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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

6 July 1984

Prime Minister

CDD
6/7

[Handwritten initials]

Dear Charles,

Mr Chernenko

The Foreign Secretary thinks that the Prime Minister might be interested to glance at the attached minute from Mr Bishop about Mr Chernenko's appearance and performance at his meeting with the Foreign Secretary. Mr Bishop acted as interpreter for the meeting.

Yours ever,

Len Appleyard.

(L V Appleyard)
Private Secretary

C D Powell Esq
10 Downing Street

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FROM: K A Bishop
Soviet Section
Research Department

DATE: 4 July 1984

cc: Sir J Bullard
Mr Jenkins, AUS
✓ Mr Appleyard, (PS,
Secretary of State)
Mr Hall, RD
Mr Packenham, ACDD
Mr Crabbie, Defence Dept
Mr Crowley, PUSD
Mr Miller, Assessments Staff
Mr Meyer, Moscow

Mr Broomfield
Soviet Department

A VIEW OF CHERNENKO ON 3 JULY 1984

1. Paragraph 7 of Moscow Telno 826 (attached) contains a description of Chernenko's appearance and performance at yesterday's meeting (3 July) in the Kremlin with the Secretary of State. Telno 826 adds that Chernenko seemed tired and not in the best of health; appeared unfamiliar with much of the detail of his brief, and turned frequently to Gromyko for advice. As another eye-witness, I find these assessments perceptive and accurate.
2. I thought it worthwhile to record one or two additional glosses for completeness of picture and for future comparison as we monitor his physical problems with the passage of time. My observations are inevitably impressionistic.
3. Although showing no visible infirmity when standing and walking, Chernenko appeared slightly more hunched and stiffer in the arms than I recall him being in February (when he received the Prime Minister) and more dessicated in appearance. February's hoarseness of voice and chestiness had largely gone and the shortness of breath was still evident but less pronounced. A few minutes into his written presentation, he had a ten-second coughing fit, which alarmed Aleksandrov and possibly also others. The air of abstraction and occasional bewilderment still clings to him. His reading of his prepared text was, again, disastrously bad - still the same high-speed gabble, the stumblings, the breaking of sentences (in order to breathe) often in mid-phrase; still the mechanical delivery, the lack of light and shade, and the failure to highlight key points. In short, the same apparent lack of conviction and even, it seems at times, of comprehension. These unfortunate defects largely persist when he goes extempore. In his one long unscripted foray yesterday (which he ended with the remark:

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"I seem rather to have run on (Kazhetsya, ya razgovorilsya)", with which Gromyko seemed to agree) he was notably repetitive and disjointed in his sequence of thought. He no doubt suffered partly from lack of deep knowledge of the issues under discussion (INF and the nuclear balance, which he himself raised), but his at times almost incoherent phraseology in Russian points also to some lack of mental discipline.

4. When listening to the Secretary of State, Chernenko persisted in his earlier noted and misleading habit of repeatedly nodding with a slight smile. This appears to be his way of registering his understanding of successive points rather than his agreement with them. Chernenko's own lack of confidence (and of authority on foreign policy matters) was evident. Not only did he frequently turn to Gromyko as though for guidance but, having completed his own scripted remarks and heard the Secretary of State's reply, he sat seemingly non-plussed as to what to do next for what seemed like ten or more uncomfortable seconds. Gromyko's own self-confidence (never in doubt) was much on display. He spoke at some length (unlike at the February meeting), without deference to Chernenko and without feeling it necessary to ask his permission. Aleksandrov, too, interjected a point to cover up for a pause in Chernenko's unfocussed ramblings on the INF issue and to put his master back on track.

5. Chernenko is clearly not his own man in the foreign policy field. On yesterday's performance I doubt his ability to be so in others or to penetrate much deeper than Pravda's poker-work slogans.

K. A. Bishop

K A Bishop

7. SO MUCH FOR THE PLAY: WHAT OF THE SOVIET PLAYERS ?
CHERNENKO LISTENED ATTENTIVELY TO WHAT YOU HAD TO SAY.
WALKING TO GREET YOU AND RISING TO SAY GOODBYE, HE SHOWED NO
VISIBLE INFIRMITY. HE WAS LESS BREATHLESS IN DELIVERY THAN
AT THE MEETING WITH THE PRIME MINISTER AFTER ANDROPOV'S
FUNERAL. BUT, WITH A PASTY PALLOR, HE LOOKED GENERALLY LESS
HEALTHY AND READ FROM HIS PREPARED TEXT WITHOUT THE FOCUS OF
EVIDENT CONVICTION. BUT HIS SUBSEQUENT APOLOGY FOR
SOME OF HIS PHRASES (IN PARTICULAR THE REFERENCE TO UNCLE
SAM'S PISTOL POINTED AT THE SOVIET UNION) WAS EQUALLY
UNCONVINCING. LEFT ON HIS OWN AFTER GROMYKO HAD SOUGHT TO RESCUE
HIM FROM CONFUSION ON ARMS IN SPACE, HE RESORTED TO THE
LANGUAGE OF EMOTIONAL PROPAGANDA ABOUT AMERICAN ROCKETS IN
EUROPE. IT WAS NOT THE PERFORMANCE OF AN AUTOMATON , BUT IT
WAS PRETTY INEPT AND CONFIRMED THE IMPRESSION THAT, AT LEAST
ON INTERNATIONAL ISSUES, THE CENTRAL FIGURE IN THE SOVIET
LEADERSHIP LACKS AUTHORITY AND SOPHISTICATION OF THOUGHT.