

Prime Minister



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

This responds to

my representation of your view that we should say less than proposed in the FCO press line. Perhaps it would be best

17 May 1989

Dear Charles, for me to seek Bernard's judgement tomorrow on what in the letter we can get away with. Agree?

Soviet Expulsions

Thank you for your letter of 16 May about the proposed expulsions of members of the Soviet Embassy due to take place on 19 May.

The Foreign Secretary agrees that we must be able to demonstrate to Mr Gorbachev that we have complied with our undertaking not to initiate publicity. He believes that when we do deploy the press line set out in your letter (and this will only be done after a further check with you), we should tell the press how we informed the Russians of our decision. This means saying publicly that Sir John Fretwell did so in a meeting with the Soviet Ambassador on the afternoon of 19 May. The Foreign Secretary also believes that we shall have to tell the press of the numbers involved. If we declined to reveal at least these details, the press are likely to make considerable play of what will seem in their eyes to be unprecedented secretiveness. This could lead to speculation that we have been engaged in some sort of deal with the Russians which would be unhelpful.

Why?

That is probably right

CAD 17/5

No

Somewhat similar considerations apply to the question of whether we should ourselves go beyond numbers, and offer the names or other details of those whom we have expelled. It is our normal practice, once we confirm expulsions, to give this kind of minimal detail and to refuse absolutely to be drawn further. To give less could be interpreted by the media as being over-protective of Soviet sensibilities. It will certainly provoke the press into using every possible means to discover the names of those involved. This could stimulate a large media presence outside the Soviet Embassy and elsewhere which will complicate the task of our own Security Services.

This would be a betrayal of my undertaking to Charles.

The Foreign Secretary thinks, therefore, that we may need to deploy the names in the press line. An alternative would be to decline to name the expellees until the press had themselves begun to identify the individuals involved. But the Foreign Secretary is concerned that, if we hold back beyond this, the result will be to inflate rather than contain the story.

Yours,  
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Private Secretary

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Saw Under Relation Priv.

