

FROM:

THE RT. HON. LORD HAILSHAM OF ST. MARYLEBONE, C.H., F.R.S., D.C.L.



HOUSE OF LORDS,
SW1A 0PW

CONFIDENTIAL

Prime Minister.

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A.J.C. 18/11

The Foreign Secretary's minute and paper to yourself and OD colleagues is timely. I myself am confident that the feeling to which he makes reference in his first paragraph is indeed widespread and not without foundation.

There was an old saying to the effect that wars are not fought about small issues, but do occur as the result of trivial incidents and the classic recipe for war is the development of two massive and mutually hostile alliances with client states in a "third world" of lesser states in a condition of near anarchy - and a single spark, say a pistol shot in Sarajevo or a riot in Corfu to set the whole explosive mixture ablaze.

I was glad that the introduction to the paper made reference to the shooting down of the Korean Airliner. It was in itself a small incident, but it has given rise to serious consequences. What I found particularly disturbing about the incident was less the barbarous inhumanity of the act than the distinct impression I received that somewhere hidden under the whole event was less a piece of deliberate criminality than an example of owlish bureaucracy operating under rigid rules and incapable at its lower levels of showing either initiative or common sense. The absurd equivocation and want of candour on the part of the higher authorities seems to be part of the mystique of Soviet Government. The malevolence and brutality of the Soviet system are not in doubt. It is easy to condemn them. But it will be more important to prevent events like these from developing into a general conflagration, as might easily have happened had something of the kind taken place in the Middle East.

I am quite convinced myself that there is too much rhetoric flying about. The worst offenders are undoubtedly the Communist powers. One only has to differ from them in the slightest respect to incur allegations of bad motives, vituperative epithets and long malicious and ultimately nonsensical tirades. I believe that these are dangerous, and will become more so in proportion as we respond in like vein. But there is no reason why we should follow suit. Not a little of the feeling that the Reagan administration is at least partly responsible for the deterioration of the situation to which the Foreign Secretary refers lies I believe in the emotional and at times almost hysterical way in which the President gives vent to his otherwise legitimate

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condemnation of the USSR and all it stands for. I do not believe that any good comes of such denunciations. A cold and clinical analysis would be far more effective. For instance, the affair of the Korean Airliner would have been far more effectively denounced by an objective analysis of the facts followed by a cold appraisal of the immense harm throughout the world that the Soviets would certainly suffer as a result. It was an opportunity missed. In the same way the fates of Afghanistan, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and the Baltic States are more valuable to us as warnings of what might befall if we were to lower our guard than as prizes to be won from Communism.

I am equally unconvinced by attempts directly to "punish" the USSR and their allies for breaches of international law (e.g. Afghanistan, Poland). We should be far more objective in assessing our own interests and avoid wherever possible cutting off our nose to spite our face. We should never enter into commercial relations with the Communist bloc unless we reap an advantage. If we do reap an advantage we should not be deterred by their inhumanity unless our national security is involved. Sanctions never work, and even if they did they should only be applied when it is to our interest to do so.

I am sure we have been wrong to avoid Ministerial and other contacts. The USSR is our enemy. It is to our advantage to study him at first hand wherever possible, and, if possible, to influence him by personal contact intelligently applied.

I believe the same to be true of contacts at lower levels. The thing to avoid is to permit contacts to be limited to Soviet sympathisers going to the USSR, or visiting Soviet figures to be allowed to limit their contacts to Soviet sympathisers here.

In the meantime although I remain intensely critical of it I am sure we must mend our fences with the Reagan administration. Britain has never gained much from a Republican administration, but all our hopes and fears must be centred on the solidity of the alliance, and the Republican administration is all we have at the present, and for ought I can see all we are likely to have at least during the foreseeable future (i.e. the next four or five years).

H: of St M.

Copies to members of OD Committee and Sir Robert Armstrong.

17th November, 1983

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