

SECRET AND PERSONAL

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

18 May 1989

Yes
Dear Charles,

Prime Minister
Content with this
revised press line,
for now only if

Soviet Expulsions

Thank you for your letter of 18 May. As requested, I enclose a revised, and more restrictive, press line.

the news
what?

I am copying this letter to Colin Walters (Home Office) and the Director General of the Security Service.

CDP
18/5

James
Stephen Wall

(J S Wall)
Private Secretary

C D Powell Esq
10 Downing Street

SECRET AND PERSONAL

PRESS LINE

[Until we decide to confirm]

It is true that a number of Soviet diplomats have been expelled?

- I am afraid I cannot help you.

[In the event that we decide to confirm]

- I can confirm that the Soviet Ambassador was asked to call on Sir J Fretwell at 1400 on Friday 19 May. He was informed that 11 present members of the Soviet community in London, and a further 3 who have recently departed on transfer, had been carrying out activities incompatible with their status. Sir John asked Mr Zamyatin to arrange for the withdrawal within 14 days of the 11 present members of the Soviet community in London. He said that we were also declaring the Soviet officials who had recently left Persona Non Grata.

- Sir John made clear to the Ambassador that such activities were particularly regrettable at a moment when Anglo-Soviet relations were better than at any time in the past. He also made clear the British Government's strong hope that the unacceptable activities which had given rise to this action and similar actions in the past would now cease. For its part the British Government would continue to work hard for further improvement in Anglo-Soviet and East-West relations while remaining vigilant about its own security interests.

/Who

C

Who were the 14 concerned?

- I am afraid that I cannot give you the details.

Why not?

- We look at these issues on a case-by-case basis. In this case we have decided not to give publicity.

What were they up to?

- In accordance with our invariable practice, unable to give any details of activities involved.

Why did you not announce the expulsions in the first place?

- We look at these issues on a case-by-case basis and, on this occasion, decided not to initiate publicity.

But why not?

- It is not our policy to comment on individual cases.

[Unattributably] The expulsions will have left the Russians in no doubt of our determination to deal with unacceptable activities. On this occasion, we saw no advantage in initiating publicity at a time of considerable promise in East-West relations.

Has the ceiling been lowered?

- No, it remains at 205, with a sub-ceiling of 46 for the diplomatic community.

/Why

Why has it not been lowered?

- We regard the present level as appropriate for legitimate activities. In the hope that these will prosper, we decided to make an exception on this occasion and not lower the ceiling.

Was there any contact between the Prime Minister and Mr Gorbachev?

- Not prepared to go into detail on nature and level of our dealings with Soviet Government.

Retaliation?

[If there has not yet been retaliation]

- Sir John made clear to the Soviet Ambassador that we would take the most serious view of any retaliation, which would be totally unjustified.

[In the event of Soviet retaliation]

- This is entirely unjustified and a deliberate attempt to damage Anglo-Soviet relations by taking action against innocent people engaged in promoting contacts and exchanges in keeping with the otherwise improved climate of our relations.

What will you now do?

- We have expelled those whose activities we found unacceptable. We have made our views on the Soviet retaliation clear to the Soviet authorities. We are prepared to go on working for improved relations. We have made plain to the Russians what this entails on their side.



10 DOWNING STREET

LONDON SW1A 2AA

18 May 1989

From the Private Secretary

SOVIET EXPULSIONS

Thank you for your further letter of 17 May about the press line for use when news of our expulsion of members of the Soviet community begins to leak. The Prime Minister agrees that we shall have to admit to the numbers involved. But she does not wish us to release names or other details commenting that this would be a betrayal of her undertaking to Mr. Gorbachev. We shall need a defensive line on why we are not reducing the ceiling for the Soviet diplomatic community. I should be grateful, therefore, if you could prepare a more restrictive press line, on a contingency basis, so that we have a working text which can be finalised at short notice. It would be helpful to have this in the course of today.

(C. D. POWELL)

Stephen Wall, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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SRWB20

CCP

Prime Minister



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

This responds to

my representation of your view that we should say less than proposed in the press line. Perhaps it would be best

17 May 1989

Dear Charles, for me to seek Bernard's judgement tomorrow on what in the letter we

Soviet Expulsions

can get away with. Agree?

Thank you for your letter of 16 May about the proposed expulsions of members of the Soviet Embassy due to take place on 19 May.

The Foreign Secretary agrees that we must be able to demonstrate to Mr Gorbachev that we have complied with our undertaking not to initiate publicity. He believes that when we do deploy the press line set out in your letter (and this will only be done after a further check with you), we should tell the press how we informed the Russians of our decision. This means saying publicly that Sir John Fretwell did so in a meeting with the Soviet Ambassador on the afternoon of 19 May. The Foreign Secretary also believes that we shall have to tell the press of the numbers involved. If we declined to reveal at least these details, the press are likely to make considerable play of what will seem in their eyes to be unprecedented secretiveness. This could lead to speculation that we have been engaged in some sort of deal with the Russians which would be unhelpful.

CAD
17/5
us
m

Why?

That is probably right

No

Somewhat similar considerations apply to the question of whether we should ourselves go beyond numbers, and offer the names or other details of those whom we have expelled. It is our normal practice, once we confirm expulsions, to give this kind of minimal detail and to refuse absolutely to be drawn further. To give less could be interpreted by the media as being over-protective of Soviet sensibilities. It will certainly provoke the press into using every possible means to discover the names of those involved. This could stimulate a large media presence outside the Soviet Embassy and elsewhere which will complicate the task of our own Security Services.

This would be a betrayal of my undertaking to Charles.

The Foreign Secretary thinks, therefore, that we may need to deploy the names in the press line. An alternative would be to decline to name the expellees until the press had themselves begun to identify the individuals involved. But the Foreign Secretary is concerned that, if we hold back beyond this, the result will be to inflate rather than contain the story.

Yours,
Stephen Wall
(J S Wall)
Private Secretary

C D Powell Esq
10 Downing Street

Saw Under Relation Priv.

