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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

8 July 1983

Dear Brian,

Chancellor Kohl: Visit to Moscow

Chancellor Kohl rang the Prime Minister this morning and gave her an extended account, lasting for some thirty minutes, of his visit to Moscow. I should be grateful if those to whom this letter is copied would ensure that it is not copied beyond Private Offices and that only those who have an essential operational need to know of its contents are given some account of them.

Chancellor Kohl said that on the morning before he arrived Gromyko had asked the German Ambassador to call and had explained that for reasons of health Andropov could not meet the Chancellor on that day. This was not a political excuse. The Russians were clearly very embarrassed. This change of plan had had the advantage that on the next day the two had been able to talk in a favourable overall situation and atmosphere. Andropov had tried to dispel the impression that he was not able to do business.

On the Tuesday morning the Chancellor and Mr. Andropov had had a private conversation, with only interpreters present, lasting for nearly two hours. In the afternoon they had been joined by Mr. Genscher and Mr. Gromyko.

As to Andropov's personality and health, it was clear that on the previous Sunday he had suffered from a very serious kidney problem. Given that background, he had been in fairly good shape on the Tuesday. While the Chancellor laid no claim to medical knowledge his impression was that Andropov suffered from grave kidney difficulties and that this had an impact on his blood circulation. This was evident from the way he moved. When he rose from his chair he walked for only a few steps and clearly found difficulty in walking. In advance of his visit, the Chancellor had been briefed by doctors especially on Parkinson's disease. But he had detected in Andropov none of the classical symptoms of this disease. He had occasional problems with his hands but this was not a permanent difficulty.

/ Andropov

Andropov in discussion was absolutely brilliant - very logical and very skilful in presenting and using his arguments. He was imbued with natural authority and was clearly in charge. This was reflected in the attitude towards him of Gromyko, Ustinov and Tikhonov. Andropov was very strong-willed and this was to be felt in the intensive way in which he looked at people. He reminded one of the traditional German concept of the Head of a Grammar School. But he had a sense of humour and was able to laugh warmly.

The talks had been very plain and direct. They were also very tough on substance but the tone had never been offensive. Given the background of firmness, an interesting feature of the talks was the desire of each side to invite understanding of its position. The Russians kept saying that they did not want to drive a wedge between the allies. They made some anti-American remarks but when the Chancellor immediately countered these his answers were accepted. They had made no negative remarks about the Europeans and were very well aware that Europe was sticking firmly and closely together at present. The Russians seemed to have the clear impression that the Alliance was in good shape on defence matters. They got the message that deployment would go ahead. Nor did they expect demonstrations to change that prospect. But they kept saying that this was not the right approach.

On INF, he would not say very much but the Russians had used the old argument about British and French strategic deterrents and had attacked the German arguments in explanation of our position very strongly. This matter had been brought up again and again. He had told Ustinov that in reality this was for the Russians only a tactical argument - what mattered to them in fact was the deployment of Pershing.

As for the future, he thought that the Russians would continue to probe the Western position at Geneva and might wish to make new proposals. Andropov was ready and wanted to meet Reagan, not in the very near future but in the foreseeable future. Nor did he demur when the Chancellor had said that he should expect Reagan to be in office for another term. If there were no results at Geneva, they would raise a clamour when we started deployment. They in turn would deploy weapons in the GDR, Poland and Czechoslovakia. It was his firm impression (though he had no evidence of this) that the Russians did not want a Cold War. In the medium term they wanted to return to sensible and reasonable relations. They wanted a Conference to follow up Madrid so there was a prospect of a negotiating forum for the future.

This desire for reasonable relations was also reflected in the exchanges about economic matters. They had a concept of co-operation with the West for the remainder of this century. The whole leadership, because of its age, was in a static frame of mind. We should take comfort from that fact.

He had had a separate meeting with Ustinov, who had been assisted by the Chief of the General Staff, the latter's deputy and two other officers. This had been an unusual conversation - very direct with little diplomatic finesse. But on account of its frankness it had been very helpful. Ustinov was a bear of a man. He could have been a spokesman for the German farmers. There

was an element of brutality in him but, like German farmers, he wanted to lead a good life and let others do so. Good eating and drinking were part of his way of life. He was very well informed and very much aware of his power.

All these military figures formed a caste. In discussion they used all the usual propaganda about the evils of NATO. But there had been one nuance. When he had told Andropov that the West would not move unless the Soviet Union showed flexibility, Andropov had not demurred. But the military had taken the line that they had made their offer and could not do more. So their game of poker was a tougher one. But it was not his impression that the military would have the last word.

Tikhonov was an economic expert and very well informed on economic matters. He had been interested to hear of the discussions of the European Council at Stuttgart. But when defence matters were raised, it became obvious that these were not his first subject.

Gromyko still had considerable authority. He was "Mr. Foreign Policy". But it was very clear that Andropov was in command.

The visit had been a working visit. He had not intended to negotiate on anything. The Russians were now in no doubt as to what the West would do. But his clear feeling was that, even after deployment, the Russians wanted life to go on. It was obvious that the Soviet Union was faced with enormous problems in the economic area. When he had raised Afghanistan and Poland they had not countered very vigorously. They seemed embarrassed by discussion of Poland and wanted to leave the subject quickly.

As regards East Germany, the Russians, because of economic difficulties and their intention to deploy SS 20s in the GDR, wished to keep open for the East Germans some freedom of movement.

They had been very interested in discovering how the Europeans dealt with each other and how they communicated. The Chancellor had said that the Europeans had their problems but their co-operation was very friendly. They had listened attentively when he had said that he would be talking to the Prime Minister, President Mitterrand and Mr. Lubbers today and that Genscher would be going to Washington over the weekend. He drew the conclusion that the more clearly we demonstrated our solidarity and co-operation, the better would be our position vis-a-vis the Soviet Union.

The Prime Minister said she wished to thank the Chancellor warmly for his brilliant account. She was very grateful for the trouble he had taken to keep us informed. She had been especially interested in the Chancellor's impressions of Andropov and the people around him. She looked forward to further detailed discussion when they next met.

Meanwhile she had one comment. It seemed to her that the stated wish of the Russians for co-operation and good relations was to some extent at odds with their position on defence. If they really wanted co-operation, it would be easy for them not to deploy SS 20s in Eastern Europe. Her impression was that the INF

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negotiations were deadlocked. We should have to think further about this situation.

Chancellor Kohl said that deployment of SS 20s in the GDR was, though the Russians would never admit it, part of their policy of domesticating the GDR. But he had no doubt that for them Pershing was the dominant subject and on that matter the Soviet position was no longer rational. Once Pershing was deployed he believed that the Russians might be ready to make some move in return for a certain reduction in the numbers of Pershings deployed.

I am copying this letter to Richard Mottram (Ministry of Defence) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

Yours ever

John Loh

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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