

cc
Soviet Union, Sept 79
Call by Soviet
Ambassador



CO SOVIET UNION

Top Copy: Defence, INF
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CTG, SACT
MISER

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

15 October 1979

Dear George,

Soviet Ambassador's Call

The Soviet Ambassador called on the Prime Minister at 1630 this afternoon at his own request. He was accompanied by Mr. N.N. Ouspenski.

The purpose of Mr. Lunkov's call was to deliver a message to the Prime Minister from Mr. Brezhnev. I enclose a copy of the original together with a copy of the (rather indifferent) unofficial translation prepared by the Soviet Embassy.

Mr. Lunkov began the conversation by precisising at some length Mr. Brezhnev's message. In reply the Prime Minister asked Mr. Lunkov to convey her thanks to President Brezhnev for the message. She reminded Mr. Lunkov of her conversation at Moscow Airport with Mr. Kosygin when she had said that it was best for talks between Governments to be conducted on the basis of facts rather than of claims and assertions. As a result of satellite photography both sides knew a great deal about each others capabilities. We knew that the SS20 was a highly sophisticated modern weapon. It had three warheads and its accuracy was much greater than that of the preceding weapons system. It was targeted on Western Europe. Mr. Kosygin would be aware that the Prime Minister would not be taken in by claims that the military capability of the Soviet Union was not being improved or that it was for purely defensive purposes.

Turning to the general question of the nuclear balance, the Prime Minister said that who ever initiated a nuclear exchange would be responsible for bringing civilisation to a end. She did not know what view might be taken in the Soviet Union, but her own view was that no-one would survive a nuclear war. Nuclear weapons were not intended to be used: they were intended to deter. To achieve this end each side needed to deploy an equivalent capability at every level. It was likely that because of the deployment of the SS20 and the Backfire bomber a gap was opening up at the theatre nuclear force level. Since the Soviet Union had deployed these new weapons systems, it was essential for the West to put something equivalent into the field.

/At this point

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At this point in the conversation Mr. Lunkov read an extract from an article in today's Manchester Guardian by Mary Kaldor. This claimed that it could be argued that it was the West which, by deploying cruise missiles and Pershing II, was introducing a new element in the East/West balance. The Prime Minister replied that this was "poppycock". The SS20 was a highly effective new system. Since it was being deployed, the West had no option but to try to catch up. If the Soviet Union cared to destroy its SS20 missiles and the Backfire bomber there would be no need for the West to catch up. Mr. Lunkov claimed that even Western experts recognised the existence of a balance between the two sides in nuclear weapons. The Prime Minister rejected the assertion and repeated that the Soviet weapons systems were new, sophisticated and of high quality. She had told Mr. Kosygin that he should not be too modest about Soviet military technology. Deterrence came through strength. The SS20 and the Backfire bomber were strong: the West would have to deploy equal strength.

Mr. Lunkov asked what could be done to stop the process of response and counter-response. The Prime Minister said that both sides would have to reduce together on a basis of confidence and of certain knowledge of the other side's capabilities.

The Prime Minister said that she would study Mr. Brezhnev's message in detail and, having done so, would consider the question of a reply. It might be that the Alliance would reply as a whole to Mr. Brezhnev's speech but it was possible that she would reply directly herself. If she were to do so, she hoped that Mr. Brezhnev would receive Sir Curtis Keeble as rapidly as she had agreed to receive Mr. Lunkov. Mr. Lunkov did not react to this point.

As Mr. Lunkov was taking leave of the Prime Minister, he raised the question of Chairman Hua's visit. He said that the Soviet Government regarded it as perfectly reasonable for the UK to develop their relations with the Chinese Government but that he hoped this would not be on an anti-Soviet basis. The Prime Minister said that the development of Anglo/Chinese relations need cause concern to no-one.

I am sending copies of this letter and its second enclosure to Brian Norbury (Ministry of Defence) and Martin Vile (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever

Richard Alexander

[Handwritten initials]

G.G.H. Walden, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.