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Prime Minister



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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London SW1A 2AH

13 January, 1984

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You asked for our views on the article in today's Times by Richard Owen, their Moscow correspondent. I enclose a copy.

We have not been able to check with Owen who his "informed Russian sources" were. Some of his previous reports from Moscow have contained inaccuracies and exaggerations.

As far as the substance is concerned, there was no reflection of the idea that "a senior Kremlin leader could come to London for high-level talks", nor of any "feelings for a marked improvement in Anglo-Soviet relations", when the Soviet Ambassador called on Sir Geoffrey Howe this morning.

The line that Owen reports can serve a number of Soviet purposes. It fits with the present Soviet tactics of wedge-driving between the Europeans and the US, and it reflects the very hard anti-US line which has been a consistent feature of recent Soviet propaganda. For the rest, it is interesting that Owen's sources seem to have suggested that an initiative for the reinstatement of Kornienko's visit might come from the Soviet side: the Russians have so far turned down the invitations extended for him to visit London in both December and January.

Our assessment of the article is, therefore, that it should be treated with some reserve. In choosing a journalist, the Russians must have intended their views to become public. While this could be a signal that they were interested in doing business with us (and this in itself may be a welcome development), the business the Russians most want to do (but on their own terms) is in the areas of strategic arms limitation and INF, and they know that in these fields there is no substitute for the US. On balance, therefore, we see the main element in this as an attempt to put pressure on the Americans prior to the Shultz/Gromyko meeting and to stimulate jealousy and doubts among the Europeans as to who in Europe might be the favoured Soviet interlocutor in place of the Americans. But this need not be the only aim, and the fact that the Russians feel the need to float such ideas may indicate some uncertainty and indecision on their side. This could present us with opportunities to get our own views across and influence their thinking. They will of course have noted and carefully assessed the Prime Minister's recent public statements.

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All this points to the continuing need for very close consultation on the Western side, and incidentally to the importance and timeliness of the Prime Minister's and Sir Geoffrey Howe's discussions with Mr Shultz on 15 January.

In the time available Sir Geoffrey Howe has not seen this letter: I shall show him a copy in tonight's box.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'R B Bone', written in a cursive style.

(R B Bone)
Private Secretary

A J Coles Esq
10 Downing Street

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Kremlin may seek Britain's support

From Richard Owen
Moscow

The Soviet Union is considering an approach to Britain in an effort to revive East-West detente at a time when the superpower dialogue has almost ground to a halt, according to informed Russian sources.

If the Stockholm meeting between Mr. Andrei Gromyko, the Soviet Foreign Minister, and Mr. George Shultz, the US Secretary of State, proved disappointing, the Kremlin might put out feelers for a marked improvement in Anglo-Soviet relations. A senior Kremlin leader could come to London for high-level talks, sources suggested.

It is understood that Mr. Georgy Kornienko, the Deputy Foreign Minister, may visit Britain. Last year's trip was cancelled after the Korean airliner disaster, which brought East-West relations to a new low.

The last British official to visit Russia was Mr. Malcolm Rifkind, a Junior Foreign Office Minister, in April last year. Apart from Mr. Francis Pym, who attended the funeral of President Brezhnev in November 1982, no Foreign Secretary has visited Moscow since Dr. David Owen in 1977. Sir Geoffrey Howe will meet Mr. Gromyko at the Stockholm conference next Tuesday.

The Russians are reportedly encouraged by what they regard as Mrs. Thatcher's pragmatic approach to the Kremlin. After powerful attacks on Soviet tyranny, which earned her the label of pathological anti-communist in Moscow, the Prime Minister turned at the end of last year to calls for dialogue.

Soviet sources said an approach to Britain would be strengthened by fears that President Reagan might be re-elected in November. Britain held a "unique position" in the Western alliance, since it had an independent deterrent, traditional ties with Washington

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Kremlin turns to Britain

Continued from page 1
and could act as a channel to the United States.

It is understood that although formal contacts have been minimal recently, Britain has made it clear that it would respond to a Soviet attempt to improve relations. There were reports last October that Mr. James Callaghan, the former Prime Minister, was carrying a message from Mrs. Thatcher, when he visited Moscow, for talks with officials, including Mr. Gromyko.

Mr. Callaghan denied this, but subsequently called for a realistic approach to the Soviet Union at a time of dangerous tension.

President Andropov said yesterday in a written statement that "not a single opportunity" should be missed for reviving the Geneva arms talks and promised to scrap Moscow's threatened retaliatory measures

if cruise and Pershing missiles were withdrawn from Europe.

Mr. Andropov said the Soviet Union wanted to remove obstacles which had led to the breakdown of the talks, but he blamed the collapse on Washington. He said America had used the Geneva talks as a cover for deploying "new first-strike weapons in Europe". To have continued the talks would have been "tantamount to complicity in deception of the European and world public".

The Warsaw Pact has said it will station new missiles in East Germany and Czechoslovakia, and Mr. Andropov said, in November, that Moscow would threaten the United States "from the oceans and the seas".

Mr. Gromyko will meet Mr. Shultz next Wednesday. Soviet sources said, however, that the Kremlin did not have high expectations of a rapprochement with the Reagan Administration and might seek an

"alternative dialogue partner" at a time of East-West confrontation over arms control, as well as regional conflicts in the Middle East, Africa and the Caribbean.

"The situation is very dangerous," one official said. "The Americans have torpedoed the arms talks, and Reagan shows no interest in doing business with us."

Sources said Britain was well placed to engage in dialogue with Russia. The history of Anglo-Soviet relations is positive, sources said. Relations were established 60 years ago in February, 1924, and the occasion will be marked by celebrations in Moscow and London next month.

● WASHINGTON: Mr. Shultz yesterday said America was prepared for a thaw in its relations with the Soviet Union, but added: "It takes two to thaw" (Mohsin Ali writes).

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

16 January, 1984

Soviet Union

The Prime Minister has noted the contents of your letter of 13 January about the article in The Times of that day by Mr. Richard Owen.

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R. B. Bone, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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