

Remarks on the Departure of General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev of the Soviet Union

December 10, 1987

The President. Mr. General Secretary, these last few days have been exciting, indeed, for both of us and for our fellow countrymen who followed the course of our discussions. I'm pleased to report that upon the completion of our business that this summit has been a clear success. Like the star on the top of the National Christmas Tree, which was lit the evening you arrived, Mr. General Secretary, this summit has lit the sky with hope for all people of good will. And as we leave, it is up to both sides to ensure that the luster does not wear off and to follow through on our commitments as we move forward to the next steps in improving the relations between our countries and peoples.

I believe both the General Secretary and I can walk away from our meetings with a sense of accomplishment. We have proven that adversaries, even with the most basic philosophical differences, can talk candidly and respectfully with one another and, with perseverance, find common ground. We did not hide from the weighty differences that separate us; many of them, of course, remain. One of my predecessors, President Franklin Roosevelt, once said: "History cannot be rewritten by wishful thinking." Our discussions, in that spirit, were straightforward and designed to open a thoughtful communication between our governments on the critical issues that confront us.

Our exchange on the subject of human rights underscored the priority we in the Western democracies place on respect for fundamental freedoms. I'm pleased that during this summit we addressed this area of heartfelt importance and have ensured a continuing dialog on human rights at the highest levels of our governments.

Our discussions on regional conflicts were no less to the point. These conflicts continue to take a heavy toll in lives and impose a heavy burden on East-West relations. The General Secretary and I expressed different points of view -- we did so bluntly -- and for that reason alone, our talks have been useful in this area. Moreover, we agree that it is necessary to search for real political solutions to these conflicts. But so far, we cannot be satisfied with what has been achieved. We must now press ahead in the search for

political solutions that advance the cause of peace and freedom for the people suffering in these wars. The door has been opened, and it will stay open to serious discussion of ending these regional conflicts.

And as far as open doors, Mr. Gorbachev and I both agree on the desirability of freer and more extensive personal contact and the breaking down of artificial barriers between the peoples of the Soviet Union and the United States. As I said in my welcoming remarks, the fact that our governments have disagreements should not prevent our peoples from being friends.

Of course, the greatest accomplishment of these 3 days was the signing of a treaty to eliminate a whole class of U.S. and Soviet nuclear weapons. Another one of my predecessors, a President I have admired since my youth, Calvin Coolidge, once said: "History is made only by action." Well, it took enormous effort and almost superhuman tenacity on the part of negotiators on both sides, but the end product is a treaty that does indeed make history. It is in the interest of both our peoples, yet I cannot help but believe that mankind is the biggest winner. At long last, we have begun the task of actually reducing these deadly weapons rather than simply putting limits on their growth.

The INF treaty, as proud of it as we are, should be viewed as a beginning, not an end. Further arms reduction is now possible. I am pleased some progress has been made toward a strategic arms reduction treaty over the last 3 days. Individual agreements will not, in and of themselves, result in sustained progress. We need a realistic understanding of each other's intentions and objectives, a process for dealing with differences in a practical and straightforward manner; and we need patience, creativity, and persistence in achieving what we set out to do. As a result of this summit, the framework for building such a relationship has been strengthened.

I am determined to use this framework. My goal -- which I believe you share, Mr. General Secretary -- is a more constructive relationship between our governments, long-lasting rather than transitory improvements. Together, we can bring about a more secure and prosperous future for our peoples and a more peaceful world. Both of us are aware of the difficult challenges and special responsibilities inherent in this task.

During World War II, when so many young Russians served at the front, the poem "Wait For Me" became a prayer spoken on the lips of Russian families who dreamed one day of

the happiness that their reunion would bring. The cause of world peace and world freedom is still waiting, Mr. General Secretary. It has waited long enough.

General Secretary Gorbachev, Mrs. Gorbachev, it is good that you came to America, and Nancy and I are pleased to have welcomed you here. Your visit was short, yet I hope you'll take with you a better sense of the spirit and soul of the United States of America. And when you get back to Moscow, please pass on to the Soviet people the best wishes of the American people for a peaceful and prosperous new year.

Thank you, and Godspeed on your journey.

The General Secretary. Esteemed Mr. President, esteemed Mrs. Reagan, ladies and gentlemen, in these last hours before our departure for home, we note with satisfaction that the visit to Washington has, on the whole, justified our hopes. We have had 3 days of hard work, of businesslike and frank discussions on the pivotal problems of Soviet-American relations and on important aspects of the current world situation.

A good deal has been accomplished. I would like to emphasize in particular an unprecedented step in the history of the nuclear age: the signing of the treaty under which the two militarily and strategically greatest powers have assumed an obligation to actually destroy a portion of their nuclear weapons, thus, we hope, setting in motion the process of nuclear disarmament.

In our talks with President Ronald Reagan, some headway has been made on the central issue of that process -- achieving substantial reductions of strategic offensive arms, which are the most potent weapons in the world -- although we still have a lot of work to do. We have had a useful exchange of views, which has clarified each other's positions concerning regional conflicts, the development of our bilateral ties, and human rights. On some of these aspects, it seems likely that we can soon identify specific solutions satisfactory both to us and to other countries. A useful result of the Washington talks is that we have been able to formulate a kind of agenda for joint efforts in the future. This puts the dialog between our two countries on a more predictable footing and is undoubtedly constructive.

While this visit has centered on our talks with the President of the United States, I have no intention of minimizing the importance of meetings with Members of Congress, with other political leaders, public figures, members of the business and academic communities, cultural figures, and media executives. Such contacts enable us to gain a better and more profound knowledge of each other, provide a wealth of opportunities for checking one's views, assessments, and even established stereotypes. All this is important, both for policymaking and for bringing peoples and countries closer together. These meetings have confirmed the impression that there is a growing desire in American society for improved Soviet-American relations. In short, what we have seen here is a movement matching the mood that has long been prevalent among Soviet people.

In bidding farewell to America, I am looking forward to a new encounter with it, in the hope that I will then be able to see not only its Capital but also to meet face-to-face with its great people, to chat and to have some lively exchanges with ordinary Americans. I believe that what we have accomplished during the meeting and the discussions will, with time, help considerably to improve the atmosphere in the world at large and in America itself, in terms of its more correct and tolerant perception of my country, the Soviet Union.

Today the Soviet Union and the United States are closer to the common goal of strengthening international security, but this goal is yet to be reached. There is still much work to be done, and we must get down to it without delay. Mr. President, esteemed citizens of the United States, we are grateful for your hospitality, and we wish success, well-being, and peace to all Americans. Thank you, and goodbye.

Note: The President spoke at 2:25 p.m. at the South Portico of the White House. The President spoke in English, and the General Secretary spoke in Russian. Their remarks were translated by interpreters. Earlier, the President and the General Secretary met in the Oval Office and then attended a working luncheon in the Residence.