

them—that's why.

*Soviet Union*

*Q.* Can I switch topics a moment? You're going to be meeting with the Soviet Foreign Minister on Monday after he meets with Jim Baker on Saturday. According to some of your aides, the scenario goes something like this: you now lean somewhat strongly toward postponing the February summit in Moscow, but if Bessmertnykh comes here and has good news on START and also says, listen, if you cancel this summit Mikhail Gorbachev is likely to be overthrown by more conservative people in Moscow, within the Kremlin, that you might change your mind. Any truth to any of that?

*The President.* I am looking forward to the consultations that Secretary Baker will have with Mr. Bessmertnykh. Mr. Bessmertnykh knows the United States very well and he knows the difficulties that we have with any use of force in the Baltics. And so I would stop it right there, John [John Cochran, NBC News]. I am not going to go into some hypothesis that some aide may have discussed with you or anybody else. We're going to see how this plays out. And we have an arms control agenda that I want to see fulfilled, but whether it would be ready in time for the meeting that is now scheduled, I don't know. We're having some difficulties there, frankly. And I expect Jim Baker will be discussing these difficulties.

We have some problems, obviously, on the Baltic States. We have a lot of common ground still with the Soviet Union. It is a country that has been strongly supportive of our objectives in the Persian Gulf. And we have an agenda that Baker and Bessmertnykh will talk about, and then I look forward to seeing Mr. Bessmertnykh, and then I'd be in a better position to respond definitively to your question.

*Q.* Sir, could I just ask, is it less important than it used to be for you to help Gorbachev survive politically? Are you so disappointed in his actions in the Baltics that you have a different view of it?

*The President.* I am disappointed in the Soviet actions in the Baltics because use of force is not the way to resolve that problem. And I've had an opportunity to discuss

that with the President, and I know the difficulties that he faces. And I have not lost sight of the fact that Mr. Gorbachev was the catalyst, really, for much of the change that has taken place in Eastern Europe; had a lot to do with the reunification of Germany, which is obviously in the German interests and I think in the interests of the United States; a lot to do with common ground in the Persian Gulf.

But the problems in the Baltic States, the use of force there, causes us great difficulty. And so the Bessmertnykh-Baker talks will touch on a wide array of issues—some where we have very much common ground, some where we have common objectives that are not fulfilled, and some where we might have clear differences. And at that point I will take a look again at the whole problem and see what must be done. And I'm sure the Soviets will be doing the same thing.

*Persian Gulf Conflict*

*Q.* Mr. President, the reports from Israel now indicate that the injuries to civilians, perhaps deaths, may have been caused by Patriot missiles themselves not striking their targets, or at least if they struck them parts of them fell back on the civilian population—which raises anew the question of the sufficiency of the Patriot missile and the question about whether you are now contemplating additional measures to try to deal with this obviously persistent problem?

*The President.* We are certainly dealing with that all the time and we want to find ways to stop it. We want to find ways to stop these brutal, senseless, nonmilitary-value attacks on civilian populations.

*Q.* Can you give us a sense of your level of confidence in the Israelis continuing to show restraint here? Obviously, it can't be any easier for them now than before.

*The President.* No, although this one—I felt I might be asked that question walking in here—and there's still—I'm still not certain that we know all the details exactly of what happened on this. I will again express enormous confidence in the Patriots. They are doing very, very well. But whether this was debris falling down from an intercept, or not, I simply don't want to comment on