

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

MEETING WITH CPSU GENERAL SECRETARY ANDROPOV

3:00 p.m., Thursday, June 2, 1983

CPSU CENTRAL COMMITTEE HEADQUARTERS, THE OLD SQUARE, MOSCOW

General Secretary Andropov welcomed me back to the Soviet Union, saying that he would not ask me how I felt being back, since I was an old Muscovite. I responded that I was struck by all the beautiful buildings that had gone up in recent years. It was not so when I first came here nearly sixty years ago.

I then said to the General Secretary that I would like to give him a remembrance of the man who first brought about relations between the United States and the Soviet Union. I noted that it was now the fiftieth anniversary of the institution of U.S.-Soviet relations, and we really should have a celebration, but I could only leave the General Secretary an autographed picture of President Roosevelt.

I also said that I wished to give him a copy of my memoirs of our relations during the war with Stalin. The General Secretary thanked me warmly for these two gifts and went immediately into reading a prepared statement. The statement was as follows:

"Mr. Harriman, Mrs. Harriman, we would like to say that we value that both of you considered it necessary to come to Moscow at this time. We know you are active champions of improved U.S.-Soviet relations and know you are guided by concern where relations are going at this time."

I interjected that the General Secretary was absolutely correct in that perception.

The General Secretary continued:

"Let me say that there are indeed grounds for alarm. The situation, such as it is, is no fault of ours and unless reasonable measures are taken the relations could become still worse. At this time they are developing quite unfavorably and this does not suit us at all. We hope that you can influence those who think along the same lines.

"Forty years ago, Mr. Harriman, you came as Ambassador of the United States to the Soviet Union. We were then allies. We succeeded in rising above the differences in our social systems and united in the face of the fascists and defended peace in the world. We saw your own personal contribution at that time, and we do not forget it.

"Today the Soviet people and the American people have a common foe -- the threat of a war incomparable with the horrors we went through previously. This war may perhaps not occur

through evil intent, but could happen through miscalculation.
Then nothing could save mankind.

"It would seem that awareness of this danger should be precisely the common denominator with which statesmen of both countries would exercise restraint and seek mutual understanding to strengthen confidence, to avoid the irreparable. However, I must say that I do not see it on the part of the current Administration and they may be moving toward the dangerous 'red line'.

"I shall not pass judgment on the peculiarities of the American political system. Nevertheless, why is it that every election campaign, especially the Presidential campaigns, must be accompanied by anti-Soviet statements? Why must there be a hullabaloo about a lag in armaments or windows of vulnerability?

"It is probably far easier to appeal to chauvinism and to other such sentiments than to tell the truth. The elections pass, but they leave their aftermath. Mistrust and enmity have heated up, and there is a sharpening of the arms race and new arms programs.

"But we would prefer to think that the policy of a country such as the United States should be built not on a momentary but on a realistic, stable basis. For instance, what is the

line of the present Administration in respect to the Soviet Union? It appears oriented on speaking ill, military preponderance and economic and other kinds of harm. I venture to say to you, quite frankly, that such a line in the first instance shows a lack of understanding of the role and potential of my country and of the United States, and you know better than us the impact it has in relations between the United States and its allies. It is exceptionally damaging for international relations as a whole.

"The previous experience of relations between the Soviet Union and the United States cautions beyond all doubt that such a policy can merely lead to aggravation, complexity and danger. No results can be expected from it; both sides lose -- not ours alone. And the engendering of new types of arms complicates our task.

"Nothing is left to the imagination in what Washington throws down as threats, damnations and outright abuse, but they are mistaken. We are not that kind of people nor that kind of politicians. Nothing can come of it.

"We are convinced that in present international conditions, taking into account the military situation and the growing number of explosive problems, we cannot afford the luxury of destructive rivalry in interaction between the United States and the Soviet Union.

"We treat our relations with the United States seriously,
fully understanding their significance for peace and the need
to avoid nuclear war. We would prefer peaceful coexistence,
mutually-beneficial or, even better, good relations as our
policy.

"However, I will make no secret of the fact that beyond
all doubt there is one victim of the evil which may come from
the attitude taken by the White House. That is confidence,
the confidence which began in the last decade and was valued
throughout the world. These are not just swear words that are
being put out but an attempt to undermine all the things created
bilaterally and on a broader plane in that period.

"In these conditions, we can simply have no confidence
in the present Administration and certain people should really
give that a lot of thought.

"Nor are we in the habit of interfering in election
campaigns. We conduct our affairs with the United States and
those leaders elected by the people. We make no linkages for
understandings between the United States Government to how they
would reflect on chances of this or that party or this or that
candidate for President. We do not evade contact with the
Republican or Democratic Parties. Our conversation today is a
graphic example. We want to normalize our relations on an
equitable basis to benefit all Americans, regardless of their
party.

"Finally, I would like to say that we pay tribute to the personal dedication of Mrs. Harriman and the Governor to strengthen mutual understanding for better relations, for building on our common interest in peace and good relations. I also note that we follow with interest the efforts by your family that the United States have solid and thoughtful experts on the Soviet Union. We welcome that through your lucky hand it would appear that scholars, diplomats and others can develop an objective understanding of the Soviet Union.

We know that the Harriman family is actively participating in the political life of the United States. We would appreciate your setting out a few views on the prospects in your country and for relations with the Soviet Union."

When the General Secretary finished this statement, I responded that I wished to address first his last remarks. I said that I was grateful that he understood the attitudes of my wife and myself which we hoped could be to the benefit not only to the people of our country, but of his. I continued that he had asked for my comments. I would be glad to make some.

I wished to say that his remarks appeared directed both against the United States and against the current Administration. It was not clear to me which of his remarks were general and which were directed against the Administration. The General

Secretary responded that all of what he had said that was critical was related to the current Administration, but he should not be taken as criticizing when he said that it is a fact of life that in an American election campaign a wave of anti-Sovietism is raised. He was, however, not faulting the people or the United States as a nation.

I responded that it would not be appropriate for me as a private citizen to make comments regarding an American administration. If I were to do so, the place would be in the United States and not in the General Secretary's office. The General Secretary immediately responded that that would go without saying, and it was certainly not something which they expected of me.

I continued that regarding his suggestion that in an election campaign adverse comments were always being made about the Soviets, many people speak during these campaigns and many say some difficult things. I said that I did not know the source of his information, but in my view they were not the rule but the exception. I also continued that it was our general policy to develop sound relations with the Soviet Union, to develop trade, and to take actions which would be beneficial not only to the people of the United States but to the people of the Soviet Union.

I could say that as far as I am concerned, and my wife, our attitude would be as we have said, and one beneficial to the improvement of relations.

I added that I wished to recall that I had been in Moscow under more agreeable circumstances, when we negotiated the Limited Test Ban Treaty, still one of the most successful agreements between the United States and the Soviet Union. Its twentieth anniversary would be next month. I said that I believed we could return to those days, if we could cooperate, if we could work together to improve relations. I was dedicated to that goal and so was my wife, and I felt that our visit would help in that respect.

I also noted that I fully agreed with the General Secretary that it was not his affair to become involved in American politics, but I felt it was possible for the Soviet Union to take steps which could help to improve relations. I also had to note that other actions were sometimes taken which made it more difficult to do so. I said it would be helpful if the General Secretary could give me a significant message to take back or if he could make some statement beneficial, to and which would improve relations.

I noted that I was not here to speak of things which could make our relations more difficult; the General Secretary knows them already. I repeated that I hoped the General

Secretary could make statements on improving relations which would encourage American opinion towards their improvement. I said that I felt there was more goodwill in the United States than perhaps apparent at this time. That goodwill was latent, but ready to express itself.

I then noted that my wife would like to say something at this time. Mrs. Harriman then expressed her gratitude to be included in the conversation and reaffirmed that she shared her husband's views. She said that she knew there were many things which we cannot do, but she said that we should talk about those things which could work to our common good.

My wife asked whether it might be a good idea if more Members of Congress should ask to visit the Soviet Union this summer. Mrs. Harriman noted that House Majority Whip Tom Foley was already heading a delegation arriving July 1. She said she would like to know whether they would be well received. Mrs. Harriman emphasized her belief that it was better to meet and to talk directly rather than through written communications.

The General Secretary responded that in principle the Soviets were in favor of meetings of that sort. Each visit would, of course, be weighed on its merits, but it was important that people meet with each other. The meetings did not necessarily have to be with the General Secretary himself, but they certainly could be with his colleagues. In short, his answer was yes.

I then continued that I appreciated his recalling our wartime relations. I had come at that period with the British and other Americans to find out what was needed. We were able to send supplies to enable the Red Army to resist so gallantly as it did, so effectively, and eventually to drive the enemy out. I said that not just myself but others would be ready to support the improvement of relations again if the Soviets could take appropriate actions.

The General Secretary responded that in making my observations I had mentioned that there were some Americans who wanted good relations between the United States and the Soviet Union. He also took note of my comment that the critical remarks were incidental, since as he had said the Soviets were prepared to work with any Administration in our common interest. He said that he would like my leaving him with that impression.

The General Secretary said he still had one more point to raise. He added that in regard to my comment that the Soviets take at times certain actions which complicate the situation, he wanted to note that we stand on different positions. What the Soviets believe are the right steps, the Administration thinks are wrong, and vice versa. He wanted to know how to do this, by what mutual steps. He said, however, it could not be by the one step which it appears President Reagan wants -- a Soviet unilateral laying-down of its arms. That could not be.

I said that I agreed on the need for reciprocity. I emphasized again that I was not here to discuss difficulties -- that is, to review the steps that the Soviets have taken or what they say the U.S. has taken. Nevertheless, our discussion should be in general terms how to work on or to get around our difficulties.

I said we must continue, however, to be able to tell the Soviets frankly what we are against. I said I wished to emphasize that whoever is saying the American people are not for peace, as are the Soviets, was informing the General Secretary incorrectly. Americans are just as anxious as the Soviets to develop and improve relations.

I reiterated my view that we should first deal with those matters which stand the best chance of success. There are those which are more difficult and it is not useful in the first instance to go into those with which we are at variance. We should go into those on which we can have agreement. I repeated my belief that the General Secretary knew the areas in which the United States is opposed to what the Soviets have done. I felt then we could discuss how to overcome them if the General Secretary indicated how important it is to have good relations.

Frankness remains all-important, and from what the General Secretary had told me, I said that I believed that it was his point of view. The General Secretary interjected that that was certainly his point of view.

I then asked whether the General Secretary could tell me of anything he could do to make the situation easier for those who wanted to improve relations -- what messages he might have or what actions he might take on his own toward progress as a whole. The General Secretary responded that he would think it over.

I reiterated my hope that he would do something, and my wife supported me. The General Secretary then responded somewhat heatedly, asking whether what the Soviets were supposed to do was to make unilateral concessions. He said that he felt the Reagan Administration was demanding one-sided actions by the Soviets and refusing to act reciprocally. He maintained that the Soviets' suggestion of the freeze would not work against the interests of either side. He also said that in his view, of late the United States Administration was not even answering the Soviet approaches.

I then asked if I could talk to Ambassador Dobrynin whenever I met him, which was regularly, of possibilities, and the General Secretary responded that I was always welcome to talk. I said that I was glad to hear the General Secretary was ready to think over ways of moving relations forward. I noted that I would be seeing the press this afternoon -- my usual practice when I am in Moscow. I asked whether there was anything that I could say to them to encourage their reports along this line.

The General Secretary asked me to tell the media that it was the most sincere and fervent desire of the Soviet government to have normal relations with the United States and to develop them in the best traditions of those relations. He emphasized that there were good traditions in Soviet-American relations and that the Soviets do not forget them.

When I noted that the press at the conference would not be just Americans but from other countries and Soviets as well, the General Secretary asked me to say in addition that he was ready and interested in developing Soviet-American relations, to search for joint initiatives, proposals which might make the present situation easier. He added that he would in that instance be awaiting the U.S. response.

I then thanked him for his courtesy in receiving me. I wished him well in his important leadership of his great country. I hoped that he would remain in good health and achieve what he desired, with the objective we had discussed in mind. I noted that I had one last statement.

I was now 91 years old, and I did not know how many more times I could come to the Soviet Union. I wished to let the General Secretary know, however, that I was someone in the United States with whom I hoped he would speak, just as I would be talking to his Ambassador, on matters important to our relations. He thanked me and said that he would certainly do so.

I then noted that I should not take any more of his time and hoped that the meeting had been as useful to him as it had been to me. He noted that he was very happy with the meeting (Arbatov later informed me that Andropov had passed the word that he felt the meeting was a success).

COMMENT:

The principal point which the General Secretary appeared to be trying to get across to Mrs. Harriman and me was a genuine concern over the state of U.S.-Soviet relations and his desire to see them at least "normalized", if not improved. He seemed to have a real worry that we could come into conflict through miscalculation. He was critical of the current state of relations, but was careful to stress -- several times -- that efforts for improvement had to be mutual. This point about the need for Soviet, as well as U.S. steps was included in the Pravda and Tass summaries of our talk.

I felt Andropov was making a major effort to be non-polemical in our conversation.

I am not in a position to make a real judgment on Andropov's health, although we noted occasional tremors of his hands, but not when they were in repose, and a rather rigid walk. He was in full command of himself and his part of the meeting: read his statement without effort, and responded or made points during the exchange quickly and without reference to Aleksandrov.

Also present, besides Mrs. Harriman, the General Secretary and myself, were the General Secretary's Assistant, Andrey M. Aleksandrov-Agentov, and the interpreter, Viktor Sukhodrev, both of whom had been at all my previous meetings with Brezhnev, as well as Peter Swiers, who was able to accompany me again on a trip to the Soviet Union through the courtesy of the Department of State.

**NATIONAL
SECURITY
ARCHIVE**

This document is from the holdings of:

The National Security Archive

Suite 701, Gelman Library, The George Washington University

2130 H Street, NW, Washington, D.C., 20037

Phone: 202/994-7000, Fax: 202/994-7005, nsarchiv@gwu.edu