and so forth, bilateral issues from maritime agreements to boundaries to cultural exchanges .

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and so forth and arms control. The President expects the conversation -- at least from his side -- it will focus on arms control. And his purposes will be twofold: first to make clear that since their walkout we have used the time to advantage, to examine our own positions in START and INF, and the last four and half months in anti-satellite systems; and that we have come away from that with an array of flexible positions and a readiness to engage on these issues with great flexibility. That is not to say that he will in this session get down into the detail of saying, "Here is a new offer in this area, and here is another one in this one," but to say that, if together we can find a way to resume this discourse, you will find that we are prepared to deal constructively with your concerns in a very flexible fashion. And, finally, he will say, "Let's figure out how to do that."

Now, while we have been looking at these areas of START, INF and so forth, the Soviets have expressed an interest in anti-satellite systems. Last year, the President as well spoke publicly about the value of conducting research to examine whether in the decades ahead we might be able to place greater reliance upon defensive systems in strengthening deterrence.

These are important issues. So are offensive systems. He believes it reasonable that we consider where we are to clear the air and to make clear that we are prepared to discuss all of these issues and that we invite their own proposals on how we can begin to do that.

Well, I could give you a lot more wisdom, but why don't I take your questions for a while.

Q Well, what's different about this approach than we've had in terms of -- we have said we'll deal with anti-satellites and the offensive weapons -- what's so new?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: We're going to have a Russian to listen to it.

Q Well, you've been talking to them now since June, haven't you?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, I think that we have been trying to get them to listen for well beyond that, Helen, but they --

Q But is there anything new in this?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, I've just said there's quite a lot that's new in our substantive positions on each of these issues. And so that we can get to an exchange on those, we need, first, their agreement to entertain it at all.

Q Is it your belief or hope that this meeting would lead to another session either with Gromyko or to a meeting between the President and Chernenko or another Soviet leader? What's the -- where do you want to see it go in terms of the -- kind of process?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: First of all, there's been a long hiatus here where there hasn't been frequent high-level discourse. Now that that is occurring, we think it's probably necessary first to clear the air of misunderstandings and to establish foundations. After all, this is the first time the Foreign Minister has met with the President personally to see where he intends the country in the years ahead and how he feels about dealing with the Soviet Union -- and to put out some ideas from our side on how we can do that.

Now, when that happens, the Soviet Union's going to have to think about that, and they will. And I expect that they will come

MORE

back to tell us what they think about it. And I would expect that to be at the ministerial level. Now, at that point, I would think the final step -- and reasonably soon -- would be to say, "Okay, we agree on this format and that and let's start again."

Q Let's start what?

Q -- some --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: But I wouldn't think --

Q Start what?

Q -- again.

MORE

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Resume a habit of high level discourse in each of these regional and functional areas -- disagreements on regions, disagreements on arms control, disagreements on bilateral issues, and so forth.

Q Some senior administration official or other has evidently suggested that this could lead, through contacts not necessarily by the President, to a summit meeting, or series of summit meetings on the Ford Vladivostok model. Do you look for something like that to come out of this somewhere down the line?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I really wouldn't. And that wasn't me.

Q Wrong official.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, it is the wrong official. I don't think that's likely.

Q Can I just --

Q You don't think -- excuse me, I want to follow -- you don't think summit meetings are likely as a result of that process?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Bill -- I'm sorry -- good point. I think that the President's position, both on wanting an outcome that would justify a summit meeting, is, as it always has been, supportive. But that he believes that there has to be some groundwork established by ministerial level and other subordinate exchanges beforehand. And he still feels that way.

Bernie?

Q Are you -- is it your intention, in other words, to suggest more regular meetings at the Shultz-Gromyko level, such as there was in the past, when they would discuss all the outstanding issues other than this once-a-year-at-the-U.N. type of meeting?

And, when you're talking about specific differences on regional and bilateral -- are you talking about the type of meetings we've had in the past, such as having an Assistant Secretary talk about Afghanistan, or an Assistant Secretary talk about Southern Africa -- is that the type of -- which were held periodically. Not very recently, I guess.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: We're talking about both, really. And, in fact, as thorough-going a practice of exchanges between our officials and theirs, at all levels, as we can get. So we're talking about not just the Secretary of State, but perhaps between the Ministers of Defense, Agriculture, and all of the other Cabinet officers and counterparts as well as subordinates in support of that.

Q If the President said -- believes that Vietnam was viewed by the Soviets as a measure of U.S. decline, where does the Lebanese policy fit in? And the failure of that earlier this year?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I don't accept your characterization, and I don't think that, for the Soviet Union, the experience of seeing U.S. diplomacy succeed and have the PLO leave Lebanon, they view entirely as a loss, indeed, as a loss for their side.

Q But, but --

MORE

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I think that, too, since that time, the clear evidence that when problems occur in the Middle East, whether it's in the Gulf, whether it's in the Red Sea, that the countries of the area turn to the United States, not the Soviet Union.

Q But then you are saying that -- putting Lebanon aside -- that the President believes the Soviets now see a renewed America, renewed policy, a renewed strength -- in other words, that theory of rearming the country and refurbishing its foreign policy -- finds us at a point where they now well believe that they have to deal with us. Is that his view?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes.

Q May I expand on that?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Steve?

Q Because I was confused by the way you characterized the period of decline before -- in your introduction. You said that this period of decline led to a situation in the mid-1970's of -- using your words -- "approximate parity." And then this led to economic decline. But, I believe, that in the late seventies that military began, and the President did not view the mid-seventies as a time of parity, but rather of inferiority. Did you mean to suggest that the President has now reassessed that recent history? You seemed to emphasize that he'd spent a lot of time going over the last 10 or 15 years. Has he now reassessed that period, and now come to think that what he used to think was inferiority by the United States was, in fact, parity?

MORE

And, secondly, what does he think exists now, parity or superiority, compared to what it was a few years ago?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: First of all, when I ticked off those issues, I was saying that we assume that they, the Soviets, not us, the Soviets may have looked at those three different outcomes of the '70's and seen them as indicators of decline. So if in their perception, when they saw the evolution of the balance to a position of parity, that, as a reflection of trends, their improvement and our decline, they liked those trends and believe that those reflected decline on our part.

Separately, the economic decline, and our apparent inability to cope with it in the late '70's, was a similar manifestation of a society in decline.

Now, that doesn't have anything to do with President Reagan's judgment on what the balance may have been. In fact, however, if you research the President's record, his own estimate in the mid-'70's of what the current state of affairs was is that there was rough parity and that we were --

Q Is that wrong, to have parity?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, I didn't say it was wrong at all.

Q Oh?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: In fact, that's what has reaffirmed that he seeks to preserve today.

Q Well, I'm sorry, but this is more than an academic interest, I think. Does the President think that there was rough parity then when he took office? And, if so, what does he think exists now? Or does he think we were behind when he took office and what does he think now? This would appear to be important in shedding light on his frame of mind as he goes into these important talks.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The President believed that the -- that there existed effective deterrence at the time that he came into office, but that the trends of having no modernization in U.S. systems promised to erode that position to one of our own vulnerability. That's just simple logic.

And it's for that reason that -- to preserve a position of parity and stability that he proposed the modernization of the U.S. triad.

Q Earlier you said that the President has some ideas which he'd like to put on the table as to how to clear up the misunderstandings that exist now. I'm a little confused as to what those ideas are, and, specifically, is he going to propose some sort of regular or periodic meetings at the ministerial level?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes. Now, that is one of probably a half dozen ways of renewing exchanges on this agenda. You can have ministerials exchange your views on it. You can have delegations, perhaps a new kind of delegation on both sides, strike up a discourse on some part of your arms control agenda.

MORE

You may take several different approaches and his point is here that we want to find those. We're not insisting on any particular one. But we have a panaply of possibilities. We'd like to know what they think about it, so that we can then close quickly on how to do it.

Q Well, are you also then looking or considering the possibility of abandoning, say, the current INF and START forums or -- maybe as a way to get the Soviets back to talking about arms and allowing them to save face?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I'd put it the other way around. I wouldn't say that we are -- talk of doing away with anything. We want to build something and that something is a prompt, sustained dialogue on this agenda of disagreements.

Now, we are not wedded to any particular format. We want to know their ideas. We have some, but there's a lot of flexibility here.

Q -- arms control?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Bill.

Q Let me clear up the question of what it takes to lead to a summit meeting. You rejected the notion that there could be summit or summits on the model of Vladivostok. But then you seem to suggest that if the preparatory work were done, it could lead to other kinds of summits. What is it that you rejected when you said that you didn't think that would happen?

Q -- repeat the question?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The question

MORE

was that I had appeared to reject the format of a Vladivostok interim agreement approach, and if we don't have that in mind, what is wrong with it, and what do we have in mind. Well, my point was to say that in this session we're not going in and proposing and focusing upon a Vladivostok kind of get together as something we want to do right now.

At the same time, I'd have to say that if the Russians were to come up with that idea or if, in the give and take, they say that there ought to be a way station on which you mark progress and milestones, I think the President would give it very serious consideration.

I took your question originally to be, was I saying or had I said before that that was going to be a central objective of the President in this meeting, and I -- that's not so.

Q What are --

Q Does the President --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Excuse me. Right after this one.

Q What is it, or what do you find in recent Soviet behavior or actions that makes you think that they would be amenable to a regular series of ministerial meetings, including perhaps the Minister of Defense?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, I think, first of all, the experience of the past four years has been one in which their strategy hasn't produced the results that they have wanted. And this approach of confrontation and intimidation and of playing upon the fears of the American people and the allies, that it hasn't come out the way they preferred. So they may be considering another approach.

Separately but related, I think the maturing of our own programs, notably defense programs, give them a self-interest, particularly their military -- a self-interest in wanting to come to the table to seek to put caps on those very programs. And so, for both reasons, the Foreign Minister has accepted to come and have a meeting. And he has done so out of self-interest and perhaps out of the conclusion that if they are to change course, they had better first meet the President of the United States and find out from him personally how he thinks, what his priorities are, and how to deal with them.

Q Does the President --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Lou.

Q Excuse me. Does the President think that the meeting that Mr. Mondale is going to have with Mr. Gromyko the day before in any way undercuts what he's trying to do?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No.

Q Well, what is his view of the meeting -- of that meeting?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, he welcomed the statement of the former Vice President that his message would be that the United States is together in its determination to solve problems and to maintain our strength. He hasn't commented beyond that.

Q In your answer to the question over here when you said that he was not wedded to any particular formats in terms of talks with the Soviets -- but the question had started out by specifically asking about the formats of INF and START. And I want to make sure I understood what you were either suggesting or not suggesting -- I mean, did that answer go to the point of whether we would be willing to set aside the format that the arms control talks had started in?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: We think both of those are very solid, viable, valuable settings. We're talking about strategic and long-range INF systems.

We will entertain any alternative idea and give it very serious consideration.

Q Can you point to any other -- aside from the fact that Gromyko is coming here, any other signals you may have gotten to indicate that the Soviets accept your reasoning?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, I wouldn't comment on that. I am -- well, I'm sorry. You'll just have to -- I feel confident that they have a very high interest in renewing exchanges with the United States, but, I'm sorry, I wouldn't go beyond that.

It's not based on intuitive, inductive, or other logic personally. It's based on what I read and what I see each day as estimates on their thinking now.

MORE

Chris?

Q Two questions: You said in your introductory remarks, I think, that you didn't think that the President would get into the specifics of arms control although he would express a willingness to negotiate on everything flexibly. Two questions: One, are you saying that neither the President nor Shultz will be offering any new arms control proposals? And, secondly, on this question of format, is the U.S. going to offer any proposals about changes in formats or are we simply expressing the willingness to receive flexibly Soviet proposals?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, the President will make clear that, having spent virtually a year in exhaustive examination of how we might make progress, that we have some new ideas. And he will speak generically in strategic and long-range INF -- what kinds of approaches we believe may hold some promise of making progress. But he won't get into the numbers of launchers, warheads, missiles in X context to be balanced against their counterparts -- no -- because -- I mean, we could do that, but the first item of business has to be where are we going to meet, how can we do it and are you really willing to come at all.

Q If I can just follow please -- but will either he or Shultz offer in a -- you talk about generic ideas -- also new ideas about formats for negotiations? Or are you just simply saying we're going to receive what they suggest?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, I think we will have some ideas on formats.

Q On new formats?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes.

Q What are the ideas?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Excuse me?

Q Can you tell us what the new ideas are?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No. (Laughter.)

Q Well, you're on background. Why not?

Q -- now. Akhromeyev in his interview a week or so ago was complaining that in the START forum that originally the United States came in with inequitable proposals. Is the President prepared to commit himself to equitable solutions, providing equal security to both sides in his talks with Gromyko?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Akhromeyev is just wrong. And, of course, we're coming in with equitable positions that will lead to a stable balance.

Q More equitable --

Q What's he going to talk about at the U.N. meeting on Monday?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I'll be glad to give you about five minutes of wisdom on that. Is anybody else interested in that?

Q Yes.

Q Is it totally unrelated to U.S.-Soviet relations?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No.

Q -- really interested. (Laughter.)

Q Africa.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: All right. Lesley's responsible. She asked for this --

Q -- are you all going to be upset with me?

Q We'll see.

Q No.

Q It depends on what he says, Lesley.

Q Could I just ask one question before we go to that? You said that the President took a crash course in studying --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, I didn't.

Q -- post-war U.S.-Soviet relations. Then, the last ten years anyway. Did he change his mind at all on the Soviet Union in studying up on all -- what's happened in the past, which he obviously has been following through the years anyway?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, to say he's changed his mind, I think, implies different value judgments on their system. Maybe you don't intend that. If that's what you intend, no. He believes, as he has, that our systems are fundamentally different, and they're going to remain so. His purpose in this review is to determine what approaches have worked in the past and which ones haven't. He has also spent quite a lot of time on reading just literature on the Soviet Union.

Q Human events.

Q Yes, what has he --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Goes back a long time now. He asked and was given books on the Russian people --

Q Can you tell us which books?

Q What did he read? That's interesting.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The Land of the Firebird.

Q Anything else?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, there've been four or five. They're -- And he's visited with authors of pieces like this and then with people who have come and gone from the Soviet Union from out of government -- authors as well as --

MORE

Q Who wrote that?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Susanne Massey.

Oh, God, don't go calling her -- that poor woman is going to be -- (Laughter.)

Q Well, give us some other names so we --

Q What's her home number? (Laughter.)

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I think I like Lesley's question better. But it was a very broad interest and the character of the Russian people, the nature of the Soviet decision making process was a separate, turgid piece that we gave him about six months ago -- a separate piece that we gave him on the --

Q Who was the author of that one one? (Laughter.)

Q Turgid piece?

Q Detergent. (Laughter.) Have him launder his thoughts with. (Laughter.)

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: There was a separate piece that we'd given him on the current relationship between members of the Kremlin today; another piece on the role of the party versus the role of the ministries; a separate piece on the economy of the Soviet Union historically and today,

Q Has he studied up on Gromyko at all?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes.

Q What's he done on that? I read something that he had read transcripts of Gromyko meetings with other people --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Oh, that, plus these --

Q He -- he has done that?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: He has gone over those meetings with the Secretary of State. And the specific Gromyko role over the past 37 years was a specific paper that he got.

Q What was that?

Q Gromyko --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Excuse me?

Q Would you repeat that?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Chris had asked -- had he focused on Gromyko, and I said that he had -- both within the context of previous meetings with U.S. officials and Gromyko's personal stewardship in the past 37 years.

Q Did you mean transcripts? Transcripts of Gromyko?

MORE

SENIOR ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICIAL: Well, the transcripts were part of the meetings where the Secretary discussed these meetings with him. And yes, here and there, the President has read those transcripts. I couldn't certify to you that he's read every single transcript.

Q Is part of that -- understanding Gromyko's style and how he handles himself in meetings?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes.

Q What conclusions do you come to about that?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The President's conclusions I wouldn't comment upon.

Q The point is he does feel better informed now -- he does feel better informed now by this --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: This goes back. It's not a matter of the recent past. This extends over a couple of years. And there has been an acceleration of it in the past 6 months, but the President's recurring interest -- and, ever since I've been here -- each morning in meetings, those things that come out again, and again, and again, are what makes the Soviet Union tick, and what are their interests today?

Q He now knows that submarine launched missiles cannot be recalled. (Laughter.)

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Do you have a question?

Q I do -- to follow up on Helen's question about whether the President has changed his mind. In his recent studies, has he become convinced, for example, that -- that Marxism-Leninism should not be left on the ash heap of history, as he said earlier, or that, perhaps, the Soviet Union is indeed not the "Evil Empire" as he once called it.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The President believes that we and the Soviet Union will compete as super powers in the years ahead for the foreseeable future. And he believes that that can be a peaceful competition. And he intends to try to make it so.

Q Could I just follow up on Jim's question first. Does the President feel it's necessary to explain to Gromyko, or somehow reassure him, that he is somehow a different person, or a changed person from the evil empire President of two years ago?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No.

You had a question -- on the side.

Q Yes. There's a reported CIA study which says the Soviet Union is not merely in decline, but deterioration. Does the President subscribe to that? Is he aware of that? And, if so, why would he want to bother at this point? (Laughter.)

Q That's a good question.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The President acknowledges the super power status of the Soviet Union, and believes that they, and we, together, have a responsibility to assure stability in the world.

Q Does that mean the CIA studies are wrong?

MR. SIMS: We're going to have to take about two more, because he has something else to --

Q You seem uncomfortable with these questions that are based -- maybe

not that one, but other questions that are based on the President's own words in the past.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I'm not a bit uncomfortable with the assertion that President Reagan has wanted, for as long as I have worked for him, to solve problems with the Soviet Union. He has adopted an approach to doing that which relies upon making clear to them that we have no hostile intent, that we intend to remain an activist power in the world, that we respect their super power status and do not seek to change their internal system and that we are prepared to reduce tensions in the world by dealing seriously with, first, the reduction of arms and discussions aimed at solving regional and bilateral problems. That is a matter of very deep conviction for him.

Q That sounds so reasonable, and yet, if you're the Soviets looking at him, as you say he has been looking at the Soviets, they hear all these other words, some of which have been quoted here today, others I could -- I don't mean to argue about it, except to ask you whether he doesn't perceive that they listen to the Ronald Reagan who has been saying all these other things all these years. And does he not feel some responsibility for that?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, two points, Sam. I take your point, but I think there are two factors that bear.

First of all, the President's public speeches, notably, the January speech of this year, countless other statements since that time, are on the record for the Soviet leaders to see.

Q May I interject? Could the Soviets not be excused for thinking that the tone of those speeches, which changed so markedly in January of this year, have something to do with the fact that there's going to be an election in the United States? I don't mean to be disputatious; but, for heaven's sake, as Sam points out, the public record is so much on the other side.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, the public record of the -- Well, I'll back up. The private record of what his gut intentions are, what he senses is -- what he believes must be the legacy of his stewardship before leaving office has always been, from the very earliest days, a reduction in the level of nuclear weapons and making peace in one or two other parts of the world. Now, that is something that is unambiguously clear.

Now, I was about to make a second point on Sam's original question. And that is that I think any serious student of the Soviet Union and of its decision-making process and what influences it toward being hostile or conciliatory is just what they tell it it is. And that is the international correlation of forces. The Soviet Union doesn't make decisions based upon the level of rhetoric in any country. They see those things as tactical considerations at most. And for them, their view of the United States and of how to deal with it is conditioned fundamentally on that correlation of forces.

And so I don't believe that there has been any ambiguity in Soviet thinking about how this country -- whether or not this country is willing to deal with them. They know very well that we're willing to deal with them.

Q Can I go back to Chris Wallace's question --

MR. SIMS: Don, we're going to have to stop here and I'm sorry.

Q What about the UN question that I asked about 10 minutes ago?

Q The UN speech. You were going to give --

Q Why do you have to go?

Q Can you do it --

MR. SIMS: He has to go. He has a schedule. I'm sorry.

Q Just give us a quick rundown.

MR. SIMS: You know, we've been here for 45 minutes. Good questions are worthwhile --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I --

MR. SIMS: -- can't keep all afternoon.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I apologize. I talk slowly. But if it's any solace to you, the Secretary of State's going to give an on-the-record --

MORE

Q Well, can you just give us --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: -- speech --

Q When?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: -- on the UN speech.

Q When?

Q Sunday.

Q Is it mainly U.S.-Soviet relations? Is it mainly disarmament? Can you characterize --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: It is about half U.S.-Soviet relations and the other half is an expression of the optimism, the confidence that the President feels that we have the instruments at hand. We and the other country members of the United Nations to solve problems on a very broad scale -- social, economic, as well as security problems. And he goes, in a short excursion, over the several regional disagreements that exist today and talks to how we can make some headway, and then focuses on the Soviet Union. And he -- in that context, he has three principal themes; that is, the imperative of reducing nuclear arms, the importance of solving regional disagreements, and the opportunities there for broadening bilateral exchanges between us. And he closes with a -- I must say -- uplifting bit of eloquence on how promising the future is.

Q Any new proposals?

Q Does he have anything new --

Q Any new proposals?

Q -- any new proposals?

Q Go for the gold?

Q Four more years?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END

3:10 P.M. EDT