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PS/Mr Blaker

Copies to: Mr Fergusson
News Department
Research Department
CSCE Unit
PUSD

MR BLAKER'S MEETING WITH MRS AVITAL SHCHARANSKY: MONDAY,
27 APRIL 1981; 1500 HOURS

1. I submit a brief for this meeting.
2. Mr Blaker will be aware that Jewish groups in London have used the occasion of Mrs Shcharansky's current visit to publicise Mr Shcharansky's case. There was a demonstration during the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra's performance at the Royal Festival Hall on the evening of 22 April and a demonstration outside the FCO on the morning of 23 April.
3. Mrs Shcharansky has called on Mr Blaker before, on 28 March 1980. She speaks good English. Mrs Shcharansky will be accompanied by Mrs Margaret Rigal, co-Chairman of the Women's Campaign for Soviet Jewry. A copy of their latest newsletter is attached.
4. Mr Sheinwald will attend to take a note.


pp. B J P Fall
East European & Soviet Department
24 April 1981

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1. Please add the following paragraph to Mr Fall's minute
of 24 April 1981:

B. 15. Mrs Shcharansky may ask about the recent press
reports (copy of Times article attached) that her
husband might be exchanged for a KGB officer (Koslov)
held by the South Africans. We would rather not make
any comment, but, if pressed, Mr Blaker may wish to say
that, while we understand that Mr Koslov is in South
African custody, we are not involved in any discussions
over possible exchanges.

N E Sheinwald
East European & Soviet Department
27 April 1981

15. Mrs Shcharansky may ask about the recent press

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POINTS TO MAKE

1. Mr Shcharansky's condition. Very distressed to hear of the privations and continuing victimisation your husband is suffering in labour camp (solitary confinement, no visitors, further deterioration of health). What is the latest position?
2. Does Mr Shcharansky have books to read? We understand that only letters to his mother are now allowed. Is this correct?
3. How long will the ban on visitors last - all year or, as his mother has been told, only until the autumn?
4. HMG's Attitude. As you know, the British Government is disturbed and concerned at your husband's plight. We have raised Mr Shcharansky's case on numerous occasions, most recently in Plenary and working group sessions at the Madrid Review Conference. A very large number of other Western Governments have also given their fullest support. We will continue to do all we can to work for his release or, more modestly, an improvement in the appalling conditions he faces. Although our bilateral efforts and moves through the CSCE process may not bring immediate results, they force the Soviet authorities to attempt to defend their policies before a large and critical audience, and that in itself draws attention to your husband's and others' plight for the benefit of the uninitiated.
5. Soviet Attitudes. I cannot, however, be optimistic about the attitude of the Soviet authorities. There has hardly been a single encouraging development in their treatment of Soviet Jews and the wide range of religious and political dissidents over the past 18 months to 2 years. The picture today is bleak.
6. Prospects. Can you identify any realistic methods of putting further pressure on the Russians? Will you be making personal contact with the new American Administration?

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BACKGROUND NOTE

1. Shcharansky was born in 1948 in the Ukraine. Graduated with distinction from the prestigious Institute of Physics and Mathematics in Moscow. Worked as a computer mathematical research specialist until dismissal from the Institute in 1975.
2. First applied for visa to emigrate to Israel in 1973. Refused on grounds of access to 'classified' material. His fiancée, Natalia (Avital) was granted a visa in June 1974 and told to leave by 5 July, the day after their wedding. She was promised that her husband would be permitted to follow soon afterwards. But he was subsequently again denied exit permission.
3. Shcharansky then entered fully into dissident activities as a result of which he was harrassed, arrested and detained on several occasions. He helped found the Moscow Committee for the Implementation of the Helsinki Agreement (headed by Dr Yuri Orlov) in May 1976. In October 1976 he was one of three Jewish activists granted an interview with Soviet Internal Affairs Minister and other leading officials. In January 1977 Shcharansky was among those named in a Soviet television film entitled 'Traders in Souls', and in March he was accused in Izvestia of working for the CIA. He was arrested in the same month and charged with treason and anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda. His trial did not take place until July 1978. He was sentenced to three years imprisonment (backdated to the time of his arrest) followed by 10 years in a strict regime labour camp. The sentence was condemned by foreign governments. President Carter denied Soviet allegations that Shcharansky had worked for the CIA.
4. Shcharansky's health has deteriorated seriously in prison. He suffers from severe headaches and eye-sight problems. A recent letter complained of loss of memory. He is allowed no solid food and is now reported to weigh only six and a half stones. He is in a labour camp near Perm in the Urals, and since the beginning of this year is said to have been put in solitary confinement in a prison within the camp. It also seems that he has been denied visiting rights during 1981. A visit planned by his mother for 27 April has been refused.
5. Toward the end of his spell in prison in 1980, he was allowed books to read in his cell. We do not know whether this continues. In view of the fact that he has been put in solitary confinement for allegedly violating camp regulations, it is extremely unlikely that such 'privileges' would be allowed.
6. We have raised Mr Shcharansky's case on a number of occasions with the Soviet authorities, most recently in both Plenary and working group sessions at the Madrid Review Conference.
7. Mrs Avital Shcharansky was trained as an art restorer. She left the Soviet Union with her brother in 1974 and has since lived in Israel. She travels widely in the West campaigning on her husband's behalf.

EESD

24 April 1981

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*Original returned to
Jag Robinson.*

FROM
NICHOLAS
BETHELL

TELEPHONE
01-402-6877

73 SUSSEX SQUARE
LONDON W2 2SS

From: Lord Bethell, MEP.
To: Miss Caroline Stephens

27th April 1981

Avital Sharansky, wife of the well known imprisoned Soviet-Jewish dissident, is in London for the next four days. You will remember that a year ago I suggested that the Prime Minister might wish to receive her for a few minutes, but I did not press the point very hard and in the end a meeting could not be arranged, although she was seen by Peter Blaker.

It seems to me that today there are stronger reasons why the Prime Minister might consider receiving Mrs Sharansky. The whole tragic episode has been made more acute by the fact that he has spent the last four months in solitary confinement in No.35 labour camp in the Perm complex. According to his last letter to his mother in Moscow, the contents of which I have read, he has lost a lot of weight as a result of the starvation diet imposed on prisoners in solitary confinement. Also his eyesight is damaged and he complains of losing his memory. Mrs Sharansky fears that at the end of his six-month sentence of solitary confinement he may be subjected to a further "internal trial" in the labour camp, which would impose on him a harsher "regime" of prison conditions.

Mrs Sharansky was received on April 14th by French foreign minister Francois-Poncet and there will be a substantial demonstration about the Sharansky case in Paris on May 7th. Her Zionist supporters here are arranging a demonstration in London for May 17th, after the expiry of the present ban on public demonstrations. The whole issue, you will appreciate, is linked in Jewish minds with recent deplorable incidents of swastika-daubing on synagogues and tombstones in Jewish cemeteries.

It also seems to me that, if something is to be done over the Sharansky case, now is the time to do it, while the Madrid review of the Helsinki agreement is still in progress. President Reagan's decision to lift the embargo on the export of grain to the Soviet Union - whether one agrees with it or not - is a gesture that clearly demands a reciprocal act from the Soviet side.

I also think that, from the party political point of view, it would be advantageous for the Prime Minister to receive Mrs Sharansky at this

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time. She will be well aware of the fact that the Jewish communities of north-west London are concerned about various aspects of government policy - the European initiative on the Middle East, the probability that Lord Carrington will meet Yasser Arafat after July 1st and the Prime Minister's own recent visit to the Arabian peninsula with its accompanying talk of large British arms sales to Arab nations.

If the Prime Minister decides to receive Mrs Sharansky, British Jewry will be tremendously gratified and encouraged. It would be a substantial gesture of friendship towards Israel and it would hardly be likely to antagonise the Arab world.

I would be very grateful if you could put these arguments before the Prime Minister with my suggestion that she should under the special circumstances try to find time to receive Mrs Sharansky for a few minutes.

Michaelmas
