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SOVIET UNION:

Pm's visit: Jun. 1987

PRIME MINISTER'S
PERSONAL MESSAGE
SERIAL No. T 58/87

CAB/WTE 001

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FM CABINET OFFICE LONDON
TO THE WHITE HOUSE
BT

S E C R E T

MESSAGE FROM THE PRIME MINISTER
TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.

DEAR RON,

I HAVE JUST GOT BACK FROM MY VISIT TO THE SOVIET UNION AND WANT TO LET YOU KNOW STRAIGHTAWAY HOW IT WENT. GEOFFREY HOWE WILL BE GIVING GEORGE SHULTZ A DETAILED ACCOUNT NEXT WEEK.

I FOUND MR. GORBACHEV IN VERY VIGOROUS AND ROBUST FORM. ALTHOUGH IT IS ALWAYS DIFFICULT TO TELL IN THE SOVIET SYSTEM, HE GAVE EVERY APPEARANCE OF BEING FULLY IN CHARGE, WITHOUT ANY NEED TO CONSULT HIS COLLEAGUES. HE SPOKE WITH THE UTMOST CONFIDENCE AND ASSURANCE. IT WAS NOTICEABLE HOW RYZHKOV DEFERRED TO HIM. DESPITE SOME CONTROVERSY OVER HIS REFORM AND RESTRUCTURING PLANS, I WOULD SAY THAT HE IS VERY FIRMLY IN THE SADDLE.

I WAS VERY STRUCK BY THE PROMINENT ROLE WHICH MRS. GORBACHEV PLAYED IN THE VISIT. BOTH OF THEM WENT TO GREAT LENGTHS TO BE GOOD HOSTS. WE ENDED WITH A VERY INFORMAL SUPPER PARTY ATTENDED ONLY BY MR AND MRS RYZHKOV AT WHICH WE TALKED VERY FREELY.

GORBACHEV IS DETERMINED TO PRESS AHEAD WITH HIS PLANS FOR INTERNAL REFORM. HE APPEARS TO REALISE THAT IT WILL TAKE TIME TO GET RESULTS IN THE ECONOMY: HE SPOKE OF 5-7 YEARS BEING NEEDED. HE TALKS ABOUT HIS AIMS WITH ALMOST MESSIANIC FERVOUR. AT OUR PRIVATE SUPPER HE SPECULATED FREELY ABOUT SUCH LONG-TERM IDEAS AS PAYING PEOPLE MORE AND THEN CHARGING THEM SOMETHING FOR SERVICES LIKE HEALTH AND EDUCATION. HE TALKS ABOUT THE NEED FOR INCENTIVES. HE CLEARLY RECOGNISES WHAT A POOR STATE THE SOVIET ECONOMY IS IN. BUT SOME OF HIS IDEAS APPEAR SIMPLISTIC. ONE CANNOT YET SEE QUITE HOW THEY WILL DELIVER INCREASING PROSPERITY ON THE SCALE HE WANTS AND NEEDS. I DOUBT THAT HE IS READY TO TAKE THE SORT OF STEPS NEEDED FOR REALLY FUNDAMENTAL REFORM. EVEN SO, I AM FIRMLY CONVINCED THAT IT IS IN OUR INTEREST TO ENCOURAGE HIM, ESPECIALLY IN HIS ENDEAVOURS TO CREATE A WHICH WOULD BE...

MY TALKS WITH GORBACHEV LASTED SOME 12 HOURS. HE HIMSELF DESCRIBED THEM AS HAVING BEEN SOMEWHAT TURBULENT BUT HAVING GREAT CLARITY. WHAT STRUCK ME MOST WAS THAT, HOWEVER SOPHISTICATED GORBACHEV AND HIS SENIOR COLLEAGUES MAY BE BY COMPARISON WITH PREVIOUS GENERATIONS OF SOVIET LEADERS, THEY STILL HARBOUR AN EXTRAORDINARY DEGREE OF MISCONCEPTION AND MISINFORMATION ABOUT WESTERN LIFE AND VALUES. IF EVER I HAD ANY DOUBTS WHETHER GORBACHEV IS A TRUE 'BELIEVER' IN THE COMMUNIST SYSTEM, MY TALKS WITH HIM DISPELLED THEM. I TRIED TO SHOW HIM A LESS DISTORTED VIEW OF INTERNATIONAL REALITIES, SPELLING OUT WITH COMPLETE CANDOUR THE REASONS FOR THE WEST'S APPREHENSIONS ABOUT SOVIET POLICIES AND INTENTIONS. I TOLD HIM THAT WHILE WE WELCOMED HIS COMMITMENT TO INTERNAL REFORM, WE STILL AWAITED SIGNS OF CHANGE IN SOVIET EXTERNAL POLICIES...HE DID AT LEAST CLAIM THAT THE AIM OF EXTENDING COMMUNIST DOMINATION THROUGHOUT THE WORLD WAS ONLY A SCIENTIFIC CONCEPT OF NO PRACTICAL RELEVANCE TO SOVIET POLICIES.

ON ARMS CONTROL I ENDURED A LONG LAMENT ABOUT HOW THE WEST RESPONDED TO SOVIET INITIATIVES BY CREATING NEW LINKAGES AND CONDITIONS. BUT I BELIEVE THAT I WAS ABLE TO MOVE HIM TOWARDS ACCEPTANCE IN PRACTICE OF THE STEP BY STEP APPROACH WHICH WE AGREED AT CAMP DAVID LAST YEAR. HE IS KEEN TO COMPLETE AN INF AGREEMENT AND ACCEPTS THAT IT MUST INCLUDE CONSTRAINTS ON SHORTER-RANGE SYSTEMS, ALTHOUGH HE IS NOT PREPARED TO ACCEPT A WESTERN RIGHT TO MATCH SOVIET LEVELS (WHICH I SAID WAS A KEY POINT). HE ALSO OBJECTS TO THE PLANS TO DOWNGRADE PERSHING IIS TO PERSHING IS. HE PROFESSED WILLINGNESS TO WITHDRAW THE SS22S AND SS23S FROM EUROPE AND 'DESTROY THEM IN FRONT OF THE TELEVISION CAMERAS.' HE ACCEPTS THAT THERE SHOULD BE IMMEDIATE FOLLOW-ON NEGOTIATIONS ON SHORT-RANGE WEAPONS, BUT INSISTS THAT THESE SHOULD INCLUDE U S FORWARD-BASED SYSTEMS, INCLUDING THE DUAL-CAPABLE AIRCRAFT. I REMINDED HIM THAT THE SOVIET UNION HAD FAR MORE AIRCRAFT IN THIS CATEGORY. HIS AIM IS PATENTLY THE DENUCLEARISATION OF EUROPE. I LEFT HIM IN NO DOUBT THAT I WOULD NEVER ACCEPT THIS.

THESE ARE POINTS WHICH YOUR NEGOTIATIONS WILL HAVE TO PURSUE IN GENEVA. BUT HE SEEMS GENUINELY ANXIOUS TO HAVE AN AGREEMENT WHICH HE CAN PRESENT AS A CONCRETE ACHIEVEMENT FOR HIS NEW APPROACH. I WOULD THINK THAT THERE IS A PRETTY REASONABLE PROSPECT OF GETTING SUCH AN AGREEMENT WHICH MEETS OUR REQUIREMENTS BY THE END OF THIS YEAR.

HE ALSO SEEMS READY TO MAKE PROGRESS TOWARDS AGREEMENT ON CHEMICAL WEAPONS, ALTHOUGH I REALISE THAT THIS MAY IN PART BE TACTICAL BECAUSE OF SOVIET FEARS THAT THE UNITED STATES WILL RESUME PRODUCTION OF SUCH WEAPONS. BUT HE WAS VERY MUCH TOUGHER ON THE LINK BETWEEN START AND SDI. I PUT TO HIM MY IDEAS ON GREATER PREDICTABILITY. HE DESCRIBED THEM AS AN INTERESTING, PRACTICAL PROPOSAL BUT GAVE NO SIGN OF FLEXIBILITY. ALTHOUGH HE SUBSCRIBES TO THE NEED FOR EARLY NEGOTIATIONS TO REDUCE CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS HE TRIES TO DENY THAT THERE IS AN IMBALANCE IN THE SOVIET UNION'S FAVOUR. THIS DOES NOT AUGUR WELL FOR SERIOUS DISCUSSIONS.

I DETECTED LITTLE SIGN OF NEW THINKING ON AFGHANISTAN. HE AND HIS COLLEAGUES ARE CLEARLY MUCH EXERCISED ABOUT THE PROBLEM AND ARE THRASHING AROUND LOOKING FOR A WAY OUT. BUT THEY ARE STILL NOT READY TO ACCEPT THAT THE PRESENT REGIME IS NOT AN ADEQUATE BASIS FOR POLITICAL RECONCILIATION.

HE OBJECTED STRONGLY TO MY RAISING HUMAN RIGHTS, BUT NEVERTHELESS GAVE SOME QUITE USEFUL ASSURANCES ABOUT THE TREATMENT OF INDIVIDUAL CASES. MY FEELING IS THAT WE SHALL SEE SOME PROGRESS, ALBEIT SLOW, ON THIS FRONT. THE VISIT WAS VERY WELL WORTHWHILE ON AT LEAST THREE COUNTS:

- GORBACHEV NEEDS TO BE TOLD IN PLAIN, UNVARNISHED TERMS WHAT THE WESTERN VIEWPOINT IS. AND HE WAS. IT WAS INTERESTING THAT HE DID NOT ALLOW MY FRANKNESS TO AFFECT OUR PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP. I WAS ALSO ABLE TO GET OUR POINT OF VIEW ACROSS TO A MUCH WIDER AUDIENCE ON SOVIET TELEVISION. I WAS INTERVIEWED FOR SOME 50 MINUTES AND EVERY WORD WAS TRANSMITTED, EVEN THOUGH I MADE SOME VERY EXPLICIT COMMENTS ABOUT THE SOVIET SYSTEM AND THEIR POLICIES.

- WE HAVE AN INTEREST IN SUPPORTING HIS REFORM POLICIES, EVEN IF THEIR RESULTS ARE MODEST. AS SAKHAROV HAS SAID, AN OPEN SOCIETY IS SAFER FOR ITS NEIGHBOURS. WE SHOULD PUSH GORBACHEV TO RECOGNISE THAT.

- THE RESPONSE OF THE RUSSIAN PEOPLE WAS REMARKABLE ON MY WALKABOUTS IN MOSCOW, ZAGORSK AND TBILISI. THERE IS CLEARLY A DEEP LONGING FOR CONTACT WITH THE WEST. WE SHOULD TAKE EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO EXPLOIT GLASNOST TO MAKE OURSELVES AND OUR SOCIETIES BETTER KNOWN TO THEM.

I HOPE THAT YOU WILL HOLD THIS INFORMATION CLOSELY. I LOOK FORWARD TO DISCUSSING THESE MATTERS MORE FULLY WITH YOU WHEN WE NEXT MEET.

WARM REGARDS,
YOURS, MARGARET.

BT