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From the Private Secretary

19 November 1987

US/SOVIET SUMMIT: POSSIBLE STOPOVER BY MR. GORBACHEV

Mr. Kossov of the Soviet Embassy came to see me at short notice this morning. He said that the Ambassador had just received a cable from Moscow saying that it had still not been settled whether or not Mr. Gorbachev would make a stopover in the United Kingdom on his way to Washington. The telegram had gone on to ask a number of questions about the arrangements that might be made were Mr. Gorbachev to come here. Although Mr. Kossov did not say so, the questions seemed to be predicated on the possibility of a stopover on the way to Washington rather than on the way back.

Mr. Kossov said that the first question was whether the Prime Minister would definitely meet Mr. Gorbachev herself. I said that in principle she would of course do so, but we would need to know when he would come. Mr. Kossov said that it would be on the morning of Monday 7 December. I said that the Prime Minister would certainly be back from the European Council by then and I was confident she would make herself available. Mr. Kossov asked whether we envisaged talks between the Prime Minister and Mr. Gorbachev. I said that this would certainly be one of the main purposes of such a stopover. Quite how matters were organised would depend on how long Mr. Gorbachev was here. I recalled that the Ambassador had earlier spoken of a technical stop requiring about two hours. Mr. Kossov said that he had no precise information but thought that it might in the circumstances be longer, for instance four hours. I said that in such a case there would no doubt be time for talks and lunch.

Mr. Kossov asked about the protocol aspects. Mr. Gorbachev would be accompanied by several senior officials, notably Mr. Yakovlev, Mr. Shevardnadze and Mr. Dobrynin. Would appropriate arrangements be made for them too? I said that I was sure that this would be the case. As soon as we had a firm proposal and some details we could discuss arrangements.

Mr. Kossov then said that the Soviet authorities had noted my earlier speculation that rather than land at Heathrow, Mr. Gorbachev might go to Brize Norton. He wondered whether I could tell him more about it. I said that Soviet

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military intelligence could probably tell him more about it than I could. It was our main RAF transport base some miles west of Oxford. The advantages, so it seemed to me, were that it would be easier from a security point of view and for controlling the press. Mr. Kossov enquired whether the facilities might not be rather primitive. I said that on the contrary, Brize Norton had a comfortable officers mess where the Prime Minister had recently dined. I was sure that, if Mr. Gorbachev and his party came, they would be made very comfortable at Brize Norton, with arrangements for meals and so on. Mr. Kossov wondered whether there would be "protocol" at Brize Norton. I said that I assumed there would be a red carpet and an Honour Guard of some sort, although for a relatively brief stopover we would not want to provide the full works. But all this could be discussed. Mr. Kossov asked whether the military presence would be very obvious. He was thinking about the impact on television and in the press if Mr. Gorbachev appeared to be in an entirely military environment. I said that I did not think this would be a problem. There would be a number of people in smart blue uniforms. But they would not be running around in combat gear with tanks stationed at every corner. My recollection was that Brize Norton was run rather like an airport, with the additional advantage of controlled access.

Mr. Kossov noted all these points carefully and said he would report back to Moscow. He would let me know as soon as he heard that a decision one way or the other had been taken. His impression was that the matter was still open. I said that we were perfectly relaxed about this but would obviously welcome the longest possible notice if Mr. Gorbachev were indeed to come.

I am copying this letter to John Howe (Ministry of Defence). I would be grateful, however, if knowledge of the possibility of a stopover by Mr. Gorbachev could be kept to a very restricted circle at this stage.

(C. D. POWELL)

A. C. Galsworthy, Esq., C.M.G.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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