

Weekend Box



(2)

10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister -



These are some background papers on Soviet wines (including the arrest of Dr Sakharov) at which you may care to glance.

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

25 January 1980

Dear Michael,

Handwritten notes:
F.A.
R.H.S.
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SOVIET UNION: ARREST OF DR SAKHAROV

/ The Prime Minister, and other members of OD, may be interested in the attached note.

(G G H Walden)

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ARREST OF DR SAKHAROV

1. With Solzhenitsyn, who was expelled from the Soviet Union in 1974, Sakharov has been the most authoritative of the dissident leaders and the best known in the USSR and the world. He had made a meteoric scientific career and played a key role in the development of the Soviet hydrogen bomb. His services had been recognised by membership of the highly prestigious Academy of Sciences and by numerous state awards. As a dissident leader, he advocated liberalisation of the Communist system and greater respect for human rights and took up particular cases of repression. He also criticised Soviet foreign policy, notably expansionism and the military build-up. It was he who led in developing the most effective tool of the dissidents: the maintenance of close contacts with Western media correspondents in Moscow, so that material passed to them appeared not only in the world media but also in Western broadcasts in Russian to the USSR. He received the Nobel Peace prize for his human rights work in 1975, but was prevented from accepting it in person.

2. The deportation of Sakharov to a city barred to foreigners will be a major setback to the dissident movement, already greatly weakened by the imprisonment and expulsion abroad of its leading figures. The Soviet leaders have no doubt been anxious to move against Sakharov for a long time but have been constrained by his unique stature in the world. They will have been particularly keen to have him out of the way before the Olympics. The choice of the present time will also have been influenced by the poor state of East-West relations after Afghanistan, which meant that the Soviet leaders had much less to lose internationally than at many other times. Although this is a more speculative point, the Soviet leaders may also have wanted to snub President Carter after his firm reactions to the invasion of Afghanistan; the President

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had an exchange of letters with Sakharov in 1977, which greatly antagonised the Kremlin. Sakharov has also been a frequent visitor to the US Embassy. The soviet leaders probably thought that deportation would attract less international condemnation than would imprisonment. Expulsion abroad may be considered impossible in the case of a nuclear weapons scientist, although Sakharov has long ceased to be active in that field. So far the action has been purely administrative. Soviet press allegations that Sakharov gave nuclear secrets to the West might point towards a trial. But that would intensify the international reactions and may on balance be unlikely.

3. The timing of the arrest is nevertheless surprising in two respects. It came just when Western opinion was veering towards relocation or boycott of the Olympic Games and will probably strengthen that trend. Moreover, it will antagonise opinion in France and West Germany and thus may tend to reduce the differences among Western countries about policy towards the Soviet Union after Afghanistan - differences which the Russians had been trying to exploit. M. Chaban-Delmas, President of the French Assembly, has cut short a visit to the USSR in which he had persisted, to evident Soviet satisfaction, despite events in Afghanistan.

4. It is very possible that the resignation of Deputy Prime Minister Kirillin, head of the government department covering science policy and scientific relations with foreign countries, is connected, as well as simultaneous, with Sakharov's arrest. Kirillin is relatively broadminded for a senior Russian. We know that he maintained his friendship with Rostropovich, when the cellist 10 years ago was unpopular with the authorities because

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Solshenitsyn was living in his Dacha. Kirillin probably knew Solzhenitsyn and will have known Sakharov at least before he became a dissident. Kirillin might well have thought that his department's job of fostering East-West scientific exchanges would be badly set back by Western reactions to Sakharov's arrest.

5. The arrest of Sakharov, following events in Afghanistan, shows that the Soviet leaders, while professing interest in continued detente, are in a mood to give much less weight than usual to their interests in East-West relations and are willing to disregard Western opinion. The contradictions in the present line may possibly reflect uncertainty and disagreement among the leaders. The present truculent mood is not likely to lead to early invasion of another country (although intelligence indicators are of course being watched with especial care). Apart from pursuing their general drive for influence in other countries, the Russians may take further steps to get rid of elements in East-West relations which they dislike. They will probably consider reintroducing jamming of Western broadcasts in Russian, on the full but not 100% effective scale they operated before 1973. There could well be a reduction in the recent record rate of Jewish emigration. Cancellation of some kinds of cultural events such as book exhibitions (there is a British one in the Soviet Union in April) is possible. The clamp-down on the already much weakened human rights movement within the USSR will probably continue with further arrests.

Eastern European & Soviet Department

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

24 January 1980