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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with Eduard Shevardnadze, Foreign
Minister of the Soviet Union (U)

PARTICIPANTS: The President
James A. Baker, Secretary of State
John H. Sununu, Chief of Staff
Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs (notetaker)
Dmitry Zarechnak (Interpreter)

Eduard Shevardnadze, Minister of Foreign
Affairs
Alexander Bessmertnykh, First Deputy Foreign
Minister
P. Palazhchenko (Interpreter)

DATE, TIME September 21, 1989, 3:05 p.m. - 3:40 p.m. EDT
AND PLACE: The Oval Office

Foreign Minister Shevardnadze: It is good that these issues have been intensively discussed. President Gorbachev has reaffirmed the need for an informal meeting -- no agenda, small group. We have discussed all this on several occasions. As for a quick trip to the United States, we believe that would raise many problems, especially with an official trip expected next year. We concluded that would create a mistaken impression. A meeting, in the absence of agreements, would also lead to disappointment in both countries.

President Gorbachev asks you to weigh the possibility of meeting in any third country. President Gorbachev is planning to visit Finland in October and Italy in November (after November 20th). If the President was interested in any other places in Europe, or close to Europe, we could arrange a meeting.

The President: When will President Gorbachev be going to Italy?

Foreign Minister Shevardnadze: His visit will begin on November 20. He will be in Finland in October.

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If that working meeting does not go forward, we should prepare for a real Summit. Given the current state of discussions, there may be an urgent need for major decisions on START, and Summit input will be needed.

If we were to begin working toward a Summit, when should it take place? We should give negotiators time for serious preparation. Perhaps late spring or early summer would be right. If we set that date, we could get two ministerial meetings in before the Summit. Any date later than that would be difficult because we will be holding a Party Congress in October. Holding no Summit at all would be inconsistent with the situation in our relationship.

The President: I am glad we could have this discussion. Just so you hear it from me, let me go back a bit. I have been officially opposed to an informal meeting. But, because of rapid changes around the globe, the problems you face and we face, I have changed my position 180 degrees. The four of us were in Paris, and we heard our allies indicate their desire that I meet with President Gorbachev. We spoke with our allies of the many changes, in China, Eastern Europe, the global environment, and elsewhere. We talked about the possibility that maybe we, in the U.S., should change our minds and favor an informal meeting without an agenda.

If we did, I would have to explain to the press why I changed. But my real concern is that I do not want us to miss anything, to let something fall through the cracks. Today Eastern Europe is important -- not to make decisions -- just to discuss important issues.

We need to get comfortable with each other, so we can talk really frankly -- pick up the phone, for example. My predecessor did not have a close relationship with President Mitterrand. I wanted a better one. He can be a difficult man -- we all can. I invited him to Maine. It was the best darn thing I ever did. Because of this recent step, our relationship is on a completely different plane. The chemistry is different. It could become the same with us. It would be good; I know it.

Foreign Minister Shevardnadze: This is consistent with what President Gorbachev thinks.

The President: I understand why it won't work, but that is why a meeting connected to the UN General Assembly would have been

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perfect. The press might otherwise reflect disappointment that no agreements were signed, etc.

Foreign Minister Shevardnadze: That would have been best, but for the fact that President Gorbachev spoke there last year.

The President: We know, but that is why we thought of Alaska and the environment. We understand why that was not possible. We will regroup and keep thinking about this. I really want to do this. I am convinced it would be a good thing.

Foreign Minister Shevardnadze: That is why President Gorbachev wanted me to tell you about his two visits in Europe which are already set.

The President: I will think about it. We are not saying no. Please ask President Gorbachev to think further. There has to be some rationale to keep the fact of a meeting from getting out of hand. That was the problem with Spain. There would be no reason for me to go there absent a crisis.

Foreign Minister Shevardnadze: If some trip you made would coincide with our trips, that would stop the speculation.

The President: Let me ask a logistics question. We thought about this idea for Alaska. How about holding one meeting on our ship and one on yours. Is there some problem in that notion from your perspective?

Foreign Minister Shevardnadze: Korea. If we were to meet you in Alaska, North Korea would ask why we did not visit them as well.

The President: Let's keep talking about this until we find an answer.

Secretary Baker: I suggest that we tell the press we have agreed on holding a Summit meeting by next summer.

The President: That would take the pressure off and then, if we could have another meeting, it would be clear it was not a Summit.

Foreign Minister Shevardnadze: So we will make an announcement, indicating a time frame for the Summit.

(There was then a discussion which resulted in agreement to

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describe the time frame as before mid-year 1990.)

Foreign Minister Shevardnadze: When would we announce this? I need to call President Gorbachev. We could say we had a good discussion and will be more specific later.

(End of meeting)

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