

“You Could Have Said Yes”

Interviewee: Caspar Weinberger

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The Reykjavik, Iceland, summit between President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev almost succeeded in eliminating the U.S. and Soviet nuclear arsenals. The talks foundered, however, on Reagan's unwillingness to forgo the Strategic Defense Initiative. Commenting on what Gorbachev might have done to have saved the agreement, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger relayed Reagan's cheeky answer.

Caspar Weinberger: The President was anxious to try to get a better relationship, and the Soviets wanted two or three things. They wanted to de-couple us from Europe. They wanted us to give up the Stealth technology, and they wanted us not to deploy any missiles in Europe in response to theirs. We declined, and President Reagan was offered all these glittering reductions and opportunities in Reykjavik. But the price was always that he'd have to give up strategic defense. He was not willing to pay that. When that meeting broke up—I was not there— [Mikhail] Gorbachev, who had misread him completely and was quite sure that these offers of reduction would work, came out and said to him sort of helplessly, “Well, I don't know what more we could have done.” President Reagan said, “I do. You could have said yes.”

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