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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

7 April 1987

PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO THE SOVIET
UNION: INTERPRETER'S NOTES

I enclose some notes which Richard Pollock, who interpreted for the Prime Minister during her visit to the Soviet Union, has sent me. They serve as a useful addition to the formal records and you will wish to let Soviet Department and Research Department see them as well as Sir Bryan Cartledge in Moscow. I do not think they need to go much more widely than that.

CHARLES POWELL

A. C. Galsworthy Esq., C.M.G.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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MR. POWELL

Prime Minister's Talks in USSR: 28 March/1 April 1987

Observations by interpreter

1. Preface

- (i) It is assumed that No. 10 will decide distribution. The typing is therefore deliberately left to No. 10.
- (ii) It is assumed that the Private Secretary's record - where available - will have been read. Additional comment/observations only here.
- (iii) Occasions referred to:
 - (a) Visit to the Bolshoi Ballet
 - (b) Restricted Talks (Mr Gorbachev)
 - (c) Formal Dinner (Mr Gorbachev)
 - (d) Formal Talks (Mr Ryzhkov)
 - (e) Private Dinner
 - (f) Leave-taking in Kremlin
- (iv) Perspective: The impressionistic nature of some of the following comments is shaped by experience of other bilateral discussions over a number of years [including visits by the Foreign Affairs Committee (July 1985) and Lord Whitelaw's IPU Delegation (May/June 1986), and - in UK - the December 1984 Gorbachev meeting in Parliament, and the further visit by a Supreme Soviet Delegation under Zagladin in February 1987 (talks with FAC)].

2. Visit to Bolshoi Ballet

Conversation in box limited, and "small talk". Uspensky covering Gorbachev/PM, Pollock covering PM/Mrs Gorbachev. Hosts had not expected/realised two Acts being merged before Interval. At Interval, brief chat on merits of Tchaikovsky/Mozart and formative influence on Gorbachev's tastes - then to dining-room, assuming "the others will find us" [but it needed 5+ minutes for that]. Meal talk relaxed the atmosphere. Mrs Gorbachev recalling visit to UK (inter alia), and expressed sympathy with Channon family. Cordial ~~conversation perhaps caused time-factor to be forgotten.~~ Second half of performance some 30+ minutes after first - audience had apparently been literally 'in the dark' for 5 minutes. Hosts more relaxed in second half and parting conversation "Look forward to tomorrow" [both Gorbachev and PM].

3. Restricted Talks

- (a) Gorbachev looking fitter (tanned) than recent photos/TV: effects of known 'working holiday'?
- (b) Gorbachev at start seemed keyed up, sitting back somewhat tensely, hands clasped across his midriff - notes on table between him and PM. Note-taker to his right, higher round table. Uspensky at left-end, Pollock at right-end of long

seat on which photographs of the two principals had been taken. Powell on Pollock's right, separately seated. PM to right of Powell, slightly forward, opposite Gorbachev on other side of table with elongated lateral flower vase in middle. // 2

- (c) Gorbachev's voice extremely low/quiet for c. first 15 minutes (cf. Ryzhkov's at opening of formal talks in same room - St. Katharine's Hall - the next morning). "I was not sure what we should start with ..."
- (d) At no time was there a proposed time-allocation or thematic overview, as a "shaper" of the talking to come. By ultimate end of the restricted talks (cl845), a number of subjects (on which the press would be expecting a report) had not been ventilated in any detail. It was noticeable how ready Gorbachev was to agree/shape formulations for the press - often on topics that had been scarcely broached (not that that evidenced a wish by Gorbachev to suppress their discussion). *flippant & animated*
- (e) Despite the wide range of emotions - from animated concern to flippancy - evinced by Gorbachev, he never unleashed the acrimony of which he had shown himself capable in December 1984, when answering Norman St. John Stevas (18.12.84 Grand Committee Room, Palace of Westminster) on human rights (especially religion). //
- (f) At cl250, Gorbachev said we have by no means covered everything - perhaps we need another hour. Not clear from his words that he meant deferring lunch - could have been alluding to the envisaged continuation at 4.00 pm, prior to the proposed plenary c5.15 pm. Translation a little off-beam and encouraged the PM's perception that we should keep going/put off lunch, with Gorbachev's ready agreement.
- (g) Change of location after lunch due to re-setting of furniture for plenary in St. Katharine's Hall, expected c5.15pm. // 2
- (h) Curious that Gorbachev went on for c65 minutes in his opening post-lunch remarks (including translation). Was he genuinely unmindful of the time-factor? The lack of shape/timing in the pre-lunch session suggests he might have been, and there is some evidence of general garrulousness by nature. But just possible he was aware that it was better to be "off the record" in restricted talks all day, than "on the record" - and witnessed - at a plenary. As has been commented since, Gorbachev made only one public statement during the visit - perhaps thereby laying himself less open to internal criticism. // 2 ?
- (i) There may be a merit for the future in having the Soviet interpreter deliver more frequently. A considerable amount of mood - hence 'fine tuning' of the meaning - is in jeopardy, and avoidable demands made on the hearer's imagination and reactions, where, say 5 minutes of varying emotion is then interpreted, sometimes more slowly and without the same register of moods/subtlety of nuance.

A gentle request at the outset, to this effect, would serve the purpose - if it was deemed appropriate to do so. It would not cause offence, and would have the benefits (a) of reining-in Gorbachev's loquacity, (b) keeping the PM more in touch with his mood (thus bringing the two personalities into closer rapport), and (c) requiring the PM to memorise less before responding and so enabling her more developed and frequent interventions on specific points as they arose.

It was noticeable that Ryzhkov, Cherkasia - indeed, most other interlocutors on the Soviet side - paused more frequently for interpretation. This facilitates a productive 'meeting of minds' and perception of intentions/atmosphere.

- (j) There was a perceptible 'blur' in the way Gorbachev expressed himself on the supposed sequential nature of (a) an INF agreement being reached, and (b) the withdrawal of shorter range missiles in GDR and Czechoslovakia. On two occasions the phrasing was such as could be compatible with both events happening non-sequentially (ie preparing the ground for a possible shift in the phased approach reflected in the 28 February statement). While it is possible this was loose speaking on Gorbachev's part, as he has been known to change his position this might have been a conscious, more flexible formulation. [You recall he said it will be possible to watch those GDR/Czech missiles being destroyed.]
- (k) At the end of one long post-prandial utterance, Gorbachev said something (as I reported at our evening de-brief) which was not translated - and yet to me sounded to be a cry from the heart:- "Peace will be good for you, it will be good for me, it will be good for mankind". The use of the word "me" was unusual and arguably a mark of frankness. The PM's reply came in promptly, so that it was inappropriate to interrupt with further R-E translation: also the logical flow was unaffected by the point.

4. Formal Dinner

[Since conversation only, and informal, note-taking for interpreting not effected - hence no detailed record available.] [Deliberate record-keeping would possibly cause offence.]

The fact that the speeches preceded the meal had both merit and demerit - though possibly more merit. They were 'got out of the way', thus facilitating subsequent informality. However, their content - as was inevitable since they were prepared well in advance - was not really a reflection of the mood of the two principals' conversation, either during the day, or during the evening (subsequently). Possibly the speeches contained (as was only natural) elements which would subsequently preoccupy/affect the hearer [perhaps negatively].

While the ensuing conversation was coloured, as earlier in the day, by personal cordiality, it was perhaps more contentious (perhaps due to points in the speeches) than might have been anticipated. It did appear that Gorbachev was less relaxed than usual and concerned to score points. It was also a little surprising that Mrs Gorbachev, seated on the PM's right (Gorbachev being on the PM's left), seemed keen - albeit perhaps in light-hearted vein - to resuscitate the 'arms control' themes which had had a very thorough ventilation earlier in the day. Gorbachev at moments 'bridled' more than he had during the day, and somewhat surprisingly said at the end of the meal that he was beginning to think it would be easier to talk to the Americans than to the PM. (This is a note which Arbatov has been sounding since the PM left USSR - though probably reflecting, as he does, the 'older', less constructive/less optimistic 'school'). It is noticeable that when crossed - or possibly tired - Gorbachev seems to lean to the views of his more circumspect advisers. [However, he did warn mysteriously that "something special" would be announced next day.] This somewhat sour tone on which to allow the meal to end was surprising. Moreover, the next day, Ryzhkov chose to continue the 'areas-of-disagreement-on-arms-control' theme at the opening to what was expected to be a session on matters economic, etc., not broached the previous day. Have they a "negative" lobby which they have to keep happy at the moment - not least when talking 'on the record'?

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5. Formal Talks (Ryzhkov)

Ryzhkov had a prepared text in front of him - which possibly did not include the querulous 'arms control' and 'empire of evil' themes on which he (rather surprisingly) harped initially.

Ryzhkov began in the same noticeably quiet voice which Gorbachev had adopted early in the restricted talks (also in St. Katharine's Hall) the previous day.

Ryzhkov more deliberate in utterance - choosing his words and pausing more frequently for interpretation - than Gorbachev. A much more typical Soviet bureaucrat, dignified in appearance rather than intellectually distinguished.

Again, no advance announcement of themes or proposed apportioning of time, so as to optimise discussion.

Usual - though one might have thought inappropriate - reproaches on non-competitiveness of British goods/tenders.

The 'something special', foreshadowed at the formal dinner by Gorbachev, was the rather sudden announcement of firm bilateral trade-turnover targets to 1990 and beyond (plus Soviet 'shopping-list', in English). Then - 'the negative side', as Ryzhkov put it - came a sizeable list, in Russian, of regretted (COCOM) embargoes.

This discussion also concluded somewhat abruptly, precluding the promised/requested exegesis on 'perestroika', etc, prior to the signing of documents in the Vladimir Hall.

The overall atmosphere of this meeting was more stable in its cordiality, though more superficial (perforce) in its discussion, than the previous day's discussions.

The signing ceremony was to further stabilise the cordiality/up-beat tone of the overall proceedings.

6. Private Dinner

Gorbachev and Mrs Gorbachev showed guests various rooms in a building rich in historical associations (more recently, with Litvinov, Churchill, Stalin, Eden, Molotov). Discussion (only) of the merits of dancing - prior to the meal.

Once in dining-room Gorbachev pointed out picture on wall, whose narrow bright central strip of sunshine in an otherwise 'grey' landscape he adjudged symbolic and characteristic of the previous day's frank talks. (Mrs Gorbachev had to get up from the table to see, owing to short-sightedness.)

Gorbachev again dominating the conversation - surprising that he scarcely ever invites even his principal guest's views. But reasonable (in quantity) and cordial (in quality) participation proved possible.

Ryzhkov quite forthcoming with comments - though not especially informative - on public health, education, cultural features of Soviet society, and on economic planning within the process of 'perestroika'.

Mrs Gorbachev in very chirpy form, though unaware of the problems posed by conversing through an ongoing interpretation! It is noticeable that in every situation - here and elsewhere - she addressed her husband by the comparatively formal 'Mikhail Sergeyeovich' (i.e. first name and patronymic) mode of address. This would serve to enhance both his public 'gravitas' and her own.

The fireside chat was at several separate tables, with the Soviet interpreter being allocated to the Gorbachevs and the Prime Minister.

Parting greetings were very natural and noticeably more cordial than after the Formal Dinner the previous evening.

7. Leave-taking in Kremlin

Very significant for Mrs Gorbachev's presence - and no-one else's - with Gorbachev. Suggestive not only of their sincere personal commitment to the relationship (and Gorbachev's valuation of it) with the PM - but possibly too of Gorbachev's increasing confidence in his own position. [It will be interesting to see whether the 'video-of-Mrs-Gorbachev' concern mentioned subsequently in our press causes her to be given a less visible profile - few ways of monitoring, except on satellite TV.]

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Gorbachev spoke of his sadness at saying goodbye and of the Soviet Union's readiness to cooperate with UK. PM said we are not only ready, but happy, to cooperate. //

No doubt whatever of the strength of friendship and respect those few minutes/words/facial expressions attested towards the PM and the United Kingdom - and the intention to do all possible to build thereon. //

A final observation:

The Gorbachev we saw during this visit had not lost any of the assurance or intellectual verve most recently evidenced to UK eyes during Lord Whitelaw's talks in the Kremlin, 26-27 May 1986. There were more signs that he recognised something could yet go wrong with his plans and hopes. In the restricted talks he indicated that perestroika would take 5-7 years (not defining exactly what he envisaged as achievement required, however). At the Bolshoi supper he indicated that perestroika though not easy of attainment was more feasible than the elimination of Russians' love of (ie excessive) drink - indeed he deemed that impossible. On arms control his line seems to devise what he believes are 'fair' proposals, try them out (on his interlocuter), but - if rebuffed - not to sulk, but to be willing to think again and possibly modify the proposal. Witness 28 February. He can change his mind, and needs to be allowed to do so - one may suggest - without loss of face. //

R.P.

6 April 1987

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