

Transcript of Reagan-Gorbachev Summit in Reykjavik

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[Materials from Gorbachev archives: "Conversations of M. S. Gorbachev with R. Reagan in Reykjavik on 11-12 October 1986"]

[Text] On 3 January 1993, the SOA-2 [Strategic Offensive Arms-2] Treaty was signed in Moscow, according to which the United States of America and Russia would reduce their arsenals of strategic offensive arms by two-thirds no later than the year 2003. A great step would thereby be made on the road to nuclear disarmament.

It is appropriate to recall that the beginning of the process of reducing nuclear weapons was laid down by the INF Treaty of 1987 and the SOA-1 Treaty signed in 1991 (but which has not yet gone into effect). The signing of these treaties was preceded by a meeting of the leaders of the two nuclear super-powers—M. S. Gorbachev and R. Reagan—in Reykjavik in October of 1986.

Held at the initiative of M. S. Gorbachev, the Reykjavik meeting bore a dramatic character. The possibility of radical reductions and elimination of nuclear weapons was discussed for the first time. Moreover, the parties came close to agreement, but were not able to reach final agreement. The stumbling block became the American SDI [Strategic Defense Initiative] program. Nevertheless, it was specifically this meeting which essentially laid the foundation for the breakthrough in reduction of nuclear weapons.

The editors are beginning the publication of the transcript of the talks in Reykjavik, which have been kindly presented to us by the "Gorbachev Fund."

The First Talk

(Initially one-on-one) - morning of 11 October 1986

After exchanging greetings, R. Reagan and M. Gorbachev agree on the order of conducting the meeting.

[Reagan] I have been impatiently awaiting this meeting. In the organizational plan, it would evidently be expedient to devote part of the time to talks held one-on-one, and part of the time—to the exchange of opinions in the presence of the ministers of foreign affairs. Is this procedure acceptable to you?

[Gorbachev] Yes, I agree with this. As a matter of fact, that is what we had in mind when we proposed the meeting.

[Reagan] With what problems shall we begin our discussion? It seems to me that we have an entire series of problems which were left without adequate discussion at our meeting in Geneva, as well as questions which have arisen since that time. I am referring to the problem of intermediate range weapons, space, and agreements on ABM [anti-ballistic missile] defense, as well as proposals on strategic weapons which were discussed by our delegations at the talks in Geneva. I am proceeding from the fact that both our sides have expressed the desire to rid the

world of ballistic missiles and of nuclear missiles in general. The world is impatiently awaiting an answer from us on the question of whether it is possible to realize this desire.

[Gorbachev] Mr. President, I believe that it would make sense to first conduct a brief exchange of opinions on the situation in the world which has prompted us to appeal to you with the proposal of an urgent meeting, and then I would like to present to you the specific ideas with which we have come to this meeting. I believe that it would be beneficial to invite E. A. Shevardnadze and G. Shultz to that part of our discussion when I will present the specific proposals. Obviously, we will be ready to discuss all questions which the American side feels necessary to raise.

What you have said in regard to the topics of the discussion coincides with our feelings about what questions are expedient to discuss at a personal meeting of the leaders. I can assure you that we have much to say on the problems of arms limitation and disarmament. At our subsequent meetings, as I understood from the speech you gave prior to your departure for Reykjavik, we will also touch upon other questions—regional, humanitarian, and bilateral, which are the subject of concern for both your country and ours.

[Reagan] I would like to add that, in my opinion, we really will have to talk about human rights. Unlike other questions which we have cited, this problem will not be the subject of official agreements between us. However, it has a great influence on how far we can go in cooperation with the Soviet Union in view of our public opinion. I already told you in Geneva, and I will repeat now, that human rights, and specifically questions of exit from the Soviet Union, are ever present in appeals to me. And if we are unable to resolve these problems in a satisfactory manner, then this will also affect other questions in the sense that the community will not give the American government credit for implementing possible agreements, if we do not convince the Soviet side to agree to an easing of its position on human rights.

[Gorbachev] We will still talk about human rights. But now I would like to express in principle form our general impression of what has happened in the world since the meeting in Geneva, what problems are the subject of concern of the Soviet Union and the USA. It is useful to compare our evaluations on this matter, and then to go on to specific problems of arms control and disarmament, including strategic arms, medium-range missiles, the ABM Treaty and the cessation of nuclear testing. On these questions I will speak out specifically, as we had agreed, in the presence of E. A. Shevardnadze and G. Schultz.

[Reagan] Yes, I agree with your approach. I raised the topic of human rights only to remind you of those explanations which I gave on this topic in Geneva. We do not want to intervene in the domestic functions of your government. However, we believe it is important that you know the force of public opinion in the USA. We are a nation of immigrants. One out of every eight Americans has some relation with your country and your people. Just

yesterday I received a letter from one of the senators, whose mother is Russian. I understand the force of the national spiritual tie, since I, as an Irishman, feel these ties myself, in this case with Ireland. Therefore, I see that all Americans are concerned about what is going on in that country which is bound to them with these ties. And it will be easier for us to conclude agreements on various questions under conditions when our public opinion is not aroused and is not angered by some events in the country of their cultural heritage. However, I agree that these problems become secondary in importance as compared with the problems of nuclear arms. They have worldwide significance, and the entire world awaits their decision from us.

[Gorbachev] Mr. President, in the spirit of our coordinated approach to the question of how to organize our meeting, I would like to make you aware of the evaluations given by the Soviet leadership, and by me personally, of the importance of the meeting in Reykjavik in connection with the situation in the world and the status of Soviet-American relations. Much is being said these days throughout the world about our meeting, and the most varied, even opposing, judgements are being expressed. But now, when we are sitting at this table and our meeting has begun, I am even more firmly convinced of the fact that the decision to hold it was a responsible step by both sides. First of all, our direct discussion signifies that Soviet-American dialogue continues. Although it is proceeding with difficulty, not as our peoples and the entire world would like, nevertheless it is continuing. And this in itself already justifies the trip to Reykjavik. Some people—and there are quite a few of them—believe that the Reykjavik meetings are associated with certain personal ambitions of the participants. I am in categorical disagreement with this and refute it. The meeting is a testimony to our responsibility to the respective peoples of our countries and the entire world. After all, much in the world really does depend on our two countries, and on the quality of relations between them and their leaders.

[Reagan] I have already told you that I believe our situation to be unique. Here we are, the two of us, sitting together in a room, and we may resolve the question of whether there will be peace or war in the world. We both want peace, but how to achieve it, how to strengthen trust and reduce mutual suspicion between our two peoples!

[Gorbachev] That was my second thought, and I would like to develop it, supporting in principle what you have said. After Geneva, we put a complex and expansive mechanism of Soviet-American dialogue into motion. In this time, the mechanism of our dialogue has been disrupted several times, it has suffered many bumps and bruises, but on the whole it is moving ahead, and the movement is taking on force. This is a positive result. However, on the main questions which concern both sides—how to eliminate the nuclear threat, how to utilize the beneficial impulse of Geneva, how to reach specific agreements—there is no movement, and this concerns us somewhat. Many words have been said regarding these problems. They have been

discussed in detail and are being discussed at the negotiations on YaKV [editor's note: reference is made here to the Soviet-American talks in Geneva on nuclear-space arms]. However, these talks have practically come to a standstill. How can we give a different evaluation when at these talks there are 50-100 variants swimming around in the air, and we cannot see one or two which would really ensure the progress of the negotiations? Therefore, we have come to the conclusion that we need an urgent meeting with you, so as to give a strong impulse to this process and allow us to reach agreements which could be concluded during our next meeting in the USA.

[Reagan] I think exactly the same. As has been explained to me, there is an entire series of proposals on the negotiating table in Geneva. There was a proposal to limit nuclear missiles by 50 percent, to a limit of 4,500 warheads. For you this turned out to be too low a threshold, and you proposed parameters of 6,400-6,800 warheads. For us this figure was too high, since it allows a threat of destruction to the entire world. We proposed an intermediate solution, a middle figure between these two indicators, i.e., 5,500 nuclear weapons, keeping in mind the fact that our goal remains the total elimination of strategic nuclear missiles.

[Gorbachev] I would like to make clear to you and to the U.S. government the thought that we want such solutions to the problem of arms limitation and are approaching our proposals which I will present today in such a way that the reduction in nuclear arms would consider to an equal degree the interests of both the USA and the Soviet Union. If in our proposals we considered only our own interests, and thereby gave reason to suspect that we were seeking roundabout means of attaining military supremacy, this would not stimulate the American side to seek agreement, and could not be the basis of agreement. Therefore, I would like to precisely, firmly and clearly announce that we are in favor of such a solution to the problem which would ultimately provide for complete liquidation of nuclear weapons and would ensure equality and equal security of the USA and the Soviet Union at all stages of movement toward this goal. Any other approach would be unintelligible, unrealistic, and inadmissible. We would hope that the USA would act in the same way.

[Reagan] We have exactly the same feelings. A difficult question here is verification and control over the fulfillment of the assumed responsibilities for arms reduction. There is a Russian proverb to this effect: Trust, but verify. At our previous talks, we expressed optimism regarding the reduction of intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Europe. I am referring to the total elimination of this class of weapons. The participants in the negotiations cite a number of other questions where progress is possible, specifically strategic arms. Yet in all these questions we need verification and control over fulfillment of the agreed-upon responsibilities. If we are able to achieve this, then the entire world will welcome such an outcome.

[Gorbachev] I will not object here. We have a clear position in favor of effective control over fulfillment of disarmament agreements. Today, when we have supposedly come to that stage when the process of developing

specific agreements may begin, it is rather important for us to ensure effective and reliable control within the framework of such agreement. If we do not have this, then I do not think that we will be able to ensure tranquility and a peaceful situation for our peoples. We are ready to go together with you as far in questions of control as our confidence in fulfillment of responsibilities under the agreements will permit. I am prepared to speak out more specifically later, when we invite our ministers. But now I would like to say a few words about the future meeting in the USA. We view Reykjavik as a step along the path to this meeting.

[Reagan] Our meeting has been called a "base camp" on the way to Washington.

[Gorbachev] Yes, and they added that it was located halfway. After all, Reykjavik is located almost exactly halfway between Moscow and Washington.

[Reagan] When I agreed to your proposal regarding the meeting, I did not measure the geographical distance. It just seemed to me that London was not quite a suitable place for a meeting of the format and character which you proposed. It is too large a city, with too many distractions, but here we can discuss everything calmly. By the way, can we talk about the date of your visit to Washington? Are you going to give your suggestions, or should I name a date?

[Gorbachev] I will complete my thought. I have already spoken publicly and indicated in correspondence with you that both our countries must be interested in the effectiveness of my visit to the USA. We agree that this meeting must lead to tangible achievements on cardinally important problems of limiting the arms race which worry the Americans, the Soviet people, and other peoples. You and I cannot allow the upcoming meeting to fail in this sense. It would be a very serious blow. People would begin to ask what kind of politicians these are who meet with each other, pronounce many words, talk for hours, hold one, two, three meetings, and still cannot agree on anything. This would be a scandalous outcome, with consequences which would be difficult to predict. It would evoke disappointment throughout the entire world. The meeting in Reykjavik, we are convinced, must create the prerequisites for the fact that during my visit to the USA we will be able to work out and sign agreements on problems of arms limitation. This would give it a significant result. But for this we must compare our points of view on these problems today and tomorrow, outline the means of their resolution, coordinate the assignments given to our ministers of foreign affairs and other representatives, and define the volume of work, and already with consideration of all this determine when it would be most expedient to conduct my visit to the USA.

[Reagan] One other problem which I have not mentioned. If we come to an agreement regarding the number of strategic missiles, then we will have to agree at the same time on their maximal throw-weight. After all, it would hardly make sense to establish some limit on the number of missiles and open the possibility for the parties to have

only heavy missiles within the framework of this limit. This would not reduce the destructive force of nuclear missiles, and we do not agree to this. We must, within the framework of an intermediate decision, agree also on the throw-weight, obviously keeping in mind the ultimate goal of total elimination of nuclear weapons.

[Gorbachev] I will answer that question for you. But now, if you do not object, we will invite Mr. Schultz and E. A. Shevardnadze.

The discussion was further continued in the presence of the USSR Minister of Foreign Affairs and the U.S. Secretary of State.

Reagan briefly informs his both ministers about the content of the discussion which had been held, and gives the floor to M. S. Gorbachev.

[Gorbachev] I will begin the presentation of our proposals.

Our parties are in agreement that the principle question of international policy of the two countries is the recognition of complete elimination of nuclear weapons as our mutual goal. This is logically tied with our agreement in Geneva regarding the fact that nuclear war is inadmissible and impossible.

How do we understand the movement toward this goal? Our approach was presented in my announcement of 15 January 1986. Your side also made corresponding official announcements. I would like to confirm our point of view regarding the fact that we should move toward this goal in stages, ensuring at each stage equal security for both sides. We expect that the USA will act in the same manner. Such an approach is once again organically tied with our agreement in Geneva regarding the fact that not one of the parties should strive to achieve military supremacy over the other.

I will present our proposals on **strategic offensive arms**. Both we and the USA have presented proposals on a 50 percent reduction of SOA. We spoke of this also at the meeting in Geneva. However, since that time, many variants have passed across the negotiation table. I would like to confirm now that the Soviet leadership is interested specifically in deep, 50 percent, reductions in SOA—and no less. The year which has elapsed since Geneva has convinced us of the fact that the world awaits from the USSR and the USA not merely insignificant, but specifically deep reductions in SOA. We are proposing now, as opposed to our previous proposal of a 50 percent reduction in arms which can reach each other's territory, to agree on the reduction only of SOA. We are leaving aside intermediate range missiles and U.S. forward basing means. Here we consider the point of view of the USA, and are making a great concession to it. Since strategic arms comprise the basis of the nuclear arsenals of both sides, we believe that their reduction must be performed with the constant retention of equality or parity. We are proceeding from the fact that both the USSR and the USA will agree with the fact that the reductions must consider the historically formulated peculiarities in the structure of the nuclear forces of each of the parties.

With 50 percent reductions, we are ready to take into account the concerns of the USA regarding heavy missiles and also intend to significantly reduce our weapons of this type. I emphasize—significantly, and not cosmetically. However, we also expect that the USA will also show similar attention toward the concerns of the USSR. I will illustrate this with the following example. The USA has 6,500 nuclear warheads on submarines deployed throughout the world, which present a great problem in terms of verification and control. Of these, 800 are warheads with MRV (multiple reentry vehicles). We also know the accuracy of the American missiles, both ground- and submarine-based. We hope that the USA will meet the Soviet Union halfway on this point.

Medium-range missiles [IRBM]. We have spoken much about them, much is being said about them throughout the world, and various predictions are being made. The Soviet leadership has once again analyzed this problem from all sides. We have considered the situation in Western Europe, the opinion of the governments and the community of these countries, and decided that we must approach this problem from the broadest positions, naturally considering both our interests, the interests of our allies, and the interests of the USA. Based on this, we propose the complete elimination of USSR and USA missiles of this class in Europe. We are agreeing to a great concession—**withdrawing the question of the nuclear forces of England and France.** I think you understand what a great new step we are now taking: After all, the nuclear potentials of these countries continue to grow quantitatively and qualitatively. Yet we are ready to seek a compromise solution and are even agreeing to considerable risk for this sake. We would hope that the USA, acting in the spirit of compromise, would also agree to make some concessions to us, and considering the major concession which we have made, would withdraw the question of the Soviet medium-range missiles in Asia, or would at least agree to begin talks on nuclear arms—Soviet and American—in Asia.

Within the framework of this problem, we are ready to resolve the question also of missiles with a range of less than 1,000 km. We are ready to freeze their numbers and to begin negotiations on these missiles.

This is how our proposals on nuclear arms appear. We would hope that the American leadership will duly evaluate our broad compromise approach.

The third question consists of the **problems of ABM defense and banning of nuclear testing.** I believe that for us the assurance of preserving a timeless ABM Treaty, the clearly designated term for non-exercizing the right of withdrawal from the treaty, would have the goal of strengthening the conditions of the ABM Treaty as a foundation on which we could resolve the problems of nuclear disarmament as a whole. Here we propose coming to an agreement on a compromise basis. We are adopting the American approach, which provides for the basic term of non-exercizing the right of withdrawal from the treaty and the term of conducting negotiations, and are proposing to define the joint term of full and strict adherence to all points of the ABM Treaty. Here it is important to

ensure mutual understanding of the fact that developments and testing in the sphere of SDI would be allowed within the confines of laboratories, with prohibition of outside-of-laboratory testing of means intended for space-based destruction of objects in space and on Earth. Obviously, this would not entail a prohibition on testing permitted under the ABM Treaty, i.e., testing of stationery ground-based systems and their components.

In regard to the term of non-exercizing the right to withdraw from the treaty, different figures were quoted by both sides. We are proposing as a compromise variant a rather long time—10 years and no less, and then we would have, say, 3-5 years to decide what to do further on this problem.

One other aspect. Logically stemming from the need for preserving the ABM Treaty which has been acknowledged by both sides is also the need to prohibit anti-satellite means. After all, it is clear to you and to us that if this were not done, then in the course of creating anti-satellite means it would be possible also to develop anti-missile weapons. Therefore, it is prudent to reach mutually acceptable agreements on the prohibition of anti-satellite means and to cut off this channel.

On the problem of nuclear testing. We have pondered this question at length and from all sides. Perhaps in some degree it is understandable that until the parties agree to broad measures for reducing the strategic potential, their nuclear weapons, one of the sides might still have doubts as to the expediency of total cessation of nuclear testing. However, today in the context of the proposals which I have presented, such doubts must be cast aside. Therefore, it is expedient to agree on the full and final prohibition of nuclear testing. As we know, we have had negotiations on this question. We propose to renew them on a bilateral or trilateral (with the participation of Great Britain) basis. Obviously, as long as the negotiations are going on, the parties may act at their discretion. But in the course of the negotiations, as we understand, questions of control, of reducing the energy yield thresholds of the blasts, of reducing their number, and of the agreements of 1974 and 1976 could be reviewed. The start of negotiations on the total and general prohibition of nuclear testing would create good prerequisites for the rapid development of an agreement on strategic arms.

This, Mr. President, is the packet of our proposals on all the basic aspects of reducing nuclear weapons. I propose that you and I, here in Reykjavik, give directives to our appropriate departments—the ministries of foreign affairs and others—for the joint development of agreements which we could coordinate and sign during my visit to Washington.

In this context, I would like to emphasize once again that the Soviet Union is interested in the effective and reliable control over measures for disarmament, and is ready to implement it by any means needed, and by means of on-site inspections. We are awaiting such an approach also from the United States.

I have spoken here of some very serious things, and in order to avoid any ambiguity, I would like to give you an English translation of the standard text of what I have said.

[Reagan] We are very encouraged by what you have presented here. Of course, I also noted certain divergences in our positions as concerns strategic and intermediate-range missiles. For example, in our position, reaching the zero point on intermediate-range missiles in Europe also requires the reduction of Soviet missiles in Asia, which may be aimed at Europe under conditions when the USA no longer has any means of deterrence there. Such a situation is not suitable to us. We propose the reduction of Soviet missiles in Asia, or instead of zero—the reduction of Soviet and American missiles in Europe to 100 units, so that the USA would still have a means of deterrence. On strategic arms, we want to attain reduction of this class of weapons to zero. And here I would like to draw a line to the ABM Treaty. As I already said in Geneva, we viewed SDI as an idea having significance only under conditions of liquidation of strategic weapons. Therefore, we are proposing to you, at the same time as reduction in the number of these arms, to sign an agreement which would replace the ABM Treaty. This agreement would provide for both sides to conduct research in the sphere of defensive arms within the framework of laboratory testing permitted by the ABM Treaty. However, when either of the sides approaches the limits, going outside the framework of the ABM, then the tests could be conducted in the presence of the other party. If, for example, we were the first to reach this boundary, then we would invite you to observe the testing of such systems. And if the tests showed the possibility and practical expediency of creating a defensive system, then this agreement would obligate us to share this system with the other side. In exchange, the parties would promise to fully liquidate strategic arms, and within a period of 2-3 years would agree in the course of negotiations on such a system of mutual use of such systems. The reason for such an approach consists of the fact that each of the sides will retain the capacity for production of offensive weapons: After all, we had it before, and we need a guarantee that no one will create it anew, whether this be either of our two sides or some maniac like Hitler, who will want to create offensive weapons. We will need a defense against this. And we propose to protect ourselves once and for all against the rebirth of strategic arms in the world, and on this basis to build our future for many years.

[Gorbachev] Let me react briefly to your comments. First of all, we view your statements as being preliminary. I have just presented entirely new proposals, and they have not yet been discussed at any negotiations. Therefore, I ask you to give them proper attention and to express your reaction later. Secondly, what you have said is on the same level and in the same plane as what the American participants in

the negotiations in Geneva say. We value the efforts of experts on the detailed development of questions, but they have not moved matters ahead. We need a new input, a new impulse. We want to create it with our proposals. But how is the American side acting? We are proposing to accept the American "zero" in Europe and to sit down at the negotiating table on Asia within the framework of the medium-range missile problem, while you are retreating from your former position. We do not understand this. In regard to ABM defense. We are proposing to retain and strengthen this fundamentally important agreement, while you propose rejecting it and destroying the mechanism which creates the basis for strategic stability. We do not understand this. About SDI. You need not worry. We have gotten to the bottom of this question, and if the USA creates a three-level system of ABM defense, we will find an answer. We are not concerned by this, but rather by the fact that SDI would mean a transfer of the arms race to a new environment, its elevation to a new stage, the creation of new types of weapons which would destabilize the strategic situation in the world. If that is the goal of the USA, then we can still understand its position. But if it wants stronger security for its people and for the entire world, then its position contradicts that goal and is directly dangerous.

Concluding my reaction to your comments, I would like to express the hope that you, Mr. President, will carefully review our proposals and give an answer, point by point, on what you agree with, what you do not agree with, and what disturbs you.

[Reagan] We will continue our discussion of these questions in the second half of the day. For now I will make only one comment. If we were to propose studies in the sphere of strategic defensive systems under conditions where we would reject the reduction of offensive weapons, we could be accused of creating a cover for a first strike. But our position is not such. We propose the rejection of offensive strategic systems. The agreement which I have proposed would prohibit us from expanding a strategic defensive system until we reduced offensive arms. This system would be our protection and yours in case of unforeseen situations, a sort of gas mask. After all, when the use of chemical weapons was prohibited after World War I, we did not reject gas masks. They were the guarantee of our protection against such a weapon in case someone decided to use it. And the methods of creating such a weapon are known. It is exactly the same with offensive strategic weapons. We need a gas mask here. But we can discuss this in more detail at the next meeting.

[Gorbachev] Alright. We will continue the discussion in the same complement.

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