

# Interview With Alastair Burnet of ITN Television of the United Kingdom

**March 10, 1988**

Soviet-U.S. Relations

Q. Mr. President, do you trust Mr. Gorbachev?

The President. Well, let me say, I used a Russian proverb. I'm not a linguist, but I did learn this and have used it several times in his presence. If I'm pronouncing it correctly, it is *dovorey no provorey*. It means trust but verify. And I think that's the policy that has to be followed. I have cited Demosthenes, who a thousand years or two back in the Athenian marketplace said: "What sane man would let another man's words rather than his deeds tell him who is at peace and who is at war with him?"

Q. Then are you not in a great hurry to get a strategic arms agreement with him that you can sign in Moscow?

The President. Well, this is one of the problems. It's a pretty complex negotiation that is going on. Apparently, both sides would like to get this 50-percent reduction in weapons, but it's a little more complex than the INF treaty that we did agree to because of the verification features and all. So, I am acting on a supposition that he also wants the treaty. And it's a case of not setting a deadline whereby you have to hurry and maybe accept something less than is possible simply to meet a deadline. So, we've set no date, but we're working just as hard as we can to arrive at an agreement.

Q. Will you go to Moscow if you can't get an agreement in advance?

The President. Oh, yes, because I think there are other things. Our negotiations at the summit meetings and our discussions have been on a number of things -- not only the arms control but the regional problems, Afghanistan, Nicaragua, things of that kind, and also human rights. We believe that that is of great importance if the relations between our countries is to improve, that there must be some solution to these things that we think are such violations of human rights. And we've made progress in all of our meetings on all of these subjects. And so, I'm looking forward to the summit. It will be nice if we have reached a point at which, as we did here, we could sign that treaty. But if not, I think we would continue to discuss it, make progress, and eventually come to a signing.

Q. Why do you suppose Mr. Gorbachev would want to make progress with you rather than wait, say, for your successor?

The President. Well, you know, there might be some merit in the fact that we now know each other. We've laid a groundwork of relationship. And someone coming in new -- and he

remembers his own experience coming in -- there would be probably a wait while someone else established themselves in the position and you discovered what their ideas were and so forth. So, I think that probably he would like to get some things wound up because of all the groundwork that's been laid.

### Nuclear Weapons in Europe

Q. Do you agree with Mrs. Thatcher that it would be foolish for anyone to expect a nuclear-free Europe for many, many years?

The President. I do agree. And I think that probably what she is saying is something that I've also said, but that hasn't been recognized as much. And that is that this idea that came into being of a nuclear-free Europe at the same time that we're all aware that in conventional weapons the Soviet Union is far in advance of NATO -- and it is only the presence of some of the nuclear, particularly tactical weapons, that have redressed that imbalance. So that before you could ever look to a nuclear-free Europe or world you would have to have an establishment of parity between the forces in conventional weapons.

On the other hand, I believe that as we continue with our Strategic Defense Initiative, the seeking of a defensive weapon -- there never has been an offensive weapon yet in the world that has not led to a defense, even the sword and the shield. And I believe that it is possible to come up with a defensive system that can render the nuclear weapons obsolete. Because I have said -- as a matter of fact, to your Parliament, when they graciously allowed me to address them -- I have said a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. There can't be a victor in a nuclear war. Where do we live after we have poisoned the Earth?

Q. Are you reinforcing America's nuclear capacity in Britain?

The President. I try to refrain from speaking in such details, as matters that are strategy, that I don't think should be discussed. So, I can't go beyond that. I don't want to talk about systems that -- that, I think, is information that should be held.

Q. But many people do think that the INF treaty, for example, made it necessary for you to reinforce American nuclear capability.

The President. Well, the truth is that there are still a great many nuclear weapons in NATO, in the tactical and battlefield-type weapons. We still have our Trident submarines and so forth and are going forward with those programs. And I think the enemy's well aware of that. So, I don't think that first fear that was expressed by some people that INF was in some way lowering our defensive strength.

Let me point out that it was the Soviet Union that came along with a nuclear weapon that was targeted on all the leading targets and cities and so forth of Europe. NATO had nothing to match it. NATO appealed to us -- this was before I was in office here -- for weapon systems to provide a defense -- or not a defense, a deterrent, I should say. And when I came in office, I inherited this situation.

Well, first we asked the Soviet Union to withdraw those weapons. And they refused. And then we went forward with the deployment of our own match to their weapons. And if you'll remember, there was great objection on the part of many people to that. At the same time, however, that we went forward, and the Soviets were quite upset and left the table. I proposed to the Soviets that we would join them in a zero-zero option. And again, there was some scorn about that -- as if I had done something that could not possibly happen. And the Soviets left the bargaining table. But they returned.

#### Soviet-U.S. Relations

Q. Would that be the special advice that you would give to your successor -- --

The President. Yes.

Q. -- -- after 7 years in the White House?

The President. Yes. The special advice -- and was proven very simply with this particular thing we're talking about -- and that is: Deal from strength. Twice the Soviet Union walked away and said they wouldn't discuss things with us. We persisted in implementing and putting the weapons in, deploying them, and they came back. And now we have a treaty. That zero-zero has eliminated an entire weapon system for both sides. So, peace through strength is very common sense.

#### Presidential Election

Q. And who is your successor going to be?

The President. That, I can't say. In this position, in our country, I'm the titular head of the party, and with all of the primaries going on -- until a nominee is selected, I must remain neutral.

*Note: The interview began at 10:47 a.m. in the Map Room at the White House.*

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1988/031088c.htm>