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Shultz sees U.S.-Soviet thaw as a rare chance to disarm

By Martin Sieff
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WASHINGTON — Secretary of State George Shultz told Congress yesterday that the current thaw in U.S.-Soviet relations presents "a rare moment of opportunity" to achieve nuclear disarmament.

Asked by Rep. Tom Lantos, Democrat of California, whether he was not being too optimistic, Mr. Shultz replied: "We have to aspire in order to achieve great things. We do not want to get into the habit of saying, 'Let's lower our expectations.'"

The Geneva summit between President Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev last November showed the possibility of such "constructive negotiations," Mr. Shultz said.

In a statement remarkable for its optimism, Mr. Shultz said that even should Moscow challenge U.S. interests in Latin America and elsewhere, the administration should still pursue "constructive relations" because of the nuclear threat.

Mr. Shultz's remarks apparently reflected the State Department's interest in exploring Soviet sincerity by offering matching concessions for Mr. Gorbachev's post-summit offer to eliminate all nuclear weapons on earth and in space by the end of the century.

But Mr. Shultz gave no details to back up his optimistic forecast. He did not say how the president would respond to Mr. Gorbachev's proposal.

The U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency is believed to be in sympathy with the State Department's views, but the Pentagon is believed to prefer standing firm on past U.S. proposals.

"We approached the Geneva summit in a spirit of both aspiration and realism," Mr. Shultz told the House Foreign Relations Committee. "We will bring that spirit to our negotiations with the Soviets through the coming year.

"We will pursue the Geneva negotiations with energy and good faith, and without artificial deadlines," Mr. Shultz said. "We will also pursue

them with a sense that we may be at a rare moment of opportunity."

No date has yet been set for a second summit meeting this year between the president and Mr. Gorbachev. U.S. officials said on Tuesday they doubted a decision would be made before the Soviet Communist Party Congress is held later this month.

The officials said the party session also was holding back a decision on when Mr. Shultz would next meet Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze or when U.S. and Soviet negotiators would hold talks on troubled areas such as the Middle East and Afghanistan.

Mr. Shultz said the planned summit agenda would cover the same four sets of issues that were discussed at Geneva: arms reductions, regional conflicts, human rights and U.S.-Soviet relations.

The secretary of state also gave the committee a glowing report on Latin America. Pointing to a map, he said more than 90 percent of the people in the region and in the Caribbean now enjoyed democratic government, compared to less than one-third in the early 1980s.

In the last six years, he said, elected civilian leaders had replaced authoritarian regimes in Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Gre-

nada, Guatemala, Honduras, Peru and Uruguay.

But Mr. Shultz tempered his optimism with the warning that the most immediate danger to democracy in Central America remains in communist Nicaragua. He pledged the Reagan administration would not abandon the democratic resistance there.

Apparently referring to covert — or secret — U.S. military aid to the rebels, Mr. Shultz said, "We will be discussing with the Congress what this moral and strategic imperative requires."

This story is based in part on wire service reports.