

Radio Address to the Nation on the Soviet-United States Summit Meeting in Moscow

May 28, 1988

My fellow Americans:

As this pretaped broadcast reaches you, I'm in Helsinki, Finland, on my way to the Soviet Union, where I arrive on Sunday. When I meet in the coming days with Soviet General Secretary Gorbachev, it will be our fourth set of face-to-face talks in 3 years. Through our conversations, U.S.-Soviet relations have moved forward on the basis of frankness and realism. This relationship has not rested on any single issue, but has been built on a sturdy four-part agenda that includes human rights, regional conflicts, arms reduction, and bilateral exchanges. What has been achieved in this brief span of time offers great hope for a brighter future and a safer world.

Through Western firmness and resolve, we concluded the historic INF treaty that provides for the global elimination of an entire class of U.S. and Soviet intermediate-range nuclear missiles. Soviet armed forces are now withdrawing from Afghanistan, an historic event that should lead finally to peace, self-determination, and healing for that long-suffering people and to an independent and undivided Afghan nation.

It is also encouraging to hear General Secretary Gorbachev speak forthrightly about glasnost and perestroika -- openness and restructuring in the Soviet Union -- words that to Western ears have a particularly welcome sound. And since he began his campaign, we can list developments that the free world heartily applauds. We've seen many well-known prisoners of conscience released from harsh labor camps or strict internal exile, courageous people like Josif Begun and Andrei Sakharov. Soviet authorities have permitted the publication of books like ``Dr. Zhivago" and the distribution of movies

such as "Repentance" that are critical of aspects of the Soviet past and present. Greater emigration has been allowed. Greater dissent is being tolerated. And recently, General Secretary Gorbachev has promised to grant a measure of religious freedom to the peoples of the Soviet Union.

All this is new and good, but at the same time, there's another list that the West cannot ignore. While there are improvements, the basic structure of the system has not changed in the Soviet Union or in Eastern Europe, and there remain significant violations of human rights and freedoms. In Asia, Africa, and Central America, unpopular regimes use Soviet arms to oppress their own people and commit aggression against neighboring states. These regional conflicts extract a terrible toll of suffering and threaten to draw the United States and the Soviet Union into direct confrontation.

These and related concerns will be at the top of my agenda in the days ahead. I shall say, among other things, that the Soviet Union should fully honor the Helsinki accords. In view of that document, signed in Helsinki in 1975, it is difficult to understand why almost 13 years later cases of divided families and blocked marriages should remain on the East-West agenda or why Soviet citizens who wish by right to emigrate should not be able to do so. And there are other issues: the recognition of those who wish to practice their religious beliefs and the release of all prisoners of conscience.

In working for a safer world and a brighter future for all people, we know arms agreements alone will not make the world safer; we must also reduce the reasons for having arms. As I said to General Secretary Gorbachev when we first met in 1985, we do not mistrust each other because we're armed; we're armed because we mistrust each other. History has taught us that it is not weapons that cause war but the nature and conduct of the Governments that wield the weapons. So, when we encourage Soviet reforms, it is with the knowledge that democracy not only guarantees human rights but also helps prevent war and, in truth, is a form of arms control. So, really, our whole agenda has one purpose: to protect peace, freedom, and life itself.

We would like to see positive changes in the U.S.S.R. institutionalized so that they'll become lasting features of Soviet society. And I would like to see more Soviet young people come here to experience and learn from our society. And that's why we're ready to work with the Soviets, to praise and criticize and work for greater contact and for change because that is the path to lasting peace, greater freedom, and a safer world.

I'm grateful for your prayers and support as I embark on this journey. Until next week, thanks for listening, and God bless you.

Note: The President's address was recorded on May 23 in the Library at the White House for broadcast on May 28.