

CONFIDENTIAL

SUBJECT CUMASTER

File 20240X



bc. P.C.

Wtg Record.

10 DOWNING STREET

LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

25 July 1989

Dear Brian,

PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH THE SOVIET DEFENCE MINISTER

The Prime Minister had a talk lasting some fifty minutes with the Soviet Defence Minister this morning. General Yazov was accompanied by the Soviet Ambassador and an aide. The Defence Secretary was also present. General Yazov was in high good humour, apart from the increasing and visible irritation at Zamyatin's frequent interventions.

Soviet Internal

General Yazov opened by conveying warm regards to the Prime Minister from Mr. Gorbachev and Mr. Ryzhkov. The Prime Minister said that she continued to admire Mr. Gorbachev's vision. She recalled telling members of the intelligentsia during her visit to Moscow in 1987 that it was not enough to support Mr. Gorbachev at the beginning: it was when he ran into difficulties that he would really need their support. Change invariably produced problems before benefits. People were inclined to take advantage of liberties before they were ready to assume responsibilities. General Yazov agreed: the Soviet Union faced a situation where the majority thought more about its rights than about its responsibilities. The Prime Minister continued that, all the same, it was a very exciting time which we were watching with great interest and some concern. An awful lot rested on Mr. Gorbachev's shoulders. General Yazov acknowledged that Mr. Gorbachev had to deal not only with the theoretical aspects of perestroika but also the practical implementation. People wanted everything at once, without pausing to think about the difficulties. The Prime Minister commented that Mr. Gorbachev had a good group of people round him, and a conviction and commitment which communicated themselves to others. General Yazov said there was also a toughness of character. Gorbachev was a man of strong will. He was also now taking more trouble to communicate with ordinary people. He had many loyal friends, as the Prime Minister had observed. The Prime Minister suggested that she was more used to opposition than

CONFIDENTIAL

Mr. Gorbachev was. General Yazov said solemnly that Soviet Ministers needed to get used to opposition.

The Prime Minister said that she also thought highly of Mr. Ryzhkov. We hoped that he would visit the United Kingdom later this year. The Ambassador said that he would do so. General Yazov said that Ryzhkov had been very much involved with presenting his new government to the Supreme Soviet. Every candidate had been grilled. There had been a lot of goodwill, and a lot of not so goodwill as well. This was a symptom of general dissatisfaction rather than directed at individual Ministers. The Prime Minister said that it was difficult to get people to understand that government could not do everything.

The Prime Minister continued that the difficulties being experienced with strikes and with the nationalities must present the armed forces with particular problems in helping to police disturbances and provide aid to the civil power. This was no doubt a new role for the Soviet armed forces. General Yazov thought that the nationalities problem was the most serious single difficulty faced by the Soviet Union. The problem had been artificially created during the war years, with the displacement of indigenous populations, many of whom now wished to return to their original territory. But economic problems were also a major worry. The Prime Minister asked how this year's harvest would be. General Yazov said that the Soviet Union lay in the zone of "risky agriculture". There had been drought this year in Siberia and northern Kazakhstan. But people tended to talk too much about problems and forget advantages. Healthy forces in Soviet society supported perestroika and he believed that results would be forthcoming. He hoped the Prime Minister would return to the Soviet Union soon. The Prime Minister said that she hoped to visit Kiev next year.

#### Arms Control

The Prime Minister said that the various arms control negotiations seemed to be going quite well, in particular the conventional forces reduction negotiations. Inevitably there would be difficulty when we got down to detailed discussion. She wondered how General Yazov saw the prospects. General Yazov said that, following the recent exchange of concrete proposals, the conventional forces negotiations had come alive. He was confident there would be results. He was less happy about the START negotiations. The parameters for these had been set in 1987 and drafting ought to be moving ahead. But the United States had taken up positions on, for instance, cruise missiles and the counting rules for bombers which were harmful to Soviet interests. More generally, the Soviet Union was making substantial unilateral reductions in its forces and weapons and was withdrawing six armoured divisions from Western Europe. As Defence Minister he was constantly having to answer letters from the public asking why the Soviet Union was disarming itself. The Prime Minister said she hoped he pointed out in reply the massive imbalance which existed in the Soviet Union's favour. There seemed to be indications

3  
THIS IS A COPY. THE ORIGINAL IS  
RETAINED UNDER SECTION 3 (4)  
OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS ACT

that the equipment being withdrawn tended to be of the older variety. General Yazov contested this: many of the divisions had the latest equipment including T72 and T80 tanks. They were returning to the Soviet Union and being disbanded. The Prime Minister commented that each side had to be sure of its defence at each stage of negotiated reductions.

#### Chemical Weapons

The Prime Minister continued that Britain had done some unilateral disarmament of its own during the 1950s by getting rid of its chemical weapons. Unfortunately other had not followed suit and chemical weapons remained a major concern. General Yazov said that the Soviet Union welcomed talks on the problem and was ready to destroy all its chemical weapons. It had built a special plant for the purpose. The Ambassador intervened to refer to the recent talks with Mr. Karpov, which had cleared up misunderstandings. The Prime Minister said she was not at all sure this was the case. She had spoken bluntly to Mr. Gorbachev about our misgivings whether the Soviet Union was coming clean with us on the subject of chemical weapons.

General Yazov said that the United Kingdom was free to inspect any installation or base in the European part of the Soviet Union to check that Soviet information was correct. He would not deceive so charming a lady - oh yes you would, said the Prime Minister - but would tell her frankly that all Soviet CW agents had now been concentrated in one particular area, so that they were ready for destruction. The Prime Minister repeated that we felt the Soviet Union had been less than frank with us. General Yazov responded that this may have been so in the past but was not any more. The Ambassador said that, when Mr. Gorbachev returned to the Soviet Union after his talk with the Prime Minister on this subject, he had called together all the military and industrial people and told them that she doubted their figures. He had asked for a full report. The result had been to send Mr. Karpov and his colleagues to the United Kingdom. The Prime Minister said that the visit had not by any means laid to rest all our fears. Mr. Gorbachev had told her that he would look into our misgivings and she relied on him to do so.

#### Soviet Armed Forces

The Prime Minister asked whether force reductions caused problems of morale in the Soviet armed forces. General Yazov said that the reductions really only touched the officers. Reductions in the ranks were achieved by reducing recruitment. Students were already exempt and students who had been drafted earlier were being discharged. He was trying to avoid discharging young officers, preferring to get rid of those who had served their time. The main problem was to find suitable accommodation for them. They all wanted to go back to the big cities, but the Government was insisting that they must live, for sometime at least, in the area where they last served. There was some pressure from those with technical


qualifications to leave the armed forces early and join co-operatives and small enterprises. He was not inclined to prevent this.

### Conclusion

The Prime Minister said that General Yazov's visit was historic and an indication of the steadily improving relations and increasing trust between the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom. General Yazov expressed warm gratitude for the invitation to pay the visit and the very interesting and promising programme. He knew that the great Marshal Zhukov had always wanted to visit the United Kingdom but had been prevented by the Cold War. It was his special privilege to be the first Soviet Defence Minister to come here. The Prime Minister said that the number of those who remembered the Second World War and its hardships was decreasing. There was a special duty on that generation to see that it never happened again.

The meeting ended with some exchanges about the need for Mr. Gorbachev to take a proper holiday. General Yazov thought that he would do so from or shortly after 4 August.

I am copying this letter to Stephen Wall (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), Alex Allan (HM Treasury) and Trevor Woolley (Cabinet Office).

Yours sincerely,  


(C.D. POWELL)

Brian Hawtin, Esq.,  
Ministry of Defence.