

12 November 1987

The Hoover Institution
Stanford University
California 94305

Dear Prime Minister,

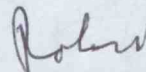
I'm enclosing a note on the political position, and possibilities, in the near Soviet future -- which seem very volatile indeed. (I've been having a lot of close contacts lately.)

A Washington scholar who was in Moscow just after your television interview was just telling me that all the taxi-drivers and so on he talked to were enthusiastic about the "Zheleznaya Ledi" - (Iron Lady). With them it was not so much the points you made, with the exception of your "grown-up", non-propaganda-cliche treatment of nuclear weapons: what they loved was your answering back, and flattening, the official spokesmen -- something most Muscovites have dreamt of but never expected to see!

The American political scene is pretty volatile too. The Republicans are again ahead, assuming the economy holds up. And Bush, after a slump, is again favourite, with Dole a close runner-up. The Democrats are, as you know, in disarray. All the candidates so far are terrible; even Gore, whom I have come across, only seems to be taking a sounder line on some points for tactical reasons. (Senator Bradley, if he could run, would be excellent - probably as good as any Republican on basic foreign policy.)

Warmest regards, as ever, and to Denis, and
from Liddie,

yours sincerely



Robert Conquest

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10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister

A further analysis of
Soviet developments from
Robert Conquest. A useful
antidote to the views of
those who see Gorbachev
as the great white hope
of western liberal democracy;
but probably a shade
over-cautious.

Robert is over here
next week, but I think you
are probably too busy to
see him this time. I will
have a talk. **MI** CDP

Soviet Political Urgencies

In the Soviet Union events are moving fast. Or rather, political tensions seem to be approaching some sort of crisis. The last few months have notably, though not yet totally, clarified the position.

First, Gorbachev's own political stance has fully declared itself. He has lately spoken time and time again, at length, and far beyond the ordinary call of Soviet piety, about Lenin and Lenin's continual influence on everything he does.

In particular, he makes it clear that he sees himself as, in a sense, another Lenin. That is to say, he looks back in Lenin's 1921 decision to abandon crash-programme Communism for the New Economic Policy as his model. Not that he wants anything like NEP, with its return to an independent peasantry and a market system. The parallel is rather that his aim is, like Lenin's, to save the system and to do so by what may be seen as moves unacceptable from the point of view of those concerned with strict party dogma. Lenin wrote of the necessity never to compromise on essentials, but to exercise careful judgement on the permissible extent of retreat and manoeuvre. The key was the preservation, or even strengthening, of the party's grip on all the key points of power and of administration.

Gorbachev's problem is, of course, that he is nowhere

near achieving Lenin's ascendancy in the Party and State. And it is also true that the Soviet state in 1921 was within months of total collapse, and the urgency of the situation was obvious, while today the threat is not so immediate, and is anyhow only clear to a minority. Moreover, it was physically quite easy to instal NEP: but Gorbachevite 'reconstruction' is immensely difficult.

On the Stalin issue, which has become a main political battleground between the factions, Gorbachev has also staked out a clear position. He wishes to air, and to disavow, Stalin's crimes, or at least those committed against the Party, the Army and the intellectuals; and to provide the USSR with a credible, even if not entirely true, past. But it is only these Stalinist aberrations that he wishes to disavow. The Stalin years are particularly revolting pages in the Soviet record. But the rest of it is bad enough. And Gorbachev strongly asserts the correctness of the Lenin dictatorship, the destruction of the independent peasantry, and the "building of socialism" during Stalin's time -- bar a few "errors" and "shortcomings".

Gorbachevian 'glasnost' has permitted many facts about history and society to emerge But at no point has there been the minimal toleration of the ideas of pluralist democracy, or of self-determination for the minorities; or indeed, of any unorthodox view. The disputes and revelations are entirely within the system.

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Second, the matter of the direction of Russian nationalist forces is now also better defined. It is not merely a matter of crackpot sects like Pamyat. Some of the best writers still in the USSR are among the Russian nationalists. Over the past few years they had been the core of the anti-apparatchik ecological and conservationist lobby, opposing big Party-style schemes like the diversion of the Siberian rivers, and writing about the horrors of collectivisation and of the modern Soviet village.

They are now again in the arena; and this time the more extreme of them like Belov serve up the Jewish-Freemason plot notion, while even more moderate ones, like Rasputin, oppose liberalisation and Westernisation. They are also against the Leninist idea of the eventual merging of nations. In this they have been joined by a number of Ukrainian, Azeri and other writers, taking the line that Gorbachev's continued insistence on a supranational Party and State destroys their background.

What of the effect, of Russian nationalism in particular, on the Party and the masses? The crudity of the semi-fascist stuff released by glasnost is quite extraordinary. A Soviet writer was saying that people, hearing propaganda about the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, often believe it, since the public has had none of the inoculation against that sort of thing provided by a long period with a free press and academy. One liberal I spoke to the other day said that what he feared most was "the People". Liberalism and Westernisation, in fact, appeal largely to a middle-class intelligentsia, and not

to all of them.

At any rate, a curious political line-up has emerged. In effect, to put it crudely, an alliance of Stalinists and nationalists faces an alliance of Leninists and liberals. Neither is a particularly natural concatenation.

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Thirdly, the political struggle proper within the upper strata of the Party has become very sharp. Gorbachev has so far failed to make headway against his opponents. He has not yet got an adequate grip on the Party, and may never get it. It has been made clear that early in 1988 an attempt will be made to transform the provincial and republican leaderships, with a view to securing a Gorbachevite majority at the Party Conference in June of that year. This will naturally be opposed and as far as possible prevented by the current sceptical majority of the Central Committee, and their friends in the Politburo.

Gorbachev cannot put his 'reconstruction' policies into effect until he has a solid grip on power.

Broadly speaking, he has two choices. He can attempt to achieve undoubted supremacy, and force his policies through. Or he can hope to drag or chivvy his colleagues, some even more reluctantly than others, in the new direction. The trouble with the first choice is that it means a hard and uncertain battle. The trouble with the second choice is that not only resistance but also mere inertia make it almost certain that the policies

will be both diluted and postponed. But half measures won't work. Even Gorbachev's maximum programme hardly seems likely to do more than patch things up for the time being, unless new forces emerge to push it a good deal further. But even in effecting reconstruction as envisaged at present, one of Gorbachev's followers has said "You can't cross an abyss in two jumps".

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In this perspective, international affairs do not seem to play a major part. Gorbachev can indeed blame his predecessors (and has done so, at least implicitly) for the expensive failure of SS20 deployment, and for the Afghan war. He can claim more flexible and useful tactics in the exploitation of Western opinion. But there is little sign of any but tactical change in foreign policy. For some years there has been less emphasis on (and investment in) the navy, and in overseas commitments, but not the abandonment of earlier gains. No substantial cutback in military resources has yet been made, though Gorbachev has spoken of such a prospect.

Perhaps the silliest of Western reactions is the cry, heard in sanguine or left-wing circles, that the whole international scene has changed "in the era of glasnost". Though glasnost is a striking move by former Soviet standards, it hardly even begins to satisfy the Helsinki criteria for a peaceable world order.

As a subsidiary point, or postscript, we should note a

new, and so far minor, element: that glasnost has allowed the military papers to fill their columns with complaints from the Soviet officer corps about their living conditions -- in particular housing and educational facilities for their children, It is clear that, unless of high seniority, the country's regular officers regard themselves as badly done by, and that this has now become corporately conscious through reading the military press. In the long run, this may imply (for example) unreliability in coping with civilian riots and demonstrations, and so be a factor in any true crises.