

Jp 0470

MR. POWELL

Professor Bialer

I enclose a minute by Martin Nicholson recording a lunch with Professor Bialer in New York on 21 November. The Prime Minister may find it interesting.

2. Professor Bialer will be in London on 28-29 January on a sponsored visit arranged by BIS New York. He will probably be on his way back from a visit to Moscow. He told Mr Nicholson that, when in London, he would like to address a small group of three or four people about his findings on the Eltsin case. He asked that you should be among those he spoke to.

3. The Prime Minister may wish to take this chance to talk to Professor Bialer again (you will recall he attended the seminar on 27 February). But, if not, I should be happy to arrange a small meeting at which you and I could listen to him.

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PERCY CRADOCK

11 December 1987

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SIR PERCY CRADOCK

PROFESSOR BIALER

Thank you for your note about Professor Bialer. The Prime Minister would like to see him and could do so at 1830 on Thursday 28 January. I should be grateful if Martin Nicholson could get a message to him proposing this.

(C.D. POWELL)

14 December 1987

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LUNCH WITH PROFESSOR BIALER, NEW YORK, 21 NOVEMBER 1987

1. Mr Raymond (BIS New York) and I had lunch with Professor Bialer (Columbia University) on 21 November. Bialer had just returned from a lightning visit to Moscow (at Soviet invitation) for the 70th Anniversary celebrations, when he had learnt a certain amount about the Eltsin affair, and was about to set off again to continue his investigations.
2. Eltsin. Because he felt he was in the process of ferretting out the full story from the beginning of this year onwards, Bialer did not want to be drawn. But he promised a full read-out when passing through London in early January, on his way either to or from Moscow. Meanwhile he would reveal only that he was convinced that there had been another, truncated meeting of the Central Committee (only 180 attending) immediately after the celebrations. Bialer was, however, clear that the main issue was Eltsin's personality. His frustrations had been evident to the Ambassadors who attended his briefing a few weeks before (I mentioned that Mr Marshall had found his tone somewhat hectoring). He must have been suffering some sort of nervous breakdown. It followed that the episode would not affect the strength of Gorbachev's political position.
3. The Summit. Bialer was adamant that there had been no extraordinary Politburo meeting (eg on 25 October) to reassess the advisability of a summit. Bialer (like all my US interlocutors) put Gorbachev's hesitations down to a mixture of pique at Shultz and emotional upset over the Eltsin affair (Bialer stressed Gorbachev's emotional character which sometimes made him unpredictable). But the bad reaction in the World press had been sufficient to set Gorbachev on course again.
4. "New Thinking". I quizzed Bialer about an interview he had given Izvestiya at the end of October, in which he had said that attention should be paid to the words the Soviet leaders used even if in some areas actual changes in foreign policy were not apparent. Bialer defended this view: as he had said to Izvestiya, we were dealing with programmatic statements which had been carefully thought through, and whose consequences the Soviet leaders were prepared to live with for decades ahead. We must wait and see when they would be translated into foreign policy, but it would be wrong to dismiss them. (Bialer was, however, incensed with Izvestiya for having omitted the list of cases he had cited - troops in Afghanistan etc - where Soviet policies had palpably not changed.)

SDI. Bialer attributed the softening of the Soviet position on SDI to Roald Sagdeev, Director of the Institute of Space Research, whose praises as an honest and straightforward man Bialer sang loudly. He was more scientist than politician (unlike Velikhov), but his advice on SDI, on which he spoke to Gorbachev weekly, was of the greatest political importance. Sagdeev was convinced (like Sakharov) that the SDI programme would not work and that it was not worth the Soviet Union's expending political capital on it in a direct frontal assault. Bialer agreed that this new attitude had shown through in Shevardnadze's Washington press conference on 31 October. Bialer added that of course Sagdeev's was not the only advice being proffered to Gorbachev: the military, basing themselves on a worst case analysis, were doubtless urging the opposite. (In general Bialer stressed the cross currents of opinion and advice to which Gorbachev was being subjected, which made it difficult to predict what was coming.)

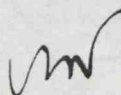
6. Civilian/military relations. It has long been Bialer's thesis that Gorbachev has imposed a civilian element into policy making in defence and arms control issues (the Ministry of Defence being staffed entirely by uniformed officers). He mentioned on this occasion that Gorbachev had drafted into the apparatus retired military personnel (he instanced Batenin, who had come to the UK in March with Primakov from IMEMO). Bialer was also convinced that Aleksei Arbatov of IMEMO was engaged on work with classified materials (he would no longer see Bialer in his office) and that he and other civilian specialists were being asked to comment on General Staff proposals, to the indignation of the latter. Bialer also noted that Marshal Akhromeev's recent interview with the New York Times had been given in the office of Falin (Chairman of Novosti Press Agency - and tipped by Bialer to be the next Chief Editor of Pravda).

7. Afghanistan. Bialer showed the same excitement over Afghanistan as my other American interlocutors. He was convinced that the decision had been taken to cut losses and withdraw. This would involve giving up the hegemony of the PDPA and looking to the UN machinery to conjure up a neutral and non-aligned Afghanistan. The principle reason for the decision in Bialer's view was the unacceptable drain on the Soviet Union's prestige abroad. He did not claim to know when the decision would be implemented, however. He thought it would be only after the June 1988 Party Conference, when Gorbachev would have sufficient power to overcome domestic opposition.

8. Third World. Bialer thought the Soviet Union had minimal commitments towards Nicaragua or for that matter Ethiopia, despite appearances. Angola, however, was a different matter because of its strategic position in the forthcoming struggle for Southern Africa: it was an investment.

9. Perestroika and the future. Bialer discussed Gorbachev's reforms along the lines of his recent articles in Foreign Policy No 68 and the US News and World Report (9 November): Gorbachev was out to modernise the Soviet Union and in doing so was forcing ambiguities (eg the role of the Party) and contradictory pressures (eg the need for austerity and improved living conditions) to the surface. Bialer thought that when it came to the crunch Gorbachev would radicalise rather than compromise. But two unpredictable developments could force caution on him - an explosion in Eastern Europe (towards which Bialer thought Gorbachev still had no real policy), or an exacerbation of the nationalities problem at home. Here Bialer thought all problems were manageable so long as the three Slav republics stuck together, but he was currently monitoring the Ukraine rather closely, where linguistic nationalism was rearing its head. He thought that one of the reasons Shcherbitsky had been kept on so long as Ukrainian Party leader could have been his ability to hold the balance between the "left and right banks" of the Dnepr (ie urban, more Russianised, and rural Ukraine).

7. Gorbachev's "Perestroika" book. Bialer had had an advance copy with a request to write an introduction to it. He had refused: although the domestic section of the book was an honest account of the reform process, the foreign policy section displayed all the worst aspects of "new thinking"; in Bialer's view Gorbachev had been ill-advised to include it in the form he had.



MARTIN NICHOLSON

2 December 1987

