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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

20 June 1983

Prime Minister

is asked for the assessment.

A.S.C. 29/6.

c. Sir A. Parsons.

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Dear Sir,

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Soviet Central Committee Plenum and Supreme
Soviet Session - 14-16 June

The Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party held a Plenum on 14-15 June. This was followed by a meeting of the Supreme Soviet, at which Mr Andropov was elected President.

/ I enclose a note bringing together the main points to emerge from these two meetings.

Yours
R B Bone

(R B Bone)
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq
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SOVIET CENTRAL COMMITTEE PLENUM AND SUPREME SOVIET : 14-16 JUNE

1. On 14-15 June, the first of the two Central Committee Plenums normally held each year took place. It was followed by a meeting of the Supreme Soviet on 16 June. These meetings gave the Soviet leadership a chance to make personnel changes in the higher levels of the Party, and to place on record views on internal and external developments. The following paragraphs summarise briefly the main points. Traditionally the second Plenum in each year deals with the economy. Economic results and reforms, if any, will be dealt with then.

Personnel Changes

2. The most important move was announced at the Supreme Soviet. Andropov, proposed by Chernenko, his chief rival, was unanimously elected President. This means that in seven months Andropov has now added two other major offices, those of President and Chairman of the Defence Council, to that of General Secretary, a task which took Brezhnev 13 years. Although the post is largely honorific, election as President formalises Andropov's pre-eminence, and facilitates the protocol of dealing with the West.

3. Nevertheless, although he is clearly in command, Andropov's appearance has given rise to widespread speculation in the West about his health. Andropov is known to have had heart problems during his time as Head of the KGB. It is not possible to confirm rumours that he suffers from a kidney or Parkinson's disease. All who meet him are impressed by his intellectual grasp. But the fact that he was seen to have difficulty in walking to the podium at the Supreme Soviet will have raised some question marks in the minds of the Soviet bureaucracy about the length of his tenure of office.

4. For the rest, the leadership changes were less extensive than had been expected, and involved no alteration in the membership of the Politburo. With only 11 members it remains unusually small. Even with the recent departure of three of the oldest members, its average age is still over 67.

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5. The relative lack of changes, taken together with Chernenko's reference to unity and harmony in the leadership, would appear to confirm that a modus vivendi has been reached in the Politburo between Andropov and Chernenko. There is no evidence of policy differences. Rather the accommodation seems to be based on an understanding that Andropov will not precipitately change the personnel structure developed under Brezhnev.

6. The most significant change on the Party side was the appointment of Romanov, the Leningrad Party Secretary, to the Central Committee Secretariat. Romanov is 60, and he and Gorbachev (51), the Party's agricultural overlord, are now the best placed contenders for power in a few years, although if Andropov had to step down in the near future, the odds would be on Chernenko succeeding him.

7. In order to underline the fight against corruption, for the first time since 1964, two members of the Central Committee, one a former Minister of the Interior, were publicly expelled 'for mistakes they had made in their work'.

Ideology

8. The theme of the Plenum was ideology. The Party's current programme still dates from 1961, and the fact that some of its Khrushchevian boasting, such as the USSR would overtake the US in 20 years, has manifestly not been realised, has been the cause of some embarrassment. Brezhnev shied away from this awkward subject during his latter years. Andropov has now grasped the nettle. His speech outlined some points which might be expected to appear in a new Party programme. Some of the things he had to say were quite direct - 'In politics one has to pay for one's errors' - 'If a Party loses touch with the people, self-proclaimed contenders for the role of those who express the interest of the working people emerge in the ensuing vacuum' - etc.

9. Chernenko's speech indicated that a tougher line might be taken on culture, including a more selective approach to the import of Western culture.

Relations with 'Socialist' Countries

10. Andropov made some implied criticisms of Poland. He called for greater economic integration with the Communist bloc, and made some less than enthusiastic comments on the Soviet attitude to Third World countries with a socialist

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orientation. It is not clear whether this indicates some disenchantment with the cost of assisting socialist countries in the Third World. It almost certainly does not mean that the Soviet Union is likely to forego any relatively low cost opportunities for extending its influence in such countries.

Relations with the West

11. Andropov, Chernenko and also Gromyko (in a Foreign Affairs survey at the Supreme Soviet), were all sharply critical of what Andropov called 'the aggressiveness of ultra-reactionary forces led by US imperialism'. At the same time, none of them closed any doors or indicated that negotiation with the US was no longer possible. Gromyko wanted smoother relations with the US in the knowledge that this was important to prevent war. The overall impression was slightly defensive.

12. France and the FRG were singled out as the major European partners with whom good relations and fruitful cooperation might be possible. Security questions were to be given priority in contacts with the FRG 'particularly during Chancellor Kohl's forthcoming visit'.

13. Italy, Britain and Spain were the other Western European countries specifically mentioned, with whom the Soviet Union wanted good relations.

14. Nothing new emerged from the formulations on START, or INF, which was given surprisingly little attention in Gromyko's speech. Nevertheless, Andropov stated clearly that the attainment of 'a strategic military balance between socialism and imperialism ... is one of the most important results of recent decades. It required ... no small efforts and resources, and we shall not allow it to be upset'.

15. The only new initiative was a call by the Supreme Soviet for a nuclear freeze by all nuclear powers. This is a new variation on the long-standing Soviet proposal for a freeze on US and Soviet nuclear forces. It is self-serving and unacceptable, given the vast increase in Soviet nuclear forces at all levels in recent years.

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

21 June 1983

SOVIET CENTRAL COMMITTEE PLENUM AND SUPREME
SOVIET SESSION - 14-16 JUNE

The Prime Minister was grateful for the assessment enclosed with your letter of 20 June, the contents of which she has noted.

A. J. COLES

Roger Bone, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.