

SOME IMPRESSIONS OF THE ANGLO-SOVIET ROUND TABLE AT  
CHATHAM HOUSE, December 1979

These discussions, between ten Russians and eleven from Britain\*, took place in a courteous but sometimes cold atmosphere over two days. The Russians wanted the discussions to have a sequel, however, at least they said they did.

The main points made by the Russians were:-

1. They all expressed horror at the announcements made the day before the Round Table began that NATO was going to take seriously the modernisation of their weapons. All repeatedly said that that would introduce "a new spiral in the arms race". None accepted our arguments that the measures announced were the very minimum commensurate with the menace of the SS20 and the Backfire, and no Russian had anything to say about NATO's complementary proposals for disarmament. The SS20, the Russians said, was merely a modern version of an old missile.
2. The Russians thought that if the U.S. congress were not to ratify the Treaty on SALT 2, it would be a "return to the cold war"; most were disinclined to believe that the Treaty would be ratified. They were sceptical about the idea of beginning SALT 3 before SALT 2 had been ratified.

\* see Appendix I



3. They were reluctant to give any real reply to accusations about Cuban and East German activities/and, when pressed, said that both those friends of the Soviet Union were merely helping, by building roads and schools, such countries as Angola and Ethiopia to overthrow colonisation. They were not pressed on Afghanistan (though they should have been) nor on Soviet support, at one remove perhaps, for international terrorism. They did not respond to a suggestion that they were either being lured into adventures by Cuba or were using Cuba to ensure military intimidation in zones in which they had economic interests.

4. The Russians condemned the occupation of the U.S. embassy in Iran and the taking of the American hostages. But their determination to draw any worthwhile conclusions was modest. They said often that they did not want to see a collapse of Iran.

5. They did not at all like the idea of China being a super power at the world's top table. The idea "destabilised" the elaborate arrangements made since 1945 to ensure a "good balance". To assist China with weapons was an "erroneous historical calculation". Russia realised that traditional British policy was to oppose the strongest power - now the Soviet Union - by a constellation of other powers. But to "play this Chinese card" might risk the weapons, which we were supplying, being one day pointed in an unexpected direction.



It would be a good thing if we could dissuade the Chinese from talking any more about their demands for the revision of frontiers. Russia was negotiating with China and they were optimistic that relations would soon be improved: "no ideological questions" divided them.

6. Russia regarded itself as an indispensable part of the world economy. They were making, and would go on making, investments in poor countries. "Backwardness" in the underdeveloped world could cause "conflicts".

7. They themselves had a major place for western investment in their five year plans.

8. Of course, all such arrangements, mentioned under 7 above, could be "jeopardised" by bad relations. They were, therefore, alarmed by the tone of some of the Prime Minister's recent statements - at Luxembourg, for example. They did not, however, pursue this argument at all strongly and seemed appropriately mollified by a reference to the passage in the speech at Luxembourg about the need for contacts at all levels and the immediately preceding paragraph which pointed out that modernisation of weapons and renewal of Western resolve were an essential preliminary for real understanding.



They spent a little time criticising us for apparently reviving an old "policy of strength" which they seemed to think was synonymous with "overweening strength", not merely self-confidence.

9. They had no hesitation at all in thinking of Camp David as being a way of concluding a Middle East peace treaty while excluding the Russians.

10. Mr. A.Y. Bovin, of Izvestiya, sometimes talked eccentrically but it did not seem as if his views carried much weight. The tougher but actually more sympathetic V.I. Koybyh, of Literaturnaya Gazeta, described Bovin as their "unguided missile".

(Signed) HUGH THOMAS

Dec. 28, 1979



APPENDIX I

PARTICIPANTS

RUSSIANS

Academician N.N. Inozemtsev	Director, Institute of World Economy & International Relations, Moscow (IMEMO)
Mrs. Maksimova	IMEMO
Professor O.N. Bykov	Deputy Director, IMEMO
N.A. Kosalapov	IMEMO
A.Y. Bovin	Izvestiya
V.I. Kobysh	Literaturnaya Gazeta
Professor M.A. Milstein	Senior Researcher, United States & Canada Institute
V.V. Mordvinov	Head of Foreign Economic Cooperation Department, GOSPLAN
P.T. Pmenov	Secretary, Central Trades Union Committee
V.N. Cheklin	Deputy Head, Soviet Trade Delegation in London

BRITISH

David Watt	Chatham House, Director
Robert Belgrave	Policy Adviser to Board of British Petroleum Co. Ltd.
Professor Hedley Bull	University of Oxford, Professor of International Relations
Richard Davy	Chief Foreign Leader Writer, The Times
The Rt.Hon. Edmund Dell	Chairman, Guinness Peat Ltd.
Michael Kaser	Reader in Economics, University of Oxford
The Rt.Hon. William Rodgers MP	Opposition Spokesman on defence matters
Lord Roll of Ipsden	Chairman, S.G. Warburg & Co. Ltd.
Professor Hugh Thomas	Chairman, Centre for Policy Studies
William Wallace	Director of Studies, Chatham House

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The Prime Minister has Dec 29, 1979

seen - Post 31/11

Dear Michael,

I thought you might like  
to see a brief note I did  
about the Anglo Soviet round  
table 1979.

Yours ever

Augh

Michael Alexander Esq  
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