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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

1 February 1980

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Mr.

Dear Michael,

Soviet Foreign Policy After Afghanistan

/ I enclose a note on this subject. Lord Carrington will see this over the weekend.

*For me
G.G.H.*

(G G H Walden)
Private Secretary

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SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY AFTER AFGHANISTAN

1. The main aim of Soviet foreign policy is to accumulate power and influence in the world while also preserving the security of the Soviet State. The Soviet Union recognises that this will lead to its being engaged in continuing competition with the US, and to a lesser extent with China whose emergence as a world power the Soviet Union wishes to slow down. One of the Soviet purposes in seeking influence in developing countries is to win ground in this competition. But the need to preserve Soviet security means that the USSR must avoid actions which might provoke an uncontrollable process leading to nuclear confrontation with the US. The USSR under Brezhnev has sought reasonable relations with the US and Western Europe, partly to reduce the risk that the East-West contest would produce such crises. The Soviet leaders also have an interest in obtaining Western technology to help modernise the sluggish and inefficient Soviet economy, and grain to compensate for the great failures of Soviet agriculture.

2. To reconcile their security needs, and their wish to have reasonable relations with the West, with their aim of increasing their power and influence in the developing world, the Soviet leaders propounded their own version of 'detente'. Their idea was that East-West relations could be improved in certain fields, so that they would get the things they wanted and also would secure, in negotiations with the US, the recognition which they coveted that they were now one of two super-powers. But the Russians never thought of detente as being comprehensive. They excluded from it their freedom to maintain dominance in Eastern Europe and dictatorship at home, to wage a struggle of ideas against the West and to acquire power bases in the Third World.

3. After the Vietnam war the US was far less willing to resist actively Soviet encroachment in the developing world.

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The Russians exploited what seemed to them weakness by proxy interventions in Angola and Ethiopia. Vietnam took over Cambodia. Although there were strong local reasons for the Russian move over Afghanistan, the Russians will have added to them the potential strategic gains from a decisive move on their part. The Western failure to react on earlier occasions, except by words, probably encouraged the Russians, after years of steadily building up their influence in Afghanistan, to believe that the West would not be unduly disturbed by Soviet military intervention there, even though it would be the first use of Soviet combat forces in the developing world. The Soviet leaders probably also calculated that there would be few dividends in 1980 from their relationship with the West, so that the cost in that regard should not be great. The invasion was thus an extrapolation of existing Soviet foreign policy. The West's failure was to realize in advance how selective was the Soviet concept of detente and that the Russians would exploit to the maximum whatever latitude for aggression in the Third World Western behaviour and local circumstances seemed to allow.

4. The Russians will persist in their drive for influence whenever possible. There will be further occasions when they will consider the use of force. They will assess carefully what latitude exists for this in the light inter alia of Western and world reactions to Afghanistan. At the same time, they will have reasons for wishing in due course to return to reasonable East-West relations, notably their desire to avoid hostilities with the US coupled with their need for Western technology. Since they cannot readily find substitutes for this, their need will persist whether or not the flow of technology from the West is seriously interrupted as a result of Afghanistan. The Russians will probably also want arms control negotiations to get going again (although not in earnest until after the US elections), since they fear that the US, with its greater economic and scientific resources, would suffer less from an all-out arms race; they

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will also want to avoid the greater international instability which an all-out arms race might create. The question is whether they can be convinced that detente, if the West is to play ball, must be reciprocal and global, and that the aggressive pursuit of Soviet aims in the developing countries will put an end to it.

5. While a firm and lasting Western response to Afghanistan would have a fair chance of causing the Russians to be more cautious, the short term Soviet reactions will be truculent. The Soviet leaders are intensely sensitive to the risk of appearing to give way under pressure. They are therefore likely to take some steps designed to show that they are not taking punishment lying down. There is still no question of a sudden Soviet attack on the West, and armed intervention in another developing country is unlikely, at least in the short term, for the Russians will be wary while the non-aligned and the West remain vigilant and critical after Afghanistan. The most likely Soviet steps are ones which the Russians want to take anyway and the cost of which is reduced because East-West relations are at present bad. The deportation of Sakharov from Moscow can be seen in this light. A reduction in the recent record flow of Jewish emigration, a resumption of full-scale jamming of Western broadcasts or cancellation of some cultural events like book exhibitions in the USSR are possible. So is an attempt to reduce the freedom of manoeuvre of some of the East European countries. They may well increase the pressure in sensitive and vulnerable areas; e.g. in Berlin, by restricting the return of ethnic Germans, in the Northern Seas, and on the Bulgarian/Macedonian question. Though the Helsinki Final Act is still regarded as a major achievement of the Brezhnev era, and the Soviet Union will want the Madrid Review meeting to be held next winter as planned, the value to them of Madrid is not such as significantly to inhibit such actions if they are thought desirable on other grounds.

6. The Soviet leaders will also wish to exploit differences
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among Western countries about how to react to Afghanistan. Brezhnev in a Pravda interview has sought to do so. But Soviet actions have not been well calculated for this purpose. Sakharov was arrested when the President of the French Assembly was in Moscow. Although West Germany's special interests have made it hesitant about following the US and UK in reacting to the invasion of Afghanistan, high level meetings planned by the Federal Republic with Hungary, Czechoslovakia and East Germany have been postponed, no doubt at Soviet instigation. The reason is probably that Moscow anticipates that the West will try to develop its relations with Eastern Europe while freezing those with the USSR. Soviet wedge-driving tactics could involve a move towards the French on their proposal for a European Disarmament Conference (however unattractive to them it may be in its present form) or the dangling of major export contracts in front of French or West German firms.

7. Soviet relations with China were already bad before Afghanistan. These factors will intensify Soviet fears that any crisis with the West or with China could become a crisis with both. This arouses long-standing fears of encirclement. The Russians are likely in the long-run to seek a stable and controlled relationship with China as well as with the West. But for at least some years to come the balance of advantage for the Soviet Union will lie in developing its relationship with the West rather than with China.

8. In pursuing their drive for influence in the developing world, the Soviet leaders will seek, subject to the need to avoid East-West confrontation, to make new gains whenever opportunities arise. When they consider this necessary and the risk acceptable they will continue to be prepared to use force. Opportunities for new influence may grow if the Arab-Israeli dispute continues, particularly since, despite the inherent antagonism between Islam and Communism, the Russians may see their best opportunities, after the furore over

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Afghanistan subsidizes, in the unstable Islamic countries of the Middle East and South West Asia. From their established base in South Yemen they already are making efforts in the Yemen Arab Republic. They have strong motives for seeking influence in Iran, because of its oil and strategic location, but will also be conscious that the Western reactions would be far greater than over Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. Border troubles between Afghanistan and Pakistan, which they may not instigate but which are likely to drag them in, will offer opportunities to intimidate and infiltrate the latter. There will be a major effort to consolidate Soviet influence on India under Mrs Gandhi. The Russians will also hope for further opportunities in Southern Africa. They will support Cuba in its efforts to gain strong influence in other Caribbean and Central American countries.

9. The Soviet leaders are not likely to invade Yugoslavia when Tito goes. They will seek to play on economic problems and the differences between the nationalities, in the hope of creating opportunities for reintegrating Yugoslavia into their sphere of influence, even in time by invasion, although the Russians will be watching carefully for a military response by the West.

CONCLUSION

10. Before Khrushchev became top dog, he seemed as colourless as Stalin's other henchmen. In a totalitarian oligarchy, change can be arbitrary. It is possible that Brezhnev's successors will adopt a different foreign policy. It is possible for instance that they will reckon that detente has not produced enough results for the USSR and that, with the West and China coming closer together and the West taking more trouble about its defences, a Soviet policy of assertiveness in the developing world and no detente should be tried. But the leaders would fear that such a policy could increase the risk of East-West escalation, and might think that the absence of detente would not enable them to gain ground faster in the developing world. So the likelihood remains that the next leadership will be influenced by the

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same factors as the present one and that foreign policy will not radically change course. We are in for a difficult period in East-West relations. Western firmness will be indispensable. Provided that the Soviet Union faces consistent and determined opposition to its aims, its own self-interest may lead it to be less assertive in pursuing them, and more anxious to look for agreement in areas of mutual interest. In this way, it could be brought in time to accept a more balanced view of detente.

Foreign & Commonwealth Office
31 January 1980

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