The Change to Engagement in Britain’s Cold War Policy:

The Origins of the Thatcher-Gorbachev Relationship

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The scale of change in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and in East-West relations in the second half of the 1980s was such that more startling things happened than the development of a good relationship between Margaret Thatcher and Mikhail Gorbachev. Yet, there was something remarkable about the transformation of the militantly anti-socialist Thatcher, Britain’s Conservative prime minister, into the strongest supporter—certainly among conservative politicians worldwide—of the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Few would have predicted that Thatcher would establish constructive and friendly relations with a Soviet leader and go on to support him in the corridors of power of Washington and Europe. Of course, Gorbachev was a very different kind of Soviet leader from any of his predecessors and one who radically redefined the meaning of socialism, abandoning Leninist orthodoxy. His conception of socialism became essentially social democratic,¹ which meant that his beliefs became strikingly similar to those at that time of Thatcher’s principal domestic opponents in the British Labour Party. Yet, whatever her dislike of socialism in any form, Thatcher did (if only reluctantly) recognize that social democracy was, indeed, democratic, and different in kind from Communist ideology and practice. That Gorbachev changed Soviet policy and ideology fundamentally goes some way to explaining the relationship, although it is notable that Thatcher began to speak up for Gorbachev internationally well before the fundamental changes were in evidence. From her first meeting with Gorbachev in December 1984, she found that he combined


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personal charm with an ability to argue without resort either to dogma or to a
script. No less important, however, for the development of the relationship,
and less well-known, is the fact that a shift in British policy toward the Soviet
Union and Eastern Europe was inaugurated by UK policymakers in September
1983, a time when Gorbachev was only a speck on their horizon. A
significant manifestation of this was a conscious effort to engage more actively
both with Communist leaders and with their societies.

The point at which this change in British policy took place was a two-day
seminar held at the prime minister’s country residence of Chequers on 8–9
September 1983. Its aims were ambitious—no less than “to consider the
Government’s strategy in international affairs with a view to establishing clear
aims for the next few years and considering practical action in furtherance of
those aims.” John Coles, the prime minister’s private secretary at the time (he
was succeeded by Charles Powell at the end of 1983) told the Foreign Office:
“By far the most important session in the Prime Minister’s eyes will be that on
East/West relations to which we are now devoting virtually the whole of 8
September. Mrs. Thatcher will expect the discussion paper or papers to ad-
dress fundamental questions.” The oral discussions at Chequers were impor-
tant in themselves. Of significance also, however, was the fact that the prime
minister’s convening of the seminar meant that the Foreign Office and the
Ministry of Defence had to consolidate their thinking on policy toward the
Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and submit proposals to Thatcher. Moreover,
the prime minister, who did not trust the Foreign Office as an institu-
tion, asked for papers from eight outside academic experts. The greater part of

2. During Margaret Thatcher’s years as prime minister, seminars of different kinds were held at
Chequers. The two seminars discussed in this article had an official status, with the Foreign Office as
well as the prime minister’s private office extensively involved in their preparation. There were other
Chequers seminars convened by the prime minister’s political allies such as those organized by Hugh
(Lord) Thomas, the chairman of the Centre for Policy Studies (launched by Sir Keith Joseph and Mar-
garet Thatcher as a radical Conservative think-tank in 1974). It is mainly that kind of seminar that is
described in George R. Urban, Diplomacy and Disillusion at the Court of Margaret Thatcher: An In-
sider’s View (London: Tauris, 1996). Many of the participants in the political rather than governmen-
tal seminars endeavored to pull the prime minister in a direction akin to that of the most hardline
members of the Reagan administration. The advice Thatcher received from them was substantially at
odds with the analyses presented at the official September 1983 Chequers seminar as well as at var-
iance with the advice of the Foreign Office.

3. Memorandum from John Coles, Private Secretary to the Prime Minister, to Brian Fall, Private Sec-
tary to the Foreign Secretary, 27 June 1983, Foreign Office Papers, RS013/1. In 2007 and early
2008 I was able to get this and other documents cited below declassified through the UK Freedom of
Information Act.

4. Memorandum from John Coles to Brian Fall, 30 June 1983, Foreign Office Papers RS013/1; emphasis in original.

5. I adopt the familiar term “Foreign Office” rather than the official title “Foreign and Common-
wealth Office” but use the abbreviation “FCO.” Similarly, I refer to the Secretary of State for Foreign
and Commonwealth Affairs and the Secretary of State for Defence by their more frequently used ti-
tles, “Foreign Secretary” and “Minister of Defence.”
the first day of the seminar consisted of discussion arising out of them. The substantial papers submitted by the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence; the letters with policy advice to the prime minister from Foreign Secretary Sir Geoffrey (now Lord) Howe and Minister of Defence Michael (now Lord) Heseltine; and the eight papers written by the academics, complete with the prime minister’s annotations of all of these documents, are now available for examination for the first time.6

The Chequers seminar of 8–9 September 1983 involved outside academic specialists on day one, with ministers and officials taking over later in the afternoon and continuing their discussions the next day. The examination of trends and possible developments in the Soviet Union—and, to a lesser extent, Eastern Europe—took place on the first day; the discussion on the second day focused on arms control and on the Middle East. The meeting with the outside specialists began at 9:00 a.m. and included a lunch, with further discussion, following which the prime minister sought the views of the academics on what could and should be done to promote change for the better in the Soviet Union. The proceedings involving the scholars lasted for more than six hours, which for the academics who took part seemed a gratifyingly large part of a prime minister’s (and other senior ministers’) day. In the morning seminar, the prime minister was flanked by Foreign Secretary Howe and Defence Minister Heseltine. Malcolm Rifkind, the minister of state at the Foreign Office (later, in John Major’s government, himself to become foreign secretary), also took part.7

The two-day event amounted to a substantial reexamination of the condition of Communist Europe and of Britain’s relations with and policy toward the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Some years later I asked Sir Anthony Parsons (who, along with Sir John Coles, had prepared the meeting) how he would rate its importance. He replied: “It changed British foreign policy.” More recently, that view was endorsed by Malcolm Rifkind.8 At a seminar marking the tenth anniversary on 8 September 1993, Sir Charles Powell (the private secretary to the prime minister from 1983 to 1991) described the

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6. In addition to using the annotated version of these papers and other related documents, I have been able to draw on the notes I took as a participant in the 1983 seminar and two further seminars with Prime Minister Thatcher on the Soviet Union—an informal small-group meeting at 10 Downing Street on the eve of Gorbachev’s December 1984 visit to Britain and a more formal Chequers seminar shortly before Thatcher made her 1987 visit to the Soviet Union.

7. Also on the government side of the table were Sir Antony Acland (permanent under-secretary of state at the FCO and head of the Diplomatic Service), Sir Anthony Parsons (the prime minister’s special adviser on foreign affairs, 1982–1983), Malcolm Mackintosh (the Soviet specialist within the Cabinet Office), Lord (Hugh) Thomas, Bryan Cartledge (assistant under-secretary at the FCO after serving as British ambassador to Hungary, 1980–1983), and John Coles (the prime minister’s private secretary).

1983 seminar convened by Thatcher as “one of the most influential meetings of her premiership.” He said that the prime minister had “learned about the power structure” in the Soviet Union, “about the people (especially Gorbachev),” and about “the need for broader contacts (she started with Hungary).”

As we shall see, Foreign Office officials at the time were inclined to play down any features in the scholars’ assessments that differed from their own. Thatcher, however, was more influenced by the academics, even when their views coincided with those of the Foreign Office, given her distrust of that government department. That the Chequers seminar inaugurated a change of government policy is made clear in the contemporary documents now available. The prime minister’s private secretary, John Coles, in a memorandum of 12 September 1983 to Howe’s private secretary, Brian Fall, wrote:

The question of whether or not the United Kingdom should seek increased contact, at higher levels, with the Soviet Union was discussed at length. It was agreed that the aim should be to build up contacts slowly over the next few years. There would be no public announcement of this change of policy.

In a further letter dated 13 September, Coles notes continuity in some of the other policy areas discussed at the Chequers 8–9 September meetings, but observes: “The conclusions of the meeting on East/West relations are in a different category in that they relate to the formulation of a new policy.”

The documents produced by the Foreign Office for the September 1983 seminar and personal communications sent by Howe and Heseltine to the prime minister in advance of that meeting favored greater dialogue with the countries of Communist Europe and, most notably, the Soviet Union. The substantial Foreign Office paper on “East-West Relations,” prepared by ministers and officials, was read and annotated by the prime minister. Unsurprisingly, the paper displayed no inking that change in the eastern half of the European continent was imminent. The summary of the conclusions, with which the paper opens, states: “Western leverage on the Soviet Union is not great. Eastern Europe may provide greater opportunities for influence. But in

9. From my brief notes of that meeting, a seminar mainly concerned with looking ahead to Russia in the remainder of the 1990s rather than back to the 1983 meeting. For an article on the 1993 seminar, with some observations also on the 1983 event, see Julian Bullard, “Judges of History in the Making,” The Independent, 20 October 1993, p. 18. Bullard describes the seminar of 1983 as “outstanding in content as well as result,” in contrast to a later Chequers seminar on Germany in 1990.

10. “Policy on East/West Relations,” Memorandum from John Coles to Brian Fall (FCO), 12 September 1983, Foreign Office Papers, RS013/2; emphasis added.

11. Memorandum from John Coles to Brian Fall, 13 September 1983, Foreign Office Papers, RS013/2; emphasis added.
both cases the process of change will be long term.” The Foreign Office concluded, nevertheless, that “the time is ripe for a more active policy aimed at ‘the gradual evolution of the Soviet system towards a more pluralistic political and economic system.’” The quotation seemed well chosen from a tactical point of view to appeal to the very pro-American prime minister, for it came from the U.S. secretary of state, George Shultz. As such, it did not reflect the view often attributed to the Reagan administration (especially in retrospect) of wanting to destroy the Soviet system in short order. The language, however, did not wholly appeal to Thatcher, who said at one point during the 1983 seminar that she did not like the term “pluralism,” describing it as “too academic.” In the document on East-West relations, the Foreign Office authors note that “the main means of assisting change in the Soviet Union is through the spread of information.” In a passage that was heavily underlined by the prime minister, they add: “KGB defectors have commented that informed questioning at factory and other meetings presents them with one of their most difficult problems.”

In one of the annexes to the document on East-West relations, the Foreign Office authors produced an “Action Programme,” which is included below as Appendix 1. Among the most important points in the program were the recommendations that the West should seek the pluralization of the Soviet system “as a conscious goal” and should adopt “a strong and active policy...
in Eastern Europe aimed at encouraging tendencies away from the Soviet Union.” Of special significance also was Recommendation 8, on which the foreign secretary and prime minister indeed followed through: “The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary should aim to meet all of his Eastern European opposite numbers during the course of this Government. The Prime Minister might consider a visit to Hungary.” Less than half a year later Thatcher flew to Budapest, and in 1985 alone Foreign Secretary Howe visited five East European countries. In Poland he met not only with General Wojciech Jaruzelski (who impressed him) but also with senior Solidarity supporters, and he placed flowers at the grave of Father Jerzy Popieluszko, who had been murdered by the Polish security police. Surrounded by a large crowd singing patriotic Polish songs and shouting “Viva Anglia!” Howe was rendered speechless as tears welled up in his eyes.

The main text of the FCO paper on East-West relations stressed the desirability of an increase in contacts with the Soviet Union: “At the political level, the meetings of senior ministers or heads of government expose their Soviet interlocutors to the sort of direct questioning and criticism which their own system is designed to prevent. Khrushchev’s and Brezhnev’s visits to the West made a profound impression on them both. Andropov has yet to set foot in a free Western country.” The document suggested that high-level contacts “present the West with opportunities for penetrating the secretive system of Soviet decision-making, assessing the relative strength of the various views and protagonists involved and thus reducing the chances of dangerous misunderstandings.” Doubtless, with President Ronald Reagan’s “evil empire” rhetoric (of earlier that same year) in mind, the FCO authors go on to observe:

Care also needs to be taken over public statements about the Soviet Union and its leaders. Direct criticism and straight talking in discussions are understood and accepted. But statements which disparage the Soviet state or its leaders provoke a strong emotional reaction based on an inferiority complex vis-à-vis the developed countries. This can complicate negotiations on specific issues for fear of loss of face should concessions need to be made.

The two senior ministers who attended the Chequers seminar, Howe and Heseltine, both showed themselves in advance of the meeting to be firmly in

17. “Hungary” was double-underlined by Thatcher on her copy of this document.
19. Ibid., p. 434.
20. The emphasis is in the original FCO “East-West Relations” document. Thatcher herself underlined the phrase “direct questioning and criticism” and the points about Nikita Khrushchev, Leonid Brezhnev, and Yurii Andropov.
21. Ibid., p. 25.
favor of more dialogue with the Soviet Union. In a three-page memorandum dated 1 September 1983 from Heseltine to the prime minister, the minister of defence wrote,

In the end we have to ask ourselves what really is the objective in British involvement in efforts to achieve arms control. Is it just cosmetic, as many of our domestic political opponents argue it is—something we do not out of conviction but because it is expected of us? Or are we genuinely trying to make the future safer than it will be if the present arms build-up continues in both East and West? However difficult it is to achieve I am convinced that the latter must be our objective. After all if we don’t insist on a positive role in this field who else do we expect to do the task for us? And that requires a greater understanding of the Soviet Union and its motives than we have now. I believe that achieving that understanding—and all that would flow from it—is in the end a task which only Ministers can accomplish.22

In the same memorandum Heseltine says that if “a more broadly based political dialogue with the Soviet Union were to begin, I for one would be very much in favour of it. One of the things that worries me most about the present security scene is the absence of such dialogue for which I think there can be no substitute if we are truly to get the measure of the Russians and be able to derive the right policies for dealing with them.”23

In a six-page memorandum to the prime minister, marked “Secret and Personal,” on 5 September 1983, Howe wholly concurred, writing:

If anyone at our meeting were to argue that the shooting down of the Korean airliner24 makes dialogue with the Russians impossible, or shows that it is useless, I should myself want to maintain the exact opposite, namely that this incident proves how dangerous is the state of affairs where the Soviet Union is seen by the rest of us as threatening, but evidently feels threatened itself, and where the two superpowers talk to each other more across the floor of the United Nations than they do on the Hot Line.25

22. “Britain and Arms Control,” Memorandum from Michael Heseltine to Prime Minister, Cabinet Office Papers, MO 11/9/4, 1 September 1983, p. 3.

23. Ibid.

24. This refers to Korean Airlines (KAL) flight 007, which had strayed over Soviet territory and was shot down by the Soviet military on 1 September 1983, leading to the deaths of all 269 people on board and a sharp increase in international tension.

25. Memorandum from Geoffrey Howe to the Prime Minister, 5 September 1983, “Strategy Meetings on Foreign Affairs and Defence,” Cabinet Office Papers, PM/83/65, p. 5. Following a meeting with Howe on 31 August, a first draft of this document was written by the head of the FCO Planning Staff, Pauline Neville-Jones. The draft was “somewhat rewritten” by Sir Julian Bullard, the deputy permanent under-secretary, on 2 September “to take account of (a) comments received from those to whom the earlier draft was copied, (b) the Korean airliner incident and (c) Mr Heseltine’s important minute to the Prime Minister of 1 September.” See “Strategy Meetings on Defence and Foreign Affairs,” Foreign Office Papers, RS 013/1, 1–2 September 1983.
Howe stated that the FCO paper on East-West relations “is the fruit of mature reflection among our best experts here and of discussion between myself, Malcolm Rifkind and my other colleagues.” He went on to argue that the government should “now increase the level and frequency of contact with the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries,” adding:

At the moment Chancellor Kohl is effectively the only top level Western leader in close and direct touch with the Russians. The French will always be idiosyncratic; while in the United States, where Reagan could have a tough race on his hands next year, the tendency will continue to be for the Administration to see East/West relations mainly in domestic political terms. Your own unique relationship with the President and your standing in Europe and elsewhere can, it seems to me, give Britain a voice in the Alliance which it badly needs at a time when the Soviet campaign against INF deployment is obviously entering a peak period.26

Thatcher herself devotes two-and-a-half pages of her memoirs to the 1983 Chequers seminar, although the perspective in the book is very much that of 1993 rather than ten years earlier.27 What the former prime minister includes in the memoirs does not always tally with her more modest expectations at the time, even though she was more open than most diplomats were to the idea of radical change in Communist countries.28 Neither in the government papers that have recently been released, nor in Thatcher’s notes on the 8–9 September papers, whether academic or governmental, is there any evidence for the retrospective claim that she was looking for an individual who could transform the Soviet system (“I spotted him because I was looking for someone like him”).29 The documentary evidence suggests that when she set in motion a process that led to Gorbachev’s acceptance of an invitation to visit Britain in December 1984 (before he became CPSU General Secretary), she did not believe that fundamental change in the Soviet system was imminent. However, Thatcher was quick to recognize Gorbachev’s distinctiveness

26. Ibid., pp. 4–5.
28. There is no doubt that Thatcher was interested in something more than business as usual. In a memorandum to Howe’s private secretary, Brian Fall, on 30 June 1983, under the title “International Affairs: Strategy Meetings,” John Coles wrote, with reference to the forthcoming Chequers seminar: “I do not think the Prime Minister would regard ‘firmness and dialogue’ as an aim but rather a means. She would be more inclined to see our objective in the long term as the replacement of Communist by democratic regimes. She would expect to see some analysis of our capacity, in conjunction with our allies, to achieve that objective. If the analysis shows that the achievement of such an aim lies at best a very long way in the future, the question will arise of how we can work towards it and what, meanwhile, our subsidiary aims should be. The Prime Minister has expressed to me some interest in devising a policy of weakening the links between the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe—perhaps that could be considered in one of your papers” (italics added).
29. Thatcher, Downing Street Years, p. 452.
when she first met him prior to his becoming Soviet leader. Moreover, during the early period of his tenure as General Secretary, when many prominent Western observers—including senior officials in the Reagan administration, and numerous conservative commentators on both sides of the Atlantic—were still dismissing the changes in the USSR as merely cosmetic, she realized that what Gorbachev was doing was of real political significance. In the course of 1984 both the prime minister’s office and the Foreign Office showed keen interest in encouraging a visit to Britain by Gorbachev. Both parts of the government, each of which would like to see itself as the prime mover, were in agreement about this, but none of the governmental papers prepared for or relating to the September 1983 seminar mentions the name of Gorbachev.

What Margaret Thatcher has to say in her memoirs about the September 1983 seminar is exclusively concerned with the contribution of the academicians; she disregards entirely the serious papers produced inside the government. Indeed, what comes out clearly in her discussion of the seminar is the more general point already noted—her deep distrust of the Foreign Office. She writes about “my decision to arrange a seminar at Chequers on Thursday 8 September 1983 to pick the brains of experts on the Soviet Union,” but she was dissatisfied with the list of proposed participants she received from the FCO. She goes on:

But instead of the best minds on the Soviet system I now found myself presented with a list of the best minds in the Foreign Office, which was not quite the same thing. I minuted on the original list of suggested participants:

This is NOT the way I want it. I am not interested in gathering in every junior minister, or everyone who has ever dealt with the subject at the FO. The FO must do their preparation before. I want also some people who have really studied Russia—the Russian mind—and who have had some experience of living there. More than half the people on the list know less than I do.30

All eight academic participants wrote brief (6- to 8-page) papers that were read in advance by Thatcher during her traditional August visit to Balmoral as guest of the Queen and by the other ministerial participants. Ignoring the longer papers produced by the FCO and by the Ministry of Defence, Thatcher says in her memoirs:

In fact, by the time the seminar went ahead I felt that we did have the right people and some first-class papers. The latter covered almost all of the factors we would have to take into account in the years ahead in dealing with the Soviets and their system. We discussed the Soviet economy, its technological inertia and the consequences of that, the impact of religious issues, Soviet military doctrine and expenditure on defence, and the benefits and costs to the Soviet Union of

their control over eastern Europe. The one issue which, in retrospect, we underestimated—though it figured briefly—was the nationality question, failure to solve which would ultimately lead to the break-up of the Soviet Union itself. Perhaps for me the most useful paper was the one which described and analysed the power structure of the Soviet state, and which put flesh on the bones of what I had already learnt in Opposition from Robert Conquest.31

**Introducing Gorbachev**

As the author of the last-mentioned paper, I will highlight here some elements that the prime minister picked up on. In a later section I will discuss salient points from the seven other papers. (The titles, sub-sections, and order of presentation of the papers are in Appendix 2.)32 In retrospect, it is clear that I erred on the side of caution in my written submission. I noted, however, that the CPSU “recruits a disproportionately large number of well-educated specialists into its ranks and this ‘party intelligentsia’ has grown both numerically and in importance in the post-Stalin era.” I mentioned that there were intellectuals who “are adept at putting forward reform proposals while abiding by the ‘rules of the game,’” and I raised, in a tentative way, the possibility of more far-reaching change:

That the party intelligentsia can play a decisive part in introducing not only piecemeal reform but also more fundamental change was demonstrated by the case of Czechoslovakia in the years 1963–68. The Soviet Union is a very different country with different historical traditions and it would be rash indeed to predict an early “Moscow Spring.” But in principle it is clear that a movement for democratising change can come from within a ruling Communist Party as well as through societal pressure. It would be carrying an historical and cultural determinism too far to say that this could never happen in the Soviet Union.33

I noted that “the major slowdown in Soviet economic growth” meant that “different ideas for the restructuring of the economy are now being put forward with a greater chance than hitherto of being taken seriously,” but that all Soviet leaders seek to preserve those features of the political system (including the “leading role” of the party, “democratic centralism” within the party, censorship, and

31. Ibid.
32. I kept all eight of the 1983 papers, but the copies I obtained from the Cabinet Office under the Freedom of Information Act have the considerable added value of the prime minister’s underlining of particular passages as well as her notes from the oral presentations on 8 September.
33. I have put in italics—which were not in the original—the passages underlined by Thatcher. (The one word that is underlined was rendered thus in my text.)
KGB surveillance) which they regard as safeguards of the stability of the Soviet state and bulwarks against political pluralism (for political pluralism they see as but a short step to disintegration and anarchy, a view which has much more plausibility in the case of the vast and multi-national Soviet state than it had in 1968 in Czechoslovakia).

I continued:

Andropov is trying to resolve the dilemma with a mixture of discipline and reform. So far, the tighter discipline has been more in evidence than the reform, but there are signs that Andropov realises that the visible hand of the police needs to be supplemented by the invisible hand of a reformed economic mechanism (offering its own financial sanctions as well as incentives) if the transition from the “extensive” to “intensive” stage of economic development is to be successfully accomplished.34

Turning, finally, to the succession to Andropov, in view of his “uncertain health,” I observed (wrongly, in the first case, as it turned out) that Konstantin “Chernenko (72 later this month) and [Viktor] Grishin (69 this month) have probably missed their chance.” In my final paragraph, I made a pitch for Gorbachev:

The two best-placed contenders are now Gorbachev (52) and [Grigorii] Romanov (60). Romanov, when he was Leningrad First Secretary, established a reputation as an efficient economic administrator, as a hard-liner in cultural matters, and for an extravagant life-style. Gorbachev, though the youngest member of the Politburo (which may tell against him with colleagues fearful of his introducing too rapid a generational change) has more experience in the Central Committee than Romanov. He is the best-educated member of the Politburo and probably the most open-minded. He might well be the most hopeful choice from the point of view both of Soviet citizens and the outside world, though no General Secretary will have a free hand and what is at issue is the style and nature of Soviet authoritarianism (either more benign and ameliorative or more Stalinist) rather than a transition to political pluralism. That is not in prospect for the foreseeable future. But the differences between living in the Soviet Union today and in Stalin’s time are far from insignificant and it would be a mistake to rule out the possibility, or to underestimate the importance, of further evolutionary change.35

Having raised earlier the theoretical possibility of a “Moscow Spring” analogous to the Prague Spring, I finished on a more skeptical note about something as radical as the development of political pluralism in the Soviet

34. The words “discipline” and “reform” were underlined by the prime minister.
35. The underlining is by Thatcher. The italics are not in the original. The passage I have italicized was not underlined by the prime minister—something that casts further doubt on the notion that she was already, prior to the Chequers seminar, looking for “someone like” Gorbachev.
Union “for the foreseeable future.” That was close to a universally held view in 1983—in the Soviet Union no less than in the West. However, what developed under Gorbachev’s leadership was nothing less than political pluralism—in both theory and practice. Gorbachev himself broke the taboo on using the term “pluralism” other than pejoratively when in 1987 he spoke favorably about “socialist pluralism” and by February 1990 endorsed “political pluralism.”36 Over-caution notwithstanding, I was, in the context of 1983, at the optimistic end of the spectrum of “experts” who evaluated the prospects for change in the USSR.

In my oral presentation at the September 1983 seminar I mentioned that reform-minded party members in the Soviet Union classified people into three groups—“reactionaries,” “conservatives,” and “progressives.” (These terms were written down by Prime Minister Thatcher in her half-page of notes on my oral remarks, including the points that “reactionaries” meant Stalinists and that the “conservatives” were probably in a majority.) I was more explicitly positive about Gorbachev than in the written paper. After I had spoken about him, the prime minister turned to Sir Geoffrey Howe and said: “Should we not invite Mr Gorbachev to Britain?” Howe concurred.37 (I knew more about Gorbachev than others did largely by a stroke of luck—my good relations with one of the leaders of the Prague Spring, Zdeněk Mlynář, who had been Gorbachev’s close friend when they studied together in the Law Faculty of Moscow State University from 1950 to 1955.38)

The possibility of inviting Gorbachev to Britain was not, however, reflected in any of the papers summarizing the results of the seminar. The Foreign Office’s “Action Programme,” attached to the FCO paper on East-West relations and written in advance of the seminar, listed as recommendation 3: “At the political level, the Prime Minister should adopt the objective of a meeting with Andropov. This should be prepared by a visit to the UK by [Andrei] Gromyko for talks with Sir G Howe.”39 In the margin next to the


38. See my “Introduction” to Mikhail Gorbachev and Zdeněk Mlynář, Conversations with Gorbachev: On Perestroika, the Prague Spring, and the Crossroads of Socialism, trans. by George Shriver (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. xiv, where I quote Mlynář as having described Gorbachev to me in June 1979 as “open-minded, intelligent, and anti-Stalinist.” Without citing Mlynář by name, I mentioned that view of Gorbachev in the oral discussion at Chequers on 8 September 1983.

39. For the “Action Programme,” see Appendix 1.
proposal for a meeting with Andropov, the prime minister wrote: “Where?”
In a letter dated 12 September 1983, John Coles, writing from the prime
minister’s office to Brian Fall in the Foreign Office, reported on the seminar
and mentioned that the participants spoke “both for and against a meeting
between the Prime Minister and Mr Andropov,” adding that the prime minis-
ter would not go to the Soviet Union for this purpose. Andropov would have
to come to the West for the first time in his life. Coles continues: “It might be
useful to arrange at the appropriate time for other senior members of the
Politbureau, particularly potential successors to Andropov, to visit London.
The Prime Minister would be prepared, in principle, to receive one or more
such visitors. This question should be further examined and recommenda-
tions made in due course.”

That is the closest the immediate documentary reaction to the Chequers
seminar comes to the matter of an invitation to Gorbachev. Evidently, despite
Thatcher’s off-the-cuff proposal on 8 September, there was a circumspect de-
sire for further reflection on when an invitation should be issued and to
whom.

**Invitation to Gorbachev**

One could reasonably argue that in late 1983 it would have been premature to
invite Gorbachev to Britain. He was at best number three in the Soviet hierar-
chy (after Andropov and Chernenko, the latter being second secretary) and
that is without taking account of the formidable and powerful figures of
Dmitrii Ustinov as defense minister and Andrei Gromyko as foreign minister.
However that may be, the main emphasis in the immediate aftermath of the
September 1983 seminar was on inviting Andropov rather than Gorbachev to
Britain.

Thatcher herself makes this point in her memoirs when she recounts how

41. I assume that when Margaret Thatcher in her memoirs identified my paper as “perhaps for me the
most useful,” she had, at least partly, in mind my positive references to Gorbachev, which I elaborated
in my oral presentation. I draw a similar conclusion from the invitation I later received to come to
10 Downing Street specifically to speak to the prime minister and foreign secretary about Gorbachev
on the evening before his arrival in Britain in December 1984. Within the Foreign Office the experts
on the Soviet Union also thought of Gorbachev and Romanov as likely contenders to become CPSU
General Secretary. Malcolm Rifkind first heard the name Gorbachev from Nigel Broomfield. The
FCO did not, however, bring Gorbachev to Thatcher’s attention. In the lead-up to the September
1983 seminar, their main concern was to establish the principle of the need for East-West dialogue.
Their subsequent desire to invite Gorbachev was based on the view that he was Chernenko’s likeliest
successor and on the advantage of his comparative youth rather than on knowledge of his reformist
disposition.
on 25 September 1983 she flew to Canada and had a meeting the next day with Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. This meeting came less than a month after the Soviet military had shot down a Korean airliner that had blundered into Soviet airspace. After a sideswipe at “liberal leftists” like Trudeau being “unable to grasp . . . that such acts of brutality as the shooting down of a civilian aircraft were by no means uncharacteristic of the communist system itself,” Thatcher observes that “most interesting for me was his impression of Mikhail Gorbachev, of whom I had heard but whom I did not yet know.”

She goes on:

Pierre Trudeau had found him sticking to the conventional line as regards the INF negotiations, but without the blinkered hostility which characterized the other Soviet leaders. Mr Gorbachev had apparently been prepared to argue and make at least verbal concessions. I did not at this time foresee the importance of Mr Gorbachev for the future. The conversation served mainly to confirm my view that we must persuade the new Soviet leader, Yuri Andropov, to visit the West. How were we to make a proper assessment of the Soviet leaders if we did not have personal contact with them? Still more important, how were we to persuade them to see further than their own propaganda if we never showed them what the West was really like?

From Canada, Thatcher flew to Washington for a meeting with President Reagan. They discussed “the strategy we should pursue towards the Soviet Union generally over the years ahead.” She adds in her memoirs: “I had been giving a good deal of thought to this matter and had discussed it with the experts at a Chequers seminar. I began by saying that we had to make the most accurate assessment of the Soviet system and the Soviet leadership—there was plenty of evidence available about both subjects—so as to establish a realistic relationship: whatever we thought of them, we all had to live on the same planet.”

This was the year in which Reagan had declared the Soviet Union to be an “evil empire.” In numerous parts of the Reagan administration (though not in the State Department), there seemed to be a strong feeling that the less contact with the Soviet Union, the better. This was also the year in which Reagan had announced his Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), which the FCO regarded not only as a distraction from serious arms control negotiations but...
also as an impediment to better East-West relations. Thatcher herself was skeptical about the feasibility of SDI and was concerned about its possible deleterious effect on nuclear deterrence. By the time Thatcher wrote her memoirs, she had decided that SDI had played a positive role vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, but when she visited Reagan at Camp David on 22 December 1984—in large part to report on Gorbachev’s visit to Britain, which had just taken place—she was quoted in the official transcript as saying: “Even if an SDI system proved 95 percent successful—a significant success rate—over 60 million people would still die from those weapons that got through. . . . We must emphasize that SDI is only a research program; and that our objective is both to maintain a military balance and to enhance, not weaken, deterrence.”

Part of the rationale for inviting a Soviet leader to Britain was that nearly 30 years had passed since the last such visit—the trip by Nikita Khrushchev (accompanied by Nikolai Bulganin) in April 1956—unless one counts the very brief stopover by the chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers Aleksei Kosygin in 1967. At that time Kosygin was undoubtedly an important figure in the Soviet hierarchy, but Leonid Brezhnev held the more powerful post of CPSU General Secretary. The last time a British prime minister had gone to Moscow for discussions was in February 1975 in the person of Harold Wilson.

The proposal to invite Andropov to Britain was stillborn because it soon became evident that he was too ill to travel anywhere. Instead, Thatcher ended up going to Moscow—her first visit to the USSR as prime minister—in February 1984 for Andropov’s funeral and met his ailing successor. There was a Russian joke at the time, alluding to Konstantin Chernenko’s evident physical frailty, about Thatcher phoning Reagan and saying: “You should have come for the funeral, Ron. They did it very well. I’m definitely coming back next year.” And come back she did in March 1985 for Chernenko’s obsequies, with the added incentive of reengaging with her interlocutor of three months earlier, who had just become leader of the Soviet Union.

Following the September 1983 Chequers seminar, it was government policy to have more high-level contact with the Soviet Union. If it had been left to the Foreign Office to decide, the government would have tried earlier to set up a meeting at the highest level. A number of senior FCO officials, in-

has pointed out, to put U.S.-Soviet relations on a more constructive footing. See Matlock, Reagan and Gorbachev, pp. 52–53, 74–77.

cluding Nigel Broomfield, the head of the Soviet department, regretted that Britain, unlike France and West Germany, had not been pursuing contacts with Soviet leaders. Howe’s predecessor as foreign secretary, Francis Pym, had taken a similar view. Although Pym placed the “primary blame for arms escalation on the Soviet Union,” he was also critical of the rhetoric used by Reagan and Thatcher. Pym supported the efforts by Reagan and Thatcher to counter Soviet SS-20 missiles by deploying cruise and Pershing II missiles, but he worried about the tone of their public comments: “I agree entirely with their sentiments, but I disagree with the fact that they were expressed so frequently, so publicly, in such intemperate language and without any countervailing acknowledgement of the need for co-existence and understanding.”

Pym’s relations with the prime minister were, however, particularly bad—he was unceremoniously dismissed from his post as foreign secretary on 10 June 1983—and the FCO’s influence in 10 Downing Street was at rock bottom during his tenure.

Because the decision had, however, been taken following the Chequers seminar to get to know the likely successor or successors to Andropov, the Foreign Office discussed Soviet politicians who would be appropriate interlocutors. The names of Romanov and Grishin, as well as Gorbachev, came up, but the idea of inviting either of the first two to Britain was rejected. The eventual invitation went only to Gorbachev, as is clear from the documentation now available and from the recollection of the minister directly in charge. Not until June 1984, however, did the invitation naming Gorbachev

48. Ibid.
49. In early 1984 Pym wrote, “I tried to persuade the Prime Minister that Britain should rebuild a dialogue with the Soviet Union. After President Brezhnev’s death, I tried to persuade the Americans that President Reagan should seek an early meeting with his successor. Margaret Thatcher’s attendance at President Andropov’s funeral represents a change of heart which I welcome unreservedly. However, while top-level contacts are necessary, they are not sufficient. A short summit meeting, where everyone is surrounded by hundreds of diplomats, henchmen, interpreters and microphones, is no substitute for permanent contact at all levels of Government and, indeed, in non-political fields as well.” Ibid., p. 60. Thatcher did not attend Brezhnev’s funeral. Pym headed the British delegation.
50. In a conversation between Charles Powell and Chris Collins of the Thatcher Foundation on 12 September 2007, presented as a paper to the Pavia Conference on 1–2 October 2007, Lord Powell says that all three Soviet officials were invited and that it was “our great good fortune” that Gorbachev was the only one who accepted. In a letter to me fifteen years earlier (27 August 1992), Powell mentioned only Romanov in addition to Gorbachev, saying that, fortunately, “Gorbachev was the one who accepted.” Powell at that time added that the September 1983 seminar played a greater part than the FCO in the decision to issue the invitations. However, the Foreign Office was in charge of implementing the new policy in the wake of the Chequers seminar, and Sir Malcolm Rifkind, as the minister responsible, strongly confirms the recollection of Sir Bryan Cartledge (in an e-mail message to me, 3 November 2007) that no one from the Soviet top leadership team other than Gorbachev was invited.
actually arrive in Moscow. An earlier invitation was sent in February, but it made no suggestions regarding who might lead the Soviet delegation.51

FCO officials soon surmised that the best way to invite a Soviet delegation would be under the auspices of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). The head of the British branch of the IPU, Peter Temple-Morris—at that time a Conservative member of Parliament (and now a Labour peer)—had spoken in late 1983 to the minister of state at the Foreign Office, Malcolm Rifkind, about the desirability of a visit by members of the Soviet legislature. Temple-Morris and another Conservative MP, Sir John Osborn (the head of the Great Britain–USSR Association), met Rifkind at the Foreign Office on 24 November 1983 and took the initiative in proposing a visit in late 1984 by a delegation from the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. It is the recollection of both Temple-Morris and Rifkind that already at this meeting, two-and-a-half months after the Chequers seminar, Rifkind mentioned the name of Gorbachev.52 However, the official FCO record of the meeting does not refer to Gorbachev or anyone else in the Soviet leadership.53 Somewhat surprisingly, the report portrays Temple-Morris and Osborn as more eager than the minister for a visit by Soviet politicians.54 On the one hand, Rifkind noted

51. A fanciful account of the beginning of the process by which Gorbachev was invited to Britain was provided by a former diplomatic correspondent of the Daily Mail, John Dickie, in his book, Inside the Foreign Office (London: Chapmans, 1992), pp. 231–234. Having described the head of the Moscow municipal party organization, Viktor Grishin, as “the Leningrad party boss,” Dickie says that at Andropov’s funeral in Moscow in February 1984 Thatcher looked at Chernenko “and realized that important changes could not be long delayed in the Soviet Union.” She was armed, Dickie says, with what he calls the “Broomfield Report,” supposedly delivered to Sir Geoffrey Howe in July 1983. At that time the Foreign Office was already working on its major paper for the Chequers seminar, as discussed above (but unmentioned by Dickie). An updated version of that paper was sent to 10 Downing Street in August, but the first version had to be delivered by 25 July (see the memorandum from Sir Antony Acland to the Foreign Secretary, 19 July 1983, Foreign Office Papers, MFX 023/4). On the face of it, that document would appear to be the source of Dickie’s confusion. Sir Nigel Broomfield, however, has confirmed “that I did not draft it although there are passages I recognize which may have been taken from submissions I made on relations with the Soviet Union” (e-mail message to me, 18 February 2008). Broomfield’s best opportunity to have any direct influence on Thatcher was during her interrogation of officials on the flights to and from Andropov’s and Chernenko’s funerals. He was among those who accompanied her to Moscow on those occasions. Under the UK Freedom of Information Act, I requested the release of a report delivered to the foreign secretary in July 1983, of which the main author was supposedly Broomfield. An FCO search turned up no record of it, and the “Broomfield Report,” as described by Dickie, appears to be wholly mythical.

52. Email communications from Lord Temple-Morris to Archie Brown, 14 and 24 November 2007; and conversation between Archie Brown and Sir Malcolm Rifkind, 10 March 2008.

53. Rifkind and Peter Temple-Morris are almost certainly correct in believing that a reference was made to Gorbachev as early as the November 1983 meeting. Temple-Morris recalls not being familiar with the name of Gorbachev when Rifkind first mentioned it to him. By the time Andropov died in February 1984 (when Gorbachev was in the news as a possible immediate successor), Temple-Morris would have been aware of Gorbachev.

54. “Record of a Meeting between Mr Rifkind and Representatives of the GB/USSR Association and the IPU: 24 November 1983 at 1030 hours,” Foreign Office Papers, ENS 020/14. The notes reveal that “Mr Temple-Morris explained that the IPU Executive Committee had provisionally arranged this
that the government had not encouraged such visits after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and “would not, therefore, go out of its way to welcome the visit, but neither would it express serious opposition.” On the other hand, he mentioned “the Government’s interest in dialogue with the Soviet Union.” Rifkind observed that there could be “difficulties if the visit was perceived to be a purely social event,” but they could be “overcome if some of the delegates had some substantial political weight, and also if the agenda was a tough one for them.” It was agreed that “the emphasis of such a visit would be placed on political contact.” Given that a decision had already been taken at the highest level within the British government to pursue contacts with senior Soviet politicians, the apparently less than wholly enthusiastic FCO welcome for the IPU approach stemmed from Rifkind’s concern that any Soviet visit should be one of political substance. Moreover, the government’s decision to pursue a dialogue with Soviet leaders had not been made public. Caution was also promoted by lack of knowledge about whether the Soviet side would accept or rebuff any overtures.

The first fruits of the change in British policy, with the IPU used as an instrument, came in a letter on IPU stationery of 2 February 1984 to Aleksei Shitikov, the chairman of the Soviet of the Union of the USSR. The document was signed by the Lord Chancellor (Lord Hailsham), who presided over the House of Lords, and by the Speaker of the House of Commons, Bernard Weatherill. Andropov at this time was still alive—he died a week later on 9 February and Chernenko became General Secretary on 13 February. The Hailsham-Weatherill letter made no mention of any specific Soviet politician or even hinted at the level of seniority deemed appropriate. The document suggested that “the Delegation should consist of up to twelve persons, and it would be most convenient if it were to arrive on Monday 3rd December and remain until Friday 7 December,” with detailed arrangements to “be made by the British Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union through diplomatic channels.”

From April 1984, however, an opportunity arose to invite Gorbachev specifically. By Soviet tradition the second secretary of the CPSU chaired the

visit for November 1984 at its meeting on 23 November. It was now budgeted for next year. There was a good deal of Parliamentary support behind this proposal, but it was up to Mr Rifkind to postpone the visit if he considered it necessary.” (emphasis in original).

55. Ibid.

56. In the letter from London his name is misspelled as Chitikov. His name was correctly spelled in the covering letter from Sir Iain Sutherland, the British ambassador in Moscow, to Shitikov on 27 February 1984 (Foreign Office Papers, ESB 020/2).

57. In a conversation with me on 10 March 2008, Rifkind observed that this was for tactical reasons. Although the British government already preferred to have Gorbachev lead a Soviet delegation, it was more prudent not to mention names at this stage.
Foreign Affairs Committee of the Soviet of the Union of the USSR Supreme
Soviet. At the same session of the Supreme Soviet that elevated Chernenko to
head of state (as chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet), Gorba-
chev (who was already de facto second secretary) became chair of the Foreign
Affairs Committee. Although this post was largely honorific, both the prime
minister and the foreign secretary, who were equally keen to invite Gorba-
chev, now had an obvious diplomatic way of doing so by proposing that he
head a Soviet “parliamentary” delegation to Britain. This time—in mid-June
1984—the letter, drafted in the FCO, was sent in the name of Sir Anthony
Kershaw, a Conservative MP who chaired the Foreign Affairs Committee of
the House of Commons. It was addressed to Gorbachev in his Supreme Soviet
capacity and referred to the earlier letter from the Lord Chancellor and the
Speaker, naming the same December dates. (Subsequent negotiations led to a
visit longer than originally proposed and later in the month of December.)
The letter to Gorbachev said plainly: “I should like to invite you to lead
the delegation from the Supreme Soviet” and “I would also expect your
programme to include calls on very senior members of the British govern-
ment.”

In two telegrams to the British ambassador in Moscow, Sir Iain Suther-
land, the foreign secretary emphasized the strong preference for Gorbachev to
lead the Soviet delegation. In the first telegram, dated 14 June, Howe asked
the ambassador to “seek a meeting with Tolkunov” (Lev Tolkunov, a Soviet
journalist and member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, apparently was act-
ing as a go-between) “to communicate Sir A Kershaw’s invitation to Gorba-
chev to lead the Supreme Soviet delegation.” Howe told Sutherland he should
“make clear that if Gorbachev comes he will be received at the highest politi-
cal level (i.e. by the Prime Minister), and have meetings with senior members
of the government at which a wide range of questions could be discussed.”

In a second telegram, Howe instructed the ambassador “to inform Mr Gorba-
chev of Sir Anthony Kershaw’s invitation” and to say that “it reflects the desire
of the British Government and Parliament to pursue a broad dialogue with
the Soviet Union.” Howe also expressed the hope that he would have the
chance “of calling on Mr Gorbachev to discuss the invitation” when he visited
Moscow in July. That hope, however, was not fulfilled.

British policymakers used various channels in 1984 to communicate

58. Draft Agreed by Telephone and Sent to Sir Anthony Kershaw by Anthony Cary, Private Secretary
to Malcolm Rifkind, on 14 June 1984 (Foreign Office Papers).
59. Howe to British Embassy, Moscow, Telegram No. 535, 14 June 1984, Foreign Office Papers ESB
020/7.
60. Howe to British Embassy, Moscow, Telegram No. 536, 14 June 1984, Foreign Office Papers ESB
020/7.
their desire to host a visit by Gorbachev.61 The formal invitation, as already noted, was transmitted in June. Leonid Zamyatin, the head of the CPSU International Information Department in 1984 (and an unreliable source at the best of times), was incorrect in claiming that the letter came only in the autumn of that year. Although Zamyatin got the date wrong, he was on surer ground in saying that through the British ambassador it was made known that the prime minister would meet with the head of the delegation if it were led by Gorbachev.62 The diplomatic convenience that this was essentially an inter-parliamentary visit—as, indeed, it partly was—was maintained by the Soviet ambassador, Viktor Popov. When he officially notified Britain on 17 October that the Soviet delegation would be headed by Gorbachev, the person he contacted was the speaker of the House of Commons, Bernard Weatherill. The Speaker expressed his gratitude for “such good news,” adding that it was highly appreciated that in spite of being so very busy, Gorbachev had accepted the invitation.63

The Academic Input

Because the main focus of this article is on the origins of the Thatcher-Gorbachev relationship, the paper presented at the 1983 Chequers seminar that was most relevant to that topic has already been discussed. In light of the significance the prime minister attached to the contributions of the academics at that seminar, more should be said about their content. The second paper, “The ‘Reformability’ of the Economic System,” was by the late Alec Nove of Glasgow University, who began by sketching an imaginary paper presented by Soviet economists to a subcommittee of the Politburo chaired by Andropov. After noting numerous failures of the Soviet economy, Nove concludes his imaginary memorandum by saying: “A drive against corruption and indiscipline is clearly desirable, but by itself it cannot be enough. Comrades, the necessity for fundamental reforms must be faced, and therefore . . .” At this point the “Soviet” memorandum breaks off. Nove went on to list a number of reasons why fundamental reform would probably not take place, including power and vested interests; nervous conservatism (“no-one remembers any

61. Informally, as well as in the formal invitations, the British branch of the IPU played a role. Rifkind encouraged Peter Temple-Morris to use his Soviet contacts to emphasize the IPU’s interest in welcoming Gorbachev to Britain.


other system”); lack of pressure from below (“workers are accustomed to over-manning, featherbedding, stable prices, job security”); and ideology (which he rather provocatively described as “the Soviet equivalent of wanting to privatise the post office”). Nove observed that “the very words ‘market socialism’ are contrary to marxist holy writ.”

For these and other reasons Nove concluded that the most probable outcome was “no major change.” However, he did not exclude “the possibility of more drastic action.” Among the opposite reasons: “Power cannot be given to priority over efficiency” and “Ideology can be reinterpreted, if the leadership so wish.” Nove believed, however, that if major reforms were frustrated, “the likely consequence will be not collapse but stagnation.” (Thatcher in her copy of the paper underlined the words “not collapse but stagnation.”)

The third paper, “Social Problems: The Nationalities, Dissent and Labour,” by Alex Pravda of Reading University (and now at Oxford), had to cover a lot of ground. He noted “the ambiguity of a nationality policy claiming to foster ethnic individuality while committed to creating a single Soviet nation through economic, cultural and political integration.” He observed:

Fortunately for Moscow it is the small union republics, in the Baltic and Caucasus, that house the most militant nationalist tendencies. Where deeply-rooted national feeling persists within large ethnic groups, like the Ukrainians, it is attenuated by Russian penetration and the co-option of local elites into the central Slav control hierarchy. Of course none of this makes economic and cultural nationalism in these republics negligible. Especially when reinforced by religion and the demonstration effect of national independence struggles in Eastern Europe, it remains a cause of concern.

In the section of his paper on dissent, Pravda observed that repression by the state security forces had reduced dissent to “a mere trickle of disparate activity.” He noted, however, “low labour morale and alienation,” the symptoms of which included “absenteeism, turnover and poor work performance.” Discussing the intelligentsia, Pravda said: “Required to pay lip-service to an ideology they typically scorn in private, members of this class have come to accept as perfectly normal the hypocrisy this involves.”

The paper on “Religion,” by the Rev. Michael Bourdeaux, was the most uncompromising in its condemnation of Soviet practice from Lenin onward. Bourdeaux was among the most open to the possibility of fundamental

64. Emphasis in original.

65. In the notes I made of the seminar immediately afterward, I wrote, “People on the Government side, including the Prime Minister, indicated that much of the material in the papers and in the oral presentations was new to them. The Prime Minister expressed surprise and interest that Soviet people spoke so freely in private to academics and also at the facts on absenteeism from work and labour mobility given by Alex Pravda. She did not know that Soviet workers were free to change their jobs.”
change—on the premise, however, of “religious revival in the USSR.” He noted the importance of the election of a Polish pope and the significance of this for Lithuania, in particular, within the Soviet Union. Bourdeaux was upbeat about the growth of religious belief in the USSR, saying: “It is impossible yet to define what is happening, but something clearly is, even though perhaps on a lesser scale than in some other communist countries.” He cited Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s contention that “because communism has already shown its weakness, its inability to destroy Christianity, for this reason we may hope that the shadow will gradually pass and clear the earth; and will perhaps clear precisely those countries which have been in the deepest shadow until now.” Bourdeaux concluded: “This is a prophecy of the collapse of the Soviet system from within, with religion playing a decisive role. Could the continuing intensity of the Soviet anti-religious campaign be a reflection of precisely that same fear?” It is of interest that this specialist on religion in Communist countries raised the prospect of “the collapse of the Soviet system from within,” though whether the subsequent disintegration of the USSR actually had much to do with a religious revival is exceedingly doubtful (with the Baltic states, to a limited extent, a possible exception).

In addition to the paper by Alec Nove, two other contributions dealt with economic issues—a paper by Michael Kaser of Oxford University titled “Economic Constraints,” and one by Ronald Amann of Birmingham University on “Technological Inertia and Its Consequences.” Kaser noted the reformist views of Tat’yana Zaslavskaya and Abel’ Aganbegyan and the prospect that Andropov would pay heed to them. (In fact, they became influential advisers of Gorbachev during the earliest years of his leadership.) Kaser drew attention to a number of the problems of the Soviet economy, including, not least, the declining rate of growth. He noted that aggregate Soviet output had decelerated during the 1970s and more markedly since then, and that the “arms burden” on the Soviet economy had increased.

Ronald Amann observed that “it may well be that the Soviet Union has entered a period of no growth in real terms” and that this “creeping stagnation is occurring in countries which for the most part are markedly inferior to the developed OECD countries in terms of their relative levels of GNP per capita and consumption per capita and have a great deal of catching up to do.” He argued that the “seriousness of the situation . . . cannot be emphasised too strongly since it has acute political and psychological aspects as well as economic ones” and that “prolific and ingenious ideological writings” had failed “to obliterate from public consciousness the transparent divergence between rhetoric and reality.” Amann raised “the long term dangers of a ‘legitimacy

66. Emphasis in original.
Thus, long term tendencies of economic decline can be discerned which insidiously impede the achievement of key social and political objectives. It is appropriate to refer to this complex process as a “crisis” not because any East European society, least of all that of the USSR, is on the point of immediate collapse but because it is a systemic disorder which shows no signs of substantial reversal either in principle or in practice.

Amann was cautious in specifying the policy Western countries should pursue, noting that increased pressure could be counterproductive or promote a destabilization that could not be controlled. The policies of Western governments, he argued, might “be presented as a convenient excuse for poor economic performances, which are in reality the result of much deeper systemic failures.” So far as external pressure was concerned, he concluded that “Western governments will have to weigh carefully the long term consequences of their actions at a time when a confluence has occurred between an objective need for institutional reform and impending changes in the Soviet leadership.”

The last two papers, under the rubric “Power,” were by Christopher Donnelly, “The Impact of Military Considerations on Policy,” and George Schöpflin, “The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.” Donnelly, who at that time was director of the Soviet Studies Centre at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, and later an adviser to the Secretary-General of NATO, began with the premise that “a strategic nuclear war is the kind of war the Soviet Union wishes to avoid at virtually all costs” (the last part of the sentence duly underlined by Thatcher). He provided an account of the Soviet Defense Council and its activities and stressed political control over the military in the Soviet Union. Donnelly observed:

67. Thatcher underlined the statement in Amann’s paper that “we may have enough influence to destabilise but we are not capable of controlling destabilisation.”

68. In addition to these serious points, Amann’s paper produced some lighter moments. To quote from my own account of the meeting written immediately afterward: “Ron Amann was interrupted twice by the Prime Minister in the course of his oral presentation of his paper. Once was when he used the terms, ‘positive liberty’ and ‘negative liberty,’ a distinction which Mrs Thatcher was not familiar with but which she clearly regarded with great suspicion. The first interruption was when he quoted Stalin on the ‘egalitarianism of the petty bourgeoisie.’ Her immediate ‘What? What did you say?’ at least showed she was listening carefully. When we confirmed that Stalin really had said that, ridiculous though it was, she turned in Heseltine’s direction and said: ‘We must remember that one for Roy Hattersley.’ It is often said that she is totally without a sense of humour and has never been known to make a joke, but I found that response quite funny, so we may have been present on a historic occasion.” Roy Hattersley, who at that time was deputy leader of the Labour Party, is renowned for his stress on equality. The prime minister, in her two pages of handwritten notes on Amann’s analysis, duly recorded, “Radical concern with equality became a petty bourgeois deviation.”
Whilst military considerations . . . are weighed in every decision of state, and defence expenditure is given exceedingly high priority in the national budget, military personnel play a less important role in decision-making than might be thought. They are involved in all levels of government, but only in limited numbers. The relationship of the armed forces to the Communist Party is rather like that of skilled bricklayers and steel erectors to architects . . . the influence of military representatives in government on state and party policy tends to be a fluctuating negative one: party First or General Secretaries have not always thought it necessary to have the Minister of Defence as a full member of the Politburo. As skilled artisans, however, the advice of the military is frequently sought by the architects of Soviet policy, the party leadership, which is aware of the value of the armed forces as a means of getting one’s way.69

More controversially, Donnelly argued against the idea that the Soviet defense industry was “a millstone around the neck of the Soviet economy,” suggesting that it was “better viewed as the dynamo of the Soviet economy, because it is the most efficient and energetic element of the economy.” Defense expenditure, he argued, could not be seriously altered “without a considerable restructuring of the economy as a whole”—something that, though possible, would “require very serious motivation,” which appeared to be absent.

With regard to the Soviet Union’s Warsaw Pact allies, Donnelly observed that “the regular soldiers probably comprise the least anti-Soviet element in each Warsaw Pact country” and concluded: “With the possible exception of the Romanian, no Warsaw Pact army can be expected to defend its country against a Soviet intervention. All the Warsaw Pact armies (even the Polish Army) can, within certain limitations, be expected to support the Soviet Army against NATO in the event of war.”

George Schöpflin, who was then affiliated with the London School of Economics and with the School of Slavonic Studies of the University of London (and is now a member of the European Parliament, representing a Hungarian constituency), discussed the benefits and costs of Soviet control over Eastern Europe. He argued:

In ideology, the maintenance of Marxist-Leninist (Soviet-type) systems underpins Soviet claims for Marxism-Leninism to be a world system, especially in its Soviet form. In politics, there is a sense of prestige and satisfaction from ruling directly or semi-directly over a large tract of what in Soviet eyes is “the West” or at any rate Europe. Both these serve to legitimate Soviet rule in the eyes of the Soviet population for which the existence of a belt of client states in Eastern Europe is a source of emotional satisfaction. To this may be added the “blood price” factor, i.e. that the Soviet Union “paid in blood” to liberate these areas in

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69. The one underlining was in the original; the italics were not. The italicized passage was both underlined by Thatcher and included in her handwritten notes on the presentation.
the Second World War and will, therefore, never abandon them to “fascism” or “imperialism.” In defence, the existence of a defensive glacis has an analogous function. In economics, regardless of whether Eastern Europe constitutes a burden or not, it is part of a world economic sub-system with its centre in Moscow. In a word, the Soviet Union maintains an empire and is content to do so. . . . For all these reasons, the Soviet Union is unlikely to accede to (unofficial) East European demands for the Finlandisation of Eastern Europe.

Schöpflin expressed the view, which seems to have been largely shared within the FCO, that “the outlook for Eastern Europe as a whole in the 1980s is one of little change.” In a country-by-country survey, he regarded Hungary as “a bright spot,” although that was “despite some evidence of political decay, four years of zero growth and virtual bankruptcy in 1982”? The bright side lay in the fact that Hungary was seeing “the first officially sponsored debate on the future shape of politics in any Warsaw Pact country since Czechoslovakia [in]1968.” Hungary had also implemented a comparatively successful agricultural reform, but Schöpflin was skeptical that Hungary’s experience would be transferable to the Soviet Union.

Prime Ministerial and FCO Perceptions of the Academic Assessments

No one—politicians, diplomats, or scholars, either in Britain or in the USSR itself—foresaw anything like the speed of change that occurred in the Soviet Union later in the decade. On the British side there was a desire to promote positive evolutionary change. Accordingly, a large measure of agreement existed between the academics and the Foreign Office in urging engagement—as much contact as possible—with people in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and a rejection of the idea that anything could be gained by isolation of the “evil empire.” Paradoxically, the FCO may have got more of its standpoints accepted by the prime minister when they were expressed independently by outside specialists.70 These were people whom Thatcher felt she had personally selected and whose presence at the meeting was a result of her veto...

70. Sir Percy Craddock, who served in the Foreign Office from 1954 until 1984 and who from 1984 to 1992 was the foreign policy adviser to the prime minister (Thatcher until November 1990 and John Major afterward), has written of Thatcher: “Her attitude to the Foreign Office was curious. For individual officials, who had shown themselves competent and who had helped her, she had much goodwill and would commend them, or ask for them to be consulted, years later. But mention of the Office in the collective sense brought out the worst in her. . . . In Norman Tebbit’s caricature they became the ministry that looked after foreigners, in the same way that the Ministry of Agriculture looked after farmers. In her perpetual struggle against a hostile world she saw them as defeatists, even collaborators.” See Percy Craddock, In Pursuit of British Interests: Reflections on Foreign Policy under Margaret Thatcher and John Major (London: John Murray, 1997), p. 24.
of the original Foreign Office list. Attendance at the prime minister’s seminars—the issue of who would participate, whether from the ranks of academic specialists or from inside government—was invariably contentious. Initially, Thatcher did not intend to include even Michael Heseltine (with whose views on a number of issues she disagreed) in the September 1983 meeting with the outside specialists, but he succeeded in getting himself invited. At a later seminar on the Soviet Union, held in February 1987 (discussed briefly below), a number of senior FCO officials as well as the secretary to the Cabinet were among those who, to their chagrin, found themselves excluded.

Notwithstanding broad areas of agreement between the academics and the Foreign Office position, the former were somewhat bolder in the options for change in the Soviet Union they were prepared to consider. That is not surprising. The scholars had nothing to lose but their access (and, in any event, no reason to suppose that they would ever again be invited to offer advice to the prime minister). Although the FCO views and those of the academics substantially overlapped, especially on policy priorities, some significant differences also were evident. It is notable that when commenting on the papers by the outside specialists, Foreign Office officials focused especially on the parts that coincided with their own views. When some of the scholars gave reasons for political inertia in Moscow and also reasons why significant change might occur, the official commentary on the academics’ papers dealt mainly with the factors conducive to inertia. A case in point is a memorandum from David Manning to Pauline Neville-Jones on 7 September 1983 in which Manning concludes that the academics’ analysis “is close to our own and offers no startling new insights” and that “the expectation is of minor reform not major change in the Soviet Union.” Two possible sources of long-term change were, however, picked up by other officials. Sir Julian Bullard believed that Michael Bourdeaux’s paper was “in a class by itself... with its con-

71. In July 1983 John Coles used suitably diplomatic language when he informed Brian Fall in the FCO that the prime minister did not want Heseltine to be at the meeting with the academics: “It is necessary for reasons of space, to keep the number of those attending within reasonable bounds. The meeting with academic experts is not intended to embrace defence aspects of East/West relations except incidentally. The Prime Minister would therefore not wish to trouble the Secretary of State for Defence and MOD officials with that part of the proceedings, but would be most grateful if... they could arrive at Chequers for the afternoon internal policy discussion on East/West relations on 8 September.” See the letter from Coles to Fall (copied to the Ministry of Defence), 22 July 1983, Foreign Office Papers, RS013/1.

72. “Prime Minister’s Strategy Meeting: East/West Relations,” Memorandum from D. G. Manning to Pauline Neville-Jones, 7 September 1983, Foreign Office Papers, RS 013/1. In 1983 Manning was on the FCO Policy Planning Staff. As Sir David Manning, he completed a distinguished diplomatic career as British ambassador to the United States, 2003–2007. The recipient of his memorandum, Pauline Neville-Jones, was at that time head of the Policy Planning Staff. Later, in 1993–1994, she chaired the Joint Intelligence Committee. She is now a Conservative life peer.
clusion that we may one day see the collapse of the Soviet system from within, with religion playing a decisive role.”73 The head of the FCO’s Soviet Department, Nigel Broomfield, in contrast, dismissed Bourdeaux’s judgment as “subjective and long-term” but endorsed Amann’s emphasis on economic failure and technological backwardness.74

Even if no great gulf existed between the Foreign Office assessments and those of the academics, the latter, while mindful of the obstacles to change, were more inclined than the FCO to point to more radical possibilities. For example, none of the officials picked up on the Czechoslovak case of 1968, which showed that democratizing change could come from inside the Communist Party itself, or referred to any Soviet politician other than Andropov, thus ignoring the suggestion that an open-minded Gorbachev was well placed to become Soviet leader and that it was in the interests both of Soviet citizens and of the outside world that he be chosen.75 Nor did the FCO officials refer to Nove’s point about the possibility of drastic action because power cannot be given total priority over efficiency and ideology can be reinterpreted. At least one FCO official did take seriously the possibility of “the collapse of the Soviet system from within,” including Bourdeaux’s forecast that religion would be the main motive force of that change, but none went so far as to accept Amann’s contention that the USSR was in crisis in 1983 because of “a systemic disorder which shows no signs of substantial reversal either in principle or in practice” (though, as noted above, Broomfield came fairly close to this view). Although, with professional caution, the FCO officials at the time did not dwell on the more dramatic alternatives—which several of the academics had raised—to a Soviet “muddling through,” they acknowledged them with the benefit of hindsight.76


74. “East-West Relations: Papers by Academics,” Memorandum from N.H. R. A. Broomfield, 7 September 1983, Foreign Office Papers, RS 013/1. Broomfield quotes the head of the FCO Research Department (Soviet Section) as saying that interest in religion in the Soviet Union “is diffuse, mostly non-practicing and to be seen as an intellectual and semi-conscious reaction against the tedium of life under the Soviet system. It is not a charter for action.” Broomfield expressed the view that “the Soviet system will change from within” and “whether it will collapse or evolve is perhaps the key question.” In that change “religion will play an important but not decisive role.” What would be decisive, in all probability, was “economic failure and the inability to understand and control the technological and communications revolution which is now sweeping the developed world.”

75. The officials saw, and agreed with, what the specialists said about the obstacles to change but screened out the more radical alternatives that had been mooted. For example, David Manning’s summary of my paper was that it was “a lucid description of the Soviet political system as well as the factors militating against reform and change.” See “Prime Minister’s Strategy Meeting: East/West Relations” (cited in note 72 supra).

David Manning, in common with Julian Bullard, noted a lack of policy advice in the scholars’ papers. Most of the outside specialists had assumed that they were invited to Chequers not to give policy recommendations but, essentially, to provide the prime minister and her colleagues with a better understanding of what was going on in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Hence, they included little overt policy advocacy in their papers. The main point urged by them, when Thatcher explicitly sought their views on policy at a post-lunch session of the 8 September 1983 seminar, was the desirability of more contacts with Communist countries at all levels—from dissidents to General Secretaries. This, they argued, together with the spread of information (in which the British Broadcasting Corporation had an important role to play), would promote the pluralization of these systems. Western countries, they held, had nothing to fear from such contacts. In some ways the emphasis of the academics on the importance of contact at all levels with citizens and politicians in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe was more closely aligned to the view of Foreign Secretary Howe (who had been in that post for only three months) and of FCO officials—and, indeed, that of Minister of Defence Heseltine—than to the gut instincts of Thatcher.

In a memorandum to Pauline Neville-Jones on 12 September, A. J. Colquhoun of the FCO Planning Staff reported that Sir Antony Acland, the permanent under-secretary, had that morning provided “a brief description of the meetings at Chequers last week.” Colquhoun reports Acland saying: “the opening session with the outside experts on the Soviet Union had been fascinating, well structured and thoughtful.” He went on: “The level and tone of its discussion had however deteriorated after lunch when the academics had departed.” The memorandum continues:

The Prime Minister had made a great show of reluctance about accepting the value of improving our talks with the Soviet Union. She didn’t seem to accept that the present lack of channels to Moscow damaged our interests. She wanted to know what the purpose of a dialogue would be and what its content should be. Nevertheless, she showed signs of interest in meeting Andropov, but not in Moscow. She agreed in the end that once the KAL crisis had died down there should be an improvement in links with the Russians as long as they did not involve herself and as long as it was understood she had the right to veto these talks if they went too far. David Goodall reported that one notable success had been to convince the Prime Minister that there was very little scope for destabilising the Soviet Union or Eastern Europe.77

77. Memorandum from A. J. Colquhoun, 12 September 1983, Foreign Office Papers, RS013/1. David Goodall was the deputy secretary in the Cabinet Office at that time. In view of what occurred later in the decade it might be thought, with hindsight, that this was not much of a “success.” Yet, despite what happened in 1989, the FCO view was quite correct in policy terms. If Western countries had de-
Thatcher had a vigorous, at times aggressive, style of questioning. This, however, did not necessarily indicate hostility to the viewpoint being expressed. She liked to push people to see whether they could back up their arguments. In fact, far from attempting to destabilize the Soviet Union, British policy under Thatcher became one of constructive engagement, especially once Gorbachev emerged as General Secretary. Both 10 Downing Street and the Foreign Office applauded Gorbachev’s reforms and concluded that it was in the best interests both of Soviet citizens and of the rest of the world that Gorbachev should remain in control so long as he was pursuing liberalizing and democratizing change at home and a constructive policy abroad. Initially, however—at the time of the September 1983 seminar—there was some tension between the views of the prime minister, on the one hand, and Howe and Heseltine, on the other. Acland reported to senior Foreign Office colleagues that at the first session of the Chequers seminar on 9 September—on arms control—Thatcher “showed signs that she thought that Mr Heseltine and the Secretary of State were ganging up on her to make concessions.”

The general point, as noted earlier, about the need for more contacts figured in the official commentary on the meeting. John Coles’s 12 September memorandum raised the possibility that Thatcher would meet one or more Soviet Politburo members in London, “particularly potential successors to Andropov,” although without any mention of Gorbachev specifically. It appears that the prime minister fluctuated somewhat in her view of the need for dialogue with Soviet leaders, depending on who was supporting the proposal. She was more responsive to the idea when it came from academics than when it was urged upon her by ministers or officials in the FCO.

Gorbachev’s First Visit to Britain

After the death of Andropov and the selection of Chernenko as his successor, Gorbachev became, initially, the de facto and then the official second secretary of the CPSU Central Committee. This was not because he was close to Chernenko (which was very far from being the case) but because Andropov had so extended Gorbachev’s responsibilities that he was in the prime position...
to become number two following Chernenko’s appointment. Indeed, in December 1983, when Andropov was dying, he had proposed that Gorbachev be invited to chair the Politburo and lead the Secretariat in his absence, making it clear that he wished him to be his successor. Had Andropov lived for another year, Chernenko would doubtless have been pensioned off. Andropov had added several paragraphs to a speech that was to be read out for him at the CPSU Central Committee session on 26–27 December 1983 when he was too ill to attend, including the sensational passage expressing his wish to elevate Gorbachev above Chernenko. But the old guard—in the shape of Chernenko himself, Defense Minister Dmitrii Ustinov, and Chairman of the Council of Ministers Nikolai Tikhonov, along with the head of the CPSU General Department, Klavdii Bogolyubov—decided that the addendum to Andropov’s speech would not be read out. When Andropov’s aide, Arkadii Volskii, told Bogolyubov that he must telephone Andropov to tell him about this, Bogolyubov allegedly replied: “Then that will be your last phone call.”

The fact that Andropov lived only another six weeks meant that the old guard had a last gasp in the shape of Chernenko (literally in his case since, aged 72, he was suffering from emphysema).

Meanwhile, Thatcher had already taken an important first step with the new British policy of more active engagement with the countries of Communist Europe by visiting what was the least repressive country at that time, János Kádár’s Hungary, in early February 1984. This was her first visit as prime minister to a Warsaw Pact country. Thatcher, undoubtedly with some tutelage from Sir Bryan Cartledge, who had worked with her at 10 Downing Street before becoming ambassador to Budapest, had become aware of the degree of liberalization that had occurred in Hungary. Even so, what she saw was rather better than she expected from a Communist country (although, in her memoirs, she emphasizes the strict limits within which Hungarian reform took place). In Hungary, in sharp contrast with the Soviet Union, there was no shortage of fruit, vegetables, and other foodstuffs in the shops and markets, thanks to a successful agricultural reform. The Hungarians had indeed gone further with economic reform and with a degree of political relaxation by 1984 than had any other East-Central European country. By the time Gorbachev came to Britain, Thatcher had made herself one of the best-informed Western leaders on the Communist world.

On 14 December, the evening before Gorbachev arrived in Britain accompanied by his wife, Raisa (with Aleksandr Yakovlev among those in his entourage), Thatcher convened an informal seminar at 10 Downing Street.

82. Thatcher, Downing Street Years, pp. 454–458.
She invited four academics and one businessman to brief her and Foreign Secretary Howe. Alec Nove was there to speak about the Soviet economy, Michael Kaser discussed economic relations within the Soviet bloc, Lawrence Freedman of King’s College, London covered international relations and arms control, and I spoke about Gorbachev. The businessman was Norman Wooding, who had long been involved in East-West trade and commercial relations with the Soviet chemical industry, in particular. Neither the Cabinet Office nor the Foreign Office has been able to locate any documentary reference to this meeting. That is not altogether surprising, for although not “sofa government,” this was sofa consultation—a fairly relaxed discussion without any papers. Because Thatcher had already seen Hungary for herself, her reaction was informed as well as realistic when I said that I thought that Gorbachev wanted to go as far as the Hungarians with reform in the Soviet Union but could not openly say so yet—he had to be careful. “My goodness, he will have to be careful!” was her response. She was aware that a reform-minded Soviet politician who aspired to the leadership of his party and country had to exercise a certain restraint and self-censorship if he were to get to the top. By implication, she accepted that it would be a significant step forward if the Soviet Union were to have even the degree of economic reform and political relaxation that had occurred in Hungary. In fact, if subsequent liberalization in the Soviet Union by 1986–1987 could indeed be compared to that of Hungary, Soviet political reform by 1988 had far outpaced anything that happened under Kádár, and by 1989 Gorbachev’s perestroika had gone well beyond the reforms of the Prague Spring. Even an optimist about Gorbachev in 1984, as I was, would not have dared to predict change on that scale so soon. One obvious but important point—which became clear during the 10 Downing Street meeting on the eve of Gorbachev’s arrival—was the hope on the British side that the visit would do Gorbachev some good. That hope would have been dashed if Gorbachev had turned out to be an assembly-line Soviet politician. But at the end of the visit, Thatcher was able to say, in all sincerity as well as with political calculation: “I like Mr Gorbachev. We can do business together.”

British ministers and officials were all impressed by Gorbachev—by his willingness to engage in reasoned argument rather than stick to a script, by his good humor, and by his style. They sensed a greater open-mindedness, even though they could not discern in what he said any change in Soviet policy. Gorbachev, with enough people in Moscow (not least in Chernenko’s entou-


rage) eagerly waiting for him to put a foot wrong, was in no position to initiate new policy at that point. Nevertheless, his speech to British parliamentarians not only had a freshness of tone but contained different language, and he was conscious of the significance of the latter. In speaking about the need to end the Cold War because it carried within itself a military threat and the possibility of hot war, and in calling for productive discussions, he declared: “For this, not only words are needed (although in politics they are also important).” He introduced into the speech phraseology, the significance of which was to become clearer in subsequent years, such as “new political thinking” and Europe as “our common home.”

The focus of world attention was on Gorbachev as never before during his visit to Britain. One look at Chernenko indicated that his days were numbered, and it was clear by this time to all that Gorbachev was a major contender for the succession. The popular newspapers paid at least as much attention to Raisa Gorbacheva as to her husband, and she also got a very good press in Britain. Both Gorbachevs had prepared for the visit as assiduously as Thatcher had. The Soviet ambassador, Viktor Popov, speaking informally less than six weeks after Gorbachev had returned to Moscow, said it was “a visit by the right man at the right time” and that it had been “successful and useful in many different ways.” The ambassador’s wife added that one of the reasons the visit had been successful was that “they did not look like people from Madame Tussauds.”

Gorbachev’s stay in Britain ended a day prematurely because of the death of Soviet Defense Minister Ustinov, a powerful figure in the Soviet hierarchy. Ustinov died on 20 December, and Gorbachev left for Moscow the following

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86. Ibid., pp. 114–115.
87. This was at a high table dinner at St Antony’s College, Oxford, 1 February 1985. The afterglow of the Gorbachevs’ visit seemed a good moment to invite Ambassador Popov back to St. Antony’s, where he had spent a year in 1957. How hard Gorbachev was concentrating on making his visit a success is indicated by the following remarks of Popov (from my notes made later that evening): “Popov said that Gorbachev scarcely ate at any of the lunches or dinners put on for him by British hosts—only at the dinner which he (the Soviet ambassador) had for him. I mentioned that it had been reported that he had not eaten at the lunch in the Italian restaurant with Neil Kinnock and Denis Healey. Popov said that he did not eat anything at Chequers either and Mrs Thatcher had said to him (and he had agreed) that they must not let on to the press that he hadn’t eaten. It would appear that Gorbachev did not want the food to come between him and total concentration on what was being said to him and what he was saying, rather than that he is not interested in food. Popov said that though the restaurant where they went with Kinnock was a very small one and not an especially expensive one, they provided the best meal of the Gorbachev visit. When he commented on this to Gorbachev, Gorbachev replied: ‘Don’t tell me!’ When he got back to the embassy at the end of each day he was always hungry and would have a meal prepared for him there at 1 o’clock in the morning. Each day in Britain Gorbachev, who was staying in the Ambassador’s apartment in the Embassy, went to bed at 2 a.m. and was up at 7 a.m.” An ability to work long hours and survive on little sleep was a characteristic Gorbachev shared with Thatcher.
day. It was clearly important for him to be in the Soviet Union at a time of any change in the political leadership. (In fact, during the thirteen months of stalemate under Chernenko, Ustinov’s death was the only change in the composition of the Politburo.) As Gorbachev departed for Moscow, Thatcher left for Washington, DC. One of the most important roles she played was in helping to persuade Reagan that Gorbachev was a Soviet leader of a different type. Meeting with President Reagan, Vice President George H. W. Bush, Secretary of State George Shultz, and National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane on 22 December 1984, she contrasted Gorbachev favorably with Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, mentioning, inter alia, that Gorbachev “was much less constrained, more charming, open to discussion and debate, and did not stick to prepared notes.” She added that Gorbachev’s wife was “equally charming.”88 Shultz in his memoirs recalls Thatcher’s buoyancy at this Camp David meeting: “She was enthusiastic about Gorbachev, as had been clear from her public statements.”89

Thatcher did not have long to wait before meeting again with her new Russian friend. Chernenko died on the evening of 10 March 1985, and by the afternoon of 11 March Gorbachev had been unanimously elected as the new General Secretary by both the Politburo and the Central Committee. Thatcher built on the rapport she had established with Gorbachev three months earlier when she had a lengthy, warm conversation with him in Moscow on the occasion of Chernenko’s funeral.90 Gorbachev’s first official visit to a Western country after becoming General Secretary was to France in the autumn of 1985, but the British-Soviet relationship prospered during the perestroika years, despite tensions over spies from time to time as well as many political disagreements, especially between Thatcher and Gorbachev over nuclear weapons. The main reason for this, of course, was the change in Soviet foreign policy and the liberalization and partial democratization of the Soviet political system. Nonetheless, it was significant that Thatcher, who did not disguise her vigorously anti-Communist views or her hard line in defense of British nuclear weapons, became the most influential advocate among European politicians—especially among those on the conservative side of the political divide—of Gorbachev’s perestroika, accepting it as a major reform (and one that turned into transformative change) at a time when others were skep-

90. See A. S. Chernyaev, Shet’ let s Gorbatchevym: Po dnevnikoyam zapisiam (Moscow: Kul’tura, 1993), p. 33. Anatoli Chernyaev, who at that time was deputy head of the CPSU International Department, was appointed by Gorbachev in February 1986 as his chief aide on foreign policy.
tical. In some forums at home she displayed skepticism herself, but her public political support was helpful for Gorbachev even in the Soviet Union, where she acquired a lot of respect, especially after her visit in March 1987 (which included a television interview in which she trounced her interrogators).

The February 1987 Chequers Seminar

Thatcher prepared herself thoroughly for her March 1987 visit to the Soviet Union. She read Gorbachev’s speeches, as well as journal articles and lectures about perestroika—by Ronald Amann, Peter Frank, Dominic Lieven, Anthony Polonsky, Richard Pipes, and the present author—and at least part of a book on Soviet politics by the American scholar of Polish origin, Seweryn Bialer.91 The prime minister also decided to hold another seminar at Chequers, titled “The Soviet System under Gorbachev: Terminal Case, or Ripe for Revival?” The seminar occupied the whole of 27 February. Charles Powell, who developed such a close rapport with the prime minister that she retained him as her principal adviser until her removal from office,92 provided Thatcher with a list of excellent questions that, as he noted, did “not match exactly” the official agenda circulated in advance. The first two (of twenty-eight) questions were “has the existing system reached a point of crisis where change is unavoidable? Or can it muddle on almost indefinitely?” and “Is Gorbachev simply trying to galvanise people to make the existing system work

91. Seweryn Bialer, The Soviet Paradox: External Expansion, Internal Decline (London: Tauris, 1986). When Charles Powell gave these materials to the prime minister on 18 February, his cover note described Amann’s inaugural professorial lecture at Birmingham University as “the most stylish and original” of the papers, all of which he summarized. Powell concluded, “The only general comment which I would add is that British academic experts on the Soviet Union seem to be more excited by the prospects of reform and change in the Soviet Union than their American counter-parts, as represented by Professor Bialer.” That the prime minister carefully read the papers is beyond doubt. In preparing for her 1987 visit to the Soviet Union, she also sought advice from Oleg Gordievsky, the former Soviet State Security Committee (KGB) station chief in Britain, who was working as a double agent for British intelligence and defected to the United Kingdom in 1985. Gordievsky apparently contributed to Thatcher’s preparation for what turned out to be a highly successful television interview in Moscow in which she was able to convey information to her Soviet audience that up to that time had been withheld from them. See Craddock, In Pursuit of British Interests, p. 100.

92. Becoming private secretary to the prime minister was normally just an important step in the career of an exceptionally high-flying member of the diplomatic service. As Sir Percy Craddock noted (in his In Pursuit of British Interests, p. 15): “The custom is that after two to three years at the centre, the Private Secretary returns to his department, is promoted and passes back into the stream of diplomatic life. Charles, however, proved impossible to move. . . . Mrs Thatcher would not let him go and he stayed with her until she fell.” Craddock, who says he enjoyed good personal relations with Powell during their years together at 10 Downing Street and who greatly admired Powell’s abilities and industry, also observes (ibid., p. 14): “It was sometimes . . . difficult to establish where Mrs Thatcher ended and Charles Powell began. Perhaps it could be said that for some years ‘he held the pen.’” Craddock quotes Saint-Simon’s comment that “among the four private secretaries the one who holds the pen has all the privileges and the others have none except their entrées.”
better? Or does he want real changes to the system?” Powell emphasized to the prime minister: “You need to reach a judgement on how far Gorbachev really intends to change the Soviet system and what his prospects of doing so successfully are. A great deal else depends on that judgement, including how you handle your talks with him and how we present your visit. The Seminar is intended therefore to focus on this aspect, and the academic participants are in the main experts on the internal affairs of the Soviet Union.”

Thatcher kept strict control over the size and composition of the seminar participants. Even the secretary to the Cabinet, Sir Robert Armstrong, and his deputy, Christopher Mallaby (who had considerable experience with the Soviet Union), were among those who wanted to attend but were not invited. Armstrong pressed for both of them to be included, and, when that did not succeed, he urged that at least Mallaby be invited, though again to no avail.

The Foreign Office initially submitted a list of fifteen outside specialists—eleven academics, two journalists (Mark Frankland and Edwina Moreton), and two businessmen (Ralph Land and Norman Wooding)—to the Prime Minister with the recommendation that she select ten of them. She excluded the journalists and businessmen and did not confine her choice of academics to those on the FCO list. In a note to Colin Budd at the Foreign Office on 6 January 1987, Powell wrote that the prime minister had agreed that the following should be invited: “Academic: Dr Ammann [sic], Mr Brown, Mr Donnelly, Professor Nove, Professor Howard, Mr Frank, Mr Bialer, Mr Conquest, Lord Thomas. Official: Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary, Sir P Craddock, Sir B Cartledge, Mr Ratford, Dr Nicholson, Mr Powell.”


94. In a memorandum of 22 December 1986 to Charles Powell, Armstrong wrote, “This Seminar will obviously be of great interest and importance, and I very much hope that you will agree that the Cabinet Office can be represented at the discussion during the afternoon. If it were possible, both Christopher Mallaby and I would very much like to come; but, if you had to rule that there could only be one of us present, I think the choice should fall on Mr Mallaby.” In a memorandum to Armstrong of 9 January 1987, attaching correspondence “between Mr Powell and the FCO, which was not copied to us,” Mallaby wrote that Charles Powell had said “he thought I would probably be included in the end.” In a handwritten note Armstrong told him “Keep up the pressure.” However, on 23 February Mallaby informed Armstrong him that, as matters stood, he was being excluded: “[Powell] now says that the Prime Minister is insisting that the participants be kept to 16. They include Sir Percy Craddock, Martin Nicholson and Mr Ratford (FCO).” Armstrong that same day sent another note to Powell requesting that Mallaby be added to the list attending the seminar, but received a reply on 24 December from Powell saying, “The Prime Minister was adamant that she wishes to keep numbers to a minimum and is not prepared to add any additional names. The same response has been made to the Foreign Office, who also wished to introduce an extra candidate. She is sorry to disappoint Mr Mallaby and others.” The various memoranda are stored in the Cabinet Office Papers.

95. Thatcher accepted the FCO suggestion that Peter Frank of Essex University be invited to write a paper. Because Alec Nove was unable to attend, the seminar bringing government and academics together (as in 1983, there was a later session involving only ministers and officials) had only fifteen participants.
To the three survivors of the 1983 seminar (Amann, Brown, and Donnelly) five others had been added to the prime minister’s academic list. Robert Conquest of Stanford University’s Hoover Institution was an old friend of Thatcher (and was frequently consulted by her informally) and the author of important books on the Soviet Union (most famously his works on the Stalinist terror). Seweryn Bialer of Columbia University had been suggested by FCO officials when Powell told them that Thatcher would like to include an American scholar. Peter Frank followed Soviet current developments closely and was a frequent commentator on radio and television. Sir Michael Howard was Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford and a specialist on international relations and defense policy, though not on the Soviet Union specifically. Lord Thomas of Swynnerton (Hugh Thomas) was a scholar but one whose expertise as a historian lay in the Hispanic world. His inclusion probably owed more to his political allegiance. He had attended the 1983 Chequers seminar, but in a non-speaking role on the government side of the table. He had convened many of the more informal Chequers seminars of political allies of the prime minister, and he assisted in the writing of her speeches. The Foreign Office was represented by—in addition to Howe—Sir Bryan Cartledge, who since 1985 had been the British ambassador to the Soviet Union, and David Ratford, who had been minister in the British Embassy in Moscow from 1983 to 1985 and was currently assistant under secretary of state (Europe) in the FCO. The sole representative of the Cabinet Office was Martin Nicholson, who had recently succeeded Malcolm Mackintosh as its resident Soviet specialist. Powell and Craddock were present from the prime minister’s own staff.

A much greater division of opinion on developments in the Soviet Union was evident at the 1987 seminar than in 1983, although (or perhaps partly because) the greater openness in Moscow made information easier to obtain than in Andropov’s time. On 4 March 1987 the head of the FCO’s Soviet Department, Michael Llewellyn Smith, circulated Charles Powell’s summary of the 27 February seminar to a small group of officials. A handwritten addition to the cover memorandum reads: “I gather from Martin Nicholson that the line-up was not entirely academics v. officials. He groups the contributors as Enthusiasts: Amann, Frank, Brown, Cartledge. Sceptics: Thomas, Conquest, Howard with Bialer occupying the judicious centre ground (which Martin would share).” What is interesting about this lineup is that Cartledge had traditionally taken a hard line toward the Soviet Union and, on the eve of perestroika, was highly skeptical about the chances of reform. As ambassador to Moscow, however, he had witnessed, even by February 1987, far-reaching

96. For an informative discussion of Thomas’s role, see Urban, Diplomacy and Disillusion in the Court of Margaret Thatcher.
changes (although they were to become much more radical in 1988–1989). Thus, the shift in his position was based on knowledge, first-hand observation (especially of the new glasnost), and his own interactions with the Soviet authorities. By a substantial margin the most extreme skeptic was Lord Thomas. Howard and even Conquest were more open to the idea that something greater than cosmetic change was occurring in Moscow. Powell, in his official report on the seminar, wrote:

Discussion of the prospects for change within the Soviet Union revealed a difference between those, principally the experts on the Soviet Union, who were impressed by the scope and energy of Gorbachev’s reforms; and those, principally non-specialists, who were not convinced that real change would be either possible or allowed and were sceptical of Gorbachev’s motives. To simplify: between enthusiasts and sceptics.97

Powell says in his covering note that his account of what transpired in the Chequers discussions may have erred “slightly on the side of conveying too negative a view of what is happening in the Soviet Union.”98 It certainly was a much more skeptical view than that expressed by the Soviet specialists at the seminar. Moreover, most of the predictions about the future contained in the report turned out to be wrong—serious underestimations of the subsequent scale of change. The report discounted Soviet willingness to accept an Afghanistan not dominated by Communists,99 assumed the Soviet leadership would crack down on any signs of independence in Eastern Europe, asserted that there was “no likelihood that Soviet ideology would change fundamentally,” and predicted that there would be “only limited change which fully preserved the power and guiding role of the Party.” As compared with the 1983 Chequers seminar, the composition of the seminar participants was skewed more toward those who were skeptical that the Soviet Union could change significantly for the better—specifically, how far Gorbachev would dare to go and how much he could get away with. The report itself was skewed still further in that direction. All in all, the 1987 seminar was less significant than the 1983 seminar, and many of the contributions were less perspicacious.100

When Andropov was still General Secretary and the succession to him re-

98. He adds, “It was also rather inconsiderate of Mr. Gorbachev to make a major proposal on arms control on the day after the Seminar.”
99. Craddock notes that he and the Joint Intelligence Committee were among those who believed that the Soviet Union would not withdraw from Afghanistan, still less relinquish control over Eastern Europe. He observes that “we overestimated Moscow’s determination to defend its territorial gains and its readiness in the last analysis to resort to force in that cause.” See Craddock, In Pursuit of British Interests, p. 97.
100. One point I recorded at the time in my brief notes on the 27 February 1987 seminar is a remark
mained uncertain, it made sense for even close observers of the Soviet scene to hedge their bets. By contrast, the 1987 Chequers seminar was held just a month after the January plenum of the CPSU Central Committee, which had placed political reform in the Soviet Union firmly on the agenda. The direction of change was thus becoming increasingly clear to analysts of Soviet politics who were not ideologically blinkered. For a minority of specialists and many non-specialists, however, it was an article of faith that the Soviet system was impervious to change.

The most significant part of Powell’s report was the section titled “Implications for the Prime Minister’s Visit to the Soviet Union,” which noted:

It was agreed that it would be important to discourage exaggerated expectations from the Prime Minister’s visit. The purpose should be presented as being to renew earlier contacts and discussions with Mr. Gorbachev, to improve our understanding of his policies and objectives at a particularly interesting moment. At the same time, the visit would be an opportunity to pursue arms control, regional and human rights’ issues on the basis of established western positions.

Particular care would be needed in commenting publicly during the visit on internal developments. The general line should be that we were watching with interest what was going on and would give credit where it was due. While it was primarily an internal matter for the Soviet Union, the Helsinki agreements gave us legitimate grounds to comment on some aspects of what was going on. One purpose would be to draw out the links between the kind of society into which the Soviet Union might develop and the prospects for improving the international climate. It would be important to avoid any impression of impeding or obstructing change and reform.

Particular attention was needed to the drafting of the Prime Minister’s speech in Moscow and the briefing for what she might say on television. She would want plenty of time to consider drafts. She would also at the appropriate moment want to send President Reagan a message explaining her intentions.101

Although no consensus emerged at the February 1987 seminar, the divergent views expressed there, together with Thatcher’s reading in the period leading up to the seminar and her Russian visit, made her well prepared for her March discussions in the Soviet Union. The experience she gained during that visit put the prime minister more firmly in the camp of those who believed that Gorbachev was initiating profound change in the Soviet system. Following

by Seweryn Bialer worth resuscitating. Bialer had just visited the Soviet Union where he had a private meeting with Aleksandr Yakovlev, among others. At the seminar he mentioned that “he had been speaking with senior pro-reform officials in Moscow recently and had put all the arguments against likelihood of democracy to them—weight of Russian history (no experience of democracy), legacy of Lenin, etc.—and the reply was that everywhere democracy has to start somewhere, even if in England it was with the Magna Carta and in Russia only now!”

101. The emphasis is in the original.
her intensive discussions in the Soviet Union, Thatcher recognized that Gorbachev was making substantial progress with political reform, even though economic reform was modest and largely unsuccessful.

**Conclusions**

Sir Percy Craddock, the prime minister’s foreign policy adviser from 1984 until her resignation, thought that the British government led by Thatcher tilted too far in support of what Gorbachev was doing in the Soviet Union. In his retirement reflections on British foreign policy, he argues that Thatcher became “dangerously attached to Gorbachev in his domestic role.” He observes that she “admired his courage; she recognized a fellow reformer as well as a debating partner,” and he notes that her “formidable powers of self-identification and advocacy were enlisted on his behalf.”

Craddock, while skeptical about the desirability of Thatcher’s admiration for Gorbachev, recognizes that this became important for Britain internationally. The fact that Thatcher was especially close to Reagan added to the significance of her relationship with Gorbachev. Craddock writes:

Mrs Thatcher came close to claiming that she had discovered, even invented Gorbachev; her meetings and debates with him were deliberately high profile and added to her, and Britain’s, international standing. More seriously, she acted as a conduit from Gorbachev to Reagan, selling him in Washington as a man to do business with, and operating as an agent of influence in both directions.

Neither Craddock nor anyone else has, however, succeeded in explaining why it was “dangerous” for Thatcher to develop from the outset a good relationship with Gorbachev.

After all, the relationship did not induce her to abandon any of her views about the injustices and inefficiencies characteristic of Communist systems or to modify her extreme attachment to British nuclear weapons. Although it took some boldness for a Conservative prime minis-


103. Ibid., p. 201.

104. George Urban is another who criticizes what he deemed to be Thatcher’s excessive attachment to Gorbachev. When Urban and others taking part in an official Chequers seminar on Germany in March 1990 complained about the “new powers Gorbachev had taken as president” (with Urban going so far as to say that Gorbachev “was assuming powers far in excess of those Stalin himself had possessed”), Thatcher’s response was that “she was satisfied that Gorbachev did need fresh powers and that he would make cautious use of them. If dictatorial power had been Gorbachev’s ambition, he would have been content with his position as party general secretary.” See Urban, *Diplomacy and Disillusion at the Court of Margaret Thatcher*, pp. 146–147. Urban notes that this was Gorbachev’s own answer to the same question. It also happened to be the correct one.

105. Geoffrey Howe writes in his memoirs about the friendly conversation between Gorbachev and
ter of Thatcher’s convictions to put her political weight behind a Soviet leader, by doing so she was backing Gorbachev’s reformist course and showing understanding of his need to maneuver in the face of foot-dragging and increasingly overt opposition from within the Soviet establishment. Gorbachev had enough enemies at home to need all the support he could get abroad. As he undermined more and more traditionally powerful institutional interests within the Soviet system—the military, the KGB, the industrial ministries, and even the party apparatus—one of the success stories accompanying internal political liberalization was the key role he played in ending the Cold War. Vastly improved relations with Western countries were widely welcomed within the Soviet Union, even though post-Soviet Russia has witnessed something of a backlash against Gorbachev’s conciliatory foreign policy.

At the beginning of Margaret Thatcher’s second term in government in 1983, she deliberately set out to play a greater role in foreign policy than before and to make herself better informed about the major issues. The seminars she held, especially the Soviet seminars, played a significant part in that process. The Thatcher-Gorbachev relationship rested not only on a good personal rapport but on the change of British policy toward becoming more actively engaged with Communist countries in order to encourage change in their internal and external policies. Even before Gorbachev came on the scene, Thatcher was already seriously interested in replacing Communism in Eastern Europe with democracy, though she hardly expected events to move as fast as they did. Her political instincts did not readily lead her to contemplate the possibility that transformative change could be initiated from within the upper echelons of the Communist Party apparatus. However, it is commendable that, rather than rely just on those political instincts, she devoted as much time as she did to reassessing developments in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and consulting specialists outside as well as inside government. There is a great deal to be said, as more recent international events have illustrated, for evidence-based foreign policy and for political leaders to take

Thatcher (at which Howe was present) in the Kremlin in March 1985, after Chernenko’s funeral. He recalls that not everyone in the FCO was happy about the bonhomie: “One hard-boiled Foreign Office official who read the note of the meeting expressed himself ‘bothered’ that ‘the PM seems to go uncharacteristically weak at the knees when she talks to the personable Mr Gorbachev.’” Howe continues, “He need not have worried. Certainly the two leaders were attracted to each other, relished each other’s company. But neither Margaret nor Mikhail ever completely lowered their guard.” See Howe, Conflict of Loyalty, p. 430. Sir Rodric Braithwaite, the British ambassador to Moscow from 1988 to 1992 and the prime minister’s embassy host when she visited the Soviet Union in September 1989 and June 1990, observes that Gorbachev “was franker with her than with others because (as Chernyaev noted) ‘he knew that she followed the situation closely, and that it was dangerous to try to pull the wool over her eyes.’” See Rodric Braithwaite, Across the Moscow River: The World Turned Upside Down (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 136.
account of a wide range of professional expertise. Seminars of the type discussed in this article had short-term implications but were also concerned with longer-term policy and with reexamining the fundamental assumptions underlying policy. On these seminars, Sir Percy Craddock may be given the last word, for he aptly sums up their usefulness and significance, in addition to showing why they were not necessarily greeted with undiluted joy by the British Foreign Office:

From time to time the Prime Minister . . . held seminars at Chequers on international issues, drawing on academic experts as well as ministers and officials. The Foreign Policy Adviser and Private Secretary between them were supposed to organize and script such occasions. Some of them became famous. One, just before my time, inaugurated a more open approach to Eastern Europe and led eventually to the first meeting with Gorbachev. The content of another, on Germany in March 1990, was leaked, to general embarrassment.

It is very much to the Prime Minister’s credit that she found time for these gatherings and deliberately raised her sights from the day-to-day action. Although not perhaps a thinker herself, she had a respect for ideas and for those who purveyed them . . . . She also found academics a useful foil to the Foreign Office and took pleasure in praising the first to the detriment of the second.

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106. Sir John Coles has advocated greater interaction between academic experts and government. He observes: “The academic input into policy-thinking is at its most effective in direct discussion with policy-makers. The latter will normally have little time for extensive reading of academic work.” See John Coles, Making Foreign Policy (London: John Murray, 2000), p. 99.
107. The reference is to the seminar held on 8–9 September 1983.
cases) in British policymaking toward the Soviet Union in the 1980s. For helpful information, whether as background or foreground, I am indebted to Lord (Geoffrey) Howe, Sir Bryan Cartledge, Sir Rodric Braithwaite, Sir Nigel Broomfield, Sir Michael Llewellyn Smith, Lord (Charles) Powell, Lord (Peter) Temple-Morris, and the late Sir Anthony Parsons. I am particularly grateful to Sir Malcolm Rifkind, MP. In addition to several conversations in earlier years, he kindly read and commented on the text of this article. Important confirmations and clarifications resulted, although, the usual caveat remains: No one but the author should be held accountable for the interpretation.

Appendix 1

Annex B to Foreign Office paper, “East-West Relations,” prepared for Prime Minister Thatcher’s Chequers seminar, held on 8–9 September 1983

Action Programme

Soviet Union

1. During her visit to the US in September, the Prime Minister should discuss East/West relations with President Reagan with a view to adopting as a conscious goal the objective of a ‘gradual evolution of the Soviet system towards a more pluralistic political and economic system’.

2. In the arms limitation field, we should remain firm on INF, but do what we can to encourage the Americans to seek a framework agreement on START, if possible during the first half of 1984.

3. At the political level, the Prime Minister should adopt the objective of a meeting with Andropov. This should be prepared by a visit to the UK by Gromyko for talks with Sir G Howe. The timing of both these events should take account of discussions with our closest allies and of wider East/West developments, including INF deployment.

4. These visits would be underpinned by the visits to the UK of Soviet First Deputy Foreign Minister Kornienko in September, and of Deputy Prime Minister Kostandov (as the guest of ICI) in October and appropriate meetings at official/expert level on eg disarmament and the Middle East.

5. In the information field, our long term priority subject to the availability of resources, should be to increase the audibility of the BBC
Russian language service. We should also actively pursue other ways of increasing the flow of information into the Soviet Union, e.g., increasing the circulation in the Soviet Union of the magazine “Anglia,” the availability of British newspapers and periodicals and the number of British exhibitions staged in the Soviet Union.

**Eastern Europe**

6. The UK with its partners, especially among the Ten, should adopt a strong and active policy in Eastern Europe aimed at encouraging tendencies away from the Soviet Union.

7. Priority should be given to ensuring that the flow of information through contacts at all levels should be maintained and, if possible, increased.

8. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary should aim to meet all of his Eastern European opposite numbers during the course of this Government. The Prime Minister might consider a visit to Hungary.

9. Economic assistance will prove difficult, but where possible and on the basis of normal prudence, the UK should seek in the European Community, IMF and other international organisations, to persuade partners to assist developments in Eastern European countries which showed long term potential for economic reform.

**Third World**

10. Full use should be made of the West’s greater economic and political attractions for Third World countries. Openings created by those countries’ desire for Western trade, aid and technology, should be exploited to contain, and where possible reverse, Soviet influence.

**General**

11. A serious effort should be made to improve the quality of coverage of East/West events by the British media, and to raise the level of interest in Parliament.

12. Consideration should be given, possibly following the Prime Minister’s visit to Washington in September, to a major speech on East/West relations.
Appendix 2

Papers prepared by outside specialists for Prime Minister’s Chequers seminar of 8–9 September 1983

The Soviet Union

System

1. The Political System, Policy-Making and Leadership, Archie Brown
   The power structure
   The CPSU
   The policy-making process
   Leadership trends and policy dilemmas

2. The “Reformability” of the Economic System, Alec Nove
   Reform through Soviet eyes
   Options and Obstacles
   Probabilities

Society

3. Social Problems: the Nationalities, Dissent, and Labour, Alex Pravda
   Ethnic and nationality problems
   Dissent and alienation
   Labour
   Ideology
   The anti-corruption drive

4. Religion, Rev. Michael Bourdeaux
   Policy
   The place of religion
   The influence of Pope John Paul II
   Religious revival in the USSR

Economy

5. Economic Constraints, Michael Kaser
   The persistence of Stalinist irrationality
   Population distribution: fertility and age
   Excessive investment
Supply/demand imbalance
Slow growth and the arms increment
Trade dependence

   The nature of the problem
   Causes and broad implications
   The acquisition of Western technology
   Other solutions and the role of Western policy

   Appendix: Some alternative paths to institutional reform in Eastern Europe

**Power**

7. *The Impact of Military Considerations on Policy*, Christopher Donnelly
   Soviet military doctrine
   Defence expenditure
   The Warsaw Pact

8. *The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, George Schöpflin
   Benefits and costs
   Specific difficulties
   The Soviet relationship