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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

17 March 1989

Dear Charles,

Mr Gorbachev's Interview with the Times

As agreed with you, the Head of our Soviet Department has spoken twice to the Soviet Embassy to make it clear that the Prime Minister agreed to be interviewed by Izvestia on the understanding that Mr Gorbachev would be interviewed by a leading British newspaper. The Izvestia interview would be in question if Mr Gorbachev's interview fell away. Due note was taken and the only comment was to the effect that Mr Gorbachev would not want in an interview to anticipate what he would say in his Guildhall speech.

The Soviet MFA have now linked Mr Gorbachev's backing down with the recent Times cartoon of Lenin with a swastika (see attached copy telegram). We cannot force Mr Gorbachev to be interviewed by a specific British newspaper. It would be silly of the Russians to take this much offence at a cartoon but that is their affair. However, the main point remains that the Prime Minister agreed to be interviewed on the understanding that there would be a reciprocal British interview of Mr Gorbachev. You may therefore like to lean on Mr Kossov, pointing out that the cartoon affair seems a rather flimsy excuse for backing down and making it clear that we still expect a leading British newspaper to be given an interview before the visit and that the Izvestia interview scheduled for 22 March will otherwise be in question. Please let me know if you agree so that Moscow can be instructed similarly.

Yours ever,

(R H T Gozney)
Private Secretary

C D Powell Esq
10 Downing Street

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