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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

7 November, 1983

*John Smith*

*AD 8/14*

Anglo/German Summit: East/West Relations

Mr Andropov's failure to appear at any of the events or parades connected with the October Revolution celebrations in Moscow has given rise to renewed speculation about the state of his health, and its implications for Soviet policy. It is likely that this will be touched on during the Prime Minister's discussions in Bonn.

/ I enclose a supplementary annex to the existing Brief on East/West relations.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries of those Ministers who will be accompanying the Prime Minister to Bonn, and to Sir R Armstrong (Cabinet Office).

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EAST/WEST RELATIONS INCLUDING POLAND

Supplementary Annex to Brief  
by Foreign and Commonwealth Office

POINTS TO MAKE

Andropov's State of Health and its Implications

1. Andropov's non-appearance at 66th Anniversary celebrations has given rise to spate of rumours in West, and probably also in Soviet Union.
2. He has not now been seen in public since mid-August, nor have photographs of him appeared in the Press. However, the number of times he has been mentioned indicate that he is still being treated as pre-eminent. Cannot rule out possibility that he is continuing to take part in preparation of important policy statements (last two on arms control still showed signs of his personal touch).

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## 3. Two sets of implications:

internal: our preliminary conclusion is that Andropov's illness may make it more difficult to tighten up discipline and to achieve greater efficiency (points to which Andropov attaches particular importance). Calculation may be made in some parts of bureaucracy that it is no longer necessary to implement the new line with much enthusiasm, given doubts about how long Andropov is going to last (perhaps a few years at most). Nevertheless decision-making by consensus in Politburo was well established under Brezhnev and has continued under Andropov. No reason to believe there will be a breakdown in this process.

external: doubtful if major decisions affecting particularly arms control can be taken without active participation of General Secretary. If compromises were required, this would need his full involvement and influence. If Andropov's illness does prove incapacitating, its implication for policy making in the external field is likely to be that policies will tend to remain on their present course.

## BACKGROUND

4. Andropov's absence from the ceremonies to mark the 66th anniversary of the Revolution (Kremlin gala meeting on 5 November, the military parade on 7 November, at which the Salute was taken by the Defence Minister Marshal Ustinov, and the

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Moscow City Council reception on 7 November) has fuelled further speculation about his health.

5. The excuse given for his failure to appear on 5 November was a cold. The same excuse was given for his failure to meet the World Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War in Moscow on 21 October. Andropov's absence from the parade on 7 November (which Brezhnev attended every year) makes it seem probable that he is suffering from something more serious than a cold. Possibly leadership has in mind that Brezhnev died only three days after the 1982 parade and does not wish to put Andropov at risk. We have no evidence that press reports of a kidney operation are accurate. Our own assessment hitherto has been that his heart trouble (he is known to have had at least one heart attack) is more significant than any kidney condition.

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