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THE WHITE HOUSE
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October 3, 1986

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INFORMATION

NLRR FOI-114/5 #8581

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

BY CI NARA DATE 11/29/07

FROM: JOHN M. POINDEXTER *John*

SUBJECT: Meeting Gorbachev: Soviet Psychology Regarding Size and Style of Meetings

It is significant that, when Gorbachev proposed the meeting in Iceland or London, he specified that what he had in mind was a one-on-one meeting (or perhaps just with Foreign Ministers), and that it should be "confidential, closed and frank." It may be useful to speculate on his reasons for doing so, bearing in mind traditional Soviet attitudes toward meeting size and confidentiality.

Gorbachev's Probable Motivations

1. Meeting with you one-on-one, or with just foreign ministers present, conveys the image not only of dealing as equals -- which is important to him -- but also the image of a leader who is as much in charge of his bureaucracy as you are of yours. We know that Gorbachev faces major bureaucratic resistance to many of his policies. Asserting his authority by meeting you alone is a powerful way to signal that he is in charge and will make the final decisions.

2. Meeting totally in private and confidentially normally is a sign of serious intent on the Soviet part. The Soviets know very well that most of their propagandistic proposals are not realistic. When they are really serious about striking a deal, they go private. Privacy is particularly helpful to a Soviet leader who knows he must change some traditional policies, since it makes it possible for him to structure his dealings with his colleagues, and to modify public presentations of policy issues, to make it appear that he is not really backing down. Given deep-seated Russian psychological resistance to being seen compromising on principle and the extreme importance the Soviets attach to "face," any Soviet leader needs some "running room" to arrange justifications for policy shifts which avoid the impression within the Soviet Union that he has given way under pressure.

cc Vice President
Don Regan

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3. From the Soviet point of view, small meetings also have the advantage that bureaucratic elements who might oppose compromises can be excluded from direct participation. That way, the General Secretary has under his control what others are told and how it is presented to them. Infighting over "turf" is very intense in the Soviet system, and Soviets are so protocol conscious that it is difficult for them to exclude anyone from a meeting if his American counterpart is present. Shevardnadze is presumably Gorbachev's man, so Gorbachev doesn't mind including him. However, he clearly prefers not to open Pandora's box by including others.

4. One possible motivation Gorbachev could have in proposing small private meetings would be to attempt to play you for the sucker by trying to get you to agree to something without the advice of technical specialists. However, I very much doubt that this is indeed his intent. He knows enough from dealing with you in Geneva to realize that you are not the sort of person who would buy a used car sight unseen from a fast-talking salesman without having your mechanic check it out. And he also knows from Geneva that you are not the sort to be persuaded by gimmicks and disinformation. (In any case, if he should try such a tactic, it is easy enough to deal with.)

American Interests: Using Soviet Psychology to Our Advantage

We have no interest in building up Gorbachev's prestige because he is Gorbachev. We should not fall into the trap of feeling that one Soviet leader is more favorable to us than another, and therefore that it is in our interest to do him favors. We should not think of Soviet political figures as falling into "good guy/bad guy" categories. They are all "bad guys" so far as U.S. interests are concerned.

However, if we want to maximize any Soviet leader's ability to modify policies to reach agreement with us, we have an interest in cooperating to create conditions that permit him to manage the bureaucratic and perceptual barriers to change which are inherent in the Soviet system and Russian psychology. In this sense, we too have a stake in small meetings and confidentiality, though not as a personal favor to Gorbachev. (Needless to say, it is even more important to keep real and tangible pressure on him to move in our direction. Such pressure is likely to be most productive when circumstances permit us to do it relatively quietly, so that Gorbachev can cave without making it obvious that he has done so.)

Another aspect of one-on-one meetings, and very small meetings, is the impression it leaves on the Soviet leaders of your own leadership position. Russians respect strength and leadership. The past rulers they glorify are the ones who forced the Russians

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-- kicking, screaming and suffering -- into a position of power in the world. Unspeakable cruelties to their own people are almost forgotten: what counts is that they were strong and that they were leaders.

Despite all the propaganda attacks they previously levied against you, one thing is absolutely clear: both Gorbachev and the Soviet people as a whole respect you as a real leader. Your popularity here and your demonstrated political effectiveness are important factors in this judgment, but the way you handled the private meetings with Gorbachev in Geneva is not the least of them. Nothing should be done to leave the impression that your authority might be eroding as your second term progresses. In Soviet eyes, a real leader does not need to be propped up by a lot of "advisers." They can understand the usefulness in having a few experts around to consult between rounds (the mechanics to check out the used cars being offered), but instinctively feel that having a lot of people, representing various "constituen-cies," around the table is a sure sign of weakness and division.

The reason for this Soviet attitude derives from their own practice. When other Soviet officials are present at a meeting (except for members of one's own immediate office or very close political or personal associates), there is a tendency to make points just for the record, to demonstrate to various interest groups represented (or who will read the record of the meeting) that the Soviet leader was vigorous in defending their interests. They suspect that foreigners have the same tendency, therefore tend to discount much of what is said at large meetings. Real business, in their eyes, is done in private -- and kept private until ripe for announcement.

* * * * *

In sum, we can best take advantage of these various Soviet attitudes by seeing to it that you go to Reykjavik with a small, substantive staff, and conduct the meetings on a very confidential, very small group basis. This is also in keeping with our overall aim to make clear to the public that the meeting in Iceland is not a surrogate Summit.

I believe that you should plan to spend a substantial amount of your time in Reykjavik with Gorbachev one-on-one, just with interpreters. The rest of the time should probably be with George and Shevardnadze, with interpreters and -- perhaps -- a notetaker on each side, to insure an accurate historical record. If new ideas are introduced, they can be discussed between rounds with a small team which would come along to vet them. In addition, if the first day's meetings indicate that some real progress is being made, representatives from each side could be delegated to work Saturday evening on the details of possible instructions to delegations, which could be discussed by the two

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of you at your Sunday morning (final) session and either approved or modified, as you both see fit.

Prepared by:
Jack F. Matlock

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Gorbachev's Goals and Tactics at Reykjavik

We go into Reykjavik next week with very little knowledge of how Gorbachev intends to use the meeting. The same was true of Geneva of course, but the uncertainty is perhaps greater this time around.

Gorbachev's long-term goals are clear enough: to unravel the Western consensus behind tougher policies toward the Soviet Union, to stabilize US-Soviet relations in a way that gives him greater latitude in his domestic policies, and over time to regain a more favorable position in the global balance of power. Arms control negotiations play a central role in this strategy, as Soviet proposals all year long have made clear. Given all this, how is he likely to play his hand at Reykjavik?

Gorbachev's letter to you called this a preparatory meeting for the Washington summit, saying that he hoped enough agreement could be reached that would make it possible for the two of you to sign 2-3 documents during his visit. We can't yet know the thinking that lies behind this statement but see three broad possibilities:

-- Despite his coyness, Gorbachev may already have made the basic decision to come. He may consider the Iceland prep session a way of protecting himself politically, by seeming to test what your views really are on key issues. Or he may see it as an opportunity to claim personal credit for getting concessions from the US. Whatever his motives, he may believe that his basic criteria have been met by, for example, the convergence of US and Soviet positions on INF, on risk reduction centers, and so forth. If so, the purpose of next week's meeting will be mainly to seal the deal.

-- Alternatively, Gorbachev may be genuinely undecided, even skeptical. He could calculate that progress made so far is not enough to protect him from charges that you are wearing him down, or from an international perception of growing Soviet weakness. If so, he may come to Reykjavik eager to listen but determined to win a major breakthrough on his primary concerns. In this case, you would find him ready to say at the end (with a heavy heart, of course) that a summit has not yet been adequately prepared. He could thus claim that he had given us a chance and was not responsible for breaking the agreement he made at Geneva.

-- A final possibility is that Gorbachev is ready to make a decision to come, but only if he can get a little bit more in the way of concessions and assurances next week. If so, he will be strongly inclined to respond favorably to what he hears, and will not necessarily insist on movement in the areas he has harped on most loudly (SDI, testing). What he would insist (for domestic reasons but also to strengthen his international reputation) is that he have something more in hand when he leaves than when he arrived.

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There is no agreement within the government on which of these readings is correct. It is perhaps fair to say that the second possibility has the least, but still quite significant, support among our analysts; the third probably has the most, but even those who hold to it are not sure exactly what Gorbachev would regard as enough progress to meet his criteria. Also unclear is whether Gorbachev will be ready to make his own concessions for the sake of agreement, and how significant they will be. His letter to you of last month and Shultz's talks with Shevardnadze don't settle these matters at all.

On the issue of SDI, for example, the letter adopted a tough tone -- saying that the Soviet Union had no intention of helping the US into space, as Gorbachev put it. On the other hand, since mid-summer the Soviet line on strategic defense has apparently begun to waver just a bit, with the shift from demanding a total ban to a more outwardly negotiable extension of the ABM treaty for 15 years.

Similarly, we can't be sure how Gorbachev will relate these arms control issues to other items on his and our agendas. Will he be less demanding on these questions if he thinks there is a chance of winning Soviet participation in a Middle East conference? Will he offer significantly increased Jewish emigration if he thinks this will induce you to budge on the remaining unresolved issues of an INF agreement?

It is conceivable that between now and Reykjavik we may see some Soviet probes that begin to tip their hand, and to indicate which of these routes Gorbachev will follow. More likely, however, is that you will have to smoke him out during your discussions. If Gorbachev has already settled on coming, he may well open the meeting by simply proposing a date. Such a bold stroke to create a good atmosphere, and to encourage us to reciprocate his show of good faith, would be quite consistent with his style (though not with traditional Soviet negotiating tactics). Equally consistent, however, would be to toy with the question until the end, particularly if he is working from a short list of "must-have's." And he may combine these approaches -- announcing that he would like to come on a specific date, but then setting out a series of conditions that he hopes can be met before the Reykjavik meeting is over.

Between now and your departure for Reykjavik, we will present you more detailed thinking on these matters, and in particular on the kinds of tactics you should consider.

Prepared by:
Stephen Sestanovich

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WASHINGTON

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INFORMATION

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: JOHN M. POINDEXTER

SUBJECT: Your Meetings with Gorbachev in Reykjavik

Gorbachev's immediate objective in meeting you in Iceland is to define one or more agreements in the arms control area which can be completed during his trip to the United States. Your objective will be impress upon him the necessity for progress across the range of issues as you have defined them, and to determine how far he is likely to go to reach concrete agreements.

The most favorable outcome from our point of view would be an agreed date for Gorbachev's trip to the United States. However, the best way to maximize the odds that Gorbachev will commit himself to a date is to avoid seeming too eager. If Gorbachev feels that the fact of a meeting in the United States is supremely important to you, he is more likely to try to extract a substantive payment for it. It will be best to maintain the attitude that Gorbachev is welcome to come at any reasonable time convenient to him, and that you wish his visit to be as productive as possible (thus your agreement to the meeting in Reykjavik), but it is up to him to make agreements possible on fair terms if he seeks them.

In Geneva, you engaged him in considerable debate about philosophical attitudes and historical experience. In Reykjavik, Gorbachev is likely to be more goal-oriented, concentrating on what can be achieved -- though he will doubtless rise to sharp debate if he feels challenged on matters affecting his pride or the prestige of his country.

Since time will be severely limited, you will want to concentrate on a few key issues which either seem good candidates for further movement on the Soviet part, or else are of such importance that firm markers must be set down. Several arms control issues fall in the first category, while regional issues like Afghanistan and Central America fall in the second. Human rights issues fall somewhere in between: they are unlikely to be candidates for formal agreements, but Gorbachev must be convinced that more progress is required in this area if some of the other things he wants are to become feasible.

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Although Gorbachev may possibly throw in a few "sweeteners" at the outset, he probably will reserve most of his real concessions (if he is bringing any) until late in the day (or rather, until the second day). Therefore, it will probably be wise to use the first day to lay out and defend our current positions and listen carefully to what he says. By your final session, it should be clear whether we are near closure on any important points -- and whether Gorbachev is prepared to move enough on some key issues to justify movement on our part.

The people Gorbachev has named to his "official delegation" are all very close to him personally and bureaucratically: all, except for Foreign Minister Shevardnadze, come from his immediate office or the Central Committee Secretariat which is under his direct command. This means that he retains considerable flexibility to interpret the results of your meetings as he wishes in reporting to his Politburo colleagues.

My guess is that he has a keen interest in a "successful" meeting, which would enhance his prestige and authority at home and prepare the way for a visit to the U.S. -- which could bring further domestic benefits. If so, you will enter the meeting with a very strong hand, and should be able to secure some significant movement in some Soviet positions. On the other hand, if Gorbachev turns out to be unyielding, your willingness to meet him in Reykjavik should make clear to U.S. and allied publics that Gorbachev is the problem.

Prepared by:
Jack F. Matlock