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FCO

Prime Minister

A useful example of
new-style Soviet
diplomacy.

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Duncan Slater,

THE UN AND PETROVSKY

You will remember that the Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Petrovsky gave me lunch on 19 September. Yesterday I returned the compliment by giving him breakfast at my flat before his return to Moscow today. As before we were alone.

2. In welcoming him, I said that New York was now under a foot or two of snow in the form of the proposals with which he had deluged the United Nations during his month here. The question was what to do about them before they melted or were cleared away. What did the Russians intend to do next? Petrovsky said that they were in a quandary. He would value our advice. He looked to the Five as a catalyst for discussion and action.

The Five

3. Petrovsky underlined the importance for the Soviet Union of the role of the Five. He noted that HMG and the Soviet Union were at one in wishing to widen the agenda, and to use the collective weight of the Five in the United Nations and elsewhere. I said that each had to respect the fact that some might not wish to discuss particular issues at a particular time. For example the United States preferred no detailed examination of Middle Eastern problems until after the Israeli and US elections. It would be unwise to press the Americans until they were ready. At the same time I had noted, as no doubt had my Soviet colleague Belonogov, that Walters (US) had seen the first six months of 1989 as an opportunity for movement. Petrovsky agreed. But detailed work should begin as soon as possible to make the most of the opportunity. I said that Belonogov's idea of an examination of the points on which the Five agreed and disagreed would be useful when the time came.

4. On Iran/Iraq Petrovsky had little new to say. We agreed that if the Secretary-General found things blocked, he might have to call in the Five to see if there was a way out. Petrovsky expressed exasperation with both the Iraqis and the Iranians, and said that the collective pressure of the Five might have to be exercised on them.



Peacekeeping

5. We turned to peacekeeping. I said we had welcomed Petrovsky's statement that the Soviet Union regarded as generally sound the existing arrangements (my telno 1371). But I felt that in his public statement he sometimes blurred some important distinctions.

- Peacemaking was the role of the Secretary-General and the Security Council. As recent events had shown, the Secretary-General relied heavily on both the Five and the Security Council, and the Council was his source of authority.
- Peacekeeping existed essentially of the interposition of United Nations-designated forces between parties in conflict. As Petrovsky had recognized in his speech, such operations took place at the request of the parties concerned or on the decision or notification of the Security Council, leaving the Secretary-General a good deal of flexibility in how the job was done.
- Peace enforcement (under Chapter VII of the Charter) was something which had not been tried for some time. There was the Korean precedent and the events of the Congo. Soviet ideas for UN naval forces, the creation of a reserve, and the reanimation of the Military Staff Committee seemed to fall into this category. I doubted if the world was yet ready for them. That was not to deny that their time might come. As technology, in particular nuclear technology, advanced, the dangers of catastrophe caused by some maverick state increased. The world might eventually need a powerful police force, and the provision for one was in the Charter.

5. Petrovsky accepted the distinction. On peacekeeping he had welcomed our suggestion to the Five that we should draw up a paper on peacekeeping costs. Some of the costs, in particular over Namibia, looked horrendous. We had to know where we were going. Several countries had been expressing anxiety on the subject. I said that finance was the key. If those who called for peacekeeping forces were ready to pay for them and the UN had sufficient and equitable financial support, then some of the ideas Petrovsky had suggested in his speeches could be given substance. In parentheses I remarked that one trouble was that money for peacekeeping seemed to come out of the wrong part of most national budgets. If it went on to the defence part, there would be less difficulty. Petrovsky warmly agreed. If the Soviet Defence Ministry could pay the Soviet contribution to peacekeeping costs then the world would be a different place. He added that one of his current difficulties was finding out what the Soviet military budget really was. No-one understood the pricing system within it. Gorbachev wanted to reorganize it and make it comparable to Western military budgets as part of his reform of the Soviet economy. Until this was done valid comparisons could hardly be made. On my point on peace enforcement, he accepted the difficulties but thought we should begin soon to see how they might be overcome.



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7. I said that the United Nations had risen well to the challenge of finding forces to meet sudden requirements over Afghanistan and Iran/Iraq. Petrovsky agreed. He particularly commended Goulding's performance as the Under Secretary-General concerned. He had been fair, straightforward and efficient, and the Soviet Government appreciated it.

8. Petrovsky said he hoped that when circumstances were right the Five might begin a privy discussion of some of his ideas on peacekeeping. The Russians wanted to work with us and not against us. If the Five could act together in this respect within the United Nations system, it would transform discussion of the subject. He drew my attention to what he had said in his speech about taking a new look at the work of the UN Committee on Peacekeeping Operations. His Government thought it of significance that the Chinese had asked to join the Committee. Within the Committee it was important to give leadership from the Five.

Charter Committee

9. I referred to Petrovsky's speech in the Sixth Committee on 14 October (my telno 1361), and hoped he had seen our speech of 19 October (faxed to the Department). He had not done so, so I gave him a copy. I drew attention to our four main proposals and said that we hoped for cooperation with the Soviet Union on these issues. Petrovsky said that he would value both bilateral discussion with us and among the Five in due course. He expressed vexation at the recent leak of US/Soviet discussions, not only because they suggested that the agenda was wider than it was, but also because it had apparently soured the Americans' attitude. He fully acknowledged the position of Britain as the one Permanent Member who had accepted the compulsory jurisdiction of the International Court.

Afghanistan

10. Petrovsky said he was worried about the position in Afghanistan. Continued Pakistani violation of the Accords was gravely embarrassing to the Soviet Union. Gorbachev was determined to withdraw by the due date in February, but provocations created major difficulties with the Soviet military authorities (he was obviously somewhat apprehensive). I said I was not qualified to make judgements but Petrovsky would know that the Pakistanis had their own list of Soviet violations. Presumably he and Shevardnadze had been in touch with Shultz and Yaqub Khan. He replied that the Russians were in continuous touch with both the Americans and the Pakistanis. He hoped (but not I thought with conviction) that after the Pakistani elections things would change for the better. He remarked that Vorontsov had a full and strong mandate in Kabul.

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Environmental Issues

11. I took the opportunity to bring Petrovsky up to date on UN handling of the problem of likely global warming. As soon as we could sort out a reasonable draft resolution, I intended to call a meeting of Ambassadors, including my Soviet colleague (in the event I did so today). Petrovsky was glad to know the role we were taking. On environmental issues generally he reverted to his idea of converting the present underworked UN Trusteeship Council into a Trusteeship Council for the Environment which would act as a coordinating body for the various UN bodies already involved. I said, as I had said before, that it was an attractive idea but I was not sure it was workable. It was much better to see the environment as something all people held in trust than as the common heritage of mankind (a tiresome concept resurrected by the Maltese). The problem was whether change of this kind could be undertaken without alteration of the Charter. Petrovsky agreed it was difficult, but said he hoped we were thinking about it. Otherwise it would be difficult to invent a new umbrella organization for the environment. Speaking frankly he said his Government would find it useful for domestic purposes to establish clearer international rules on environmental issues. In this fashion it would be easier to cope with the industrial lobby in the Soviet Union which, as we all knew, had a deplorable environmental record.

12. I drew Petrovsky's attention to the Prime Minister's speech to the Royal Society of 27 September and later sent him a copy. Petrovsky said that the Prime Minister's ideas chimed very closely with Gorbachev's. The environment was one of Gorbachev's strong personal interests. Discussion of the subject would, Petrovsky said, be a useful point on the agenda for the discussions which he understood Gorbachev would be having with the Prime Minister when he visited Britain next year. I said I was sure that the Prime Minister would much welcome a talk of this kind.

Comprehensive System

13. Before leaving Petrovsky referred to the Soviet proposal for a Comprehensive System for International Peace and Security (CSIPS). He said that he hoped to achieve consensus on a resolution. In response to British arguments, the Russians had already watered down their ideas, and were open to any others we might have, even if it meant watering them down further. The argument was becoming somewhat artificial. Although he had once thought the idea of a "system" would be acceptable (after all it arose from Western political philosophy), he understood our difficulties and could go for an approach rather than a system. I said that we too were weary of the argument. As he knew, we were ready to look at every Soviet idea on its merits and deal with it in its appropriate place. The reason why we disliked the idea of a comprehensive system was that it established a great number of unnecessary linkages. A chain was as strong as its weakest link. When Petrovsky had declared denuclearization as part of the chain, he seemed to me to be illustrating our argument. Denuclearization was very difficult. So why link it with things that might happen tomorrow? In the meantime we did not reject the idea of a system. We had our system in the United Nations Charter.

CONFIDENTIAL

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14. Petrovsky said that he would not pursue well-known arguments further except to remark that there were some important things which did not come into the Charter like peacekeeping and the environment. I said that these could be dealt with without creating a comprehensive system. Nevertheless I would be glad to talk once more to my Soviet colleague about the CSIPS. Petrovsky repeated that all he wanted was a consensus resolution. Then we could bury the subject.

Conclusion

15. Again I have written as full an account as I can remember of a conversation which lasted almost an hour and a half. At the end Petrovsky implied that the CSIPS had become something of an embarrassment to the Soviet Union. He was fulsome in our praise, and looked forward to both bilateral cooperation with us and multilateral cooperation through the Five. He even suggested that the Five should work out common positions for use in the Assembly, in particular the Special Political Committee. He indicated that he would be seeing top people in Moscow on his return, and apart from Afghanistan, would be bringing good reports. Peace was breaking out everywhere, except perhaps in the Middle East and Central America. He looked forward to the next Anglo/Soviet discussions here or in Moscow, and referred warmly to the forthcoming encounter between the Prime Minister and Gorbachev.

16. Petrovsky knows how to apply the best butter, and once more he applied it. Some of his thoughts (for example over coordinating positions of the Five for the General Assembly) are far fetched. He likes talking and putting ideas together (especially when his own people are not listening). Rodric Braithwaite will know how much weight he carries in Moscow and how seriously we should take him. But he is certainly an interesting and stimulating person. Once or twice I had to pinch myself to remind me who he was.

Yours truly

Crispin

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