

Transcript by  
JAMES LEE of:

PRESS CONFERENCE GIVEN BY THE FOREIGN SECRETARY,  
SIR GEOFFREY HOWE, IN HELSINKI, ON THURSDAY,  
AUGUST 1, 1985

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FOREIGN SECRETARY

Good morning. In 1975, 10 years ago, high expectations were aroused by the Helsinki Final Act. Ten years on, these expectations have been largely disappointed. So what is the significance of today's anniversary?

Britain's view is that the Helsinki Final Act and the process that it set in motion continue to occupy a central position in European affairs and East-West relations. The Final Act has in many respects not been implemented. Human rights continue to be widely abused in the East. But that only emphasises the importance of keeping the Final Act before us as a blueprint for the conduct of relations between States; as a charter for cooperation and contacts between peoples; and as a benchmark by which the behaviour of all governments can be judged.

Thanks to Helsinki, human rights and humanitarian issues have become a permanent and legitimate topic of discussion in the East-West dialogue, and that is an asset not to be lightly discarded. It is one to which I attached particular value during my recent visits to Eastern Europe.

So Britain regards the anniversary as an occasion to

FOREIGN SECRETARY (CONTD.)

renew the commitment made by the 35 signatory powers ten years ago. Steady, sustained, patient pressure must continue if that commitment is to be honoured.

Much work remains to be done to improve implementation in all three of the so-called "baskets".

The Final Act brings together the full agenda of East-West relations: political dialogue, economic cooperation, cultural exchanges, confidence-building in the military sphere, contacts between individuals. But more than that, it expresses truths that lie at the foundation of any lasting improvement in East-West relations: first, that security cannot be separated from other aspects of relations; second, that mutual understanding will not grow without a free flow of ideas and people in both directions; and third, that the European continent is not so much one of governments, as of individual human beings.

These thoughts have been in my mind at the many meetings I have held in the last 48 hours with distinguished representatives of the CSCE powers. Of course, they have included Mr. Shevardnadze, the Soviet Foreign Minister, whom I met earlier this morning. This was our first meeting. I was glad of the opportunity to offer him personally my congratulations on his appointment. We had a relaxed and useful meeting and I hope it will have advanced our mutual understanding on a number of international issues as well as on the prospects for cooperation between our two countries.

At this first meeting, I thought it was important particularly to emphasise Britain's search for a steady, sustained improvement in bilateral relations; the West's sincerity in working

FOREIGN SECRETARY (CONTD.)

for greater security through balanced and verifiable arms control agreements, the need for a marked improvement in human rights. Without that, it will be difficult to engage the support of our public opinion in the search for better East-West relations.

I look forward to continuing the dialogue with Mr. Shevardnadze at the UN General Assembly in New York later this year and in due course in London.

Obviously, finally, I would like to take this chance of thanking our Finnish hosts for the warmth of their hospitality and congratulating them on the model efficiency of the arrangements they have made.

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JOHN DICKIE ("DAILY MAIL")

Secretary of State, after your meeting with the Soviet Foreign Minister, do you think we can look forward to a new chapter of better relations and, to quote a well-known prime minister, do you think Mr. Shevardnadze is a man you can do business with?

FOREIGN SECRETARY

I think that my meeting with Mr. Shevardnadze follows very naturally in sequence with the Prime Minister's meeting with Mr. Gorbachev in Britain last Christmas. I think that we were able to establish that we could have sensible, practical, useful discussions with each other, and I look forward to those playing their part in a steady improvement of our bilateral relationship on a stable basis.

QUESTION

Sir Geoffrey, do you think this conference and the bilateral meetings during these last few days in Helsinki has increased security and the means of cooperation in Europe?

FOREIGN SECRETARY

I think that it has been very valuable to have Foreign Ministers of the 35 signatory powers here together, together seeking to reaffirm the original commitments of the Helsinki Final Act and taking advantage of opportunities to meet each other bilaterally. I think all that will certainly have contributed

FOREIGN SECRETARY (CONTD.)

to improved prospects for greater security for all our peoples.

QUESTION ("THE GUARDIAN")

(very difficult to hear!) Two questions. First, did the Soviet Foreign Minister set a date for coming to London? Secondly, what can you tell me about the.....

FOREIGN SECRETARY

Three. Take that first. I left the NATO breakfast shortly after it started in order to be sure of being on time to meet Mr. Shevardnadze, so you will have to seek elsewhere for conclusions, but I had the strawberries!

On the first one, the date of the visit by Mr. Shevardnadze to the United Kingdom, that is something that will be arranged through diplomatic channels. We did not embark on a discussion of each other's diaries, but he is plainly looking forward to coming.

On the second one, the European Community discussion last night led to agreed conclusions to which I have nothing to add.

QUESTION

Sir Geoffrey, what was the British stand on the question of the final communique?

FOREIGN SECRETARY

The final communique was a document on which we were able to agree with all our colleagues.

QUESTION (SAME MAN)

I mean the Finnish draft proposals for a document.

FOREIGN SECRETARY

I am sorry! You are talking about a different meeting!

We took the view that although it is always agreeable to reach agreed conclusions in documentary form if you can, that it would not have been a constructive contribution to these proceedings if we had actually set about that search here. I think we could readily have agreed on the communique identifying those who had attended. If we had sought to extend it beyond that, we might have had a less useful and constructive meeting than we have in fact had.

QUESTION (SAME MAN)

Did you object to any particular points in the Finnish draft?

FOREIGN SECRETARY

I did not actually seriously apply myself to the consideration of a draft. I think that if all 35 of us had set about doing that, it would have been a less useful meeting than it was.

QUESTION

Mr. Shultz is reported to feel a certain exasperation at the fact that the Soviets have been leaking certain ideas, proposals, suggestions, .... <sup>cutting</sup> (~~touching?~~) nuclear missiles and in the corridors of Geneva and to certain third parties without putting them on the table during the talks. Is this something

QUESTION (CONTD.)

that you share and have the Soviets in any forum suggested any of these proposals for 25%, 30% or even greater cuts in nuclear missiles to you?

FOREIGN SECRETARY

I do not think one could claim in today's world, with the attentiveness of you and your colleagues, that any capital or any society is free from the risk of proposals leaking out in an unintentional fashion. I think that the important thing is that proposals should be seriously discussed with a view to reaching agreement on a credible, effective, confident basis, and that whatever may leak or be said publicly or for public consumption, the key thing is that serious negotiations should be taking place between those responsible for the negotiations. That is why we were so glad that the Geneva talks were resumed at the beginning of this year; that is why we are glad that there is going to be a meeting between President and Mr. Gorbechev later on.

The most important thing is that those taking part in those talks should have the opportunity of knowing that they will be preparing for them seriously with a view to reaching agreed conclusions.

QUESTION (INAUDIBLE)

FOREIGN SECRETARY

It is very hard, is it not, for anyone to be asked to convey a personal impression after less than an hour's discussion?

FOREIGN SECRETARY

I think that it was possible for us to have the kind of discussion which can be the foundation of much fuller and more useful discussions further on, later on. The atmosphere was, as I said in my original statement, relaxed and we were able to discuss in that short time serious issues across the table usefully. I look forward to many more meetings of a more extended kind.

BOB MORTNER ("FINANCIAL TIMES")

What did Mr. Shevardnadze say to you? What were the main points he made to you?

FOREIGN SECRETARY

My custom is normally to tell conferences of this kind what I have said to my opposite number, rather than the reverse, and I think that I shall only depart a limited extent from that quite useful rule.

I think the effect of the discussion was to confirm our view that there was great value to be derived from further meetings of this kind; that the discussions that took place when Mr. Gorbachev was in London were in themselves useful; that the talks that Mr. Gromyko and I had had on many occasions have also been useful in helping to understand each other; and that there is therefore a lot more value to be secured from further meetings of this kind.

QUESTION

(inaudible)



FOREIGN SECRETARY

Again, I think it is actually pressing interrogation beyond the point of courtesy to invite me to offer for you a profile of someone who is recently appointed to a most important position.

I got the impression - and no-one will be surprised by this - that Mr. Shevardnadze is addressing himself seriously and sincerely to the important issues that are of interest to all of us. It was possible for us to have a discussion which made effective use of the limited time available to us, and suggests that further meetings of that kind would be useful.

QUESTION (REUTERS)

If I could just go on from that. Was it substantially different dealing with Mr. Shevardnadze than with Mr. Gromyko?

Secondly, how did he react to your points on human rights?

FOREIGN SECRETARY

On your second point, he reacted, when I raised specific cases as I did of Sheransky(phon) and Sakharov (phon.) as illustrations of cases of that kind, by saying that they were matters for the enforcement and application of customary Soviet procedures.

On your more general question, it is manifest that Mr. Shevardnadze is not Mr. Gromyko and each person approaches this important task in his own way.

JOHN MILLER (VERY HARD TO HEAR!)

Do you think the Russians give a damn about our protests and...cases and so on and so forth....but is there anything that the West can really do to make an impression upon on them and to change.....is there anything the West can really do .....

FOREIGN SECRETARY

I think that is the most important way, obviously, in which we can continue to press this point and go on pressing it we shall. Those of you in this room recognise that the instruments which you have at your disposal are words - spoken words, printed words, written words - and you would not be doing the job you are if you did not think there was some point in deploying words in that way.

The Helsinki Final Act, as I said in my statement, lays a foundation for the legitimacy of this debate, which we shall continue to press. It is important, not just for the sake of the human beings concerned with the deprivation of human rights; it is important if we are to secure a growth in confidence and understanding which is essential to a real lasting, sustained, improvement of East-West relations. So we shall go on pressing it at conferences of this kind, privately, and tenaciously, and I think we are justified in doing that in the same way as you are pressing your points in the same fashion.

QUESTION (INAUDIBLE)

FOREIGN SECRETARY

Well, we are of the same view as a number of other countries, that economic sanctions have not been shown by experience to be effective; are not, we believe, likely to be effective in this case. We share passionately the view that apartheid is an evil foundation for a system of government; one that one cannot defend. We wish to see it changed. We wish to secure progress in that direction as quickly as possible to secure a better prospect for all the peoples of South Africa. But we do not believe that we are more likely to advance that process by the application of economic sanctions.

NICHOLAS ASHWOOD ("THE TIMES")\*

Having seen both Mr. Shultz and Mr. Shevardnadze on this visit, do you get any sense of real progress at the summit meeting between Reagan and Gorbachev?

FOREIGN SECRETARY

I think it is very important that nobody should have unduly high expectations on any single meeting at whatever level. I think it is important for any single meeting of that kind to be well prepared and seriously prepared, and I believe that both Mr. Shultz and Mr. Shevardnadze are approaching that important meeting in that way. So I believe that provided nobody has unduly high expectations, provided people regard that meeting as an important stepping stone towards the enhancement of confidence, then I think it is being approached in exactly that fashion.

GERRY (???)

....US-Soviet relations are improving.....

FOREIGN SECRETARY

I think that the US-Soviet relations over some months now have been setting themselves on a course towards gradual improvement. I think that the enhancement of that relationship, the improvement of confidence which is the framework in which progress can be made on issues on substance, is bound to be a long-term business at which both sides have to keep applying...to which both sides have to go on applying themselves patiently and tenaciously. I am sure the United States is doing that and I believe that is securing a response that will help that process forward.

QUESTION (VERY FAINT)

Talking about your meeting with Mr. Shevardnadze, you said it was in the spirit of the Prime Minister's meeting with Mr. Gorbachev rather than in the spirit of your own previous meetings with Mr. Gromyko. Do you think that there is a kind of new team in charge now in Moscow that is taking a different tack in these bilateral discussions with Western leaders, perhaps less confrontational, less lecturing, more easy, friendly discussion? What is the difference in tone, or am I mistaken here?

FOREIGN SECRETARY

I think that the essential case being presented is that of the Soviet Union as we have come to know and understand it and when Mr. Gromyko and Mr. Gorbachev were serving together, as

FOREIGN SECRETARY (CONTD.)

they were, they were presenting the Soviet Union's view of the world and of the future. So now, Mr. Gorbachev and Mr. Shevardnadze are doing so, but I think that it is right to say that there is bound to be a difference in personality and style as the baton is passed on from one generation to another.

QUESTION

...discussions this morning, whether you noted any shift whatsoever in any of their positions?

FOREIGN SECRETARY

I think it would be difficult to press that analysis too far if one contemplates the many hours of discussion that I had with Mr. Gromyko compared with the much shorter time that I had with Mr. Shevardnadze, but I think the essence of their position is the same, but I believe that the relationship between their position and ours is something where we are capable of achieving an advance and an improvement.

I think that this meeting can be seen as one more step in that road towards better relations. So it seemed to me to be a progressive relationship, about which nobody should have unduly high expectations, but where it is of some value that the relationship is improving and moving forward.

DAVID ADAMS ("DAILY TELEGRAPH")

.....South Africa seems to indicate a slight shift in his position. Do you anticipate any further shifts as a result

QUESTION (CONTD.)

of the Foreign Ministers meeting .....discuss South Africa?

FOREIGN SECRETARY

I think the fact about South Africa is that as each week goes by, as each month goes by, different things happen. There have been some events since we last met amongst the Ten in Brussels last week and in light of that, we have asked for the kind of appraisal and report to be before us at our next meeting. It is much too early to conclude whether there will be any change at all at that time.

Our essential position remains the same. We want to promote within South Africa the kind of dialogue which was commended in our conclusions last night, which we believe is essential if the prospects in that country are to improve in the way in which we all wish. We shall have to wait and see.

QUESTION

I would just like to follow up on my own question. You referred to a difference in style as the baton is passed from one generation to the next. How would you contrast the style of this generation with the style of the last one?

FOREIGN SECRETARY

I think you are pressing me too far on an occasion of this kind! You have had opportunities yourselves to see the people concerned and you may make your own judgments. I shall look forward to reading them!

QUESTION

What kind of future can you see ahead for the CSE...can you imagine that Secretaries of State will be meeting from 9 to 5 saying that they are .....

FOREIGN SECRETARY

Well the CSE process includes various components doesn't it? There is the Stockholm meeting which is itself important, where we hope there will be progress towards conclusions on confidence-building measures.

I think on the much longer-term, wider approach to CSE, I hope very much that Foreign Ministers and Secretaries of State will be meeting not only here in Helsinki but in other places, not just 10 years, but 5 years, 2 years, one year's time, because the whole process of creating the kind of confidence that is essential if we are to live together more peacefully with less confrontation over the years ahead, must depend upon continued and improving contact of this kind.

So I cannot tell you precisely what form it will take 10 years out. The agenda will remain the same. We shall go on pressing for progress on every part of that agenda, including human rights.

QUESTION

Mr.

Could you be more precise about whether/Shevardnadze has agreed to come this year....and secondly.....

(inaudible)

FOREIGN SECRETARY

As far as the date is concerned, Mr. Shevardnadze has accepted or re-accepted the invitation which I renewed to him on his succession to Mr. Gromyko.

There is no conclusion about the date and I think you would hardly expect that when he must be looking at a substantial list of engagements in what must be a very busy diary, but we shall be establishing that in the ordinary way.

As far as the South African question is concerned, it was thought useful for us to secure the advice of our Ambassadors in the context of the particular meeting of the Political Committee and it is for that reason that we are inviting them to come to consultation with us.

QUESTION

As a result of all your talks here, are you now convinced that the Russians are perhaps more ready now to negotiate a better means of living with the West than they were say six months ago?

FOREIGN SECRETARY

I believe that there is, on all sides, an increasing realisation of the need for us to seek progress in that direction and I think that over the last 6/9 months we have been moving forward in the right direction rather than moving backwards, but I choose my words very carefully because I do not want in any sense to give you or anybody else the impression that the world is in sight of a dramatic transformation of conditions that have existed for



FOREIGN SECRETARY (CONTD.)

a long time, but that the world is trying to move in the direction of that kind of change I think is the case.

JOHN ALLISON

...not resist the suggestion that our ambassador should be recalled from South Africa on the basis that we could perfectly well get his opinions on the situation down there without bringing him back here?

FOREIGN SECRETARY

Our ambassador is not being recalled from South Africa in that sense of the word and we adhere to our own view that at a time like this in particular it is important that our ambassador should be continuing to represent Britain and our views in South Africa.

But in the context of a general consideration of this kind within the Community as a whole, we found it possible to agree that it made sense to bring him in for consultation for the purposes of that meeting, but he will remain representing the views of the British Government in South Africa.

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