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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: FRANK C. CARCUCCI

SUBJECT: Mrs. Thatcher's View of Gorbachev --  
(Weekend Reading)

Prime Minister Thatcher has developed a somewhat paradoxical view of Gorbachev. She has written you about it on her return from a highly successful Moscow visit (see Tab A) and has aired it in press interviews. Given her intense interest in Soviet internal developments and their possible meaning for East-West relations, she will probably address them during her visit here next week.

On one hand, Mrs. Thatcher sees Gorbachev as sincerely aiming to revitalize Soviet society through reforms, that his efforts are politically courageous, and that they deserve encouragement from the West. Underlying this view is a conviction, which you share, that a truly more productive and prosperous USSR has to be a more liberal and decentralized system, which could be a more congenial neighbor in world affairs.

On the other hand, the Prime Minister sees Gorbachev as a very skillful and even dangerous challenger of the West. He is, in her eyes, a convinced communist, not a democrat of any stripe. He is ignorant and naive about the West, despite his more sophisticated demeanor; and he needs to be told bluntly where our values and goals differ from his. Very perceptively, she also notes in Gorbachev a certain naivete about his own system and his plans for reform. Because he is a convinced communist, he cannot really see the ultimate source of his system's ills in statism, collectivism, and party dictatorship. Nor can he invent a complete plan for reform; he must move step by step, by trial and error. His politics may be bold, even courageous; but he has no choice.

Mrs. Thatcher also notes that efforts at internal reform have, so far, not been accompanied by more than tactical reform in Soviet foreign policy. A striking case in point: The Soviet leaders who proclaim "new thinking" on foreign policy (such as Aleksandr Yakovlev, the new Politburo member and ideological mentor of Gorbachev) are also the authors of vicious anti-US disinformation, such as US government manufacture of AIDS.

Mrs. Thatcher's positive views on Gorbachev are no cause for quarrel. She asserts them in part for domestic reasons, in part because she has been greatly impressed by Gorbachev personally. But they raise two policy problems. First, by granting him the

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reputation of a true reformer, she helps make Gorbachev the media darling, especially in Europe, that she herself finds dangerous. Gorbachev may be or may become a real reformer, but he hasn't really earned this label fully. He has not yet moved beyond words, plans, and general decrees except in cultural/media liberalization, which is reversible. It would be well if Western publics heard more of the skepticism about his actual prospects for success that dominate the views of experienced Soviet watchers and, for that matter, most Soviet citizens.

Second, the Prime Minister's admonition that we encourage Gorbachev in his reform effort begs the question: How do we operationalize this without giving him dangerous, gratuitous, or at least premature concessions on security, human rights, or economic/technology issues? My answer would be as follows:

We give no concessions unless warranted by our own interests.

We safeguard the vitality of our own values and strengths. Throughout Russian history, the values and strengths of the West have been the primary source of any kind of reform in that country.

We make sure that our values are broadcast (literally by radio and all other means) into Soviet society so pressures for reform come from below.

We deny Moscow success in imposing control over other countries and challenge that control where it now exists, so that Kremlin rulers cannot use imperialism as a means to security and place in the world.

Finally, we can make clear that we applaud real reform in the USSR, reform that is truly liberalizing, democratizing, and conducive to the rule of law. We do not oppose it because we fear such reform would make the USSR stronger. Rather we believe true reform would make the USSR a better neighbor.

I doubt Prime Minister Thatcher would differ with any of this. And it is in fact what we are trying to do.

Attachment

Tab A Mrs. Thatcher's letter

Prepared by:  
Fritz W. Ermarth

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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 MUCH MORE OPEN SOCIETY. 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. IN MY 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 UNIONS FAVOUR. THIS DOES NOT BUDGE WELL FOR SERIOUS DISCUSSIONS.

DETECTED LITTLE SIGN OF NEW THINKING ON AFGHANISTAN. HE AND HIS COLLEAGUES ARE CLEARLY MUCH EXERCISED ABOUT THE PROBLEM AND ARE FRUSTRATING 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 ABOUTH 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 CASANOST TO MAKE OURSELVES AND OUR SOCIETIES BETTER KNOWN TO THEM.

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.

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