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Exchange With Reporters on the Situation in the Soviet Union

1991-12-13

Q. Mr. President, now that it appears that Gorbachev is on his way out, what are your feelings?

The President. Well, we're watching that situation very closely. Secretary Baker made a very good speech, talking about administration policy. We're looking forward to his trip. And this is not a helpful time to editorialize on personalities inside the Soviet Union.

We're supporting those who are reformed. We're supporting those who are for democracy, whoever they are, wherever they are, in whatever Republic they are and in the center. And that's been our policy, and we will continue to watch this question of self-determination evolve in the Soviet Union. And that's exactly what's happening. And we have some interests, interests in the peaceful reconciliation. We've got fundamental interests in responsibility to the whole world for the nuclear weapons question. So we want to see that that is handled with the ultimate, maximum amount of safety, and the assurances from the center and from the Republics has been very good on that, incidentally.

So we're watching it very, very closely, and I think the leaders there understand our position as to let them sort these matters out. It's not for the United States to dictate these matters, but we do have interests, some of which I've mentioned here.

Thank you all very much.

Q. Have you been in contact with Yeltsin or Gorbachev?

The President. We'll let you know when we reveal the personal contacts I've had. But we're in close contact with the different factions.

Thank you.

Note: The exchange began at 9:18 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House.