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FROM MOSCOW 011245Z FEBRUARY

TO IMMEDIATE FCO

M. JENKINS

TELEGRAM NUMBER 133 OF 1 FEBRUARY

INFO PRIORITY UKDEL NATO AND WASHINGTON

CAB OFF, ASSESSMENT STAFF

INFO ROUTINE PARIS AND BONN

ms.

PS/N^o 10 J. S.

MY TELNO 109 : THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP .

1. I HAVE STILL NO AUTHORITATIVE INFORMATION ABOUT THE CURRENT STATE OF CHERNENKO'S HEALTH. THE FOLLOWING INDICATIONS HOWEVER TEND TO CONFIRM THAT A WEEK LATER THE ASSESSMENT IN MY TUR IS STILL VALID.

2. YOU WILL HAVE SEEN THE REPORTS BY ED STEVENS IN THE SUNDAY TIMES AND VICTOR LOUIS IN THE SUNDAY EXPRESS . STEVENS IS NOW SAYING THAT HE HAS IT ON GOOD AUTHORITY THAT CHERNENKO MAY RESIGN AS GENERAL SECRETARY BUT REMAIN PRESIDENT. ROY MEDVEDEV HAS TOLD MEMBERS OF THE US EMBASSY THAT HE DOES NOT THINK CHERNENKO WILL AGAIN BE FIT TO ASSUME AN ACTIVE ROLE. ACCORDING TO THE JAPANESE EMBASSY, THE EDITOR OF PRAVDA AFANASIEV HAS SAID RECENTLY WHILE ATTENDING A CONFERENCE IN VIENNA, THAT CHERNENKO WAS SERIOUSLY ILL AND THE LEADERSHIP "DID NOT KNOW WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT".

3. THERE IS NO POLITBURO MEETING COMMUNIQUE IN THE PRESS TODAY 1 FRIDAY, AND THERE HAVE BEEN NO FURTHER ANNOUNCEMENTS, MESSAGES OR DECISIONS PURPORTING TO HAVE BEEN TAKEN BY CHERNENKO SINCE THE PREFACE TO THE FRENCH EDITION OF HIS BOOK IN MONDAY'S PRAVDA (28 JANUARY). HIS WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS BY CABLE NEWS NETWORK (CARRIED ON REUTERS) ARE NOT IN TODAY'S PRESS BUT WILL PRESUMABLY BE PUBLISHED TONIGHT OR TOMORROW. THESE WERE HANDED TO CNN YESTERDAY BY LOMEIKO WHO DENIED CHERNENKO WAS ILL AND SAID HE WAS ON A MONTH'S WINTER HOLIDAY NEAR MOSCOW.

4. IN VIEW OF REPORTS ABOUT A PLENUM EARLY IN FEBRUARY WHICH WOULD TAKE DECISIONS ABOUT THE LEADERSHIP (MY TUR) WE ARE KEEPING A CLOSE EYE ON THE MOVEMENTS OF MEMBERS OF THE LEADERSHIP.

TAKE DECISIONS ABOUT THE LEADERSHIP (MY TUR) WE ARE KEEPING A CLOSE EYE ON THE MOVEMENTS OF MEMBERS OF THE LEADERSHIP.

(A) THE FRENCH CHARGE HAS CONFIRMED TO ME IN CONFIDENCE PRESS REPORTS THAT SOLOMENTSEV HAS APPLIED FOR A VISA TO ATTEND THE FRENCH COMMUNIST PARTY CONGRESS OPENING ON 6 FEBRUARY (RATHER THAN GORBACHEV OR ROMANEV AS EXPECTED).

(B) MY US COLLEAGUE HAS TOLD ME ,ALSO IN CONFIDENCE, THAT SHCHERBITSKY WILL HEAD THE SUPREME SOVIET DELEGATION TO THE UNITED STATES EARLY IN MARCH (PROBABLY 3-9 MARCH). THERE HAD BEEN SOME EXPECTATION (ALTHOUGH NOT BY HARTMAN HIMSELF) THAT GORBACHEV WOULD GO.

(C) HARTMAN AND OTHERS HAVE ALSO HEARD THAT GROMYKO ,WHO HAD BEEN PLANNING TO GO ON HOLIDAY IN THE EARLY PART OF FEBRUARY, HAS NOW CANCELLED THOSE PLANS . THE DUTCH EMBASSY HAS BEEN TOLD BY THE MFA THAT GROMYKO WILL NOT BE ABLE TO VISIT THE NETHERLANDS IN FEBRUARY.

(D) THE JAPANESE EMBASSY HAS HEARD FROM THE YUGOSLAVS THAT VOROTNIKOV WILL VISIT YUGOSLAVIA IN EARLY MARCH.

(E) CHAZOV, THE CHIEF KREMLIN DOCTOR (AND A MEMBER OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE) HAS A VISA TO VISIT THE US FROM 5 FEBRUARY AND THERE IS NO INDICATION YET THAT HE WILL NOT GO. BUT KOSOLAPOV THE EDITOR OF KOMMUNIST (AND ALSO A CC MEMBER) HAS CANCELLED WITHOUT EXPLANATION A VISIT HE WAS DUE TO MAKE TO CANADA FROM 7 FEBRUARY.

5. THERE IS SOME INDICATION FROM ALL THIS THAT SENIOR MEMBERS OF THE POLITBURO ARE CONFINED TO MOSCOW AT THE MOMENT, BUT NO REAL EVIDENCE ONE WAY OR THE OTHER ABOUT AN EARLY PLENUM. I ASSUME THAT A PLENUM WOULD ONLY BE HELD IN PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES IF A DECISION HAD BEEN TAKEN TO REPLACE CHERNENKO. IT WOULD BE HIGHLY UNCHARACTERISTIC TO HOLD ONE WITH CHERNENKO ILL AND AN ATMOSPHERE OF UNCERTAINTY ABOUT THE LEADERSHIP.

SUTHERLAND

NNNN

DEFENCE INFORMATION GROUPS

A SHORT REVIEW OF THE PROSPECTS OF CHANGE IN THE
SOVIET LEADERSHIP AND POLICY

SUMMARY

This very brief paper, summarising his personal view, has been prepared for **S.E.E.R.G.** by:

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The paper discusses:

1. The complexion of the Politburo.
2. Factional Politburo politics.
3. Implications for policy making
4. The question of 'economic crisis'.
5. Leadership succession.

SOVIET LEADERSHIP AND POLICY

The Politburo

The failure of Chernenko to appear in public this year plus his conspicuous absence from Ustinov's funeral in December raised doubts about his physical and political health. More recent reports suggest that he may not survive to celebrate a year in office (February 1985). Physical frailty afflicts the Politburo in general. While the presence of two men in their fifties brings the average age down to a mere 63, the majority (six out of eleven) are septuagenarians likely to follow Ustinov in the near future and further deplete a fast dwindling Soviet Cabinet.

Factional Politics

There is little immediate prospect of rejuvenation. The fact that no new appointments have been made to the full Politburo since Chernenko's accession suggests a finely balanced and tense situation at the top, with no group sufficiently strong to get its own candidate through or sufficiently confident to make some quid pro quo deal. Given this balance and uncertainty Chernenko remains very much a first among equals.

The jostling for power that has now continued, with only brief respites, for more than six years is often depicted in the West as a split between two factions: the hard conservative old guard headed by Chernenko, Gromyko, Tikhonov and the more moderate and reform-minded post-Stalinsists, notably Gorbachev, Romanov and Vorotnikov. This picture over dramatises and over simplifies the situation. Factional politics in the Politburo are more complex and fluid; alignments shift over time and policy area. While generational differences may affect commitment to established policy - common sense observation takes us that far - they are an unreliable guide to policy stances.

Chernenko or Gromyko no more come out as 'hard-liners' and 'hawks' across the board than Romanov qualifies as a 'moderate'. In fact it is unrealistic to label individuals as invariably conservatives or reformers; far safer to associate them with specific views on particular policies. So Gromyko may be linked with those who wish to maintain diplomatic links with the West, even if they take a tough line in negotiation. Chernenko considers mass attitudes first and tends to view problems in terms of ideological mobilisation and political organisation. Gorbachev, though no 'liberal', seems open to ideas of increasing group incentives in the economy; Romanov favours more technocratic solutions to production problems.

Effects on Policy

The fine balance of power at the top makes it difficult for Chernenko to achieve the Politburo consensus he needs for major policy decisions. This may help to explain why the flow of policy at home and abroad has hardly been smooth or consistent in recent months. The open polemics about Honecker's visit to West Germany were probably the result of ambiguous or mixed signals from Moscow. The postponement two weeks ago of the scheduled Warsaw Pact summit in Sofia may also be evidence of an insufficiently firm line from Moscow.

The apparent zig-zag course of the Soviet line on arms talks with the United States in part reflected leadership division on this question and linked defence issues. The removal of Orgakov perhaps helped clear the way for talks with the US which most political and

many military leaders seemed to desire. The appointment of Sokolov, a professional soldier, as Defence Minister may be seen partly as a gesture to reassure those in the military concerned about giving away too much in arms talks.

Differences of opinion on agricultural policy produced a curious situation at the October Central Committee meeting. Gorbachev, the secretary in overall charge of agriculture took no active part. Perhaps this was because the meeting approved massive investment in irrigation projects to increase the sown area - a far more conventional approach to performance problems than the small group schemes favoured by Gorbachev.

As far as the economy as a whole is concerned policy differences remain unresolved. Public debate continues about ways in which to reform the system, with Gorbachev clearly favouring far-reaching changes and Chernenko insisting that more discipline and Party vigilance will be enough to yet make the existing system work well.

Economic Crisis?

The power balance in the Politburo may exacerbate policy differences and problems but it does not mean that the Soviet Union is in crisis, a much over used term. The grain harvest last year was poor but other agricultural production was roughly the same as in 1983. While energy and labour productivity remain problems, overall economic performance is slightly up on last year.

Of course, there is still pressure on investment and resources, increased by the recent rise in defence expenditure. A decision on whether to undertake general economic reform will have to be taken soon but the leadership can afford to wait and see how the various experimental schemes work out.

The Leadership

It is risky to say who will succeed Chernenko as past successions have usually produced surprises for Western observers. Still, Gorbachev and Romanov remain the front runners simply because they are the only Central Committee secretaries who are also full members of the Politburo.

It is far safer to say that the next succession will make a major difference, if only because it is very likely to bring into power a much younger General Secretary who will have time to consolidate power and push policies through against the immense bureaucratic inertia of both Party and government machines.



Jf 0125

~~MR POWELL~~

CDP
6/9

cc Mr Hatfield
Sir Percy Cradock

CHERNENKO'S HEALTH

In view of Chernenko's reappearance yesterday we decided not to pursue the idea of a special paper on his health, but to see if any useful evidence becomes available during the next few weeks which might enable us to form a more definite view than we have at present. There is however a short passage on Chernenko's health in the item about the Soviet leadership which appears in the WSI this week.

ANTONY DUFF

6 September 1984.