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Memorandum of Conversation

SUBJECT: The President's Private Meeting with Gorbachev

TIME AND PLACE: December 7, 1988, 1:05 - 1:30 P.M.,
Commandant's residence, Governors Island,
New York

PARTICIPANTS: U.S.

USSR

The President
The Vice President
Nelson Ledsky, NSC Staff
Director (Notetaker)
Thomas W. Simons, Jr.,
STATE/EUR (Notetaker)
Dimitri Zarechnak (Interpreter)

Chairman Mikhail S. Gorbachev
Viktor Sukhodrev, MFA USA/Canada
Department (Notetaker)
Georgiy Mamedov, MFA USA/Canada
Department (Notetaker)
Pavel Palazhchenko (Interpreter)

The President commented that there would be five waves of media representatives. Gorbachev responded that that was not the most difficult task they were facing. The President said the first wave would be Soviet and the last from international media. Gorbachev said each time they met the weather got better. The President replied jovially that we arranged that.

Turning to substance, Gorbachev said he hoped what he had said at the UN had not contained surprises. He had wanted to address the logical construction of what had been done in recent years, as a matter of real policy. This was their fifth meeting. It was not a negotiating session, but at the same time it was their fifth meeting, and it was special, taking place as it did in this group.

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The President said it was a pleasure for him to commemorate their meetings. He well remembered standing in front of the house before the lake in Geneva, waiting for Gorbachev at their first meeting. Most of his people thought at the time it would be their only meeting.

Gorbachev said it was true that they had much to remember, and much to look forward to as well. This was true not just in a personal sense. The most important thing they had done was to begin movement in the right direction.

Gorbachev commented that the Vice President was listening, but probably saying to himself "let them talk."

A media representative asked Gorbachev why he had announced troop cuts at the UN. Gorbachev replied that, as he had just told the President and the Vice President, what he had announced was a continuation and implementation of what he had first outlined on January 15, 1986.

Gorbachev said he appreciated what the President and he had accomplished in recent years. They had made a joint analysis, undertaken joint efforts, and taken real, specific steps forward. He had now outlined certain additional ideas that demonstrated the realistic nature of the policy and added to it. He had issued an invitation to work together, not just to the U.S. What he had said was grounded in common sense and experience.

A journalist asked him if he expected the NATO Allies, including the U.S., to reduce as well.

Gorbachev replied that he had made clear that these were unilateral steps, undertaken without reference to the Vienna mandate. He had been discussing the range of disarmament, humanitarian and economic questions with the U.S. and the Soviet Union's European partners. As for this meeting, it was not for negotiations; it resulted from his being in New York, and the President's and Vice President's invitation to meet on that occasion. He hoped it would be a useful meeting.

A journalist asked if there was opposition to the cuts in his country. Gorbachev said the answer was "no."

The President commented that Gorbachev's Russian "nyet" sounded a little like "yes." Gorbachev replied with a smile that the answer was still "no."

Referring to the camera lights, Gorbachev commented that they were between a burning fire and bright lights. The President said that as a veteran of television he had found that the lights can make you look twelve years younger.

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with the same significance. He would like to build on what President Reagan had done, as he had told Gorbachev when they had met at the Soviet Embassy, even before the Presidential campaign had gotten underway. He would need a little time to review the issues, but what had been accomplished could not be reversed. He wished to build on what President Reagan had accomplished, working with Gorbachev.

Gorbachev said he understood the Vice President's words as a very important assessment of what they had been able to achieve in the years just past. It seemed to him that the prospects for Soviet-American relations were good. He could only repeat what he had told the President on many occasions: the Soviets knew what a country the U.S. was, what its role in the world was, what its people were like. There was a lot of respect in the Soviet Union for the United States. They had cooperated together, and there were good prospects for this to continue.

Gorbachev said he agreed with Vice President Bush on the need to build on the assets the two leaders had piled up. There was a lot they could accomplish together. Here in this company, he wanted to say while they talked as friends that he would treasure the memory of all they had been able to do together in these last years. Certainly he agreed with what Mr. Bush had said about moving forward, and building on what had been achieved. But it was also proper that they try to add to it. Gorbachev said he knew Mr. Bush would become President Bush only in January. He would bring new people with him. Today, Gorbachev said, he was working with President Reagan. He did hope that the President would also treasure his memory of their joint work to solve problems that the whole world wanted to see solved.

The President noted that it was a tradition of their meetings that he come at some point to the subject of human rights. Gorbachev said the President would now be able to tell the press he had raised it again. The President said he was pleased to hear about the steps the Soviets had taken the week before on emigration and on jamming. He was pleased with the progress that had been made in the human rights field since their last meeting.

Gorbachev said he had presented certain thoughts in this regard in his UN address. The President said he had had a brief report on it, and it all sounded good to him. As he had done previously, he would like to present a list of about half a dozen names of individuals he would like Gorbachev to look at. Accepting the list, Gorbachev commented that perhaps they had already left. The President said that would be fine, if true.

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The President went on to say that we were all on Gorbachev's side concerning the reforms he was trying to make in the Soviet system. Gorbachev said he had lots of work and an interesting life. Their country had become a different one. It would never go back to what it had been three years before, regardless of whether he or someone else were leading it.

The President said he would be watching after he returned to private life, and cheering Gorbachev on. Gorbachev invited him to come to the Soviet Union as a private citizen. The President said that would be nice. Gorbachev said they would take good care of him. The President suggested they go in to lunch.

Gorbachev said he valued what the President and Vice President Bush had just said. He also wanted to continue on a consistent basis, without rushing. There was a lot to do together. He urged the Vice President to think about it. He had a little time in which to do so, although, on the other hand, it was already less than two months before he would become President.

Noting that he would be putting together a new team, the Vice President said this was not from dissatisfaction with those who were in the job now. Some of those might be leaving. Some cabinet members would stay on, others would not. The theory was to revitalize things by putting in new people. He believed that Gorbachev knew Jim Baker. He did not think he had met Brent Scowcroft, but he was well known to many people on the Soviet side. Gorbachev said he knew of him. The Vice President continued that others would be coming on board over the next few weeks. He would like Baker to continue what the President had done with Secretary Shultz: good and frequent contacts with Foreign Minister Shevardnadze. Gorbachev said he thought that would happen. The Vice President said that Secretary Baker would obviously want to get together first with his colleagues in NATO, and then with Shevardnadze. They should get together with their people to decide on things that had not been resolved.

Gorbachev said he fully understood, and found it important that the Vice President was thinking in terms of tackling and deciding and solving problems. The Vice President said he had no intention of stalling things. He naturally wanted to formulate prudent national security policies, but he intended to go forward. He had no intention of setting the clock back; we wanted to move it forward.

The President suggested again that they go in to lunch. Gorbachev assured him and the Vice President that on the Soviet side there would be full and constructive cooperation. The Vice President added that he would have the additional incentive of having the President on the phone from California getting on his case and telling him to get going.

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Memcon of President's Private Meeting with Gorbachev, 12-7-88

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