

November 3, 1988. Politburo.

Today is a historic day. After the planned Politburo, M.S. became more serious and clearly nervous, he began to speak on the subject that he “tried out” during his main talk three days ago with Shevardnadze, Yakovlev, Falin, and Dobrynin. This was about of his trip to the UN in December.

M.S.: Cdes. Ryzhkov and Maslukov, as well as other colleagues, are asking me a question. This question is also in the letters that I am receiving. Very recently, at a meeting with young Comsomols I once again came across this question: they asked me, why do we need such a big army? People have been troubled by this question for a long time.

We approached this theme at the XIX party conference. In the report, in the theses, and in the resolution we said that we need quality, not quantity.

Now the moment has come when we need to make a major decision. We are taking little steps, like the agreement to liquidate medium and short-range missiles [INF] and some other things. But that does not change the principal nature of the situation. E.A. comes across this every day... Today Shultz talked about it again. The military doctrine we announced differs from what we are actually doing in military building. If we publish how the matters stand, that we spend over twice as much as the US on military needs, if we let the scope of our expenses be known, all our new thinking and our new foreign policy will go to hell. Not one country in the world spends as much per capita on weapons as we do, except perhaps the developing nations that we are swamping with weapons and getting nothing in return.

We said that we are ready to publish data and we are pushing the Americans on this account, but if it really comes to that, what are we going to do? But that is not the main thing. We will not solve the *perestroika* objectives if we leave the army as it is: the best scientific-technical forces, the best production funds, reliable supplies... The little-Comsomols are right, why do we need such a big army?! Six million people! Somebody told me that they are offering to lower the conscription age to 17. (Maslyukov inserts a comment: Yagodin came to me with this proposal, but I refused to sign it). What are we doing? We are depleting our intellectual resources of their best young forces! Who is going to conduct *perestroika*? (Yazov: by November 9th I will present a proposal on all these questions... M.S. probably gave him an assignment immediately after the conversation).

In the GDR we have [stationed] a powerful group of armored forces, plus pontoon forces. When all this hangs over them, how can they believe that our doctrine is defensive?!

There is also the question of reducing (for now reducing) our presence in socialist countries. Today E.A. [Shevardnadze] told me about his talk with Grosz. Right now the issue is not very acute. But it could become severe under a situation like the one in Hungary right now. And then we won't be leaving voluntarily, we'll be driven out of there...Dmitriy Timofeevich! (Marshall Yazov) They say your troops are standing on a territory that contains a historical monument of world importance?

Yazov: The territory contains a famous church. A reconnaissance battalion and a medical battalion are stationed there, but we are already moving them.

M.S. Thank God! At least the monument is safe! (Laughter)

So comrades, we need to think through this issue and discuss it with our friends. I propose that the Defense Council considers everything. Then we will come back to this at the PB. Does anybody have any questions?

(Everybody nods)

Ryzhkov: (very tensely) I feel responsible to say that if we do not do this we will not achieve the XIII five-year-plan, and there can be no talk of a raise in the quality of life. Whatever government you place here, it will not resolve this problem [without reducing military spending].

M.S.: If we all agree and if we make some major decisions, then I plan to announce this in my speech at the UN.

Everybody: Yes, yes...

M.S.: This will make a great impression... after the agreement to liquidate middle and short-range missiles, and after Afghanistan, this action... the world will see that is not empty talk, these are policies. We will advance the entire process. I would put it this way: with all the significance this has for the impression in the world and for the advancement of our policy of peace, the most important aspect is still *perestroika*. Nikolai Ivanovich (Ryzhkov) is right: we will not succeed with *perestroika* without this action.

There is no question that we should be militarily powerful. But we should achieve our power through scientific advancement, through technology, through qualified cadres and modern organization of our troops. Planes, missiles... but not like Karmal who sucks us dry but doesn't produce results. We cannot be weak. This is the axiom. But we need to be powerful for security's sake, not for the purposes of intimidation.

M.S. also said that he is talking about unilateral reductions, not about the material that is going into the negotiations with the Americans and the mandate of Vienna meeting.

This will be the evidence that I was present at an event that may well take the second place of importance after the April of 1985.

Additionally, the PB discussed food supply to Moscow. On this count there was total mess and nonsense, both from Zaikov and Mesyats. We did not reach anything, even M.S. could not think of something.

There was also talk of "Memorial..."¹ Kapto already started "to act," he wrote a denunciation. But M.S. took the following approach: it's your own fault; you decided to create a memorial to the victims of Stalinism and once again nothing got done... So people decided to do it themselves, except now they have exceeded the limits... (Kapto is already charging it with the desire to become an "alternative political structure." M.S. stifled that idea and said—study it!)

We discussed Solzhenitsyn. Frolov, I, and Shakhnazarov write him (Gorbachev) a "protest" against Chebrikov and Medvedev's note, which says that "we should uphold the decree that strips him of his citizenship as a traitor of the Motherland..."

M.S. understood our point of view: yes, he is an enemy, irreconcilable and staunch. But he is an ideological enemy, and we do not try people for their beliefs in a legal state. So "think about it." The authors of the note sat there, steaming. Chebrikov

¹ A non-governmental organization formed in 1987. Memorial was established in order to find information and build a memorial to the victims of Stalinist repressions

tried to interject that “he did betray...” (i.e. there was an action). M.S. just hemmed at that.

[Source: Anatoly Chernyaev Diary Manuscript, donated to the National Security Archive
Translated by Anna Melyakova for the National Security Archive]