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World/Nation

Reagan shows optimism in final news conference

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Reagan said Thursday night "extraordinary things" have happened in superpower relations in the last four years but cautioned that the Soviets would retain superiority in conventional weaponry even after Mikhail Gorbachev's troop reduction pledge.

The president said, "The path remains open and the pace of peace continues," in a nationally-televised news conference one day after his fifth and final summit with the Soviet leader.

In a session sprinkled with complimentary references to his summit partner, Reagan replied, "Yes, I do" when a questioner asked whether he believes Gorbachev is transforming the Soviet Union into a less threatening nation.

Reagan also said Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat did not make a clear-cut commitment to recognize the state of

Israel despite a statement to that effect this week. The president said Arafat "left himself openings" on the subject.

It was Reagan's 46th and possibly final news conference as president, held in a White House East Room decorated with Christmas trees.

He began with a quip — "Got to stop meeting like this" — and ended by wishing reporters a merry Christmas.

Asked if there was hope for release of American hostages held captive in Lebanon, Reagan said he thought eventually the United States would have to negotiate with Iran because they have control of the kidnappers.

Concerning the prospect for negotiations with Iran, he said, "There are conditions that have to be met also there. Any time that they are ready to come forward on an open basis, we would be ready to talk to them."

Later, spokesman Marlin Fitzwater elaborated: "We'll be glad to talk, but we've never been able to get them to do that."

Reagan sidestepped a question about the war in Afghanistan, saying it would be unacceptable to stop arming the rebels there unless the Soviet-backed regime ended military operations. But he did not venture a detailed response to Gorbachev's call for a more comprehensive settlement to be sponsored by the United Nations.

He was asked to provide an unusual amount of reflection on his eight years in office.

Many of the questions dealt with Gorbachev.

Asked directly whether he trusted the man he has met five times, the president said, "He hasn't shown me any reason yet why I shouldn't." But, he quickly said, his attitude was one of "trust but verify."

U.S. warplane hits building in Germany; at least 4 killed

REMSCHEID, West Germany (AP) — A U.S. Air Force warplane struck an apartment building and exploded in flames Thursday, killing the pilot and at least three other people, injuring more than a dozen, and setting homes on fire.

"This looks like a war," said Johannes Rau, governor of North Rhine-Westphalia state, after touring the scene in central West Germany.

Even after the initial explosion, ammunition carried on the plane continued to explode periodically, hampering rescue efforts, one rescuer said.

The U.S. Air Force suspended all tactical training flights in Europe until Tuesday, and West German authorities asked their allies to halt low-level training missions until Christmas. Opposition political parties demanded a ban on low-level flights and sharp cuts in air exercises.

The A-10 Thunderbolt II jet, designed to support ground forces and combat tanks, was carrying 1,000 rounds of 30mm training ammunition when it crashed, U.S. Air Force spokesman Lt. Col. Ed Neunherz said.

Witnesses said the plane flew low

over a school and hit the top floor of an apartment building about 1:30 p.m. (6:30 a.m. CDT).

Wolfgang Guenther, who lives about 800 yards from the apartment building, said, "My daughters were coming home from school. I heard a tremendous blast and rushed out to find them." He said his teen-age daughters "told me . . . they could

even see the pilot in the plane."

"The plane rammed into a building that was right in front of them. They are home now and they are in shock," he said. The high school, about 1,300 yards away from the crash site, was not damaged.

There were conflicting reports on the number of dead and injured.

Air Force A-10 fighter crashes on reservation

TRACY, Ariz. (AP) — An Air Force A-10 fighter crashed Thursday afternoon near the heart of the Tohono O'Odham Indian Reservation, but the pilot ejected safely, officials said.

The plane, based at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Tucson, crashed around 3:30 p.m. about 80 miles west of Tucson. The pilot, whose identity was withheld, was admitted to the base hospital, said spokeswoman Carol Ann Keck.

Another A-10 crashed Thursday

U.S. military helicopter crash leaves 5 dead in Honduras

TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras (AP) — A U.S. military helicopter participating in maneuvers crashed in northern Honduras on Thursday, killing all five Americans aboard, a U.S. Embassy official said.

Embassy spokesman Charles Barclay said the CH-47 Chinook helicopter crashed at 1 p.m. (1 p.m. CDT) near La Ceiba, 235 miles north of Tegucigalpa.

Barclay refused to identify the victims until their relatives are notified.

He said the helicopter was based at Palmerola Air Base, 48 miles north of Tegucigalpa, the capital. Barclay said U.S. military authorities were at the site investigating the

cause of the crash.

"Five people were on board the helicopter," Barclay said. "Up to now only four bodies have been recovered from the craft, which was practically destroyed."

Honduran and U.S. military personnel formed a search team "to look for the other body" in the area, he said.

Barclay said the Chinook, which took off earlier Thursday from Palmerola, was flying a supply mission and taking part in joint Honduran-U.S. military exercises.

The United States has held a series of military maneuvers in Hon-

duras since 1982.

About 1,500 American troops are in Honduras, including 1,100 soldiers permanently stationed at Palmerola. Others rotate during the year for training exercises, military construction work and other projects.

The United States increased its presence in Honduras when U.S.-backed rebels known as Contras began fighting in 1981 to overthrow the leftist government of neighboring Nicaragua from bases in Honduran territory.

At least 30 American troops in Honduras have been killed or wounded in accidents or incidents of violence since the maneuvers began.

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