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Prime Minister
An excellent despatch. I
recommended that you should
read the two passages which
I have underlined
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"NEW THINKING"

HER MAJESTY'S AMBASSADOR AT MOSCOW TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR
FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

SUMMARY

1. "New thinking" implies a conceptual shift but is essentially a rationale for policies dictated by other factors. (Paragraph 1)
2. The central concept of "new thinking" is global interdependence. There is less emphasis on the "struggle of opposed systems"; and the interests of humanity in general are said to be more important than the class struggle. (Paragraphs 2-4).
3. The importance of military parity is slightly de-emphasised: "reasonable sufficiency" is the new criterion and security is defined as a political more than a military objective. (Paragraphs 5-6)
4. Formulations about the Third World and Eastern Europe have become more conciliatory. (Paragraphs 7 and 14).
5. A great deal of traditional ideology survives. But the old doctrine of peaceful coexistence has been taken a stage further. (paragraph 8).
6. Gorbachev has thoroughly overhauled the Soviet foreign policy machine and purged senior Foreign Ministry and Party officials. The immobility and inflexibility of Soviet foreign policy have been criticised. (Paragraphs 9-10).
7. The motivation for "new thinking": Gorbachev's need for international stability, buttressed by arms control agreements, and for a foreign policy success to provide the right framework and needed personal authority for domestic reform. International concessions and reduced priority for the class struggle require ideological justification. (Paragraphs 11-13).

8. The propaganda weapon of "old thinking", aimed at the West. (Paragraph 15).

9. Examples of more flexible and pragmatic Soviet policies worldwide. Few concrete results yet, except a less thrusting Soviet stance. But verification, Afghanistan and human rights could provide the acid tests of genuine change. (Paragraphs 16-19).

10. Classic Russian geo-political concerns remain dominant, even if partially suspended and overlaid. (Paragraph 20).

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BRITISH EMBASSY

MOSCOW

23 June, 1987

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The Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey Howe QC MP
etc., etc.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
London SW1A 2AH

Sir,

1. My despatch of 17 March on perestroika discussed the significant changes which Gorbachev is endeavouring to introduce throughout the whole range of Soviet internal policy. A different phrase from the Gorbachev lexicon, "new thinking", (novoye myshleniye) is generally used to describe the changes in the Soviet approach to foreign affairs which are claimed to be taking place under the new leadership. Whether these changes are equally genuine and significant is, however, a matter of dispute. The innovations of organisation and style are evident enough. But "new thinking" implies - and is presented by Soviet propaganda to mean - something more fundamental: a new approach to international affairs affecting foreign policy strategy and tactics. This despatch addresses the question of whether there are grounds for believing that such a conceptual shift has indeed taken place and, if so, the extent to which it has been reflected in the actual conduct of Soviet foreign policy. As so often in the study of Soviet affairs, the difficulty is to determine whether theory is the progenitor or the rationalisation of action. In the case of the "new thinking", my belief is that it represents an attempt to provide ideological justification for policies dictated by other factors.

What is the "new thinking"?

2. "New thinking" is not a precise doctrine and the various elements which may be considered to form part of it have never been systematically set out. Not all of its propositions enjoy equal authority, some of them appear to be controversial and they have been formulated in different ways at different times, including by Gorbachev himself. In the following summary of "new thinking" I attempt only to give the gist of its main propositions with a minimum of pedantic qualification.

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3. The central concept of "new thinking" is that advanced in Gorbachev's Political Report to the 27th Party Congress, and endorsed in the Congress Resolution, of an "inter-dependent and integral" world. This concept now tends to overshadow, without displacing, the traditional concept of the struggle between two opposed social systems as the cardinal factor in world politics. Gorbachev spoke at the Congress of the dialectical combination of the competition and confrontation of the two systems with "the growing tendency towards the inter-dependence of the states of the world community". "Thus, through the struggle of opposites, there is taking shape laboriously, to some extent experimentally, a contradictory but inter-dependent and in many ways integral world". More recently, in the May issue (no. 8) of the Central Committee Journal, Gorbachev's right-hand man on matters of theory in perestroika, Yakovlev, expressed a similar idea: "The need to solve the problem of survival awakens in mankind the sense of self-preservation, creates incentives appropriate to the imperatives of the nuclear age for the opposed social systems to cooperate".

4. A number of other "revisionist" propositions associated with this concept have been put forward, for example:

- the interests of humanity are more important than those of any one class;
- the threat to mankind posed by nuclear war transcends the class struggle;
- some global ecological problems transcend ideological and political divisions and require positive cooperation by all states;
- the survival of humanity and civilisation can only be assumed "if we master the difficult art of taking each other's interests into account" (Gorbachev in Paris, October 1985);
- "peaceful coexistence", as defined in the new Party Programme adopted at the Party Congress, is no longer described as a form of class and ideological struggle.

5. The other major concept to have undergone some shift of emphasis, according to the "new thinking", is that of parity. Military-strategic parity is described in traditional terms in the new Party Programme as an "historic achievement of socialism" and was referred to with satisfaction by Gorbachev in his report to the Congress. Other statements by Gorbachev have, however, tended to fudge or slightly weaken the concept by introducing two qualifications:

- (a) parity is stated, e.g. in the Resolution of the Party Congress, to have "ceased to be a factor of military/

political restraint". This meant that "security must be regarded as a political task which can be solved only through political means";

(b) at the Congress, Gorbachev introduced the idea of "reasonable sufficiency": "a steady controlled lowering of levels of military capabilities of countries to limits of reasonable sufficiency"; at the Moscow Peace Forum in February this year Gorbachev called for a "balance of reasonable sufficiency" and went on: "Everybody must realise and agree: parity in the potential to destroy one another several times over is madness and absurdity".

6. The concept of parity (at a lower level) has not been wholly abandoned, although there appears to be some edging away from it. An attentive reader of Izvestiya, in a letter published in the newspaper on 15 April, drew the logical conclusion and suggested that the Soviet Union could restrain the US with considerably fewer nuclear weapons: "Parity is not obligatory". Editorial comment, by the well-known journalist Bovin, acknowledged that theoretically the correspondent was correct but added that over-kill was necessary for psychological reasons.

7. There have also been some changes of formulation associated with "new thinking" in other specific areas of Soviet policy. Gorbachev, discussing regional conflicts with the Mexican Foreign Minister in May, called for a recognition of realities and a "balance of interests". The Soviet Union did not propose the destruction of "economic links which had developed historically between the developed West and the developing South". Other statements suggest some dilution of the Soviet rhetorical commitment to the national liberation struggle: an article in Pravda by a Soviet historian (14 November 1986) stated that the nuclear realities required revolutionary forces to "use the maximum degree of circumspection in deciding whether to engage in armed warfare". While Gorbachev restated the "Brezhnev doctrine" in attenuated form at the Polish Party Congress in 1985, he did not do so during his recent visit to Czechoslovakia. He referred to the events of 1968 on several occasions during his walk-about but without specific condemnation of the Prague Spring or endorsement of the Warsaw Pact intervention. Soviet language about relations with Eastern Europe has in general become more flexible and conciliatory. In Prague, for example, Gorbachev commented that "no single party has a monopoly of truth".

8. The elements of "new thinking" outlined above must of course be seen against the background of more traditional Soviet positions on international issues, and on East-West relations, which survive and remain firmly in place. Gorbachev's

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Report to the Congress, the Congress Resolution and the revised Party Programme are replete with unreconstructed ideological jargon about the evils of capitalism, its inevitable doom and the aggressive intentions of imperialism. There is greater frankness than in the past in acknowledging the vitality of the capitalist system and its technological achievements, but Gorbachev has not yet deemed it necessary to revise for public consumption the traditional assessment of a corrupt, hostile and declining West: "The general crisis of capitalism is growing more acute Bourgeois ideology is an ideology serving capital and the profits of the monopolies, adventurism and social revenge, the ideology of a society that has no future". This proposition, quoted from Gorbachev's Report to the 27th Congress, sits uncomfortably with the concept of an increasingly inter-dependent and integral world. In essence, however, Gorbachev's "new thinking" takes the concept of peaceful coexistence enunciated by Khrushchev at the 20th Party Congress thirty years ago a stage further. Peaceful coexistence acknowledged the reality that nuclear war would inflict such damage even on the victor that the class struggle would have to be conducted by all means short of war. "New thinking" conveys the idea that the threat represented by nuclear conflict to the whole of mankind is such that the class struggle must take second place and adds the positive element (not wholly new) that there are universal ecological and economic problems which transcend ideological differences.

Instruments of "new thinking"

9. A new phase in Soviet policies was heralded by a thorough overhaul of the Soviet foreign policy machine involving changes in structure and organisation, and a wholesale turnover of senior personnel. Gromyko, after 28 years as Foreign Minister, was kicked upstairs to become President within a few months of Gorbachev's accession and replaced by Shevardnadze, a Party official from Georgia with no significant experience of international affairs. Only two of the dozen First Deputy and Deputy Foreign Ministers inherited by Gorbachev are still in place. New Ambassadors have been appointed in Washington, London, Paris and Bonn. At the same time nearly all the senior officials concerned with international affairs in the Party apparatus have been replaced. Ponomarev, for 30 years Central Committee Secretary and Head of the International Department, was succeeded by a professional diplomat, Dobrynin, with another diplomat, Kornienko, as one of his First Deputies. The Department seems to have acquired a much more active role in the formulation and conduct of foreign policy, especially in the sphere of East/West relations. It is also relevant to the conduct of foreign policy under Gorbachev that he has consistently sought to lower the profile of the Armed Forces, culminating with the recent ignominious sacking of the C in C of the Air Defence Forces and the abrupt retirement of the Minister of Defence, Sokolov.

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10. The purge of the foreign affairs establishment clearly reflected Gorbachev's dissatisfaction with its performance. The Soviet leadership has always been reluctant to admit to any fault in the conduct of Soviet foreign policy, even in the past and under their predecessors. However, several recent public statements by Soviet leaders have come very close to doing so. At the annual October Revolution Anniversary meeting in the Kremlin in 1985 Chebrikov, Politburo member and Head of the KGB, stated that it was logical that the growing dynamism of Soviet internal affairs should be accompanied by an "activation of Soviet foreign policy" which implied, rightly, that it had been afflicted by immobility, routine and inflexibility. At the 27th Party Congress Foreign Minister Shevardnadze declared that Soviet foreign policy institutions could not be a "preservation zone immune to criticism". A prominent characteristic of the new style has been the energetic deployment of a team of Deputy Foreign Ministers and "Ambassadors at Large" to promote and explain new Soviet initiatives, particularly in arms control, in the capitals of the world. Western governments, flattered by these unaccustomed attentions, have usually received the emissaries at a high level.

Why "new" thinking?

11. Analysis of the rationale of the "new thinking" must begin with an assessment of Gorbachev's priorities. These are, overwhelmingly, focussed on the regeneration of the Soviet socialist system and of the Soviet economy. Gorbachev inherited a system which was, and so far remains, in deep crisis. Perestroika is his recipe for dragging the Soviet Union out of that crisis and for giving his country the chance, to which its size and resources entitle it, of entering the next century as a super-power rather than as an over-armed power of the second rank behind not only the United States but also China and Japan. The prescriptions of perestroika, which I described in my despatch of 17 March, have clear implications for foreign as well as for domestic policy. Emphasis on the international class struggle, in the form of competition between the capitalist and socialist systems, makes less sense when the socialist system is so clearly incapable of winning. The new CPSU Programme prudently eschews the vainglorious rhetoric of the Khrushchev era which forecast the victory of socialism, both ideologically and materially, within decades. The process of what Gorbachev and his colleagues have described as "revolutionary" change requires, ideally, a period of relative international stability. It would be difficult to prosecute, and easy to oppose, a programme of radical economic and political reform if the security of the Soviet Union appeared to be at risk as a result of East/West confrontation or of turmoil close to Soviet borders.

12. The quest for stability in the East/West relationship largely explains Gorbachev's concern to achieve significant arms control agreements before the unsatisfactory but familiar qualities of the Reagan Presidency are replaced by the uncertain quantity

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of a successor administration. Gorbachev has other powerful motives for achieving arms control agreements. The SDI threatens the Soviet Union with the choice between joining the United States in a new spiral of defence expenditure or accepting permanent technological inferiority. Neither alternative is tolerable to the Soviet leadership. It is therefore a Soviet goal either to put the SDI genie back into its bottle, corked with an agreement on strategic arms reductions; or, at least, to postpone its development by a period of super-power commitment to scrupulous observance of the ABM Treaty. Finally, Gorbachev needs the reinforcement of his domestic authority which a major arms control agreement would bring. In order to be able to take the Soviet people with him along the road of economic and political change, he must be able to show them that he has succeeded, where his predecessors failed, in lowering the level of nuclear confrontation, particularly in Europe, and thereby taking the first step towards a safer world.

13. These are the external corollaries of perestroika. If Chernenko had lived, or if Grishin rather than Gorbachev had won the struggle to succeed him, the Soviet Union's deepening internal crisis would have been ignored or at best palliated; and Soviet external policies would have continued on their traditional lines of immobilism, truculent confrontation and opportunistic interventionism. These policies were - and could again be - justified by reference to the Marxist/Leninist scriptures. But the policies which the imperatives of perestroika make it sensible for Gorbachev to pursue need a different justification and a revised ideological base. In order to achieve the major breakthrough, which now seems to be in prospect, of the removal from Europe of all intermediate nuclear weapons with a range of over 500 kms, Gorbachev has been obliged to make a series of concessions, cleverly disguised as dramatic Soviet initiatives. In the hope, unfulfilled in the event, of rousing Western opinion in favour of a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty, he was obliged to initiate a unilateral moratorium and to prolong it, in the probable view of the Soviet Marshals, beyond the point of military prudence. The "new thinking", substituting as it does a theme of ostensibly rational and humane pragmatism for all-out ideological confrontation, and "reasonable sufficiency" for parity in the nuclear arithmetic, is designed to underpin these policies with the theoretical justification which no Soviet policy can lack.

14. Relegation of the international class struggle to, at best, second place in the Soviet Union's external priorities also signals to other Communist parties, and to "national liberation" movements, that the Soviet Union has, for the time being, little or no interest in actively assisting assaults on "imperialism" which could initiate or prolong regional conflicts leading, in turn, to new dimensions of East/West confrontation. As at the 27th Party Congress, Gorbachev may still find it necessary,

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from time to time, to pay lip service to the old shibboleths: but the new emphasis on an "inter-dependent and integrated world" gives notice to "liberation movements" and to terrorists that, in the present stage of Soviet internal development, expectations of active assistance from Moscow should be modest.

15. As well as providing a theoretical basis for policies of expedient pragmatism, the "new thinking" has incidental propaganda advantages which Gorbachev has done his best to exploit. The invention of "new thinking" automatically creates its antithesis, "old thinking". The label of "old thinking" can conveniently be attached to any aspect of Western policy which the Soviet Union finds unacceptable or inconvenient. The theory of nuclear deterrence, and particularly the Prime Minister's advocacy of it, was an early target. The obstinacy of the United Kingdom and France in clinging to their own independent strategic nuclear weapons has been given the same treatment. Making a virtue of policies dictated by internal necessity, the Soviet leadership has been able to pose as the pioneer of a new era of international reasonableness and enlightened behaviour to an extent which will bring propaganda dividends not only in the Third World but probably in Western Europe as well.

Does "new thinking" mean new policies?

16. There is a case to be made for the proposition that the Soviet Union has, for the time being, become a slightly less uncomfortable and less potentially dangerous member of the international community. Although the "new thinking" represents a rationalisation rather than a basic conceptual change, it does appear to be the product of a new phase in Soviet foreign policy. Although the Soviet leadership has done and will do nothing which could be prejudicial to the security of the Soviet state, and is devoting considerable effort to the maintenance of a high international profile for the Soviet Union, it nevertheless appears to be taking a more flexible and pragmatic view of the Soviet Union's real interests. In addition to the field of arms control and US/Soviet relations, Soviet policies in most areas of the world currently reflect Gorbachev's broad objective of creating a more predictable, less accident-prone international environment within which he can more safely engage in the radical restructuring of Soviet society. His major speech at Vladivostok on 28 July, 1986, was designed, in the first place, to assert the Soviet Union's status as an Asian power with an active role to play in the region. The speech nevertheless also emphasised the "new thinking" theme of global inter-dependence; revealed greater readiness to engage in a dialogue with China - not excluding the "three obstacles"; and offered warm words to Japan which contrasted with the sour immobilism of the Gromyko era.

17. On Afghanistan, Gorbachev has moved from a policy of genocide to the promotion of "national reconciliation", however suspect that concept may be: but the Soviet dilemma is no longer that of whether to withdraw Soviet troops from Afghanistan, but how. Symbolic troop withdrawals have been made not only from Afghanistan but also from Mongolia. In the Middle East, the Soviet Government, while continuing to score political points off the United States whenever possible, seems genuinely concerned to damp down the tinder box by diplomatic and political means rather than to keep it smouldering. In the Security Council, the Russians have worked with the other permanent members to deter Iran and Iraq from continued prosecution of their war. The Soviet Union has, so far as we know, done little or nothing to exploit the troubles of Southern Africa: indeed, the African continent has occupied an even lower place in Soviet external priorities since Gorbachev came to power. There has been little direct Soviet trouble-making in Latin or Central America. And nearer home, in Eastern Europe, Soviet paternalism has been politically more benign if economically more exigent.

Appearance and Reality

18. Although the energetic activities of the revamped Soviet foreign policy machine may be seen in the longer term to have contributed to the greater international stability which Gorbachev needs - particularly if a nuclear arms agreement is signed at a US/Soviet summit in Washington this year - there are so far rather few concrete results to show for them. Any significant improvement in Sino-Soviet relations remains blocked by the "three obstacles" and the revived dialogue confined largely to consular and commercial issues. The Soviet Union's relations with Japan have actually deteriorated since Vladivostok, mainly for traditional reasons. Shevardnadze's marathon tour of the Far East and South-East Asia produced little, even in terms of goodwill, and the revived Soviet proposal for an Asian security conference has not prospered. The special relationship with India has been maintained and consolidated, but this has always been a fixed point in the Soviet Union's external relations. No exit route from Afghanistan has materialised and the problems of the Middle East and the Gulf remain as intractable as before. It can legitimately be asked, therefore, whether the policies associated with "new thinking" are likely to bring any positive benefit to the international community other than apparent Soviet abstinence, for the time being, from deliberate trouble-making.

19. With the important exception of an emerging INF agreement, the answer to this question must so far be negative. But there are three possible developments which could give the new phase of Soviet policy substantial, even historic, significance. The first would be Soviet acceptance of and genuine readiness to implement effective verification arrangements associated with an agreement on nuclear arms. This would constitute a dramatic reversal of traditional Soviet attitudes and would greatly enhance

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the prospects for agreements in other areas of arms control. Secondly, a political settlement in Afghanistan, combined with Soviet military withdrawal, which revealed a willingness on the part of the Soviet Government to tolerate a non-Communist regime in Kabul would, again, mark a historic shift in Soviet attitudes with implications for all the Soviet Union's immediate neighbours. Finally, there are already indications of significant evolution in the Soviet regime's policies on human rights matters. If the essentially limited, and possibly cosmetic, relaxation which has taken place so far - symbolised by the release of Dr Sakharov and others - were to develop into a much wider amnesty, the removal of all restrictions on Jewish emigration and comprehensive legal reform the "new thinking" would deserve a place in the history books which it has not earned so far.

20. Even if such dramatic developments were to materialise, however, certain fundamental Soviet interests, all containing the seeds of potential conflict, would remain; and no amount of "new thinking" can remove them. The Soviet Union will always wish to preserve a monopoly of influence in Eastern Europe: and, in Western Europe, to maximise its influence while minimising that of the United States. The Soviet Union will always perceive China, perhaps together with Japan, as a potential threat which it will seek to diminish by all available means, including the continuing reinforcement of Soviet relations with India. The Soviet Union will always feel compelled at least to match the power of the United States in any region, including the Pacific, of strategic importance to itself. These are vital and permanent interests, dictated by geography and by the traditionally anxious sensitivity of the centre of a vast empire to developments on its periphery. If and when Gorbachev's internal policies, and perhaps those of his successors, produce a strong, revitalised Soviet economy and a revival of national confidence, these interests may be protected or pursued with more assertive, even aggressive determination. The "new thinking" and the policies which it justifies have not replaced or extinguished Russian nationalism and expansionism. They are, for the time being, in partial suspense. The present conjuncture would be very familiar to the great Russian 19th century diplomatist, Gorchakov. As he announced in a circular note in 1856, at the outset of an analogous period of retrenchment and reform: "La Russie se recueille".

21. I am sending copies of this despatch to H.M. Representatives in Washington, Bonn, Paris, Brussels (UK Del. NATO), Rome, Peking, Tokyo, New Delhi, Warsaw, East Berlin, Prague, Budapest, Bucharest, Sofia, Belgrade, Helsinki and Vienna (UK Del. CSCE).

I am, Sir,
Yours faithfully,

Bryan Cartledge

Bryan Cartledge