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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

17 December 1984

GORBACHEV'S VISIT

Your letter of 10 December asked for an early indication of what might be said to our Allies about Mr. Gorbachev's visit in confidential briefing. My letter of 16 December reported the Prime Minister's instruction that only a limited briefing should be given. I imagine that any such briefing will also take in the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary's meeting with Mr. Gorbachev today.

I enclose a copy of the notes prepared for Bernard Ingham's use in briefing the press last night on the Gorbachev talks. I suggest that these should form the basis of briefing of our European Community partners and other members of the Alliance (for the Americans see below) on the Prime Minister's talks. Paragraphs 3 and 4 of my letter of 16 December could also be drawn upon.

In addition, one could say that Mr. Gorbachev conveyed an impression of confidence, authority and fluency, and even some charm. He was affable. He was evidently keen for his meeting with the Prime Minister to be a success, though not prepared to concede anything to achieve that. He talked readily and did not stick to prepared statements, picking up points made in discussion and responding to them. He referred occasionally to some manuscript notes in a small book but looked to his advisers for support only when it came to using American names (National Security Council, New York Times). He was at pains to bring President Chernenko's name into the discussions as a source of authority for his remarks, usually giving him his full title. He did not become riled, even when tackled quite directly on a number of points which he considered internal Soviet matters, responding firmly but reasonably. The overall impression was of no great change in substance but a considerable improvement in style over some of the hackneyed exchanges which characterize talks with other Soviet leaders. A man one can do business with. The Prime Minister liked him.

It should be emphasised that the discussions were not, and not intended to be, a negotiation, and the only substantive conclusions from them were recognition that we were at a crucial point in East/West relations, on the need to seek security at a lower level of armaments, and on the importance of developing contacts and discussions between East and West. Nor did the Prime Minister seek to cast herself in the role of an intermediary between the Soviet Union and the Americans. Indeed, she went out of her way to stress our solidarity with the Americans. It was evident, however, that Gorbachev was keen to have from her a first-hand impression of American policies and the likely outcome of the present ferment in Washington on arms control issues. Equally, the Prime Minister will of course be passing on her impressions to President Reagan.

Particular care should be taken in dealing with any suggestions that the Prime Minister distanced herself from President Reagan over the question of arms control in space. The line should be that the Prime Minister held to the position which she has set out in a number of major speeches recently. It could be recalled that she has consistently recognised the need for research into ballistic missile defence to guard against the Soviet Union obtaining a lead in this area, and recognises the importance of the SDI as a factor in bringing the Soviet Union back to the arms control negotiating table.

In briefing the Americans, you will need to steer a careful course between stealing the Prime Minister's thunder (her own briefing of President Reagan next Saturday) and sharing information with them on the usual privileged basis. To the extent possible, I think you should stick to the general line proposed in this letter, augmented by the promise of a fuller account from the Prime Minister herself on Saturday. But you might also emphasise the very close attention with which Mr. Gorbachev questioned the Prime Minister on American motives and intentions at Geneva, and the Prime Minister's strongly supportive remarks about President Reagan in reply.

I am copying this letter to Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

(C.D. POWELL)

TMS.

L.V. Appleyard, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

Mr. Gorbachev's press briefing. Sunday 16 December
PM's talks with Mr. Gorbachev.

Could I apologise to you firstly for being an hour and a half late, the reason for this of course is that the talks went on longer than one had expected. Now can I make clear the basis of this meeting, it is of course unattributable, you use British sources. I recognise that because of the time some of you may wish to get away and therefore I will give you immediately a broad outline shorn of a lot of the detail, which I can go into later, of the talks. Mr Gorbachev and the Party arrived at Chequers at 12.30, sat down for lunch at about 1.25 after cocktails and of course a photocall. They had luncheon till just before 3. It was very much an informal lunch at which the Prime Minister had Mr Gorbachev on her right and Mr Zamyatin on her left and she spent much of the time during lunch talking to Mr Gorbachev. They then adjourned and the talks that took place subsequently were as between the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary, Sir Geoffrey Howe, on the one hand and Mr Gorbachev, Mr Zamyatin and Mr Yakovlev on the Russian side with of course interpreters' consecutive translation. The discussion which lasted for two and three quarter hours was conducted as indeed the lunch was in very friendly basis, it was a business-like discussion but in a relaxed atmosphere and I think that the Prime Minister would feel that it was an excellent start for her to an important week in international diplomacy. At the end I think both the Prime Minister and Mr Gorbachev agreed that it had been a very constructive discussion and perhaps that is indicated by the fact that Mr Gorbachev in fact did not leave Chequers until the time he was supposed to be at the Russian Embassy, namely about 6 o'clock. Now as for substance, virtually the whole of the two and three quarter hours were devoted to East/West relations and arms control and there was a brief discussion at the end of Anglo/Soviet trade. Mr Gorbachev brought with him a personal message for the Prime Minister from Mr Chernenko.

This message which must of course remain confidential set out the positive attitude with which Mr Chernenko says the Soviet Union approaches both Anglo/Soviet relations and international issues, particularly the talks which are to be held in Geneva in January. The Prime Minister recalled her useful and constructive discussion with Mr Chernenko after Mr Andropov's funeral in February. She asked Mr Gorbachev to convey her greetings to Mr Chernenko. She received the message warmly and Mr Gorbachev actually read it out to her; it is relatively short and the Prime Minister indicated that she will reply to it in detail.

Now throughout the discussions the Prime Minister sought to impress Mr Gorbachev with the sincerity of the British, NATO and not least the American approach to arms control talks. She emphasised that the West wished to achieve security at a lower level of armaments, while of course recognising that balance was essential. Both recognised that each had different outlooks and the meeting was in fact a useful opportunity to get over strongly held points of view about each others' way of life and political systems. Each recognised, I think, that what the other wants is security within their own boundaries at a much lower level of armaments. Now this was not a negotiating session at all, therefore there were no conclusions reached. In so far as there was an outcome, it was, I think, it was complete agreement on the need for much more contact at this and other levels as a means of building the confidence necessary for successful negotiations on arms control. That I suppose implies a long haul, obviously I cannot dissent from that. I think Mr Gorbachev conveyed the impression that if for example the UK and the Soviet Union could establish a better relationship then the effect would spread. While these talks were going on Mrs Gorbacheva was given an extensive and indeed intensive tour of Chequers. In fact she spent 2 hours looking round the house, which she found very interesting and not least the library where she spent quite a lot of time looking at the collection. So, that I think in essence is what I have to say. I can of course go into more detail for those who would wish it about the arrangements and whatever but I suggest that for those who have editions to catch should we have a natural break here and then I'll take questions?