

Prime Minister

You will remember having a talk with Nicholas Soames about his recent visit to the Soviet Union, and the impression he got from talking to a number of senior Soviet officials.

I enclose a report which he has made of the visit which I have copied to John Coles. ✓ *MA 10/5*

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MICHAEL ALISON
10.5.84



REPORT ON A VISIT TO MOSCOW

From the 23rd to the 26th April I accompanied Professor John Erickson and Group Captain David Bolton (RAF retired) on a visit to Moscow to attend preliminary meetings prior to the 'Edinburgh Conversations' which are to be held in Moscow in September this year. A log of the meetings I attended is attached.

From these discussions I have drawn a number of personal conclusions:

1. The Soviet system is entirely reactive. I do not believe they are capable of coming forward with innovative and radical ideas of their own to break out of the present log-jam of ideology.
2. They suffer from a deep-seated sense of insecurity which together with a massive inferiority complex leads to a real fear on their part that to concede at certain levels is to be humiliated.
3. I think they believe that the Americans are seeking superiority and they have serious problems finding the money to cope with such developments of their own.
4. They have substantial internal problems (the reasons for which are well known) and this obviously has a profound effect on their thinking internationally.
5. Their system enables them to take a much longer term view of world affairs than does a democracy where emphases are constantly changing and evolving.
6. The present hard line taken in Moscow is a mechanism for avoiding any serious discussions before the American Presidential Elections.

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7. I believe there are substantial misconceptions on both sides which further exacerbates an already highly difficult situation.
8. The trading of formal insults is part of the conventional proceedings in these matters but I am in doubt that recent American pronouncements questioning the very legitimacy of the Soviet Union and its system have been damaging. This they regard as much more serious than the normal line of abuse.

At the present time they believe that the Americans do not want a deal - this is quite apart from the considerations of an American Election. If there was to be evidence of 'good political intent' as they see it then I believe that progress could be made. I think that the most important areas that we should concentrate on are the confidence building measures which if successful could lead to momentum for other agreements. MBFR is an area where I am sure that an accommodation could be arrived at given the right circumstances. But it is unlikely there will be any deals unless the atmosphere changes for the better.

Whatever future progress is to be made, it is crucial that we arrive at a long term plan which can be carefully laid out step by step. This is of particular importance bearing in mind the long term view that the Russians take.

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At the end of the day it will be, of necessity, the West that comes up with the bold initiatives and the original ideas since the Russians fear of perceived humiliation and latent 'chippiness' prohibits them from having any realistic capacity in this direction. The more mature and sophisticated Democracies will have to make the running.

The most striking perception that I came away with was that despite their great power, they are obsessed by their sense of insecurity. I believe that we should constantly emphasise to them that despite the differences between East and West, it should not be a bar to the achievement of a realistic, frank, long-term relationship.

I am convinced that Britain has a much larger role to play in these matters than we at present believe. The Prime Minister has a strong personal card to play but we also have an obligation to try to wean the Americans away from the damaging, unhelpful and simple rhetoric which has become so much part of the conventional dialogue.

In conclusion I am convinced that it is the democracies that must take the initiative. Whatever the Americans may say the Russians believe at the moment that they do not want to arrive at an accommodation and this in itself represents a failure of East/West relations.

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I do not believe that the Russians have any intention of having a confrontation in Europe but I fear greatly the possibility of a collision in the Middle East, Africa or elsewhere. It is for this reason that we really must break out of the sterile format of proceedings and look for a new realistic, long-term plan. At the very least we should seek to try to narrow the differences between our respective points of view before moving on to talks over as broad a field as possible.



MEETINGS LOG

Institute of USA and Canada Studies:

G. ARBATOV
GENERAL MILSTEIN

Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

V. P. SUSLOV
V. M. SEMENOV

Institute of World Economy and
International Relations:
(I.M.E.M.O.)

PROF. AN YAKOLEV

PRAVDA:

VICTOR AFANASYEV
(Editor-in-Chief)

The Military:

MAJ. GEN. R. F. MIKAILOV
(General Staff)
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