

THE PRIME MINISTER'S OPENING STATEMENT

AT

AN UNRECORDED PRESS BRIEFING

IN THE

BRITISH EMBASSY, MOSCOW: 14 FEBRUARY

10 Downing Street
Press Office
Whitehall
SW1

01-930 4433

My call on Mr Chernenko lasted for about half an hour.

I was accompanied by the Foreign Secretary and the British Ambassador. Mr Gromyko was present. You will not expect me to reveal the substance of our talk, if we are serious about promoting better

East/West dialogue then it has to be conducted on a confidential basis. So let me talk to you about my personal approach to East/West politics. There has been a tendency to portray my visit to Hungary and my decision to come to Moscow as a sudden and unexpected development.

That is just not true. It was plain to me and the Foreign Secretary last summer that the time had come for a serious review of relations with the East. The build-up of arms - the increasing number of SS20s - and the West's need to respond with Cruise and Pershing had created disquiet.

The various arms control negotiations were getting nowhere and contact between East and West were so limited that the risk of misunderstanding was grave. The matter of the Korean Airliner did nothing to help but nevertheless, when I visited the United States in September, the prospects for improving East/West relations were at the top of my agenda with President Reagan and we established a great deal of common-ground.

I made my Winston Churchill speech in Washington, but the key lines on my readiness to talk in the right circumstances were not then widely noticed although they were there in that speech. Then came the Foreign Secretary's speech to the United Nations General Assembly, my Blackpool speech and my Guildhall speech. Look at them again and you will find the common threads. It was in November not February that I decided to go to Hungary and few people have recalled that many months before that I had received the Hungarian Deputy Prime Minister in London.

So the policy has been evolved over time and it will be applied over time. I look for results over years and not months and I am under no illusions at all. I believe as strongly as ever in basic Western freedoms - and I make it plain to all in the East privately and publicly that I will defend them/anywhere any time. But we must avoid the

terrible dangers that could flow from misunderstandings.

That means establishing a new confidence between East and West. And that in turn means a recognition that we have a common interest in peace and security at a lower level of weapons. I believe that past East/West exchanges have been too narrowly focussed on arms control negotiations. If there is to be progress on arms control - which I devoutly want - it will come not through negotiating skill alone but because a broader understanding has been reached.

That will establish the confidence necessary on both sides for the negotiators to be given the right instructions.

The aim is that broad understanding. I do not know whether it can be achieved - I do know that we have to try. It will be at best a long slow task. There may be set-backs and interruptions. But I earnestly hope that the Soviet leadership will respond positively.

It will be some time before we can know. But I am absolutely sure that all Western leaders are prepared to work for this goal. I am not looking for instant and ephemeral success but steady and sustainable progress.

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TEXT OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S PRESS BRIEFING

AND

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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Q. YOUR PERSONAL ASSESSMENT OF THE NEW LEADER ?

A. I THINK THAT'S VERY DIFFICULT , TODAY, AND ON THE FIRST DAY, ON THE DAY OF THE FUNERAL . I CAN ONLY SAY THAT I THOUGHT THE FUNERAL CEREMONY WAS SOLEMN AND IMPRESSIVE AND THE ARRANGEMENTS WERE EXCELLENT. THE GENERAL SECRETARY HAS HAD BOTH A PHYSICALLY TIRING AND EMOTIONALLY EXHAUSTING DAY , AND I WAS VERY GRATEFUL TOWARDS THE END OF THE DAY FOR HIS RECEIVING US FOR AN INTERVIEW FOR ABOUT HALF AN HOUR. AND OF COURSE A NUMBER OF PREVIOUS INTERVIEWS HAD BEEN HELD WITH OTHER PEOPLE AS WELL.

Q. DID YOU INVITE MR CHERNENKO TO BRITAIN OR WAS THERE ANY SUGGESTION YOU SHOULD COME TO MOSCOW ?

/ A. WG

A. WE HAD NO SPECIAL DISCUSSION ABOUT VISITS. I DON'T THINK YOU WOULD EXPECT THAT , WHEN WE WERE TALKING ABOUT BROAD, GENERAL MATTERS. BUT WE DID SAY THAT WE HOPED THAT THIS FIRST MEETING WOULD LEAD TO OTHER CONTACTS BETWEEN MEMBERS OF OUR TWO GOVERNMENTS. I DON'T THINK YOU SHOULD LEAP TO EXPECTING BIG SUMMIT MEETINGS. THAT'S NOT THE KIND OF STEADY IMPROVEMENT IN RELATIONS WHICH COMES IMMEDIATELY. YOU HAVE TO WORK FOR MANY CONTACTS BETWEEN MEMBERS OF THE SOVIET UNION AND OTHER GOVERNMENTS. WE'RE WORKING FROM THE BOTTOM UP , WITH A PROGRAMME OF INCREASED CONTACTS.

Q. CAN I ASK YOU IF MR CHERNENKO APPEARS TO HAVE A GOOD GRASP OF ANGLO-SOVIET RELATIONS AND EAST-WEST ISSUES IN GENERAL?

A. I DON'T REALLY THINK THAT YOU'D EXPECT ME TO ANSWER PERSONAL QUESTIONS LIKE THAT , AT A TIME WHEN WHAT WE'RE REALLY TRYING TO DO IS SET THE TONE OF REPHRASED EAST -WEST RELATIONS. I WAS EXTREMELY COURTEOUSLY RECEIVED AND WAS VERY PLEASED WITH THE TALKS WE HAD .

Q. IN ST GEORGE'S HALL YOU WERE GRANTED MUCH MORE TIME WITH MR CHERNENKO THAN OTHER VISITORS. WHAT DID YOU DISCUSS ?

A. ONE JUST HAD A WORD. ONE WOULD ON SUCH AN OCCASION , AND ONE THEN ALSO TURNED TO HAVE A WORD WITH MR GROMYKO. REMARKS . OBVIOUSLY FLOWED FROM ONE'S DECISION TO COME.

Q. A MEETING OF MINDS ?

A. I BELIEVE THAT WE ARE ALL RECOGNISING THAT ALTHOUGH THERE ARE FUNDAMENTAL POLITICAL DIFFERENCES , IT IS IN THE COMMON INTEREST OF PEOPLE ON BOTH SIDES OF THE POLITICAL DIVIDE TO WORK FOR A BETTER UNDERSTANDING, TO WORK FOR DISARMAMENT SO THAT WE CAN KEEP SECURITY ON A BALANCED BASIS, AT A LOW LEVEL OF WEAPONS, AND , AS PART OF THAT BETTER UNDERSTANDING, WE CAN WORK FOR GOOD BILATERAL RELATIONS AND INCREASED TRADE. I THINK THAT THE PHRASE THAT IS NOW BEING USED ON THE SOVIET SIDE IS PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE. THE PHRASE HAS BEEN USED ON OUR SIDE : WE HAVE A COMMON INTEREST IN SECURITY AND PEACE, AT A LOWER LEVEL OF WEAPONS, AND WE WISH BETTER UNDERSTANDING AND BETTER BILATERAL RELATIONS.

1Q. MR BUSH

Q. MR BUSH SAID THAT HIS MEETING HAD BEEN CONDUCTED IN A VERY GOOD MOOD AND THAT THEREFORE THERE WAS A DISTINCT PROSPECT OF IMPROVEMENT IN EAST -WEST RELATIONS . WOULD YOU GENERALLY AGREE ?

A. I WOULD BE HAPPY TO ADOPT THIS DESCRIPTION.

Q. COULD YOU TELL US WHO ELSE YOU MET TODAY, AND SAY SOMETHING BRIEFLY ABOUT THOSE OTHER DISCUSSIONS ?

V

A. YOU CAN'T OBVIOUSLY GET THE MAXIMUM AMOUNT OUT OF THESE DISCUSSIONS IF YOU ARE GOING TO REVEAL EVERYTHING THAT WAS

SAID. WE MET LATER THIS AFTERNOON , DR SOARES OF PORTUGAL. I HAVE SEEN DURING THE COURSE OF THE DAY A NUMBER OF PEOPLE , BUT NOT TO DISCUSS DEEP AND SERIOUS THINGS - MRS GANDHI AND I ARRIVED TOGETHER AND I WAS VERY PLEASED TO SEE HER. WE HAVE SEEN A CONSIDERABLE NUMBER OF THE AFRICAN COMMONWEALTH AND ALSO SRI LANKA , A LOT OF OUR EUROPEAN COMMUNITY , AND REPRESENTATIVES OF SWEDEN AND NORWAY, AND JORDAN AND ALSO MR MACHEL FROM MOZAMBIQUE. OF COURSE THERE WERE QUITE A LOT MORE. YOU KNOW AS ONE GOES UP THE STAIRS TOO, WAITING TO BE RECEIVED , YOU MEET QUITE A LOT OF PEOPLE .

Q. WHAT WAS THE IMPRESSION MADE ON YOU PERSONALLY BY THE FUNERAL ?

A. WELL, IT WAS A VERY IMPRESSIVE CEREMONY. IT IS QUITE DIFFERENT FROM ANYTHING WITHIN ONE'S OWN EXPERIENCE OF COURSE. IT WAS IMPRESSIVE, IT WAS EXTREMELY WELL ORGANISED. THE TIMING WAS PERFECT.

Q. DID YOU SEE ANYTHING IN MOSCOW THAT WOULD IN ANY WAY AFFECT YOUR VIEWS OF THE COUNTRY ?

A. WE'VE NOT HAD A CHANCE TO SEE A GREAT DEAL - I'M AFRAID.

WE WENT TO THE KREMLIN SLIGHTLY EARLIER TO SEE THE GREAT PALACE AND ONE OF THE PALACES AT THE BACK, AND I HAVE NOT, THIS TIME, GONE IN THE CHURCHES OF THE KREMLIN. I'VE BEEN THERE BEFORE. THEY VERY KINDLY SHOWED US AROUND PARTS OF THE PALACE WHICH OF COURSE ARE VERY, VERY BEAUTIFUL.

Q. AND THE MEETING WITH MR CHERNENKO WAS IN ST ELIZABETH'S HALL?

A. ST ELIZABETH'S HALL, YES.

Q. THE DESCRIPTION "IRON LADY": WOULD YOU NOW, IN MOSCOW, REPUDIATE IT?

A. NO. AT TIMES EVERYONE IN THE WESTERN WORLD AND EASTERN WORLD, VERY, VERY DIFFERENT POLITICAL SYSTEMS, AND IN THE INTERESTS OF ALL PEOPLES THAT WE WORK FOR PEACE AND SECURITY. YOU ONLY HAVE SECURITY IF YOU HAVE BALANCED REDUCTIONS IN ARMS SEMICLON BALANCED AND VERIFIED AT EVERY STAGE, SO THAT THE SECURITY OF EACH SIDE IS SAFEGUARDED IN THIS WAY. WE HAVE TO DO IT IN A SPIRIT OF SELF-RESPECT, MUTUAL RESPECT. I HAVE AN IRON RESOLVE TO WORK FOR A BETTER UNDERSTANDING.

Q. YOU'VE COME TO A COUNTRY, ONCE DESCRIBED AS ONE OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST TYRANNIES. DOES THIS SUGGEST THAT YOU HAVE CHANGED YOUR ATTITUDE TO THE SOVIET UNION?

A. I AM PREPARED TO HAVE A BETTER UNDERSTANDING. I READ MR CHERNENKO'S SPEECH TO THE LAST PLENUM. I DISAGREE WITH A GREAT DEAL OF HIS SPEECH. DEMOCRACY IS A FAITH IN WHICH I BELIEVE AND WHICH I BELIEVE IS THE BEST FOR MANKIND. BUT WE DO NOT SEEK TO IMPOSE OUR VIEWS ON OTHERS BY FORCE. NATO IS ONLY A DEFENCE ORGANISATION. BUT WE BELIEVE PASSIONATELY IN OUR WAY OF LIFE AND WE'LL DEFEND IT.

PRIME MINISTER'S INTERVIEW

WITH

PETER RUFF, BBC RADIO

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