

**Margaret Thatcher's Press Conference in Moscow**  
**23 September 1989**

Prime Minister

Ladies and Gentlemen. I have had about two and a half hours of talks with Mr Gorbachev this morning and a further one and a half over lunch. I can assure you that Mr Gorbachev is in very good form and we covered a great deal of ground.

Mr Gorbachev brought me up-to-date on progress of political reforms, the economy and the nationalities which was of course discussed at a major meeting this last week. He also told me about the very full legislative programme which lies ahead for the Supreme Soviet.

I once again expressed my very strong support for the historic changes which are taking place in the Soviet Union under his leadership.

We also had a considerable discussion in depth on arms control. I was in touch with President Bush before the meeting in the light of the simultaneous talks taking place between Mr Baker and Mr Shevardnadze.

We covered the Conventional Force Reduction negotiations, chemical weapons and nuclear issues. I think I can say we are at one in wanting a conventional forces agreement next year and we found a lot of common ground on the practical aspects. There are also encouraging prospects for a convention on chemical weapons.

I raised the continuing difficulties facing those who wish to leave the Soviet Union. Mr Gorbachev told me that there should be no practical difficulties and that legislation on this was in hand.

We dealt briefly with a number of bilateral matters, including trade. We then had a very cheerful, agreeable and delicious lunch at which Mrs Gorbachev was also present.

This was another milestone in the continuing series of discussions we have had since 1984. During that period enormous changes have taken place in the Soviet Union leading to greater political liberty and the prospect of real prosperity for ordinary people as well as much better relations between East and West. All in all, I am greatly encouraged.

Question (Financial Times)

On conventional weapons, do you think the new Soviet proposals provide the basis for a breakthrough and what do you think are the sticking points that remain in the Vienna negotiations?

Prime Minister

I am not going to go into details here. The new Soviet proposals have taken matters further forward and have particularly made progress with some things which were causing difficulty, for example aircraft is one of the things. I think, all in all, the prospects of getting a CFE agreement before the end of next year are good. I think the problems that are left can be resolved.

Question (Arab Emirates Newspaper)

As an Arab, I would like to pose two small questions to you. What is your attitude now towards the problem of the Middle East and what is the dialogue that you are now engaged in with the PLO? My second question, since you said a great deal about your liking Mr Gorbachev, now Mr Gorbachev has provided an incentive to the process of perestroika by giving an opportunity to people to say whatever they want, so how do you look upon the prospects of perestroika inside the Soviet Union and further more upon his foreign policy?

Prime Minister

First, we did not at this meeting discuss the Middle East. There was not time to discuss everything and our stance on Middle Eastern matters has not changed from that which you know well.

Secondly, the glasnost, the political will reform, I think has gone far further, far faster than any of us could ever have thought and it seems to me that they have transformed the whole atmosphere. I believe that perestroika will succeed, that is the economic reform following the political reform.

I think it is perhaps easier for governments to bring about political reform than it is to bring about economic reform. The political can be done by the government taking the requisite action, although that required a great deal of boldness and courage and vision, all of which were forthcoming from Mr Gorbachev.

The economic reform is something where the government provides the opportunity through the greater personal liberties and people have to respond in partnership with government. Economic reform, the fruits of economic reform, the greater prosperity, can only come about with the active and willing cooperation and greater effort by the people. If you take freedom then you must take responsibility with it and it is the exercise of that responsibility and that effort and initiative which brings about the economic reform. Clearly the change is so great that it takes longer than the political reform.

But I am convinced that it will come about and that the prospects for great prosperity for the people of the Soviet Union are greater than they have been at any time during the last 70 years. The old system would not have brought about prosperity for the people of the Soviet Union. The new thinking will.

#### Question (Polish Television)

Did you talk with Mr Gorbachev about the new political changes in Poland and was it a subject for your discussion today with Mr Gorbachev?

#### Prime Minister

I did of course mention Poland as part of our Eastern Europe discussion. I have been to Poland. When I went to Poland I did not think it possible that events there would move as quickly as in the event happened. I had already seen President Jaruzelski soon after the election which Solidarity won handsomely and which Mr Jaruzelski, as he then was, accepted and I congratulated him on accepting the results of that election. Now he is President and there is a Solidarity Government. We could not have foreseen that a year ago, it is remarkable progress.

I think there is a close relationship between President Jaruzelski and President Gorbachev, I think they have known one another for many years and I am very pleased with the greater freedom in Poland.

As you know, a number of Western countries, realising that Poland needs considerable help, are already offering it and will offer more after an INF Agreement has been reached.

That change has also come about because of the enlarged freedom in which Mr Gorbachev has been leading the way and said that these countries in Eastern Europe will find their own way as far as their internal government is concerned. I am very excited about Poland.

#### Question

When you had your first meetings with Mr Gorbachev and Nikolai Ryzhkov did you outline any targets or guidelines on which you had pinned hopes in terms of developing trade and economic ties between our two countries? Now for the last four or five years these targets are being met and soon will be met so from this particular standpoint, what do you think about the prospects of Soviet-British trade and economic ties?

#### Prime Minister

We have not come up as fast as we would have wished. There are a number of joint ventures and contracts which are being carried out now but certainly we need to be very active on this front and I raised one or two matters with Mr Gorbachev.

#### Question (Sunday Times)

You warned in Tokyo that we live in dangerous times. The impression you give in your opening statement is that the causes of tension and mistrust may be diminishing fast. Is that a correct interpretation?

Prime Minister

I think, but correct me if I am wrong, I thought I said uncertain times and times of uncertainty of course can carry dangers with them. What I am saying here is yes, I suppose as far as Eastern Europe is concerned, there are very very great changes, there are very great changes in the Soviet Union and uncertainties always carry their problems. I am quite convinced that the atmosphere here is greatly changed since glasnost commenced. The political changes seem to have led to a much lessening of the tension in the atmosphere. The freedom of expression is a tremendous plus, is being operated to full extend and must be a great joy to those who had not known it previously and must make a tremendous difference.

Of course it means that in some respects those who have criticisms to make will have a ready and easy means to voice them. That always happens and therefore the problems have to be discussed and are being discussed. But I think the glasnost and the great freedom of expression has led to a much better atmosphere for everyone in the Soviet Union and they are discussing it and I believe that they are conscious of that.

The economic reforms, as I have indicated, will take a little bit longer to show through in their entirety but economic prospects are there. The fact was that the old thinking and old systems which had lasted for seventy years had not produced the goods and had no prospect of producing the goods. They had produced a militarily strong Soviet Union which was the key to her international status. With a country like the Soviet Union of this size, the number of people, her international influence, she should aim to become a strong nation economically, which she can do, which glasnost and perestroika give her the means to do, and that of course means the prospects of a prosperous standard of living for her people.

So the old thinking could never have produced that and did not over seventy years at a time when other nations did. The new glasnost and perestroika can and will as a partnership between government and people.

Question

The Soviet Union wants to join the international economic organisations, especially the International Monetary Fund and GATT. What is the British position on these demands?

Prime Minister

I think it is not so much what is the British position as a point of economic principle. It is not really possible to join the IMF until you have got much closer to a freer economic system, a freer market

economic system, where you know what your costs are, there is an economic price. This has a long way still to go in the Soviet Union so I think it is a little too early to raise the question of either the IMF or GATT.

I think in due course when you have tackled and solved these problems successfully then we can address our minds to it.

Question (Novosti Press Agency)

How can you accept the latest Soviet initiatives concerning the START talks in Geneva as explained by Mr Shevardnadze in Wyoming?

Prime Minister

In Geneva the chemical weapons talks are going on, is that what you are talking about?

Question

The START talks.

Prime Minister

The START talks obviously are between the Soviet Union and the United States. They affect us because after all NATO is under the United States nuclear umbrella as far as strategic nuclear weapons are concerned. The START talks I believe will go steadily forward. It is not the will to get a result which is holding them up, it is that there are in fact a number of technicalities which must be resolved and also verification because you are dealing with a much more complicated settlement than was the case with the intermediate nuclear forces. You are dealing with more complicated weapons systems and a greater variety of them and it is much more difficult to verify than it was in the case of the intermediate nuclear weapons which, after all, were being abolished completely.

I believe the will is there to reach a settlement. I believe that the talks that are going ahead now in Wyoming will contribute to taking them further forward.

Question

What will be the steps taken by you and the United States to contribute to the settlement in the Middle East?

Prime Minister

We did not in fact discuss, as I have indicated, the Middle East at these talks. You know that we made a statement when the PLO accepted 242, so that was a very great step forward and we thought opened up the prospect of negotiations with Israel. Those negotiations have not yet come about. There are certain proposals on the table.

We have consistently taken the view that if talks are to be got going on negotiations about the future of the West Bank, the requirements of 242 require that the basis of those talks be territory in return for peace and not merely about autonomy of administration on the West Bank—and that is still our view.

Robin Oakley (The Times)

Prime Minister, do you now consider that the Soviet Union's record on human rights has improved sufficiently to enable British participation in any human rights conference in Moscow?

Prime Minister

I do not think that question arises yet. I think it will arise soon, but President Gorbachev made it quite clear that the law on emigration is still in hand and is being drafted and will come forward as soon as time permits. You will remember he referred to that in his last United Nations speech at New York.

Question

Mrs. Thatcher, on many occasions you have supported perestroika in the Soviet Union. At your press conference in Japan, you called upon the West that perestroika should be supported in the Soviet Union. What is your view? What can be the assistance of the West granted to perestroika in the Soviet Union?

Prime Minister

I think that we do. I certainly firmly support perestroika. It was a bold, courageous, visionary idea; one that will bring greater liberty to the people of the Soviet Union, which it is already doing. That, of itself, is very good both for the people of the Soviet Union and for all mankind and it also, as I have indicated, brings the prospect of economic success and prosperity. In other words, it opens up vistas and horizons which have not been available to the people of the Soviet Union for some seventy years. They thought their system would produce those things. It did not produce any personal liberty nor were they—nor could they—produce the kind of economic prosperity which people want and expect. That requires very firm political support from outside. I certainly give it.

I think it is a historic mission upon which the Soviet Union has embarked. I think it will also have other tremendous benefits for the world as a whole. As people go towards democracy and prosperity, the chances of lasting peace are very much greater and that, too, will be of benefit to us all.

So I think it is up to us all to say this is a very fundamental, courageous, bold, visionary step forward under the very strong leadership and resolve of President Gorbachev.

Question (A Magazine)

Our subscribers account for 20 million people. I should say, Mrs. Prime Minister, that you are benevolent about perestroika in our country. Taking into account your huge experience as a politician, what would you say are the potentialities for involving women in this process, in the process of perestroika?

Prime Minister

I do not think perestroika can succeed without women. No country can succeed without women, no country, and I think it enlarges the opportunities open to them as well. Women are always a great influence in every country and I think that they, too, will be pleased with the results of perestroika and will contribute towards bringing it about. You will not wake up one day and it has suddenly happened; you will have to work for it. There is no such thing as effortless prosperity! You have to get your output up to your pay and so on; you have to invest in the future. Women will take a great part and I have great faith that it will be a better future for them.

Question

Continuing the question about support of the West of perestroika, can you say that a kind of Marshall Plan could be continued in respect to the Soviet Union where you make your support contingent upon some conditions which should be met in this country?

Prime Minister

No. Various people proposed a Marshall Plan for this, that and the other. That was in the circumstances of almost total destruction after the War.

What you are proposing here in perestroika is a system of economic reform, going from a totally centrally-controlled economy—which has not worked and really cannot work—to an economy where the power and responsibility are much more widely dispersed, where they can make their own decisions much nearer to the point at which those decisions are required.

That is not a question of a Marshall Plan. It is a question of changing your system and those changes are coming about. But you are changing your system, happy in the knowledge that elsewhere in the world that has worked. It is not as if you are going into new economic spheres which have never been known before. A free market economy within a framework of law does work; it brings prosperity to the United States; it brings prosperity to Western Europe; it brings prosperity to other countries who have it. So you are going towards something which you know works.

So it is not a question of a Marshall Plan, but bringing about the change to bring about the extra prosperity for all.

Question

Prime Minister, Great Britain has never recognised the incorporation of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union. Do you see any way in which the changes currently taking place there could create a situation in which that situation could be recognised or in which there might be some movement towards further independence?

Prime Minister

I really think that we have enough problems on our plate at the moment for me not to go any further than the statements which have already been made and which are at the moment the responsibility of the Soviet Union about that particular matter. Quite clear statements have been made.

Don McIntyre

Prime Minister, my understanding is that you and Mr Gorbachev took the view that the questions that arise from the expulsions of diplomats and journalists should be discussed by the Foreign Ministers, but can you tell us when that is likely to happen and if so, whether there is something that you want to see come out of those talks?

Prime Minister

I want to see a satisfactory solution come out of the talks. I believe when the Foreign Ministers get down to it between them, that there will be a satisfactory solution emerging—satisfactory to both of us.

Question (ABC News, American Television)

Two questions please!

First, on the question of the START Agreement, did you speak with President Gorbachev about what appears to be a de-linkage of the START Agreement from restraints on Strategic Defence Initiative or Star Wars?

Secondly, you are quite famous for having made the comment that Mr. Gorbachev is a man the West can do business with. Do you think the West is doing enough business with Mr. Gorbachev today in terms of helping him in his perestroika reforms?



Prime Minister

I discussed a number of things on the START Agreement. I am not going to go into detail because they are being discussed in Wyoming now and I think it is best to leave the results of those discussions to emerge from the United States.

I certainly am doing everything I can—and did right from the beginning when these reforms were announced—to support them and to support them clearly because I could see at once that they were the boldest reform and most visionary reform that had come about for a very very long time.

I hope we are doing enough; if there is anything more we can do, please tell me!

Question (The Guardian Newspaper, London)

A number of analysts, particularly in Washington, seem to feel that because of the rising nationalist tensions in the Baltic and the Caucasus and strikes in various parts of the country, this system is beginning to fall apart.

Do you feel that the single-party system at the moment here is a force for stability or do you want Mr. Gorbachev to move on now to the kind of multi-party system that you praised General Jaruzelski this afternoon for introducing in Poland?

Prime Minister

I think it is inevitable that sometimes in the daily reporting you will concentrate on the difficulties. Let me say this to you:

Anything bold and purposeful will have difficulties to it. You must never allow yourself to be overcome by the difficulties when the scope for opportunity is so infinitely greater. The scope for changing the Soviet Union's prosperity and its relationship to the rest of the world to be a more peaceful one, is an enormous prize. Do not let some obstacles on the way stop you from going steadily and surely towards that prize.

Question (Egyptian Magazine)

Mrs. Prime Minister, always in your talks with the Soviet Union you insist on your nuclear deterrent strategy, so what is your thinking as regards the incorporation of small states within this particular sphere?

Recently, Israel fired a missile which is considered one of the stages in this particular policy, so what do you think of that particular step?

My second question to you is regarding Lebanon: what is your attitude towards Lebanon?

Prime Minister

The first one: I believe that the nuclear deterrent is an essential element of NATO strategy, a vital element of NATO strategy, and will continue to be so. My view on that has not changed.

I am against further proliferation. The five countries that have had it to date have handled it extremely responsibly and I wish that the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Agreement could get further signatories because I think that the present position has led to stability and I think if we get further proliferation it could be more dangerous. There are, after all, some missile states that now have missile-weapon technology and that, of course, gives rise for concern.

You then asked one's attitude towards Lebanon. None of us can pull a rabbit out of the hat to solve the Lebanon problem. All of us are deeply concerned about it. There, you had a highly prosperous country, Beirut one of the most prosperous cities in the Middle East, falling apart through internal strife and a certain amount of external interference.

I thought that the best hope for solution was the one which came about through the Arab League with the three Arab Heads of State getting together with King Fahd, King Hussein and the [ Benjedid Chadli] President of Algeria. I was concerned when they appeared not to be proceeding with that. I had said very firmly, if that course of action was embarked upon to try to solve the Lebanese problem they should not stop until they succeeded because it looked to me the best hope of success. I still think it is. I can, at the moment, not find any other.

There are complications in the Lebanon position, not only from the internal matters of the differences between the two groups of Christians and some of the Arab factions, but also because other Middle Eastern countries are supporting one side and others supporting another. I wish I could find something out the hat—I cannot. We shall just have steadily to go on trying and never give up hope.

Question ("Moscow News" Newspaper)

Madam Prime Minister, last April you had a chance to inaugurate the Information Forum of participants in the European CSCE process in Europe. It is to be hoped that thanks to that I have an opportunity to buy here in Moscow fresh issues of London's weekly "Economist" and recently there was signed an agreement between "Moscow News" and a British newspaper to publish that newspaper on a weekly basis in London.

My question is: as Head of the Government of one of the leading countries in the world, do you feel any practical value of the renewal in qualitative changes as far as the information contacts between our states

are concerned and what do you think should be done further, both at the state level, inter-state level and journalist level to further this process?

Prime Minister

I would be very happy if you could have a weekly copy of the "Economist" and many of them in the Soviet Union. It is an extremely good newspaper—I read it myself most weeks. I hope you will also have quite a lot of other newspapers.

I believe in the free distribution of periodicals and newspapers. I think they are very informative and some of them, if not informative, have other characteristics! (laughter) Yes, I am for the greater spread of information but one of the things one notices in Moscow is there are far more newspapers than periodicals.

I am sure you will find some "Economists" in Moscow. Are you complaining you are not getting a personal copy? Yes! Is there anyone here from the "Economist"? I am for the greater spread of newspapers and periodicals. It is no part of my belief to hold them up in any way. It is part of the Helsinki Process; it is part of the movement of ideas and I am all for it.

Question

Prime Minister, bearing in mind the way that the democracy movement in China was so suddenly put down, do you think that the progress towards perestroika is now irreversible in the Soviet Union?

Prime Minister

I think the two are very very different.

In China, they started on limited economic reform first but it was beginning to succeed in producing more goods for the people—on a limited scale certainly, but it was beginning to succeed.

You cannot get economic reform really going well and with a future unless you get political liberty. That was what they found. We have always known it.

Here, I think it was perhaps the wiser way to start: to start with the political reform, the thorough discussion. After all, new ideas come out of discussion and free interplay of ideas and discussion between one and the other. The glasnost as it is called, has gone very far very quickly, far further, far faster than we thought and I think that plus the communication of the ideas will in the end lead to much greater prosperity.

I think the point that I have to make again is that although the politicians at the top—led by Mr.

Gorbachev—could bring about the glasnost, it requires the practical and willing cooperation of the people to enlarge their responsibility and their activity to bring success in economic reform. I believe that will come about.

I believe that the changes—the glasnost—really have become permanent because they have gone so much further than anything we thought and they have given a so much better atmosphere and less tension—the fear seems to have gone—and so I believe that perestroika is now set upon its course and that it will go through to success.

*Source:* Margaret Thatcher, interview by the Financial Times, September 23, 1989, Margaret Thatcher Foundation, *Archive*, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/> (accessed May 15, 2008).