

Address to the Nation on the Soviet-United States Summit Meeting

December 10, 1987

Good evening. As I am speaking to you now, General Secretary Gorbachev is leaving on his return trip to the Soviet Union. His departure marks the end of 3 historic days here in Washington in which Mr. Gorbachev and I continued to build a foundation for better relations between our governments and our peoples. During these 3 days we took a step -- only a first step, but still a critical one -- toward building a more durable peace, indeed, a step that may be the most important taken since World War II to slow down the arms buildup.

I'm referring to the treaty that we signed Tuesday afternoon in the East Room of the White House. I believe this treaty represents a landmark in postwar history, because it is not just an arms control but an arms reduction agreement. Unlike treaties of the past, this agreement does not simply establish ceilings for new weapons: It actually reduces the number of such weapons. In fact, it altogether abolishes an entire class of U.S. and Soviet nuclear missiles.

The verification measures in this treaty are also something new with far-reaching implications. On-site inspections and short-notice inspections will be permitted within the Soviet Union. Again, this is a first-time event, a breakthrough, and that's why I believe this treaty will not only lessen the threat of war, it can also speed along a process that may someday remove that threat entirely.

Indeed, this treaty, and all that we've achieved during this summit, signals a broader understanding between the United States and the Soviet Union. It is an understanding that will help keep the peace as we work toward the ultimate goal of our foreign policy: a world where the people of every land can decide for themselves their form of government and way of life.

Yet as important as the INF treaty is, there is a further and even more crucial point about the last 3 days and the entire summit process: Soviet-American relations are no longer focused only on arms control issues. They now cover a far broader agenda, one that has, at its root, realism and candor. Let me explain this with a saying I've often repeated: Nations do not distrust each other because they're armed; they are armed because they distrust each other. And just as real peace means the presence of freedom and justice as well as the absence of war, so, too, summits must be discussions not just about arms but about the fundamental differences that cause nations to be armed.

Dealing then with the deeper sources of conflict between nations and systems of government is a practical and moral imperative. And that's why it was vital to establish a broader summit agenda, one that dealt not only with arms reductions but also people-to-people contacts between our nations and, most important, the issues of human rights and regional conflicts.

This is the summit agenda we've adopted. By doing so, we've dealt not just with arms control issues but also with fundamental problems such as Soviet expansionism, human rights violations, as well as our own moral opposition to the ideology that justifies such practices. In this way, we have put Soviet-American relations on a far more candid and far more realistic footing. It also means that, while there's movement -- indeed, dramatic movement -- in the arms reduction area, much remains to be done in that area as well as in these other critical areas that I've mentioned, especially -- and this goes without saying -- in advancing our goal of a world open to the expansion of human freedom and the growth of democratic government.

So, much work lies ahead. Let me explain: On the matter of regional conflicts, I spoke candidly with Mr. Gorbachev on the issues of Afghanistan, Iran-Iraq, Cambodia, Angola, and Nicaragua. I continue to have high hopes -- and he assured me that he did too -- that we can have real cooperation in resolving regional conflicts on terms that promote peace and freedom. This is essential to a lasting improvement in our relations.

So, too, on human rights, there was some very limited movement: resolution of a number of individual cases in which prisoners will be released or exit visas granted. There were assurances of future, more substantial movement, which we hope to see become a reality.

And finally, with regard to the last item on our agenda -- scientific, educational, cultural, and economic exchanges -- we agreed to expand cooperation in ways that will break down some of the artificial barriers between our nations. For example, agreement was reached to expand and improve civil air service between our two countries.

But let me point out here that, while much work is ahead of us, the progress we've made, especially in arms reduction, does reflect a better understanding between ourselves and the Soviets. It also reflects something deeper. You see, since my first meeting with General Secretary Gorbachev in 1985, I have always regarded you, the American people, as full participants in our discussions. Though it may surprise Mr. Gorbachev to discover that all this time there has been a third party in the room with us, I do firmly believe the principal credit for the patience and persistence that brought success this year belongs to you, the American people.

Your support over these last 7 years has laid the basis for these negotiations. Your support made it possible for us to rebuild our military strength, to liberate Grenada, to strike hard against terrorism in Libya, and more recently to protect our strategic interests and bolster our friends in the Persian Gulf. Your support made possible our policy of helping freedom fighters like those in Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Angola, Cambodia, and other places around the globe. And when last year at Reykjavik I refused Soviet demands that we trade away SDI, our Strategic Defense Initiative that could erect a space shield against ballistic missiles, your overwhelming support made it clear to the Soviet leaders that the American people prefer no deal to a bad deal and will back their President on matters of national security.

In short, your support for our foreign policy goals -- building a safer peace as we advance the cause of world freedom -- has helped bring the Soviets to the bargaining table. It makes it possible now to hope for a real, fundamental improvement in our relations.

You know, the question has often been asked whether democratic leaders who are accountable to their people aren't at a grave disadvantage in negotiating with leaders of totalitarian States who bear no such burden. Well, believe me, I think I can answer that question. I can speak from personal experience. Over the long run, no leader at the bargaining table can enjoy any greater advantage than the knowledge that he has behind him a people who are strong and free and alert and resolved to remain that way -- people like you. And it's this kind of informed and enlightened support, this hidden strength of democratic government, that enabled us to do what we did this week at the Washington summit.

Now that the treaty's been signed, it will be submitted to the Senate for the next step: the ratification process. I will meet with the leadership of Congress here tomorrow morning, and I'm confident that the Senate will now act in an expeditious way to fulfill its duty under our Constitution.

To this end, let me explain the background. In the mid- and late-1970's the Soviets began to deploy hundreds of new, mobile intermediate-range missiles capable of destroying major cities and military installations in Europe and Asia. This action was an unprovoked, new dimension of the threat against our friends and allies on both continents, a new threat to which the democratic nations had no comparable counter.

Despite intense pressure from the Soviets, NATO proceeded with what we called a two-track policy. First, we would deploy a limited number of our own INF missiles as a deterrent, but at the same time push hard in negotiations to do away with this entirely new nuclear threat. And we set out to do this with a formula I first put forward in 1981. It was called the zero-option. It meant the complete elimination of these missiles on both sides. Well, at first, many called this a mere propaganda ploy, some even here in this country. But we were persistent, our allies steadfast, and eventually the Soviets returned to the bargaining table. The result is our INF treaty.

As you see from the map on the screen now, the Soviet missiles, which will be removed and eliminated under the treaty, have been a major threat to the security of our friends and allies on two continents, Europe and Asia. Under the terms of this treaty, we will be eliminating 400 deployed warheads, while the Soviet Union eliminates 1,600, or four times as many. Now, let me also point out that this does not, however, leave NATO unprotected. In fact, we will maintain a substantial deterrent force on the ground, in the air, and at sea. Our commitment to NATO's strategy of being able to respond as necessary to any form of aggression remains steadfast.

And with regard to verification, as I've mentioned, we have the breakthroughs of on-site inspections and short-notice inspections not only at potential missile deployment sites but at the facility where the Soviet SS - 20 missiles and their components have been assembled. We have a verification procedure that assures each side that the missiles of the other side have been destroyed and that new ones aren't built.

Here, then, is a treaty that shows how persistence and consistency eventually can pay off in arms negotiations. And let me assure you, too, that this treaty has been accomplished with unprecedented consultation with our allies and friends. I have spoken personally with the leaders of the major democracies, as has Secretary Shultz and our diplomats. This treaty has full allied

support. But if persistence is paying off in our arms reduction efforts, the question of human rights and regional conflicts are still problems in our relations. But I am pleased that some progress has been made in these areas, also.

Now, in addition to these candid exchanges on our four-part agenda, Mr. Gorbachev and I did do some important planning for a Moscow summit next year. We agreed that we must redouble our efforts to reach agreements on reducing the levels of U.S. and Soviet long-range, or strategic, nuclear arms, as I have proposed in the START negotiations. He and I made real progress toward our goal first agreed to at Geneva: to achieve deep, 50-percent cuts in our arsenals of those powerful weapons. We agreed that we should build on our efforts to achieve agreement on a START treaty at the earliest possible date, and we've instructed our delegations in Geneva accordingly.

Now, I believe deep reductions in these offensive weapons, along with the development of SDI, would do much to make the world safer. For that reason, I made it clear that our SDI program will continue and that when we have a defense ready to deploy we will do so.

About the future, Mr. Gorbachev and I also agreed that as nuclear weapons are reduced it becomes all the more important to redress the disparities in conventional and chemical weapons, where the Soviets now enjoy significant advantages over the United States and our allies. I think then from all of this you can see not only the direction of Soviet-American relations but the larger framework of American foreign policy. As I told the British Parliament in 1982, we seek to rid the world of the two great nightmares of the postwar era: the threat of nuclear war and the threat of totalitarianism.

And that's why, by pursuing SDI, which is a defense against offensive missiles, and by going for arms reduction rather than just arms control, we're moving away from the so-called policy of mutual assured destruction, by which nations hold each other hostage to nuclear terror and destruction. So, too, we are saying that the postwar policy of containment is no longer enough, that the goal of American foreign policy is both world peace and world freedom, that as a people we hope and will work for a day when all of God's children will enjoy the human dignity that their creator intended. I believe we gained some ground with regard to that cause in these last few days.

Since my first days in office, I have argued that the future belongs not to repressive or totalitarian ways of life but to the cause of freedom -- freedom of the marketplace, freedom to speak, assemble, and vote. And when we see the progress of democracy in these last years, from Latin America to Asia, we must be optimistic about the future of our children.

When we were together in Iceland, Mr. Gorbachev told me that this sort of talk is sometimes viewed in the Soviet Union as a threat, but I told him then and I have said since then that this is no threat at all but only a dream: the American dream. And it's a dream that has meant so much to so many, a dream that still shines out to the world.

You know, a couple of years ago, Nancy and I were deeply moved by a story told by former New York Times reporter and Greek immigrant Nicholas Gage. It's the story of Eleni, his

mother, a woman caught in one of the terrible struggles of the postwar era, the Greek civil war at the end of World War II, a mother who was tried and executed because she smuggled her children out to safety in America.

It is also the story of how her son secretly vowed to return to Greece someday to take vengeance on the man who had sent his mother to her death. But at the end of the story, Nicholas Gage finds he cannot extract the vengeance he promised himself. Mr. Gage writes it would have relieved the pain that had filled him for so many years, but it would also have broken the one bridge still connecting him to his mother, that part of him most like her. As he tells it: ``. . . and her final cry was not a curse on her killers, but an invocation of what she'd died for -- a declaration of love." These simple last words of Mr. Gage's mother, of Eleni, were: ``My children."

How that cry echoes down through the centuries, a cry for all children of the world, a cry for peace, for a world of love and understanding. And it is the hope of heeding such words -- the call for freedom and peace spoken by a chosen people in a promised land, the call spoken by the Nazar carpenter -- Nazarene carpenter, I should say, standing at the Sea of Galilee, the carpenter whose birth into the poverty of a stable we celebrate -- it is these words that we remember as the holiday season approaches and we reflect on the events of this week here in Washington.

So, let us remember the children and the future we want for them. And let us never forget that this promise of peace and freedom, the gift that is ours as Americans, the gift that we seek to share with all the world, depends for its strength on the spiritual source from which it comes. So, during this holy season, let us also reflect that in the prayers of simple people there is more power and might than that possessed by all the great statesmen or armies of the Earth. Let us then thank God for all His blessings to this nation, and ask Him for His help and guidance so that we might continue the work of peace and foster the hope of a world where human freedom is enshrined.

To sum up then: This summit was a clear success. We made progress on each item in our four-part agenda. Mr. Gorbachev and I have agreed to meet in several months in Moscow to continue what we've achieved during these past 3 days. I believe there is reason for both hope and optimism.

Note: The President spoke at 9:01 p.m. from the Oval Office at the White House. His address was broadcast live on nationwide radio and television.

<http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1987/121087d.htm>