

cf. PC

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Prime Minister

6 June 1988

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London

A good analysis and
a necessary note of
caution. But what does
he want you to do? We
always get to the point
of 'giving a lead' but
then the line goes dead
e there's no indication
of what practical steps
works.
CDD
7/6

Dear Prime Minister,

WESTERN REACTIONS TO THE MOSCOW SUMMIT

I know, both from what you said here on 17 February and from many previous conversations, that we have very similar views about the underlying realities of East/West relations in Europe. I know therefore that you will agree with much, though not necessarily all, of what follows. I am moved none the less to write because I am concerned about one particular aspect of the rhetoric thrown up by the summit and by the events of the last several months.

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It has been evident for some time that this is a period of historic significance as regards the development of relations between the communist and non-communist halves of Europe. Mr Gorbachev and President Reagan have brought the post war era to a dramatic end and set in train a process which, if all goes well, will eventually produce a new European order. The time scale you set in talking to Charles Wheeler the other evening - 20 or 30 years - seems to me both accurate and salutary. (If I may say so, President Reagan was absolutely right to pay tribute to your own key role. I myself think this goes back beyond your first meeting with Mr Gorbachev to your decision, shortly after the 1983 elections and when East/West relations were close to their nadir, to open up relations with Eastern Europe and to visit Budapest.)

What is not, in my view, at all evident is, to quote your words at the Guildhall, that "the Summit has brought us closer to the more stable and peaceful relations between East and West that we all want to see". Peaceful, maybe; stable, hardly.

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I recognise, of course, that the only way to achieve enduring stability in Europe is for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe to go through - one way or another - a process of radical reform: in this particular sense perestroika and glasnost do bring us closer to stability. I recognise the natural and widely held desire for more stability: several Foreign Ministers echoed here last week George Shultz's words about there now being more "continuity and consistency" in East/West relations and Genscher spoke of the American/Soviet relationship having "a new stability". I recognise, finally, that political statements cannot deal in nuances and are not always to be taken literally. (The trouble is that audiences do take them literally - the more so when the statements are saying things they want to hear.)

But all this being acknowledged, the reality is (as you implied with Charles Wheeler) that the stability "we all want to see" may well be a generation or more away. In the meantime the odds must be that in the years immediately ahead there will be periods of very considerable instability.

The reasons for this go a good deal deeper than the struggle in the Soviet Union and elsewhere between reforming activists and reactionary placemen. They are based on the fact that the Russian people - like their subject peoples inside the Soviet Union and in much of Eastern Europe - have little or no experience of operating either a national political process based on the participation of individuals or a national economy based on the enterprise of those individuals.

History, I fear, has not equipped the Russians well to escape gracefully from the incubus of state socialism: it has not equipped them at all to deal smoothly with the nationalities problem inside and outside the Soviet Union. Their political inheritance is, on the one hand, of mendacity, conspiracy and violence - within and without the government - and on the other hand of indifference or other-worldly anarchism. The acceptance of gradualness, of tolerance and of unwritten rules which is central to the stable management of change in Western societies (and which even here is far from universal) is not going to be learned overnight. The Yeltsin affair presages the sort of thing we can expect, on a larger scale, in the future.

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This does not mean that reform in the Soviet Union is a lost cause. Gorbachev obviously has more than his own great talents to rely on. His summons to Moscow in 1978 and his rapid promotion tends to confirm that, as I suggested in a letter I wrote to you from Vienna in 1983, the "men in the Kremlin" had recognised well before Brezhnev's death that the Soviet empire was "essentially bankrupt". With the benefit of hindsight one can deduce that eg Andropov knew dramatic measures were required. Gorbachev's appointment may have been a surprise, but it seems to me nonsense to suggest that the Politburo, who had seen him at work for six years, stumbled on him by accident. The vigour, indeed recklessness, with which Gorbachev is developing the logic of his reforms no doubt appals many of those who appointed him. But they knew that they were opting for a reform programme of one kind or another, an eventuality - so far as I know - no Western expert was even speculating about in 1983. That is as hopeful a thought as anything that has happened since.

If we were all wrong once we can be wrong again. But any rational analysis of the Russian and Soviet experience must suggest how improbable it is that the path of reform will be smooth. Sakharov described it the other day as dangerous. This in turn implies that the progress of the East/West relationship is going to resemble that of a roller coaster rather than that of a Rolls Royce.

The more Western leaders play down this likelihood, the more exaggerated the peaks and troughs - whenever they come - are going to be. In addition to the basic argument about the long term military and geo-strategic realities, people must be encouraged to accept that the ability of Western governments to affect what happens in Warsaw Pact countries - even on human rights - is limited; that the situation there, while more hopeful than ever before, is profoundly unpredictable and unstable; that to recognise the probability of setbacks is not to question the good intentions or the capabilities of the reformers; and that to be strong, predictable and moderate ourselves is probably the best service we can render to the cause of peaceful change. This message needs to be got across consistently rather than being turned up and down as has been the case in President Reagan's speeches in recent months.

If the message is not conveyed and accepted, it will be very difficult for the West to be strong and predictable in these critical years. There is no way of foreseeing when

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the first downward swoop of the roller coaster will occur. But if Gorbachev succeeds in delaying it for even two or three years then the challenge to the foresight of Western electorates, deprived of a visible threat, is going to be severe. In the absence of a setback, we can be confident that in this same period:

- (a) there will be further major Soviet arms control initiatives (probably including headline catching unilateral reductions) on short range nuclear forces and on conventional forces;
- (b) further difficulties with public opinion in every Alliance country - in some no doubt greater than in others - both on nuclear issues and on defence expenditure in general; and
- (c) further awkwardness with the Americans as the new Administration, whoever its leader, struggles with changing priorities and the consequences of the dual deficit.

I have to add (and this is the part of the letter with which you may have some difficulty) that the prospects of short term euphoria; static or declining public support for our defence requirements; evolving US attitudes; and medium term instability are making it steadily more urgent that we develop, within the Alliance, a coherent Western European approach to this whole complex of problems. It is not simply, or even primarily, that we must find ways through closer cooperation to get more defence output from our resource input. It is also that in the uncertain environment ahead, Western Europe is going to need the stronger glue which a developing parallelism between our efforts in the security field and in the economic/commercial field would provide. This is increasingly accepted on the other side of the Atlantic. (I was, incidentally, told more than once on a visit I made to the United States last month, that after 1992 the Americans would "of course" expect the Europeans to take on more of the responsibility of their own defence.)

As you already know, I believe that you can do more than any other individual to accelerate the development of a positive and effective European defence identity within the Alliance. This is as much, if not more, a question of

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encouragement and support as of specifics. I hope you will take the opportunities which the UK's presidency of the WEU will offer to give a lead both on this issue and on the question of the prospects for East/West relations as a whole which has been the main subject of this letter.

Yours ever

Michael

Michael Alexander



10 DOWNING STREET

Rice Minister

Since the Foreign

Secretary is away, you

may yourself wish to

give an account of

the US/Soviet Summit, of

Alexander Kage's visit,

and your exchange of
messages with Mr.

Gorbachev.

C-DB