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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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4 January 1985

VISIT OF USSR SUPREME SOVIET DELEGATION: LUNCH-TIME DISCUSSION
BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND MR M S GORBACHEV, CHEQUERS,
16 DECEMBER 1984.

With CDP? Not on file

/ At Chequers on 16 December I gave you a short note of the key points made in discussion at the lunch table that day between the Prime Minister and Mr Gorbachev. I now attach in draft form, for the record, my fuller account of that discussion.

K. A. Bishop

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cc: PS/Secretary of State
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LUNCHTIME

RECORD OF PRIVATE/CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER
AND MR GORBACHEV AT CHEQUERS ON SUNDAY 16 DECEMBER 1984

Mr Gorbachev said that he had spent a good morning at the Headquarters of John Brown. The First Deputy Minister of Foreign Trade had been with him. Some of the proposals made by John Brown had been very interesting. This was an important time for considering possible lines of cooperation. He would be having further discussions during the week with British businessmen. The Prime Minister said that John Brown were doing well now. After a strike-prone period some years ago, they had been free of strikes for some 12 years now. Their orders were being produced on time and they had a very good record. Like other British companies, they honoured their contracts. Mr Gorbachev said that John Brown had good knowledge of Soviet conditions and problems. Certain points raised in their presentation that morning deserved further and immediate study, notably those for chemical plants, food processing and packaging systems etc. The Prime Minister said she understood that it was important for the Soviet Union to increase the shelf life of products. Mr Gorbachev said that the Soviet Union was losing or wasting a great deal because such infrastructure *was lacking.*

Mr Gorbachev said he would later ~~be~~ conveying to the Prime Minister a special message from Mr Chernenko. This would deal with arms control and space and with opportunities for extending the bilateral dialogue started in Moscow at the time of Mr Andropov's funeral.

In response to the Prime Minister's question about his previous visits, including his visit Canada, Mr Gorbachev said that he had liked Canada a great deal. It was a very wealthy country in terms of both finances and resources. Canada and the Soviet Union had much in common as countries. It had therefore been rather difficult to find areas of cooperation for boosting bilateral trade. Several companies
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in Canada which had expressed an interest in doing business with the Soviet Union were found to have their bosses in the United States. Some were 90% American.

The Prime Minister said that all countries had their own national feelings and pride. This applied very much to both parts of Europe. Mr Gorbachev said that to regard the interests of other countries as inferior to those of one's own was not a moral basis for policy. The national income of the CIMEA countries was rising faster than that of the Soviet Union. This demonstrated the Soviet Union's selflessness. The Prime Minister asked whether the Soviet Union was well placed for hard currency. Mr Gorbachev said it was, though this was not true for all of the socialist countries. Hungary for example, was not in a particularly easy situation. Modernisation was now under way and if credits and finance were available on suitable terms, there should be no great problem. But intergovernmental organisations in the West, and the COCOM list, which was 90% governed by the United States, as well as EEC restrictions, caused some difficulty. The Prime Minister said that the IMF was a most useful organisation. What people wanted was to be able to raise their own standard of living by their own efforts. This was true for all countries. Politicians could help in this by the line that they took. ^{But} ~~when~~ governments themselves had no money and needed to help people to earn more. How could this be achieved in a centralised and rigid economy? Mr Gorbachev said that the Soviet Union would be in an extremely difficult situation if it were unable to settle ^{in a} satisfactory ^{way} the key questions of social and economic levelling. When asked by the Prime Minister whether the Soviet Union would ever successfully achieve such a levelling out, Mr Gorbachev said that on the whole this had already been achieved. The problem of availability of jobs was already solved. The Soviet approach of course was very different from that of the West and of Britain in particular. In the Soviet Union, the numbers of workers were reduced before the workers themselves were retrained. ^{The opposite} ~~This~~ simply would not work. They had already achieved a

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standard educational system. Things were on the move. There was of course much to be taken into account, and running the country was no easy matter. The planners had to cater for all 15 Republics, and the Republics themselves had to consent. The birth rate in some of the Republics, particularly those in Central Asia, was much higher than elsewhere. The danger here was excessive working capacity. The problem however was now being overcome. Decisions had been taken over the last 10 years with the Southern Republics particularly in mind. There were complex programmes for the development of Azerbaidjan, etc, were there was still a strong attachment to agriculture. Earlier ideas of providing large industrial plants^{there} in order to attract the young had not been correct. They were now going for smaller enterprises, light industry and so forth in rural areas in order to absorb the numbers of young people. Hundreds of billions of roubles were being earmarked for irrigation schemes.

The Prime Minister wondered whether this might not all be easier if it were attempted on a free enterprise basis, with the provision of incentives and a free hand for local enterprises to run their own show, rather than being directed from the centre. Mr Gorbachev said he did not think she could really believe that everything^{in the USSR} was run from the centre. Was it even feasible to try to do so? The Prime Minister said that Soviet 5-year plans were produced by a central agency and handed down to other governmental agencies. But unless people received incentives and could profit from their own efforts and raise their own standard of living, wealth would not be created and new products would not be generated. Under the Western system, everyone ultimately received more than they would from a system which depended simply on redistribution. In Britain we were attempting, through reduction in taxation, to increase incentives and stimulate^{new} designs, new ventures, in order to raise wealth and to compete in world markets. She herself did not wish to have the power to direct everyone where he^{or she} should work and what he^{or she} should receive. That seemed a totally rigid system. It was better that people should be responsible for their own actions.

/Mr Gorbachev

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Mr Gorbachev said that his own responsibilities increasingly centred in the economic field, which was also a hobby of his. He understood the British system, but the Soviet system was superior. He would not list all the arguments in favour of this view but believed that the history of the Soviet Union spoke volumes. Before the Revolution the country had been semi-colonial. Then a new approach had been tried and had revived the country. If there had been no World War II and if the Soviet Union had had a correspondingly developed industrial base, who knows what they would not have achieved by now. Churchill had said that it would take the Soviet Union ^a quarter of a century ^{or more} after the war to get back on its feet. In fact this ^{had been} achieved very much faster. Nor had the Soviet Union had the benefit of American help ^{such} as the Marshall Plan for Western Europe. They had had to do it by themselves, in a situation of virtual blockade. The Soviet Union's choice of system had not been accidental. It produced higher growth rates. Svetlana Alliluyeva had recently returned to Moscow after an absence of 17 years. She had been amazed at the changes in that time. Western Communists, including the Head of CPGB, often had reservations about the Soviet system. They were simply told to send their Communists to the USSR and see for themselves. British, West German and other Western Communists had come by the train load to the Soviet Union in the autumn. They had travelled about by train and ^{had} seen for themselves. He hoped that the Prime Minister would "some day obtain a fuller first-hand view for herself". She would see how Soviet people lived - joyfully. Of course there were great problems, but they were being solved.

The Prime Minister asked why the Soviet authorities did not allow people to leave the Soviet Union as easily as they could leave Britain. She did not retain anyone who wished to leave. Svetlana had wished to leave and had been free to do so. So had the two Soviet soldiers who had come to Britain after fighting in Afghanistan. Their right to leave had been entirely ^{un}restricted, like everyone else's. Britain's ^{difficulty} was perhaps that too many /people

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people wished to come and live here! But the Soviet authorities were placing great restrictions on people like Sakharov, Shcharansky, and numbers of Jews who wished to leave the Soviet Union. Their names were well known. Any Ukrainians, Georgians and so forth living in the UK were entirely free to leave. Why were they restricted in the Soviet Union?

Mr Gorbachev said that they had not completed their discussion of the two economic systems. The Soviet Union was undertaking a reform and giving incentives. It was envisaging more rights but also more responsibilities and independence for local enterprises and regional authorities. The matter was complex because there were 15 Republics as well as a number of autonomous areas. But the process was well under way. Centralisation would certainly continue and even be strengthened but only as regards certain key decision-making areas. The Prime Minister asked who decided what should be produced in the economy. Mr Gorbachev said that the **C**entral **P**lanning **A**uthorities gave instructions to the various outlying areas. The Prime Minister said that this differed markedly from the British system. She did not tell companies what to produce. They competed and did their own ^{and} RD.

The Prime Minister then spoke of the current miners' strike^{in Britain}. More than one-third of miners were working hard, **T**hey had good wages, good conditions and good hours. The remainder were on strike. There was much intimidation of those who ^{or wished to work} were working^{by} -by force, violence, beatings-up, and even recently a murder. Communism was synonymous with getting one's way by violence. Its slogan was: "Brothers - when you are free, you will do as you are told". **T**his was the ultimate socialist idea and ^{explained} ~~was~~ the reputation which Communists, including those behind the miners' strike, enjoyed in the United Kingdom. People like Scargill and McGahey gave Soviet Communism a bad name.

Mr Gorbachev asked whether the Prime Minister really believed that Soviet Communists were so strong as to be able to keep the ^{British} miners out on strike for over 10 months.

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The Prime Minister said that the miners' leaders had refused to conduct a ballot within their trade union.

~~W~~here a ballot had been held, the vote had been to return to work. Some Communists and Communist sympathizers within the trade union leadership had not liked this and had thus approved intimidation to put workers willing to work back on strike. Mr Gorbachev said that the Prime Minister could speak to him in this way only because she placed such confidence in him. The problem was purely a British one. The Prime Minister said that in Britain, Communists could stand for election to Parliament but knew that they would never be elected. They had thus decided to try to take over trade unions, under Labour colours, and to infiltrate the Labour Party in the hope of getting elected. Mr Gorbachev said this was the first he had heard of this. Did the Prime Minister really think that the Soviet Union have such influence in other countries as to be able to manipulate local Communist Parties and public opinion? He could assure her that the Soviet leaders were not trying to do so and were not involved. The causes were entirely local. The Soviet Union had a firm policy: no export of Revolution and no export of Counter-Revolution. This was clear and a firm matter of principle for the Soviet Union. They should simply observe and see which system proved better. The Soviet Union did not refuse the right of the capitalist system to exist.

The Prime Minister said that such was the total freedom in Britain, ^{that} Britain was open to propaganda for other alien systems. She did not seek to prevent this. She could prove that the British system was better. But the

Soviet Union's fellow-Communists who could not get their own way through the ballot box were opting for violence. They were also being helped with finance from outside. Mr Gorbachev said it was not the Soviet Union who was helping in this way. The Soviet Union had transferred no funds to the NUM. (After a sideways glance from Mr Zamyatin, he amended this to: "as far as I am aware..."). The Prime Minister should blame Britain and not foreign Communists for the situation. Das Kapital had been written in London. The Prime Minister interjected that in a free society it was entirely possible to do so and to get it published. Mr Gorbachev said that he was aware that the Prime Minister was capable of defending herself. But the Second Congress of the RSDRP had also been held in London. The Prime Minister asked when she might contemplate the holding of British Party Congresses in Moscow. Lenin had set a tragic example of resorting to violence when unable to win through the ballot box, when he had overthrown the people's representative Kerensky.

Mr Gorbachev appealed to the Prime Minister to deal with realities. He recalled that Mr Churchill, a "dyed in the wool anti-communist", had nevertheless been sufficiently wise to join forces with the Soviet Union in certain historical circumstances. The Soviet Union's ideology was its own and was not being thrust on others. Perhaps the matter should be left there. He was not out to persuade the Prime Minister to his ideological views.

The Prime Minister said that she would doubtless be asked by several people what Mr Gorbachev's response had been

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about emigration possibilities for Jews, for Sakharov, Shcharansky and so forth. How should she reply? She would never restrain anyone in the United Kingdom by force. Mr Gorbachev expressed incredulity^{at this}, adding that in other circumstances Britain^{certainly} did use force. The Soviet Union simply abided by its own laws. It did not interfere with others and had no wish to do so, Britain should reciprocate. The Prime Minister said that she would answer press enquiries by saying that she had raised the question of people who wished to leave the Soviet Union and that Mr Gorbachev had referred to the differences between the two systems. Mr Gorbachev asked that she should reply that this was^a matter within the competence of the Soviet authorities acting on the basis of Soviet laws. These matters were all governed by Soviet legislation. In fact, 89% of all who^{had} expressed the wish to leave the Soviet Union had done so over the last 10 years. The number of requests to leave was constantly falling, and this was natural. Sometimes, people who were initially not permitted to leave were later allowed to do so. The reason for initial refusal was generally that they had been working in areas affecting national security. Pressed further by the Prime Minister on the matter, Mr Gorbachev said it was up to her how she spoke to the press. He had explained the situation. Mr Gorbachev said that the present discussion was a private one. The Soviet position remained unchanged. She would be best to say that Mr Gorbachev had added nothing new to the known Soviet position and had referred to existing Soviet laws.

The Prime Minister asked what she should say if asked /about

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about Mr Gorbachev's views concerning the miners' strike. Mr Gorbachev said this was entirely an internal UK matter and not relevant to inter-state relations. The Prime Minister said that some might point out that it was impossible to get money out of the Soviet Union without the agreement of the Soviet authorities. Mr Gorbachev said that he could state firmly that as far as he was aware no money had been transferred to the British miners from the Soviet Union.

The Prime Minister said that the difficult part of their discussion was now over. Mr Gorbachev welcomed this and recalled good examples of cooperation between the two countries, including the honouring of contracts in the energy field.

In a brief toast at the end of the meal, Mr Gorbachev expressed "great satisfaction" at this opportunity for a discussion with the Prime Minister and her colleagues. He welcomed the domestic ambience and the good atmosphere prevailing around the table. He was indebted to the Prime Minister for this. The Soviet aim in accepting the invitation ^{to Britain} was to develop the dialogue between the two countries, extend mutual understanding and find points of contact and convergence on important international issues. Neither side should be obliged to renounce its own principles or act to the detriment of ~~third~~ countries. He referred briefly to the message he was carrying for the Prime Minister from Mr Chernenko, expressing as it did readiness to continue to act in the spirit of the meeting in Moscow at the time of Mr Andropov's funeral.

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MIKHAIL SERGEEVICH GORBACHEV: A PERSONAL ASSESSMENT OF THE MAN DURING HIS VISIT TO THE UNITED KINGDOM, 15-21 DECEMBER 1984.

1. Gorbachev's performance in the UK will at least in part have been dictated by the political purpose of the visit. He described his underlying purpose in an aside to The Speaker after only five minutes on British soil - "We accept Britain as it is, and hope that you will accept us similarly; I have come to clear away the obstacles (razgrebat zavaly) in the way of improving Anglo/Soviet relations." It became ever clearer as the visit proceeded that fulfilment of this purpose required a man who could realistically sell optimism; appeal convincingly to British economic and political self-interest; sustain a long, diverse and very demanding programme; and show the acceptable face of Communism to a wide range of governmental, parliamentary, business and media representatives. (Success in this was necessary to him in his accompanying, unstated, purpose - that of exploiting the contacts and timing of the visit to the benefit of the Soviet position on the non-militarisation of outer space.)
2. My close observation of him as his interpreter throughout his official programme leaves me in no doubt that Gorbachev was eminently the right man for the job. Of course he fitted his face to the tasks in hand, refusing for example to let himself be provoked by persistent demonstrators, by the Prime Minister's challenging and probing examination of him, by the clamorous and potentially embarrassing attentions of the media, by speculative questions from Members of Parliament and others about his standing in the Soviet hierarchy. The man, however, proved not just equal to but bigger than the task, and left some strong impressions also of his real self. Also revealed were some new biographical details, including certain likes and dislikes and the intriguing fact that he was baptised (Annex B).
3. There was about his movements and his utterances an unaffected, self-assured and un-self-conscious air of competence and confidence. One was conscious of great resources of energy in him, well-harnessed. Although he joked about his heavy programme - "we'll fulfil it if it kills us" - he never flagged nor faltered. He spoke as a rule in simple, generally short and clear sentences. While showing on occasion that he could trade if necessary in the language of the dialectic, he kept his remarks throughout the week notably free of the familiar Marxist/Leninist jargon, bombast, "preachiness" or cliches.
4. He would listen, immobile, with concentration and great attentiveness, and would almost invariably answer all questions put to him - in his own time, of course, and only in the degree of detail which suited him. He had a knack of doing so in a disarmingly straightforward, unpolemical manner and of finding apt, often humorous turns of phrase to register his point or defuse unwanted tension. He was aided in this by a ready smile and occasional laughter. A roguish twinkle was never far from his eye (he even once winked at me over his shoulder as I interpreted a neat parry of his to one of the Prime Minister's verbal thrusts). He often spoke without notes, confidently, steadily, and in a manner
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which inspired confidence in his audience.

5. While not an intellectual, he clearly has a very good memory and a disciplined head. He was also thoroughly in control of his brief. I found him - especially for someone so little acquainted with the ways of the West - notably quick to size up a political situation or take a hint, indeed generally quick on the uptake. Even at 'Così Fan Tutte' he was much quicker than his more "intellectual" wife to get the point of an unfamiliar plot and to appreciate the spirit and humour of the production. His demeanour in addressing others, either singly or in large numbers, and regardless of whether they were British or Soviet, can be summed up in the word "naturalness". If, as occurred once or twice, he was less than totally fluent, that too seemed natural and bothered him not at all. He appeared at these times (when searching for a word or phrase) to prefer to be "sound" and to feel right with his answer before giving voice. If his message was unsurprising, even predictable, and rarely if ever strayed far from orthodox Soviet positions, the style was often lightened with a touch of humour, irony or with colloquialisms. It was refreshing for example to hear a Soviet leader (in conversation with the Secretary of State) use such words as chepukha (nonsense/twaddle) rather than some cant equivalent from Pravda. Such examples were far from infrequent. But the message remained, in Soviet terms, irreproachably sound, even if the style and lexicon had the ring of relative modernity.

6. Without ever for a moment suggesting ideological unsoundness or indifference (indeed, his conviction about the rightness and superiority of the Soviet system seemed heartfelt), he came across to many as a pragmatist. In official talks with the Prime Minister, Secretary of State, Mr Jopling and Mr Channon, as well as in the visits to industrial/agricultural companies and plants, he spoke as a man at ease with the capabilities of robotics, computer technology and new management techniques, and certainly not afraid of them. He regularly produced a stream of apt, often detailed comments, and of penetrating questions. His enthusiasm for airing his knowledge was marked, notably in his beloved fields of economic management and agriculture. Everywhere he seemed interested in and impressed by what our American cousins would call a "can do mentality". His unscheduled and unannounced visit to a 10 Downing Street empty of its principal resident was probably less a caprice and more an example of his confidence and decisiveness (of which there were several other instances) and his apparent conviction that problems exist to be solved. His confidence in the power of technology harnessed to sound organisation was several times expressed in terms of evident pride in Soviet power. He told one of his parliamentary hosts that the Soviet Union had told the Americans: "We can perfectly well nowadays live without you and you without us, though cooperation would be preferable"; he spoke with obvious pride to the Prime Minister about Soviet scientific and technological achievements; he showed (not for the first or last time during his visit) a strong streak of nationalistic pride, even touchiness, in telling Mr Channon that people who regarded the Russians as technological "backwoodsmen" were both arrogant and ignorant and would learn better. "Send us your smallest British flea and we'll make shoes for it!" This, though accompanied with a disarming chuckle, was said with deep feeling.

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7. The strain of Russian/Slav nationalism in him came through also in private conversation about art and music (with Mr Rifkind and Lord Gowrie), where Gorbachev sang the praises of several Soviet painters of the strongly Russian nationalist (and realist) school - notably Ilya Glazunov. He even suggested to Lord Gowrie that Britain should put on a Glazunov exhibition. At the same time he poured gentle ridicule on modernist paintings of the "nothing but a plain rectangle" variety and was amused at people who could stand in front of them for hours in rapt concentration and awe. In music, too, his pride in Russian national achievements was evident. It prompted him to recommend visitors to Moscow to go to a church in Fili, on the city's outskirts, (Sobor Svyatogo Pokrova), where 15th and 16th century Russian chants were "brilliantly" and "wonderfully" performed by an unaccompanied choir. Although the evidence is inconclusive (he guffawed at an anti-Polish bon mot by his host at a parliamentary dinner), I very much suspect that his Russian pride is tinged with racism or, at the very least, condescension towards other races. He told several people that without the firm grip at the centre in Moscow, the many races in the Soviet Union would have flown apart and produced chaos. He also remarked favourably on the pragmatic British approach towards his very demanding programme in the UK, remarking that with the Germans the programme ruled - it was "programme first, second and last". (He said he had learned some German in his youth but it was now broken and rusty). Taking an intelligent interest in everything around him, he seemed genuinely impressed both by the British sense of tradition and by examples of British technical innovation (automated insertion of windscreens in cars etc).

8. On two noteworthy occasions the unemotional mask slipped - in both cases on the issue of human rights. It slipped slightly when Mr St John-Stevas harried him, in the meeting with the House Foreign Affairs Committee, about the Soviet Union's failure to honour its human rights commitments. Prevented from changing the subject, Gorbachev threatened retaliation by vigorous "exposure" of British sins in this field. The mask slipped badly at the Official Opposition lunch, when Mr Kinnock privately pressed the same issue. This provoked an intemperate outburst of obscenities and threats by Gorbachev against "turds" and spies like Shchavansky, who was in prison "and that is where he will stay". He warned, with appropriate gestures, that Britain would get it "right in the teeth" in a "merciless" denunciation of its human rights crimes if that was the game it wanted to play. With his usual adroitness, however, Gorbachev collected himself and told Mr Kinnock that he had never spoken so undiplomatically on the subject to anyone else during the visit, and that such frankness was possible only between people who referred to each other as "comrade"! He sought a no less disarming escape route from a sharp exchange of views in private with the Prime Minister by remarking that her candour was a mark of her confidence in him. Nimbleness of foot was a feature of Gorbachev's performance throughout his stay. But the chill impression left by these instances remains: we had glimpsed beneath the surface a man conscious of power and ready if need be to exploit it ruthlessly.

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9. As remarked above, Gorbachev came to the UK to present the acceptable face of Communism and was outwardly pretty successful in his mission. He repeatedly stated his satisfaction with his programme and was visibly gratified at the length and substantive nature of his talks, notably with the Prime Minister and Secretary of State. Without evidently trying too hard, indeed quite naturally and unemotionally, he evoked a sense of confidence in virtually all his interlocutors. He struck them as approachable and, because unaffected, as also sincere or least as someone with whom it was possible to have a rational dialogue. Members of his own Delegation also seemed to find him sympathetic and approachable. The Delegation's loquacious and self-conscious "card", the poet Isaev, spoke to me in terms of admiration, even adulation, for Gorbachev's "peasant simplicity, unaffectedness and closeness to people", his "wisdom even more than his brain". His Delegation as a whole seemed to have easy access to him and to be prepared to confide in him. Their attitude, though one of natural deference and admiration, was nothing approaching awe. He not infrequently gave members of his team the floor to speak on subjects close to themselves. He was never seen to give himself airs, "pull rank" or reprimand them (not even the embarrassingly florid Isaev nor the miner, Strelchenko, who worked himself into a shouting militaristic rage at the Speaker's dinner). He was attentive to others' needs (sympathising with his interpreters as they worked, un-fed, through his mealtime conversations).

10. Gorbachev displayed generally during the visit the kind of unostentatious personal magnetism and political soundness of touch which, were he a Western politician, would swing many voters behind him. He handled the British media like a "natural" - with patience, decisiveness and winning touches of humour. I saw no signs of vanity in him. There is certainly some steel behind the surface smoothness; some fire and deep convictions behind the "cool customer" exterior. There is a disarming directness in him, and some human sympathy along with evident drive, determination and national pride. He has strong nerves (and could even swap jokes just before his departure from Edinburgh, about doctors and death, though he had only just broken the news of Ustinov's demise to his hosts). I am sure he could be utterly ruthless if necessary.

11. What these qualities and the others described above will do for him in the Soviet political arena, it is hard to predict. If the Soviet Union one day needs the kind of leader who, like a General on the eve of battle, can put new heart into his troops simply by going quietly and reassuringly among them, then Gorbachev could be their man. In this event the West would need to recall not only Gorbachev's best behaviour but also those moments when the urbane mask slipped. The combination of cleverness, modern-mindedness, Slav nationalism, energy, charm, self-assurance and single-mindedness would make him at worst a formidable adversary and at best an interlocutor to be treated with the utmost respect and circumspection.

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K.A. Bishop
3 January 1985

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Note for file

Chequers - Gorbachev's Visit

A.P. Khakhulin described in the programme as "senior aide" remained in Chequers during the visit of Mr. and Mrs. Gorbachev. He accompanied them to their bedroom on arrival and also accompanied Mrs. Gorbachev when she visited the bedroom following her conducted tour of the house. During lunch he remained immediately outside the dining room.

He professed neither to speak nor to understand English. I was not entirely convinced that this was not a pose.

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