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BBC RADIO NEWS AND CURRENT AFFAIRS

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Ryne Austin
I've underlined some interesting passages.
Please see in particular pages 4

Transcript of interview with President Reagan conducted by Brian Widlake of 'The World at One' on BBC Radio 4 at The White House on Tuesday October 29 1985.

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Strict embargo: not for use before broadcast in 'The World at One' on BBC Radio 4 at 1300 on Wednesday October 30.

Widlake: Mr President, your meeting with Mr Gorbachev is only three weeks away now. Everyone regards it as crucial. What do you hope personally to get out of the summit with Mr Gorbachev?

Reagan: Well I think that the most that we could get out is if we could eliminate some of the paranoia, if we could reduce the hostility, the suspicion that keeps our two countries particularly but basically, should we say the Warsaw Bloc and the West, at odds with each other and, well I know everyone is looking toward and emphasising a reduction in arms. This is vital and important, but I see reduction in arms as a result, not a cause. If we can reduce those suspicions between our two countries the reduction of arms will easily follow because we will reduce the feeling that we need them.

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Widlake: Mr Shultz is off to Moscow on Saturday to do the groundwork for this summit fully aware, as he himself admits, that there are major differences between the United States and Russia. Apart from the paranoia which you talk about, what are those differences as you see them?

Reagan: Oh my heavens. Here are two systems so diametrically opposed that, I'm no linguist, but I've been told that in the Russian language there isn't even a word for freedom and two nations everyone's referring to as the Superpowers obviously are competitive and our philosophies and our ideas in the world, and that probably can't be corrected, but we can have a peaceful competition. We have to live in the world together. There is no sense in believing that we must go on with the threat of a nuclear war hanging over the world because of our disagreements. We don't like their system, they don't like ours, but we are not out to change theirs. I do feel sometimes they are out to change ours, but if we could get along. They have a system of totalitarian Government and rule of their people; we have one in which we believe the people rule the Government and there isn't any reason why we can't co-exist in the world, where their legitimate areas of competition compete, but do it in a manner that recognises that neither one of us should be a threat to the other.

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Widlake: When Mr Shultz talks to Mr Gorbachev and Mr Shevardnadze what will be the topics of discussion? Will it be trying to find some groundwork for example on arms control and reduction?

Reagan: No I would think that probably the main point in their meeting ahead of the major meeting, is to establish an agenda. In other words, Secretary Shultz will tell them the things that we feel important to be discussed. Minister Shevardnadze will probably have a list of things that are on their agenda, so that we can plan and neither one of us be caught by surprise at the summit with hearing a subject coming up that hadn't even been considered, so I think that is probably the main useful purpose that will be served by their getting together.

Widlake: Is there any chance at all that the discussions Mr Shultz has in Moscow might enable you to produce an initiative before you go to Geneva?

Reagan; Right now we are in the position of studying what we call a counter proposal. In Geneva, where our arms control delegations are meeting and have been meeting for a long time, we have had a proposal for a reduction of nuclear weapons. Now for the first time the Soviet Union has made a counter proposal. We have put that in the hands of our people in Geneva now for them to look at.

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(cont.) We ourselves are studying. There are some elements in there - we have called them seeds to nurture - things that we look at and say yes, these could very easily be acceptable. At the same time, in their proposal there are some things that we believe are so disadvantageous to us that these should be negotiated and some changes made and with all of this going on I'm not in a position to say now at what point will we make our reply to their counter offer and state where we are or where we differ, and so forth and then that should be the area in which negotiations would take place. Now whether that doesn't happen prior to the summit meeting or whether our team in Geneva tables it before they adjourn for their recess that is coming up, that I can't answer. That still remains to be seen.

Widlake: But I must tell you Mr President that Mrs Thatcher has already told the leader of the Opposition, and she said this today in the House of Commons, that you were going to come up with an initiative before Geneva. Has she been talking ...

Reagan: I'm personally hopeful of that also, so she's right that that is what we are striving to do.

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Widlake: Now can we look at some of the things which obviously are going to affect Geneva, but particularly I would like to talk to you about the strategic defence initiative and how important that is going to be. Can anything be achieved at Geneva without some understanding from both sides in this area?

Reagan: Probably not, but I think there can be an understanding when they hear what we have in mind. I believe that this is something that is probably one of the most momentous things in the century. We have a team that within the terms of the A.B.M. Treaty is researching to see if there is a possibility of a defensive weapon that could intercept missiles before they reach their target, instead of having a deterrent to wars that we have now, which is both sides with massive weapons of destruction - nuclear missiles - and the only thing deterring war is the threat we represent to each other of killing millions and millions of citizens on both sides. Now if we can come up with a defensive weapon and we know that we have it, that it is there, that it is practical, that it will work, then my idea is that we go to the world, we go to our allies, we go to the Soviet Union and we say look, we are not going to just start deploying this at the same time we maintain a nuclear arsenal. We think this weapon, this defensive weapon, we would like to make available and let's have the world have this for their own

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(cont.) protection so that we can all eliminate our nuclear arsenals and
the only reason then for having the defensive weapon would be
because since everyone in the world knows how to make one, a
nuclear weapon, we would all be protected in case some madman
some day down along the line secretly sets out to produce some
with the idea of blackmailing the world and the world wouldn't
be blackmailed because we would all be sitting here with that
defence. I've likened it to what happened when in 1925, after
World War I, all the nations got together and outlawed poison gas,
but everybody kept their gas masks, so we would have a world
with some nuclear gas masks and we could sleep at night without
thinking that someone could bring this great menace of the
nuclear threat against us.

Widlake: Why do you say Mr President you would go to the world once
you had proved satisfactorily to yourself that here was a
weapon which would actually work? If you go to the world, would
you include Russia in that?

Reagan: Yes. I think that what could be safer that ... Today
everything is offensive weapons. It's the only weapon I know of
that's ever been developed in history that has not brought about
a defence against it, but what would be safer than if the two great
Superpowers, the two who have the great arsenals, both of us sat

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(cont.) there with defensive weapons that ensured our safety against the nuclear weapons and both of us eliminated arms

Widlake: But the Russians presumably would have to make their own S.D.I.?
You wouldn't offer it to them would you off the shelf?

Reagan: Why not? And I think this is something to be discussed at the summit as to what kind of an agreement we could make in the event. I would like to say to the Soviet Union we know you have been researching for this same thing longer than we have. We wish you well. There couldn't be anything better than if both of us came up with it, but if only one of us does, then why don't we instead of using it as an offensive means of having a first strike against anyone else in the world, why don't we use it to ensure that there won't be any nuclear strikes.

Widlake: Are you saying then Mr President that the United States, if it were well down the road towards a proper S.D.I. programme, would be prepared to share its technology with Soviet Russia, provided of course there were arms reductions and so on, on both sides.

Reagan: That's right. There would have to be the reductions of offensive weapons. In other words, we would switch to defence, instead of offence..

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Widlake: That of course is quite a long way away, this idealistic world of yours, if I may say so?

Reagan: Yes, yes. We are optimistic. We have had some good breakthroughs in our research so far.

Widlake: It's going well is it?

Reagan: Yes.

Widlake: And is the research going so well as to suggest to you that a defensive weapon of this kind is really practical now?

Reagan: As a matter of fact very leading scientists who are involved in this have said that, that they can foresee us achieving this weapon.

Widlake: Will it take long?

Reagan: Oh, I think we are talking a matter of years.

Widlake: Let us say though that this isn't going to come about, as you say, for a matter of years and Mr Gorbachev, as we all know, is very worried about S.D.I. Would you be prepared to negotiate on S.D.I. at Geneva?

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Reagan: Well, negotiate in a sense of coming to an agreement, which we are bound by in the future for whenever that weapon happens - bound to this matter of world-wide sharing.

Widlake: I wonder if you would be kind enough to clear up one point on the S.D.I. and it's this. Mr Gorbachev, I think, accepts the idea that you could do nothing about research because it's not really verifiable. Testing, on the other hand, worries him. Now does testing, in your view, come within the A.B.M. Treaty?

Reagan: Yes, I believe it does. I think that we are well within it and within a strict adherence to the treaty, although you could have a more liberal interpretation of the treaty that I believe is justified, but rather than have any debate or argument about that, we are staying within the strict limits of the treaty.

Widlake: Do you think the S.D.I. is likely to be a stumbling block at Geneva, bearing in mind what Mr Gorbachev thinks about it and his reservations?

Reagan: I think it should be the other way around. I think it should be one of the most helpful things in erasing some of that paranoia I mentioned or that hostility or suspicions between us.

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Widlake: You have a horror of nuclear weapons and that's why you say that S.D.I. is a good thing. If we had S.D.I. world-wide, would there still be nuclear weapons available?

Reagan: I wouldn't see any need for them at all. I wouldn't know why a nation would strap itself to invest in them, but, as I say, there is always the possibility of a madman coming along and, as I say, you can't eliminate the knowledge about building those weapons, who might seize upon them. We've had an experience in our lifetime of a madman in the world who caused great tragedy world-wide, and so I would think that this would be our gas mask.

Widlake: Mr President, can we turn now to some of the things you said in your U.N. speech. One of the central themes you brought up there concerned those areas of regional conflict, such as Afghanistan, in which the Soviets have a hand. Are you going to bring these up with Mr Gorbachev, and if so, do you expect him to respond positively?

Reagan: Well, I would think that this is very much a part of trying to rid the world of the suspicions. They claim that they fear that we of the Western world threaten them, that somehow we are lying here in wait for a day when we can eliminate their method of

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(cont.) Government and so forth. There is no evidence to sustain that. If you look back to the end of World War II our country, for example, absolutely undamaged; we hadn't had our industries destroyed through bombings and so forth and we were the only nation with the bomb, the nuclear weapon. We could have dictated to the world. We didn't. We set out to help even our erstwhile enemies recover and today those erstwhile enemies are our staunchest allies in the NATO Alliance. They on the other hand, have created, well, they have gone through the biggest military build-up in the history of man and it is basically offensive. Now we, therefore, claim we have got some right to believe that we are threatened, not the other way round. Now to eliminate that suspicion of that fear, if they really want to live in a peaceful world and be friends and to associate with the rest of the world, then we need more than words and the deeds could be the stopping of their attempt to, either themselves or through proxys and through subversion, to force their system on other countries throughout the world and that could be one of the greatest proofs there is.

Widlake: Do you think you were being a bit optimistic in your U.N. speech - you proposed the idea that these areas of regional conflict should be discussed, but of course you took it much further than that. What you are actually saying is that they should be

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(cont.) discussed up to the point when they are just eliminated.

Now do you think you are being optimistic when you recognise the fact that the fellow sitting opposite you is Mr Gorbachev and he's tied up in these things?

Reagan: Yes, but on the other hand he has some practical problems in his own country. Some problems of how long can they sustain an economy that provides for their people under the terrific cost of building-up and pursuing this expansionist policy and this great military build-up.

Widlake: His economic problems?

Reagan: Yes, and if we can show him that he can resolve those economic problems with no danger to themselves, convince him that we represent no threat, then I could see us, as I have said before. We don't like each other's systems, maybe we don't like each other, but we are the only two nations who could probably cause a world war. We are also the only two nations that can prevent one.

Widlake: Will you want to talk to him about human rights? You have probably heard that Mrs Yelena Bonner has just been granted a visa to come to the West so she can get medical treatment, but

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(cont.) she'll have to go back to Russia of course. Do you see that as a propoganda move by the Russians, or is it a step along the road?

Reagan: I would like to feel it's a step along the road and there needs to be more. I don't think however that the human rights thing should be a kind of a public discussion and accusing fingers being pointed at each other and their claim that this is an internal matter with them, but I think it should be explained that some of these violations, well, first of all is the violation of the Helskinki pact. This was one of the main reasons why we are signatories to that pact is this agreement about not separating families and so forth and allowing people freedom to choose. What they have to understand is that in some of the major areas where we could seek agreement we have a better chance in our type of society of getting the approval that we need from our congress, from our people, of some of these agreements, if these issues, these human rights problems are not standing in the way and maybe I can point that out.

Widlake: Mr President there have been fears expressed in Europe that arms control will be pushed right down the agenda at Geneva in favour of issues like regional conflict and human rights, which we've been discussing. Can you give an assurance that that is not the case?

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Reagan: | I certainly can. As far as I'm concerned that is, but as I've said, that follows another thing. The effort is to arrive at an understanding about our ability to live in the world together and at peace and the other, that can follow. Now someone - if I can only remember the quote correctly - the other day said, nations aren't suspicious of each other because of their arms, they are armed because they are suspicious.

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I think!]

Widlake: There is a feeling Mr President that Mr Gorbachev has seized the initiative in Europe - European leaders have undoubtedly been impressed by his performance. Mrs Thatcher, as you know, said that he's someone she can do business with. What do you think about it?

Reagan: Well I don't know him as yet but he seems to have shown more of an interest in the people - the man in the street - than other Soviet leaders have. He has expressed great concern about the economic problems and the improvements that he feels that should be made there and he's younger and more energetic than some of the more recent leaders have been. And I'm optimistic by nature but I have to be optimistic that he is looking at the entire picture. On the other hand I don't think we should believe that he is not dedicated to the principles of their system - to Communism and so forth. If he wasn't he wouldn't be where he is.

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Widlake: Do you think he's, in terms of youth, energy if you like, intelligence and obviously a powerful grasp of public relations, do you think he's a pretty formidable Russian leader to deal with compared with his predecessors?

Reagan: Well I don't know. On the public relations thing he did far better with some of our own press than he did with the French press who were on his recent visit when he was there. I can't judge him on that. Sometimes public relations are made by those reporting not by those doing.

Widlake: Can I take one or two other areas with you Mr President? The first is terrorism. We know how you handled the Achille Lauro affair but does that carry the risk of alienating friendly governments - Egypt, if you remember, wasn't too pleased.

Reagan: Well, I know and yet we felt that we had no choice in the matter if we were going to prevent those terrorists from suddenly, as so many in the past have, disappearing into the rabbit warrens, bound to the Middle East, mid-Lebanon and so forth, and therefore they would escape being brought to justice. They had murdered a man, a helpless individual. We felt we had to do it. But I'm pleased to say now that I think the flurry is over and that both Egypt and Italy want to continue the warm relationship that we've

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(cont.) had and so that has worked out all right.

Widlake: Mr President would you do it again even if it meant, say, violating international law?

Reagan: Well it actually didn't violate international law.

Widlake: Perhaps say could in the future.

Reagan: It could I suppose - it's a hypothetical question.

Widlake: But terrorism is always with us.

Reagan: Yes and I think that you just have to say you'd have to judge each case on its own as to the need to bring terrorists to justice, the need to convince them that terrorism is not going to be successful, it is not going to make governments like your own or our own change their policies out of fear of terrorism. If that ever happens, then the world has gone back to anarchy. So you'd have to judge that against how much you would be violating international law to achieve your goal.

Widlake: But if it was necessary I take it you would.

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Reagan: Yes.

Widlake: And you'd pursue terrorism as hard as you can, as often as you can?

Reagan: Yes. It's been very frustrating for a number of the things that have happened and I've been taken to task by members of the Press that I talked but I didn't take action. But, just look at the nature of some of those terrorist acts. The terrorist blows himself up with all the innocent people that he also kills at the same time so there's no way you're going to punish him. You now seek to find who does he belong to, what group brought this about. Well there the difficulty is almost insurmountable. But also even if you do get some intelligence that indicates it's a certain group, they're in some foreign city and you say, well how do we punish them without blowing up a neighbourhood and killing as many innocent people as they did? And this has been our problem up until this last time when we had a very clear-cut case.

Widlake: Mr President, this may be a difficult question for you to answer but what would you most like to be remembered for by history?

Reagan: Well, five years ago when we came here the United States had allowed its defences to decline. The United States economy - I

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(cont.): I remember attending my first economic summit in Ottawa, Canada and that was just in the Spring of my first year here and I remember our friends and allies, the Heads of State of the other summit nations there, beseeching me to stop exporting our inflation and our recession to their countries in this world of international trade and all that we were exporting bad economic situations to the rest of the world. The Soviet Union - again as I say through surrogates - are on their own. There was Afghanistan, there was Ethiopia, South Yemen, Angola, Nicaragua - they enforced governments of their choosing into all those countries. Well it's been five years now. We have the greatest economic recovery that we've ever had in our history. It is not we who are exporting inflation anymore. Inflation is down from those double digit figures - well for the last five months it's only been 2½% and none of our trading partners can match that. Our interest rates are down. We have created almost nine million new jobs over these five years with our economic recovery and in the world abroad the Soviet Union has not stepped in or created a government of its kind in any new country these five years. It has not stepped into one additional inch of territory and I just don't feel that maybe some of things we did here - the American people, their spirit was down and they had heard talks prior to our arrival that maybe we should give up our high expectations, that never again could we look toward the future as we had in the

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(cont.): past, lower our expectations and so forth. Today, we have a volunteer military, we exceed our enlistment quota every year, we have the highest level of education in the military, in this volunteer military, that we've ever had in our history even in wartime drafts. The American people have rallied and with a spirit of volunteerism, voluntarily stepping into problems that once they just let go by and thought somebody in the Government would take care of them. And as I say the economy last year - some six hundred thousand new businesses were incorporated in our country. I would like to be remembered not for doing all those things. I didn't do them. The American people did them. All I did was help get Government out of their way and restore our belief in the power of the people and that Government must be limited in its powers and limited in its actions. And that part I helped in, I'd like to be remembered for that.

Widlake: One final question Mr President, it's about your health. How do you feel and what do the doctors say?

Reagan: The doctor said that I've had a one hundred percent recovery. I'm riding horses regularly now as I've always done and I'm doing my exercises in the gym every day at the end of the day - I have a little gymnasium upstairs, some weights and so forth and I'm doing all those things and I've just never felt better.

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Widlake: Well Mr President you look remarkably fit. It's been a pleasure to talk to you. Thank you.

Reagan: Well, my pleasure and I thank you.

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