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REAGAN STARS ON STAGE OF GENEVA SUMMIT

The Geneva Summit was a great stage on which two actors played their roles. They did it with suspense and surprise (the press blackout), plus so much style that the substance was all but forgotten.

This was the eleventh summit since World War II, but it was very different from the preceding ten. Geneva was the first summit in which the U.S. President didn't get the short end of the stick, didn't cede any Free World real estate, didn't betray our allies, or didn't accept terms inferior to the Soviet Union.

Instead of acceding to orchestrated demands of anti-American elements all over the world that he "use" SDI (Strategic Defense Initiative) as a "bargaining chip," Ronald Reagan opened a "steady as we go" era with Moscow and returned home to receive acclaim from friend and foe alike. Even the partisan Speaker Tip O'Neill found it wise to speak in support of the President.

Soviet dictator Mikhail Gorbachev had arrived in Geneva proclaiming that the overriding issue of the Summit would be the U.S. Strategic Defense Initiative for a non-nuclear space-based missile defense shield. When Gorbachev was confronted with "vintage Reagan," he met his match.

The Soviets' failure certainly wasn't for lack of trying. They came to Geneva well-scripted and well-staffed to wage summitry as usual. They began a week ahead of time with a series of news conferences to brief the world's journalists.

The Soviet spokesmen had rehearsed their lines and had pat answers for all the topics they wanted to talk about. They hadn't counted on an occasional unexpected question which led them off their prepared turf.

When a Dutch woman, Irina Grivivna, created a scene by asking about political prisoners in the Soviet Union, the panel of grim-faced Russians replied: "Political prisoners don't exist in the Soviet Union. ... We don't have prisoners in psychiatric units."

When the same Dutch woman supplied names of prisoners known to her personally, the

Russian spokesman replied, "Madam, I don't know your circle of friends." Visibly irritated, he added, "Do we have to call the militia to remove this woman?"

Responses to questions on Afghanistan and Central America were quite contradictory. The Soviets accused the United States of actively fostering conditions that would prevent the withdrawal of Soviet troops and then had the gall to demand U.S. "noninterference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan."

After insisting that Afghanistan must "be neutral and friendly to the USSR," the Soviet spokesmen described Nicaragua as "an independent country which needs to defend itself against its powerful northern neighbor."

Dozens of well-trained Russians, fluent in English and lodged at the major Geneva hotels, eagerly engaged in controversial conversation with any American they could corner. They accused the United States and SDI of being aggressive, while stoutly asserting that all Soviet actions and weapons are merely to protect their own borders from attack.

There was only one argument for which they didn't have an answer. They terminated discussions anytime an American confronted them with the fact that the Soviet SS-18s are good for nothing in the world except to hit U.S. targets.

Due to the press blackout, reporters groveling for scraps of news were reduced to questioning Larry Speakes about such trivia as Ronald Reagan's underwear and the identity of the person who lit the fire for the Fireside Summit. Several Summit subplots (such as the "leak" of Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger's letter to Reagan) garnered much more media coverage than they deserved.

So many column inches were devoted to the costumes of Nancy and Raisa that it's no wonder Don Regan got the wrong idea about which subjects interest women. The media were overreacting to the fact that the Soviets have their first Communist boss in years who isn't dying and their first First Lady who isn't dowdy.

History teaches us that weakness invites aggression. The instability in today's world is caused by the fact (admitted in Geneva by National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane) that the Soviets' hard-target kill superiority over the United States is three-to-one. The world is a safer place today because the Soviets discovered in Geneva that we have the advantage of a fearless President who is unshakable in his determination to use American technology in defense of liberty.