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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary
(Geneva, Switzerland)

For Immediate Release

November 18, 1985

INTERVIEW WITH NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISER
ROBERT C. MCFARLANE
BY NBC'S "TODAY SHOW"

Hotel Intercontinental
Geneva, Switzerland

9:03 A.M. (L)

Q When President Reagan meets General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev tomorrow, one of the men responsible for the planning of the summit will be at the summit table. He is National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane, who joins us this morning from the White House Press Center, and good morning, Mr. McFarlane.

MR. MCFARLANE: Good morning, Bryant. How are you?

Q I'm fine sir, thank you. Earlier this morning in an interview with Dr. Georgiy Arbatov, he characterized his own summit expectations as less pessimistic than they were. How would you characterize your summit expectations?

MR. MCFARLANE: Well, President Reagan is both hopeful and optimistic. He has told us he sees this as an historic opportunity and intends to make the most of it.

Q I don't mean to look at the down side, but both sides are referring to a successful summit as a new beginning. What are the consequences of an unsuccessful summit?

MR. MCFARLANE: Well, we don't plan for that. In fact, all of our expectations are that we can establish a framework for solving problems, and the President never looks at the possibilities of failure.

Q Defense Secretary Weinberger is not here, but you and I both know that his presence is being felt. Just how angry is the President, sir?

MR. MCFARLANE: I don't think the President's angry at all. I think Cap, George, Bill Casey, myself, the Chairman -- everybody is solidly behind the President's positions here and he's very much up for this, Bryant.

Q You displayed yesterday on "Meet the Press" a bit of sensitivity to how much attention the press was playing to the letter. Without directing that, or addressing that directly, there are about 3,000 media people here. Is so much attention counterproductive to the successful ends of this summit?

MR. MCFARLANE: I think that especially before the meetings actually began, there is a natural tendency in a vacuum of news to make news when it isn't really warranted, and that's, I suppose, unavoidable; it's unfortunate.

Q Is that just something you're going to have to live with? Have you resigned yourself to it? Are you trying to limit it? What?

MR. MCFARLANE: Well, what we do is try to talk about what the issues really are, and hope that people will see the setting of this meeting in its historical perspective, and yet, I suppose that can be a little boring, and it isn't as sensational as other

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kinds of news, and yet it is a terribly significant opportunity here to set a course that is at neither extreme. The United States' experience and its relations in the past 40 years with the Russians, and that is neither cold or hostility, nor the native expectation of fundamental change in Soviet behavior, but a policy based on realism, strength and dialogue, trying to solve problems -- and the President's very, very much looking forward to this session with the General Secretary.

Q At center stage throughout this summit will be the President's Strategic Defense Initiative. It's said that Mr. Gorbachev is not coming here empty-handed. Is there anything he could bring to Geneva that might bring some SDI concessions from the President, if not in the area of research, perhaps in the area of testing or deployment?

MR. MCFARLANE: Bryant, let's remember again that the foremost urgent requirement is to deal with weapons that exist right now that threaten mankind. Those are offensive nuclear weapons. So coming here with the willingness to commit to reductions of those systems would be very, very welcome.

With regard to SDI, there are erroneous reports in, I think, Washington papers this morning that say that the President's planning to trade this away for some other concession in arms control at some future summit. That's not so. And the point is, nuclear weapons which exist ought to be reduced, and we ought to get at that right away.

Q Would you expect during the discussion, sir, to discuss a possible Soviet role in the search for Mideast peace?

MR. MCFARLANE: Well, I think that there isn't any animus toward Soviet involvement in whatever political issue if they come to that problem with a constructive idea, and for as long as the Soviet position is to support those who are most opposed to a settlement, it doesn't seem to be much basis for constructive dialogue, and so until the Soviet Union alters course, it doesn't seem to be very useful.

Q One final note. As I told you a little bit earlier, I spoke with Dr. Arbatov. I asked him at that time if there was one question he would like me to ask of you. He didn't offer a question; instead, he said, "I'd like to give him only one advice: if the President wants to make a fresh start, let him do it. Don't impede with this -- let him do it, and maybe this will give hope that the summit becomes a success. We need this success."

A comment?

MR. MCFARLANE: Well, if that expresses corresponding sense of good will and serious intent on the part of the Soviet Union, then there surely will be a successful outcome. President Reagan is here, committed to trying to chart a new direction in U.S.-Soviet relations. We have some problems with their behavior in the past. We'd like to talk those through. He believes earnestly we can make some headway, and so if there's a corresponding interest on their part, that will be the outcome.

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