

PRIME MINISTER

EXPULSION OF MEMBERS OF THE SOVIET AND CZECH
EMBASSIES

You have agreed in principle to the expulsion of a number of members of the Soviet and Czech Embassies in London because of their espionage activities. We now need to take a number of operational decisions.

Whom to expel?

The Security Service recommend 11 Russians (one fewer than before) whose cases you have already studied, and four Czechs. Full details of the Czechs are in the papers annexed but I do not think you need read them. There is no doubt that they are intelligence officers and active ones at that.

When to act?

The recommendation is that we should do it before the NATO Summit on 29/30 May. The Security Service are keen to act on a Friday, which leaves three possible dates: 12, 19 or 26 May. 12 May is the last day of the London Information Forum and better avoided. 26 May is right on the eve of the NATO Summit and might look as though we were acting to distract attention from NATO's own problems at the Summit. This points to 19 May. If the Russians retaliate - as they will - it will be an opportunity to underline at the Summit how little they have changed.

How to do it?

We want to minimise the impact on our relations with the Soviet Union. There are two ways we can try to do this. First, we could exceptionally not reduce the ceiling on the Soviet official community in Britain by the number of people expelled. This might help avoid a downward spiral and limit the Russians' retaliation. Second, we could volunteer that we would take no action to publicise the expulsions. But we have to recognise that the news is bound to leak out sooner or later, since journalists are involved.

B.

SECRET AND PERSONAL

Should you write to Mr. Gorbachev?

It is suggested that you should write to Mr. Gorbachev to explain why we are taking action, to underline our desire to limit the consequences, and to tell him that we shall not lower the ceiling or give publicity to our action. I think this is right, not least in psychological terms. You have always been direct with him and should be on this occasion. I attach a draft of a message for your approval.

Should we expel the Russians and Czechs together or separately?

There are arguments both ways. Expelling them altogether gets it over in one fell swoop but makes it more likely that the Czech expulsions will also become public knowledge. Expelling the Czechs three weeks later would perhaps diminish the appearance of a concerted attack on the Communist countries and would give us a better prospect of avoiding publicity and thus persuading the Czechs to limit retaliation. The FCO recommendation is for separate expulsions. I continue to believe it is better to get it all over in one go and try to draw a line under the episode rather than extend the agony. I see no need to show any delicacy towards the Czechs who are behaving abominably.

Agree:

- Numbers to be expelled?
- To carry out expulsions simultaneously?
- To act on 19 May?
- To write to Mr. Gorbachev in the terms proposed?

Yes

Yes -

Yes

CJP

CHARLES POWELL
5 May 1989

I am worried
 I don't see how
 3 weeks - However action
 on one would warn the Czechs.
 If not together could the two almost
 be taken but a few days apart.
 If it would
 reduce publicity
 that would help.
 I think both
 actions should
 be taken before
 the end of May. We don't
 want it hang over us while
 President Bush is here