

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: Press Releases and Press Briefings
Folder Title: Press Releases: 9349 11/18/1985
Box: 118

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)

Embargoed for release
at 2:00 P.M. (L),
Monday, November 18, 1985

INTERVIEW OF AMBASSADOR ARTHUR HARTMAN
BY USIA WORLDNET

November 17, 1985

Intercontinental Hotel
Geneva, Switzerland

Q Mr. Ambassador, many people seem to see these talks, being bilateral, as having only bilateral consequences. Could you give us a notion of the Western European considerations that went into the formulation of the American positions?

AMBASSADOR HARTMAN: Well, I think when the two major powers in the world get together, it is never just a bilateral event. We have very much in mind as we prepare for these talks the interests of other countries. And, indeed, they come to us with advice on the positions that we should take. We, in fact, get their advice rather formally in connection with arms control discussions, even when it's a bilateral arms control matter. For example, on the strategic arms talks, we listen very carefully to the advice that's given to us by our alliance partners and others.

But then on a subject like the intermediate missiles in Europe, that is almost an alliance negotiation. We are formally negotiating for members of the alliance. They give us direct advice, and we clear our positions with them.

So, we're very conscious of the European interests, and, indeed, the interests of other countries. One of the main subjects we're going to be discussing here is the ideas that the President put forward in his UN speech on how to treat some of these serious regional problems that have been actually conflicts in the world. We keep talking about arms control. We keep talking about the dangers of nuclear war. And we tend to forget that wars are going on today in various parts of the world. And it's worthwhile for us to try and see what we can do to stop those.

So, we will be discussing a variety of events around the world that have effects not only in Europe, but elsewhere. And we're very conscious of that and we're very anxious to get the ideas of other countries about how we should proceed.

Q Were the regional issues defined with the help of other countries?

AMBASSADOR HARTMAN: Yes, I would say so. They're defined not only with the help of other countries, but we have been discussing these in a variety of fora. For example, on the question of Afghanistan, there is a rather formal set of talks that have been going on under the leadership of the Secretary General of the United Nations.

But we feel also that we have something to contribute to that discussion, and we've discussed it twice now on a regional basis with the Soviet Union. And it is one of the subjects that I daresay will come up in the two days of talks we're going to have here.

So, we will be fixing an agenda. The agenda isn't

MORE

formal. And I think people get the idea that somehow or other you come in and you've got a 20-point agenda. Those of us who have seen these meetings in the past realize that it's an opportunity when the top leaders get together for them to really go over the whole state not only of the bilateral relationship, but the relationship of the two countries in the whole world.

Q Well, that raises the question, Mr. Ambassador, about what will actually happen at Fleur d'Eau when the two men come in with their interpreters and their respective parties. You will be among those in Mr. Reagan's party. How will they proceed? How will they know how long to talk about a particular issue? Will they read a prepared statement and then wait for a prepared response? What will happen?

AMBASSADOR HARTMAN: Well, I won't predict for you because a lot of this depends very much on the personal way that each leader wants to proceed. We've obviously had preparatory discussions. Mr. Shultz talked to the Soviet Foreign Minister at some length about the kinds of things that would be discussed and the order in which we would take them.

And I would say the main thing that we have agreed is that the first discussion which will be just the two leaders alone with their interpreters will be a general discussion of the state of the relationship. And really anything can come up in that discussion. And that discussion might actually be prolonged. I wouldn't say that there's any fixed time that that -- you don't go in with a stop watch and say, "All right, fellows, you know, it's -- time's up, you've got to move on to another item."

Q They'd have to mutually decide then to move on to another subject?

AMBASSADOR HARTMAN: They would mutually decide. This is a discussion. And I think there's a tendency -- a lot of the things that I read -- to think that these meetings get precooked, that the advisers get together and they decide exactly what their leaders are going to say. Well, if you know these two men, you would not think that that is the case because both of them have very strong wills. And both of them have some things that they want to say to each other. And I think both will listen.

And no amount of prepping beforehand and no amount of advising beforehand is going to write the script for this meeting. These people are leaders in their own countries. They have gotten there through political systems. There's a political system in the Soviet Union; this man rose through it, right up through a party system. And you don't get that far in the Soviet system without having real leadership qualities and without knowing what you're doing in that system.

Q And, yet, isn't there quite a difference here, Mr. Ambassador? President Reagan approaches these meetings from a position of great strength, personal popularity, consolidated power within Washington. Mr. Gorbachev, on the other hand, new to the job, is from all reports still consolidating his base in the Soviet Union. Might the unconsolidation of his support lead to constraints on his willingness to make a commitment?

AMBASSADOR HARTMAN: I think it's very difficult for us to predict or even to analyze what goes on within the Soviet system. I've seen so many people write the ins and outs, and, you know, it is extremely difficult to do. It is a secretive society. It is a society that does not engage in public debates the way we have just in the last few days, for example. A democracy depends on public debate for its strength. In the Soviet system, there is no public debate.

But you've got to believe that there are differing

points of view, and there are differing forces. And, certainly, as a man comes to the top leadership position, he does not come there with full power. He has to bring together a kind of coalition. And it's been that way ever since Stalin; there hasn't been absolute power. Krushchev was thrown out. We've seen three leaders die in the last few years, but certainly none of the three had consolidated his power. Brezhnev was in for 18 years, but he really made compromises with a variety of forces in his country.

I think that Mr. Gorbachev has consolidated power to an unusually high degree, given the shortness of time. He's made significant changes in the Politburo. He seems to speak with authority. I think he will be speaking with authority when he comes into this meeting. And we would look -- I mean, for us it's important -- and I'm sure the President will feel this way -- that it's better for him to be speaking with somebody who can speak with authority for the Soviet side because he has some very important things he wants to take up. And above all, these deal with the regional problems and with the arms control issues that are very important -- not just to us bilaterally, but to the whole world. And so having an authoritative spokesman on the other side is very important.

Now, we won't know for some time into the future how authoritative he is or how much he can make in the way of a commitment. Our President is very strong in that sense now. He's recently been elected with a large majority. He was sent off with a good bipartisan sendoff. He's had some successes in terms of not only the economy at home but also in terms of his defense buildup. So he comes to the Soviets ready to talk, but also with a show of strength, which I think is very good in discussions like this.

Q You'd mentioned, Ambassador Hartman, that there was no public debate in the Soviet Union about the various positions. But there certainly is public information. From your experience, what do the Russian people know about what will be discussed and what the Russian position is and what the United States' position is?

AMBASSADOR HARTMAN: Well, unfortunately, it's very skewed. If you were a foreigner, as I am, living in Moscow and you were just to turn on the television every evening and see what picture they give of the United States, it would be one that you wouldn't recognize. It is a propagandistic picture that they give to their own people.

Now, for example, when they show pictures of the United States, it's most often pictures of a very seamy side of life, which we have. But it's not typical of the United States. Yes, we have bums sleeping on grates. We have an unemployment problem. But they would not give any of the positive things. I rarely have seen a positive portrayal on their television of what's going on in my country. And I find evidence, in talking to some Soviet leaders, that they believe this. In other words, they believe their own portrayal. And I think perhaps one of the advantages of meetings such as this -- and eventually I hope the meetings will take place in our countries. In other words, I hope Mr. Gorbachev will get the opportunity to come to the United States so that he can see for himself exactly what our country's like, warts and all. I mean, that's the way we are. We like to have -- we are an open society, and we would like very much to show it that way. We would like to be able to show our society on their television.

And, frankly, I believe, also, Americans ought to be seeing more of the reality of Soviet life. I think in our newspapers, we tend to treat the day-to-day events. And we don't really get a picture of what life is really like. I think a lot of Americans think of the place as sort of falling on its face. Economically, you know, just nothing at all. That isn't true. Economically, they certainly have problems. They don't live on a -- in a standard of living up to ours. But the place is not falling on its face. They are used to lower standards of living.

Q More specifically, Mr. Ambassador, the Strategic Defense Initiative has been a primary concern of Mr. Gorbachev. He will make it a primary concern here, from all reports. What have the Soviet people been told about SDI? Has it been presented as a defensive initiative, or quite the contrary?

AMBASSADOR HARTMAN: No, no. The exact contrary. It has been presented as a plan on the part of the United States to make

possible a first strike against the Soviet Union. And this strikes a chord of belief in the Soviet people. In other words, they are more ready to believe that they are about to be attacked or that somebody would think of plotting an attack against them or that they have a lot of enemies around the outside. Because their entire history, not just as Soviets and communists, but as Russians, is of attacks from the outside. So they are a people who are more than ready to believe that kind of thing. And that's the way it's being portrayed from the propaganda point of view. And we have a very hard time, insofar as we want to influence the public in the Soviet Union, getting through to tell them that we, in fact, and the President believes very strongly that this is a morally much more defensible way to defend yourselves -- if it's possible, if our research can produce such a defense system that, instead of relying on offensive weapons, killing whole populations as a means of deterrence, that we would, instead be relying more on defense. Now, we don't know. It is still a research program.

The ways the Soviets are being told about this, it is as if there are certain forces in the United States that are planning to attack them and to gain superiority. And I think one of the advantages of our President meeting with their General Secretary is to give the President an opportunity, face to face, to dispel any lingering notions there may be in Mr. Gorbachev's mind. Because we never know how much they believe of the propaganda that we hear every day. And this, I think, is very unfortunate. I mean, one of the real differences and the problem that we have in trying to get together with the Soviet Union on anything is the difference between our open society and their closed society. It is extremely difficult for us to get through with information. It's extremely difficult for us to know what is going on in the country. Therefore, how do we verify agreements that are, in fact, signed?

And this difference between us, in terms of open and closedness is something that is going to be with us as long as that society exists. And when the President talks about major differences and how it will not be easy -- certainly not in one meeting, but not in a series of meetings -- for us to get over these differences.

One of the principal ones is this difference between an open society and a closed society.

Q In closing, Ambassador Hartman, the pundits -- and there are many of them -- seem to cleave into two camps, those who say that little can be achieved here in Geneva, there is a formula for intransigence and those who say there's an opportunity for face-to-face contact and some sort of breakthrough that will, in fact, change the very nature of East-West relations. Who's right?

AMBASSADOR HARTMAN: Neither. You can't make breakthroughs in two days. The issues are extremely difficult. I think it is worthwhile to have such a meeting. The President has wanted, in fact, to have such a meeting for some time. Three leaders in the Soviet Union have died during his first term of office and into his second term. He has thought that contact and discussion and dialogue were a good thing, and he has wanted to get that started.

Now, there is a leader who is in charge in the Soviet Union and this is the kind of thing that we think the beginning of a dialogue, the beginning of an exchange can make a difference. It won't cure all the problems. It certainly won't cure them overnight. But we approach this with a very realistic desire to build something more constructive.

Q Thank you, Mr. Ambassador.

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary
(Geneva, Switzerland)

Embargoed for release
at 2:00 P.M. (L),
Monday, November 18, 1985

INTERVIEW OF AMBASSADOR ARTHUR HARTMAN
BY USIA WORLDNET

November 17, 1985

Intercontinental Hotel
Geneva, Switzerland

Q Mr. Ambassador, many people seem to see these talks, being bilateral, as having only bilateral consequences. Could you give us a notion of the Western European considerations that went into the formulation of the American positions?

AMBASSADOR HARTMAN: Well, I think when the two major powers in the world get together, it is never just a bilateral event. We have very much in mind as we prepare for these talks the interests of other countries. And, indeed, they come to us with advice on the positions that we should take. We, in fact, get their advice rather formally in connection with arms control discussions, even when it's a bilateral arms control matter. For example, on the strategic arms talks, we listen very carefully to the advice that's given to us by our alliance partners and others.

But then on a subject like the intermediate missiles in Europe, that is almost an alliance negotiation. We are formally negotiating for members of the alliance. They give us direct advice, and we clear our positions with them.

So, we're very conscious of the European interests, and, indeed, the interests of other countries. One of the main subjects we're going to be discussing here is the ideas that the President put forward in his UN speech on how to treat some of these serious regional problems that have been actual conflicts in the world. We keep talking about arms control. We keep talking about the dangers of nuclear war. And we tend to forget that wars are going on today in various parts of the world. And it's worthwhile for us to try and see what we can do to stop those.

So, we will be discussing a variety of events around the world that have effects not only in Europe, but elsewhere. And we're very conscious of that and we're very anxious to get the ideas of other countries about how we should proceed.

Q Were the regional issues defined with the help of other countries?

AMBASSADOR HARTMAN: Yes, I would say so. They're defined not only with the help of other countries, but we have been discussing these in a variety of fora. For example, on the question of Afghanistan, there is a rather formal set of talks that have been going on under the leadership of the Secretary General of the United Nations.

But we feel also that we have something to contribute to that discussion, and we've discussed it twice now on a regional basis with the Soviet Union. And it is one of the subjects that I daresay will come up in the two days of talks we're going to have here.

So, we will be fixing an agenda. The agenda isn't

MORE

formal. And I think people get the idea that somehow or other you come in and you've got a 20-point agenda. Those of us who have seen these meetings in the past realize that it's an opportunity when the top leaders get together for them to really go over the whole state not only of the bilateral relationship, but the relationship of the two countries in the whole world.

Q Well, that raises the question, Mr. Ambassador, about what will actually happen at Fleur d'Eau when the two men come in with their interpreters and their respective parties. You will be among those in Mr. Reagan's party. How will they proceed? How will they know how long to talk about a particular issue? Will they read a prepared statement and then wait for a prepared response? What will happen?

AMBASSADOR HARTMAN: Well, I won't predict for you because a lot of this depends very much on the personal way that each leader wants to proceed. We've obviously had preparatory discussions. Mr. Shultz talked to the Soviet Foreign Minister at some length about the kinds of things that would be discussed and the order in which we would take them.

And I would say the main thing that we have agreed is that the first discussion which will be just the two leaders alone with their interpreters will be a general discussion of the state of the relationship. And really anything can come up in that discussion. And that discussion might actually be prolonged. I wouldn't say that there's any fixed time that that -- you don't go in with a stop watch and say, "All right, fellows, you know, it's -- time's up, you've got to move on to another item."

Q They'd have to mutually decide then to move on to another subject?

AMBASSADOR HARTMAN: They would mutually decide. This is a discussion. And I think there's a tendency -- a lot of the things that I read -- to think that these meetings get precooked, that the advisers get together and they decide exactly what their leaders are going to say. Well, if you know these two men, you would not think that that is the case because both of them have very strong wills. And both of them have some things that they want to say to each other. And I think both will listen.

And no amount of prepping beforehand and no amount of advising beforehand is going to write the script for this meeting. These people are leaders in their own countries. They have gotten there through political systems. There's a political system in the Soviet Union; this man rose through it, right up through a party system. And you don't get that far in the Soviet system without having real leadership qualities and without knowing what you're doing in that system.

Q And, yet, isn't there quite a difference here, Mr. Ambassador? President Reagan approaches these meetings from a position of great strength, personal popularity, consolidated power within Washington. Mr. Gorbachev, on the other hand, new to the job, is from all reports still consolidating his base in the Soviet Union. Might the unconsolidation of his support lead to constraints on his willingness to make a commitment?

AMBASSADOR HARTMAN: I think it's very difficult for us to predict or even to analyze what goes on within the Soviet system. I've seen so many people write the ins and outs, and, you know, it is extremely difficult to do. It is a secretive society. It is a society that does not engage in public debates the way we have just in the last few days, for example. A democracy depends on public debate for its strength. In the Soviet system, there is no public debate.

But you've got to believe that there are differing

points of view, and there are differing forces. And, certainly, as a man comes to the top leadership position, he does not come there with full power. He has to bring together a kind of coalition. And it's been that way ever since Stalin; there hasn't been absolute power. Krushchev was thrown out. We've seen three leaders die in the last few years, but certainly none of the three had consolidated his power. Brezhnev was in for 18 years, but he really made compromises with a variety of forces in his country.

I think that Mr. Gorbachev has consolidated power to an unusually high degree, given the shortness of time. He's made significant changes in the Politburo. He seems to speak with authority. I think he will be speaking with authority when he comes into this meeting. And we would look -- I mean, for us it's important -- and I'm sure the President will feel this way -- that it's better for him to be speaking with somebody who can speak with authority for the Soviet side because he has some very important things he wants to take up. And above all, these deal with the regional problems and with the arms control issues that are very important -- not just to us bilaterally, but to the whole world. And so having an authoritative spokesman on the other side is very important.

Now, we won't know for some time into the future how authoritative he is or how much he can make in the way of a commitment. Our President is very strong in that sense now. He's recently been elected with a large majority. He was sent off with a good bipartisan sendoff. He's had some successes in terms of not only the economy at home but also in terms of his defense buildup. So he comes to the Soviets ready to talk, but also with a show of strength, which I think is very good in discussions like this.

Q You'd mentioned, Ambassador Hartman, that there was no public debate in the Soviet Union about the various positions. But there certainly is public information. From your experience, what do the Russian people know about what will be discussed and what the Russian position is and what the United States' position is?

AMBASSADOR HARTMAN: Well, unfortunately, it's very skewed. If you were a foreigner, as I am, living in Moscow and you were just to turn on the television every evening and see what picture they give of the United States, it would be one that you wouldn't recognize. It is a propagandistic picture that they give to their own people.

Now, for example, when they show pictures of the United States, it's most often pictures of a very seamy side of life, which we have. But it's not typical of the United States. Yes, we have bums sleeping on grates. We have an unemployment problem. But they would not give any of the positive things. I rarely have seen a positive portrayal on their television of what's going on in my country. And I find evidence, in talking to some Soviet leaders, that they believe this. In other words, they believe their own portrayal. And I think perhaps one of the advantages of meetings such as this -- and eventually I hope the meetings will take place in our countries. In other words, I hope Mr. Gorbachev will get the opportunity to come to the United States so that he can see for himself exactly what our country's like, warts and all. I mean, that's the way we are. We like to have -- we are an open society, and we would like very much to show it that way. We would like to be able to show our society on their television.

And, frankly, I believe, also, Americans ought to be seeing more of the reality of Soviet life. I think in our newspapers, we tend to treat the day-to-day events. And we don't really get a picture of what life is really like. I think a lot of Americans think of the place as sort of falling on its face. Economically, you know, just nothing at all. That isn't true. Economically, they certainly have problems. They don't live on a -- in a standard of living up to ours. But the place is not falling on its face. They are used to lower standards of living.

Q More specifically, Mr. Ambassador, the Strategic Defense Initiative has been a primary concern of Mr. Gorbachev. He will make it a primary concern here, from all reports. What have the Soviet people been told about SDI? Has it been presented as a defensive initiative, or quite the contrary?

AMBASSADOR HARTMAN: No, no. The exact contrary. It has been presented as a plan on the part of the United States to make

possible a first strike against the Soviet Union. And this strikes a chord of belief in the Soviet people. In other words, they are more ready to believe that they are about to be attacked or that somebody would think of plotting an attack against them or that they have a lot of enemies around the outside. Because their entire history, not just as Soviets and communists, but as Russians, is of attacks from the outside. So they are a people who are more than ready to believe that kind of thing. And that's the way it's being portrayed from the propaganda point of view. And we have a very hard time, insofar as we want to influence the public in the Soviet Union, getting through to tell them that we, in fact, and the President believes very strongly that this is a morally much more defensible way to defend yourselves -- if it's possible, if our research can produce such a defense system that, instead of relying on offensive weapons, killing whole populations as a means of deterrence, that we would, instead be relying more on defense. Now, we don't know. It is still a research program.

The ways the Soviets are being told about this, it is as if there are certain forces in the United States that are planning to attack them and to gain superiority. And I think one of the advantages of our President meeting with their General Secretary is to give the President an opportunity, face to face, to dispel any lingering notions there may be in Mr. Gorbachev's mind. Because we never know how much they believe of the propaganda that we hear every day. And this, I think, is very unfortunate. I mean, one of the real differences and the problem that we have in trying to get together with the Soviet Union on anything is the difference between our open society and their closed society. It is extremely difficult for us to get through with information. It's extremely difficult for us to know what is going on in the country. Therefore, how do we verify agreements that are, in fact, signed?

And this difference between us, in terms of open and closedness is something that is going to be with us as long as that society exists. And when the President talks about major differences and how it will not be easy -- certainly not in one meeting, but not in a series of meetings -- for us to get over these differences.

One of the principal ones is this difference between an open society and a closed society.

Q In closing, Ambassador Hartman, the pundits -- and there are many of them -- seem to cleave into two camps, those who say that little can be achieved here in Geneva, there is a formula for intransigence and those who say there's an opportunity for face-to-face contact and some sort of breakthrough that will, in fact, change the very nature of East-West relations. Who's right?

AMBASSADOR HARTMAN: Neither. You don't make breakthroughs in two days. The issues are extremely difficult. I think it is worthwhile to have such a meeting. The President has wanted, in fact, to have such a meeting for some time. Three leaders in the Soviet Union have died during his first term of office and into his second term. He has thought that contact and discussion and dialogue were a good thing, and he has wanted to get that started.

Now, there is a leader who is in charge in the Soviet Union and this is the kind of thing that we think the beginning of a dialogue, the beginning of an exchange can make a difference. It won't cure all the problems. It certainly won't cure them overnight. But we approach this with a very realistic desire to build something more constructive.

Q Thank you, Mr. Ambassador.