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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary  
(Geneva, Switzerland)

Internal Transcript

November 18, 1985

BACKGROUND BRIEFING  
BY  
SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL  
ON  
GENEVA SUMMIT

Hotel Intercontinental  
Geneva, Switzerland

5:15 P.M. (L)

Q What do you think that the Soviets are likely to do if they find the President is absolutely unbudgeable on Star Wars or SDI --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: It's hard to predict what they're going to do if we stick to our position, which I assume now we are going to do. I've had no indication from any of the President's advisers advising him not to stick to that position. Our position is going to be that we're doing no more than they're doing, which is researching SDI. They're trying to find out if they can come up with a solution to a defense. We're looking to see if we can find one. They say they have not violated the ABM Treaty in their research. We don't think we are in any way. And, so, therefore, we intend to proceed.

Q Do you imagine they'll go public, make a complaint, say that --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I've got no way to judge that.

Q You've reviewed the possibilities?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, they have complained publicly. Now, that won't be news that they're complaining about our SDI publicly. How many more times do they have to do it before, you know -- everybody knows that they're objecting to it.

Q I'm just wondering what their option -- what you see as their options if you won't move at all?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: That I don't know. But I would assume that --. As a matter of fact, I guess I shouldn't even assume because I honestly don't know.

Q What is buttoned up or virtually buttoned up for the next two days in terms of agreements, understanding, post-summit, et cetera?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Nothing is buttoned up, period, fini. There are some things that are near completion and I don't want to discuss them because we want the two leaders to talk about them and to put the final blessing on them if they choose to do so.

Q These are all bilateral questions, are they?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes, yes. But you can assume which ones they are. You know the ones --

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Q Are there separate negotiations going on anywhere on these issues?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, there have been. I mean the groups have been in touch with each other.

Q No, I mean here.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, some of them have started here and are still taking place here. They're Geneva-based.

Q No, I meant of the bilaterals. Are there anything -- I mean the worker bees --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: None of us are doing -- there may be lower levels that are doing it. But a Shultz is not negotiating or a McFarlane or Regan. I'll just speak for those three guys.

Q Specifically, in terms of post-summit -- (1) instructions to the nuclear negotiators, and (2) a second summit -- where are we on those two?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Those are both possibilities, but I don't say probability, I say possibilities. They're things that, no doubt, will be discussed, but what the outcome, again, until these two men meet, it's very difficult to try to give you any degree of finality of -- I can be -- assure you that will happen, or that will happen. You can't tell.

Q What is your sense of the maximum and the minimum on this summit in terms of results?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, again, that sort of leads you to try to score something. Did you score this or did you score that? What I've been trying to convince people of is that we didn't come here to play a game, to score points and then leave on Thursday morning, declaring victory or having others declare defeat for us. That's not the kind of games we're paying. We're deadly serious on what we came here for, and that's to achieve a better understanding with the Soviets, leading eventually toward some type of disarmament, some type of lessening of tensions on these regional issues, and to encourage more person-to-person contact, and in the field of human relations, to try to reason with them to spring some more of those people loose.

Now, you can't score those things. History will have to score them for us. I'm not trying to be preachy. I'm trying to give you our frame of mind. You cannot write on Thursday, in our judgment, that this was a success or it wasn't. Just go back and take a look what history showed us about -- well, the most obvious ones; of course, Khrushchev and Jack Kennedy -- and what history told us later about it vis-a-vis what the press that day had to say in reporting it the day after that summit took place. And what we're trying to do is to approach this with a new realism that these things just aren't going to happen on Thursday; Thursday's going to be no different than Wednesday, and Friday's going to be no different than Thursday. But there may be a process changed here that eventually will lead to something.

Q Can I ask then another way around? It sounds to me if the President says all the things he said in the interviews he's going to say and all the things you guys say he's going to say. I mean, for one thing it sounds like that would take up three-quarters of the meetings right there. But aside from that --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: And Gorbachev is notorious for being long-winded.

Q -- and aside from that, it could hardly be new to

the Soviet side at this point that Ronald Reagan is going to say something like we're not going to try to change your system -- everybody's probably that saying in their sleep. But what is the thought on our side for breaking some new ground?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Why do we have to break new ground?

Q Well, or -- take back breaking new ground and then say getting off the dime --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Why do we have to get off the dime?

Q Well, then, what good are the talks?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, that's the whole thing. That's what I'm trying to tell you.

Q I'm not talking about signing a piece of paper.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: It's attitudinal to see what is their attitude. This is a nation that's bent on world domination. I don't have to tell you that; you just have to look at what's happened since 1939 to date as to what has happened with that nation and the nations they've conquered -- Lithuania, Estonia, and go through the whole -- you end with Afghanistan.

Now, faced with that realism of that's who we're dealing with, we're not dealing with really nice people. We're not out to try to really win them over, make them the 51st state or even make them part of NATO. All we're trying to do is to figure out how do you live with this crowd, recognizing that they are bent eventually on world domination? Might not be this year. It might be the year, you know, 2050. Who knows?

But you have to be realistic about it that this is the type of people we the United States, a peace-loving people, have to live with this. Now how do you get at that? You can't score it.

Q Well, new realism all to the good, there seems to be an affinity -- a natural affinity -- between the American television networks and the General Secretary of the Communist Party to do something unilaterally on Thursday to influence world public opinion, including, may I say, American public opinion. You must be very conscious of that. And although commendably you take the long view, my question is, what do you have in mind for the short view to deal with that --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: To call a spade a shovel, to recognize the reality, and to state what went on in these meetings. Now, if these meetings do produce some result, however little it will be, we'll talk about that. If it produces no result, we'll say that. If it produces a lot of result, we'll talk about that.

Q Do you see any benefit to coopting the other side in having a joint press conference?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, again, let me -- no. That's the short answer. Now, comes the long one.

Q The short answer on what? No, no --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: A joint press conference. Let me explain that one as I see it, and I can only tell you how I see it. And here again, you have to look at this from the point of view of to whom should Ronald Reagan report. Should he literally report to the press -- 3,000 of you -- all languages, and so forth, all shouting, trying to get his attention, trying to get

"the question" asked, that type of thing? What does that lend itself to in the way of a sensible interview?

What we would rather have is Ronald Reagan report first to his Allies in NATO, which he'll do in Brussels with a candid talk with them for a couple of hours. Then, he goes on and he talks to the American people through the Congress from the well there. Now, having done that, later there can come interviews and so forth to try to set it in historical perspective. But we think that the ones that are owed the first idea of what went on there are the Allies and the American people.

Now, will there be statements, that type of thing? Possibly, again. Ronald Reagan will characterize in a statement how he feels -- what the outcome of this. Would Gorbachev? I don't know. Probably he would want them. But to have a joint press conference --

Q If the first 15 minutes were to go badly, what kind of problems does that pose for the remainder of the summit? What are the risks of that first 15?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: It would mean that you'd start from behind the goal line and have to work your way out. That could happen. I suspect that both of these men, having come this far, both being world leaders and being reasonably sophisticated, are not going to allow that to happen -- that the first 15 minutes of ice-breaking results in such bad chemistry that from then on they're sour and nothing happens.

Q Could you say anything about the 15 minutes and -- well, excuse me. Can you suggest anything at all about the gestures that the President might make or the tone -- the things he's going to do to try to establish a congenial tone to this thing? Is he going to offer him a friendship ring or --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Believe it or not, I'm going to coin a phrase here -- (laughter) -- we're going to let Reagan be Reagan. Honestly. I mean, that -- we haven't taught him. We haven't tried to prep him for body gestures or language or --

Q No opening lines?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: How do you do this? I mean, this man has been at this all his life. He made a career of using language, and gestures, and so forth. You don't --

Q Has he told you what he plans to say?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I was almost going to say "you don't teach an old dog new tricks." I better retract that in a hurry.

Q Well, is he keeping secret some of the things he plans to say or, I mean, have you totally reviewed it with him presumably? It was hinted to us earlier today that he has.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, I think I have a fairly good knowledge, and I suspect Bud does and George, what he's going to say. The exact wording, no. We haven't tried to tell him to memorize a script or memorize lines.

Q Could you share with us a little bit of what he's trying to say and also --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No.

Q Well, then, could you give us a profile of some sort of Gorbachev as to how you view Gorbachev, what sort of a man he is, the adversary you face?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, a man apparently for all seasons.

Q Well, and what season do we get?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: It looks like it's winter coming on. That's a joke.

We don't know which Mr. Gorbachev we will see or whether we will see many facets of Mr. Gorbachev. I suspect, because each of us is a little bit deep in his personality and we don't have just one common face that we show at all times, I suspect we'll see many facets of Mr. Gorbachev in --

Q Such as --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, you know, anger, enthusiasm, agreeableness, some type of strong advocacy of his cause, and at the other times perhaps a willingness to listen. I mean, there are -- any of these things and all of these things can happen.

Q Quick wit, sense of humor, no sense of humor, harsh?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I have not heard any of that -- his ever being described as being, you know, a humorist.

Q But is he -- is he --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I've never heard the man described that way.

Q -- is he facile with words? Is he --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes, according to what Shultz and McFarlane found, and Art Hartman has told us and others.

Q Why wouldn't they go for simultaneous --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: He is a lawyer and is very facile.

You had a question --

Q I had the same question.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Oh --

Q Why wouldn't they go for simultaneous translation?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I have no idea. We're going with it.

Q I understand --

Q Oh, they're not for sure?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: We were checking on that. Is my colleague in the room, sir?

Q I thought it was an open question --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes, yes --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I don't know whether they've closed the loop. They were going to try to get in touch with them when they arrived here to see if they've changed their mind. And I was just trying to give you an update on that.

Q Did they tell you why that they didn't want to go for simultaneous translation?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: It's a more normal way for them to --

Q To wait?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: -- have, you know --

Q Could you give us anything the President had to say after listening to Mr. Gorbachev's arrival remarks -- his emphasis on --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I'm not sure the President listened to them. We were tied up, remember, with -- we had our own luncheon, and then we had -- no, at the time of -- I think he arrived at 11:00 a.m., did he not?

Q -- 11:45 a.m.

Q At 11:45 a.m.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: -- 11:45 a.m. Well, we -- no, we were tied up at the time, so we didn't have a time to listen to it. He will review them tonight.

Q But have you filled him in? Has he said anything --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I don't know what they are either. I haven't had time. I've been busy all day. So, we'll catch up with those tonight.

Q Do you know --

Q -- any sense of his mood and, you know --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: The President's?

Q The President's mood -- and anecdotes --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Anecdotes would be difficult because there've been few and far between since he arrived here, but he's in a serious mood. He feels that he's done his homework. He knows the points that he wants to make. He's been -- we walked him through yesterday -- through the sitting, where the thing will take place, at least on our day. And he's comfortable with all of that, so, you know, he's in sort of a relaxed mood. Had dinner last night with his son.

Q Can you tell us the names of the Soviet team? Do you know them yet?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I did know them, but I'm not sure of them now.

Q Well, will it be Dobrynin and --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes.

Q -- Shevardnadze --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes.

Q -- will be two of them? And --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: And Kornienko, who is, you know, the Deputy Foreign Minister; and, then, two of their men were Members of the Central Committee, who are mainly in the news area. I was going to say propaganda, but, you know, that --

(laughter) -- that area.

Q Not -- neither of them the interviewees -- the interviewers --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, one is the equivalent --

Q Not Shishkin or --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: -- Bud's equivalent. He's a foreign affairs adviser. And another one was characterized to me as being the Party's equivalent of Foreign Minister.

Q Has there been any movement today or in recent hours on any of the substantive issues, such as --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Let me just finish on that one thought. There is nobody from their defense area, no equivalent to Cap Weinberger or his crowd. And --

Q Is that a cause or an effect?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: -- and there's nobody from the trade area.

Q Why was Perle excluded from your meeting -- the staff meeting with the President today?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: A lot of people were excluded. Ikle was included, and Ikle --

Q So it wasn't any --



SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No. The room in which we met was a room not terribly much larger than this. And you have to restrict the number of people who can come in.

Q You think --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Did they ever close the loop on the simultaneous translation --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes, simultaneous --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: -- by the Russians?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, wait a minute. Wait a minute.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No.

Q No?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I'm not sure that's the word that they used.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, will one of you check --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Sure.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: -- with my colleague, because the question came up, and I --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Check with my colleague. He's the one that just told me. But I'll check again.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: They used a different word. It may mean the same thing, but just to --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: "Sequential" was the original --

Q Do you think in retrospect that you may have made a public relations boo-boo by getting out here early and letting the press chew on the bone on the Weinberger leak as the only story in town?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No. There were many other stories in town. The Russians got here first, if you'll recall.

Q That's true.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: With Arbatov and what-have-you and were spinning all kinds of lines. We came here on a pre-ordained plan set months ago. Our advance team, when they first came over here knew that the President would arrive on Saturday night. We have stuck to that plan. The Weinberger thing is of momentary value. It gave the press something to write about over the weekend.

Q Has McFarlane apologized for having kind of blown that thing into something?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No comment.

Q Well, just to satisfy our curiosity -- just to satisfy our curiosity, does the --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No comment.

Q Does the President -- is the President aware where the --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No comment.

Q Just where it was said -- does he still think it was a figment of somebody's imagination?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No comment.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Hey, you're not going to get anything.

Q Were you the leaker?

Q -- need anything.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Was I the leaker? Good God, no.

Q No comment. (Laughter.)

Q You said --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, that one, I'll comment on. No.

Q You said you --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Or as the President said yesterday, "Hell, no."

Q Now, you said we were going to see different kinds of character in Gorbachev. You expected to see different styles -- including anger. What do you suppose might make him angry?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Oh, I don't know. Almost anything could trigger it. It would be hard to predict. Again -- but, I mean, the -- anger is maybe a little too strong a word. But, I mean, I would see ire coming from him.

Q When everyone is sitting around the table, do you anticipate that the President and his opposite number do -- large burden of the talking? Or do you think you will -- the other principals will get into it?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: It would be most natural for them to do most of the talking, if not all of it.

Q So you anticipate you'll be relatively mute unless specifically called on?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Or if there is something that we could add to what has already been said in a particular area of knowledge we might have.

Q Is there one person on the American side that has been designated as a note-taker?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Jack Matlock is one, and Mike Palmer is the other one.

Q During the fifteen minute session they'll be sitting, as I understand it, in the living room of this particular building.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, in a small ante-room.

Q Small ante-room. During the formal meetings, will they be actually across one another from -- in a table? Is that it? Is it an oval table?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: It's -- well, maybe you didn't see it. A lot of the press did see it up at the U.N. it's this exact same table. We flew it over here from the U.N. It's an egg-shape or oval-shape table. The --

Q U.N. Mission.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: U.N. Mission.

Q Yes.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: And the -- Yes, thanks for the correction. It was the U.N. Mission. The General Secretary will sit on one side with his people, in the middle, the President on the other side, in the middle.

Q It's the -- you know, you've described the Soviets as tough cookies and Gorbachev as a tough cookie. Do we see the President extending a hand of -- do we see the President extending the hand of friendship to him of a personal kind of friendship, not --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: He's a friend of a lot of tough cookies.

Q That's right. But not in a hostile -- They're not going to see a hostile President coming in with a -- you know.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I can't tell you that. Well, the President will not be hostile going in, no. I can't tell you what the chemistry will be, for lack of a better word, during that meeting.

Q What do you hope for? When you say these two men representing these two totally incompatible -- as you say -- systems come together, what sort of relationship do you hope for?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Realism.

Q But is that a personal friendship?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, no. But both of them are leaders, world leaders. They could never have gotten to their positions without having some unusual characteristics. One of them is a broad perception of reality. And in that particular case, you could hope that even though they might not admire each other or might not end up as the best of friends, they could learn to do business together. It's not uncommon, you know, even in the United States where two business people don't particularly like each other, but they're able to do business. Two politicians don't necessarily like each other, but they can do business. Well, here are two world leaders that don't necessarily have to like each other, but can end up doing business. If they like each other -- well, that's serendipity.

Q Has the President been given any kind of advice in terms of how you deal --

Q Wait a minute.

Q Go ahead. Sorry. Go ahead.

Q There's been some talk, and it may not be very founded, that McFarlane might leave sometime within the immediate months after --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I have not heard that. Reporters keep asking me about it, but Bud hasn't said anything to me and I've not heard it from any of his staff.

Q Same for Weinberger?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes.

Q Same for Karna?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Your question?

Q Well, has the President been given any kind of advice on how not to irritate Gorbachev or how to make an impression on Gorbachev? I mean, if you let Reagan be Reagan, any concern that he'll pop off in just sort of the wrong way and --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, this guy is a very gracious man, you know. You've seen him. Ronald Reagan is a gracious person, and he likes to be congenial --

Q Naturally gracious, you say?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes, naturally gracious. He's a congenial person and, unless taunted or pushed, he doesn't usually get his dander up.

Q Well, but what about Trudeau?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, he was pushed. I was there. I heard that whole conversation. And the remarkable part of it was that Reagan held his fire as long as he did.

Q But when you think back -- and, obviously, you know the details -- but from what we heard at the time, Trudeau asked him, you know, to bend a little more on --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Bend a little more, my foot. That was about -- after about a 10-minute lecture on how we should conduct business in the United States.

Q But aren't you going to get even more lectures from Gorbachev? That's my point. Whatever Trudeau did to Reagan, isn't Gorbachev going to come out --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, you've got to remember that Reagan put up with this for three different summits and the like. It wasn't until the London summit that he finally blew.

Q Gorbachev doesn't like to be lectured on his system. How --

Q Yes, how do you avoid him blowing over human rights --

Q Exactly.

Q -- for example?

Q Isn't there a concern on your part on the --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Hell, they'll blow and then they get back together again.

I mean, the fact that two guys blow off steam again doesn't necessarily mean they can't do business.

Q The Russians have degraded Reagan in backgrounders to us -- at least to me -- as kind of a B-class movie actor and --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Let me tell you something. You'll never know whether Reagan was a B-class movie or not, but he is a Grade-A President, and that's all that counts. It's Reagan the President who is here now that they have to deal with, and they can denigrate all they like with these cheap shots -- and you can quote me on that one, by the way -- but those --

Q Which? Grade-A President or cheap shots?

MR. REGAN: Both. That type of ploy and so forth doesn't lead to the type of summit where you can have understanding. You notice that we have consistently refrained, in our backgrounding or anything else, from characterizing in an invidious way any of the General Secretary's past.

Q Why do you think they are doing this, if they are coming to the summit --

Q That's on background?

MR. REGAN: No, that's for publication.

Q Now we're back on background?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Now we're back on background.

Q Could you tell us, if the summit is supposed to be a place to get together, why do you think they're doing it? What's their motive? It seemed more like a Super Bowl than a summit.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, again, what's the motive? Thirteen summits have been held -- nineteen times we have asked to try to get together with the Soviets on various things. The whole purpose, again, is that we are both in the middle of a terrible arms race. We want to not only stop it, which has been the theme of other summits, but this summit, for the first time, says definitely reduce. And --

Q But that's not exactly what I was asking about. Why do you think they belittle --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Now wait a minute. You asked why we should get together.

Q No, no, no, no. It was why they are belittling -- why they would belittle him when this kind of thing is -- or try to belittle --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, why not ask them? We don't understand it.

Q Let me pursue that point. Is there any concern on your part that they have decided internally that you cannot do business with Ronald Reagan and Company -- these guys are hardline anti-communists, they're out to take us by the you-know-whats and the main purpose of this summit is a public relations exercise to show that, you know, get our licks in?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: That may be, but I doubt it. I think that they, too, would like to find out, is there some way that they could live with us? It's to their advantage if they can cool this arms race and so on. Look, you've got a new man taking over. He's looking ahead. All his moves have been economic ones to

improve the economy and the lot of his country and of its citizens. He can't very well do that if he's in the middle of an arms race. And I think that realism would seem to indicate that he would want it.

Q Well, wouldn't it help you in terms of your budget problems if you could back off a little bit?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Not initially because we've got things in the pipeline at this point.

Q Like long-term?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Long-term. Certainly it would help the next president.

Q You and many other members of the administration keep coming back to Gorbachev, the new kid on the block who is going to make his own name now. He's got problems at home. Are we in danger of making the mistake that Khrushchev made in Vienna when he thought of Kennedy as the new kid -- younger kid, not quite up to world speed and over-reacted and had to pay a price a year later?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: First of all, we're not going to underestimate the man. I don't think if anything that --

Q Well, you keep coming back about his domestic problems, his economic problems --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: That's not underestimating him. That, again, is realism. He has those problems -- we know it, he knows it.

Q But there seems to be an underlying wish when you mention these things -- having those problems, Gorbachev may be more susceptible to be flexible on all of these issues on your agenda.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: We naturally hope that because that's the only way. If he's inflexible and doesn't give a darn about his own economy and wants to continue this mad race, then there's nothing for us to do but go home and report to the Congress we are going to have to up the budget for defense. We don't want to do that.

Q But for instance on SDI --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: If that's what we find out, I mean, that's going to be horrible.

Q Well, let me just ask you on SDI in terms of flexibility versus inflexibility. You've already told us Ronald Reagan is going to be inflexible -- he's not going to give on SDI. What about Gorbachev on SDI? Do you really see in the next two days --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I think he's going to be inflexible. I don't think he'll agree to give up his research on SDI.

Q So then we're out --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: On SDI. Now wait a minute. About flexibility, we've already agreed to reduce 50 percent --

Q No, no, I meant in terms of his --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Now wait a minute. That's a very -- you can't say -- wait a minute. That's a very important thing. We've agreed to give up 50 percent of all of our nuclear warheads.

Q I know that, but he is saying no deal unless you link reduction of offensive weapons to a cap on SDI, and you're not giving on that. Do you expect him to be in any way possibly flexible on that?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Well, these are also the same people that said if we put the Peacekeeper, the Pershings in Europe, they'd never come back to the bargaining table. Where are they?

Q Okay, so you think that there is some hope that he might change on SDI?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Sure. He knows that he is doing it himself. They're finally starting to admit that they even are using lasers. That's the latest thing that has come out of them. They finally have admitted that, which we've known all along.

Q Do you think they are looking --

Q Well, what you see as a Soviet compromise --

Q Let's get one more from Charlotte and then call it quits.

Q Well, what you see as a Soviet compromise --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: I don't know what they'll do.

Q Accepting laboratory research but getting some other restraints --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: No, they've got to come back to us. We put something on the table here in these arms negotiations here in Geneva. Remember, we put it up first, they countered, we counter-counter. It's up to them now to come back to us with something for those arms negotiations in Geneva. And that is what we're waiting to see, what they're going to come up with --

Q Is there any --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: -- or what they have to say about that. They have -- there's been silence since we came out on November 1st from them on our proposal, except for a few quick remarks from Tass that it was the same old stuff or something.

Q Is there any possibility that as a face-saver for Gorbachev on SDI Reagan would be able -- willing to concede something such as, well, I wouldn't -- if I developed it I would assure you that I wouldn't put it in place for two or four years -- that kind of speculation.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: He's already said that when it comes to --

Q Add a couple of years on it.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: When it comes to deployment, we would stop and discuss this with our allies and other nuclear powers.

Q He has not used the word "testing", as I understand it, now for about a month or so. Is that significant?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: It's not significant. What he is talking about here is testing as part of research. In other words, research and testing go together. How would you know that your research can bear fruit until you test it? And once you have tested, then you know you have the system. It's at that point that Ronald Reagan has said, okay, before we deploy this, we want to talk.

Q Could we put the series on the record of when you are talking about, we're not trying to make them the 51st state or member of NATO?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Can we unwind somebody's tape and go back to that and let me hear it again? Or does anybody take shorthand?

Q I think I'm close to it.

Q Well, you said that "we're not dealing with really nice people, not trying to make the 51st state. How do you live with this --" You started out by saying, "nation bent on world domination since '39."

Q And we're trying to figure out how to deal with -- to live with this problem. I mean, they were the first to --

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Call a spade a shovel. I'll -- you can keep that on background. (Laughter.)



phrases. SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: You don't like my coined

Q Nobody'll know who it is.

it is. SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: Yes, nobody'll know who

Q Let's play the shovel on the mike.

(Tape is being played back.)

(Laughter.) SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL: That's background.

Q Good choice.

Q Let quote you on that.

THE PRESS: Thank you.

END