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RECORD OF CALL BY THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR, MR LUNKOV, ON THE LORD PRIVY SEAL, 5.30 PM, 29 MAY 1979

Present

Sir Ian Gilmour

Mr Lunkov

Mr Murray

Mr Ouspenski

Mr Richardson

Mr Broucher

P.A.
Gym
20/5

1. The Lord Privy Seal said he had hoped that Mr Lunkov's first call would be a courtesy visit but the British Government was desperately concerned by the situation in South East Asia, especially Hong Kong. The numbers of refugees arriving from Vietnam were vast and this was imposing a great strain and causing deep concern in the area. Old established conventions, such as that concerning rescue at sea, were under threat. He understood that the Vietnamese Government intended getting rid of around a million ethnic Chinese. As the Soviet Union had very good relations with Vietnam, he would be grateful if they would use their influence in Hanoi to change the situation. He was not saying that nobody should be allowed to leave Vietnam, but the uncontrolled exodus was both sordid and dangerous.
2. Mr Lunkov said that he did not know how many people wanted to leave Vietnam. The Vietnamese Embassy could give the required information. Sir Ian Gilmour said this was not a question of information but of action. We had already spoken to the Vietnamese. The situation was very serious and concerned not just a few people but many thousands, a lot of whom were dying at sea. He was sure the Soviet Government would not want the serious effects of this situation to spread throughout the Pacific.
3. Mr Lunkov asked what the Vietnamese Government could do. The Lord Privy Seal said that it was natural that some people should want to leave, but if thousands wanted to go or were driven out, something must be wrong. This reflected badly on the country and its social system. Gold was being demanded from people before they left. But the problem was the sheer uncontrolled number of refugees. We were not the only people concerned.
4. Mr Lunkov asked if the British Government had not been listening to misinformation from the Chinese. It looked as if the latter had been exaggerating again. Mr Murray said there was no exaggeration in the position of the British Government. Mr Lunkov should see for himself the situation in Hong Kong, where more than a thousand boat people were arriving daily who had nowhere to go. The Lord Privy Seal said that Hong Kong was already desperately overcrowded. We were not concerned with what the Chinese were saying but with the actual situation in South East Asia.

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5. Mr Lunkov said he would report to Moscow but clearly he could not discuss the internal affairs of Vietnam with the British Government. The Lord Privy Seal said that this was not just an internal affair. The external effects were all too apparent. We believed the Soviet Union should take action in Hanoi since it had the necessary influence there.

6. Mr Lunkov asked again what the Vietnamese Government could do. Those who were leaving Vietnam were adherents of the old regime. They wanted to go. The situation was similar to that in the Soviet Union after the October Revolution. The Lord Privy Seal said that these were not just people concerned about the change of regime. There was a deliberate policy of getting rid of ethnic Chinese. Mr Lunkov said he did not believe this. Mr Murray said that the Soviet Government was a Pacific power and in a position to understand the point of view of all countries there. Britain's responsibilities for Hong Kong also in one sense made her a Pacific power. This was why we could talk with authority to the Soviet Union. Vietnam was the Soviet Union's ally and the Soviet Union was in a position to help the Vietnamese to understand that the expulsion of so many people who had nowhere to go merely added to the burden of human misery. A pause was needed for the world to do something about those who had already left.

7. Mr Lunkov said that he did not agree that any blame attached to the Vietnamese. The Lord Privy Seal said he did not want to blame anyone. He wanted to bring the Soviet Union's attention to a very worrying situation and ask them to consider the matter and act upon it. Mr Lunkov said that the Soviet Union opposed any deterioration in the situation in South East Asia. They had tried to reach constructive agreement with the United States about a "zone of peace" in the Indian Ocean, but the United States had dropped the idea. The Soviet position was completely clear. The problem for the Vietnamese was not easy. The people leaving Vietnam had worked for the old regime. He would inform Moscow, but meanwhile we should talk to the Vietnamese Charge d'Affaires and stop listening to what the Chinese were saying. It was important not to create new problems where none existed. Personally he did not see any way in which the Soviet Government could help. We were looking at the problem from two different points of view.

8. The Lord Privy Seal said in conclusion that this was a humanitarian problem of dimensions not seen for many years. He hoped he could count on the Soviet Government to take full account of this.

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