

Extract from minutes of the 561st meeting of the WEU Council held at ministerial level (Luxembourg, 14 May 1980)

Caption: At the 561st meeting of the Council of Western European Union (WEU), held at ministerial level on 14 May 1980 in Luxembourg, the delegations discuss the repercussions of the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan for the development of East–West relations. The British Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Peter Blaker, and the French Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Jean Sauvagnargues, agree with the Western countries' strong reaction to the Soviet intervention and emphasise that pressure should be maintained on the USSR. But the policy of détente should be continued and dialogue should be pursued on matters relating to the prevention of nuclear war, disarmament and arms control. The British representative supports the ratification of the SALT II Agreement and the continuation of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Source: Council of the Western European Union. Extract from minutes of 561st meeting of WEU Council held at ministerial level in Luxembourg on 14th May 1980. IV. East-West relations. CR (80) 7. 13 p. Archives nationales de Luxembourg (ANLux).<http://www.anlux.lu>. Western European Union Archives. Secretariat-General/Council's Archives. 1954-1987. Foundation and Expansion of WEU. Year: 1975, 01/02/1975-30/12/1982. File 132.15 Volume 5/7.

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EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF 561st MEETING
OF W.E.U. COUNCIL HELD ~~ON~~ AT MINISTERIAL LEVEL

FILE NO. 132.15
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IN LUXEMBOURG ON 14th MAY 1980

M. G. THORN, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, was in the Chair.

IV. EAST-WEST RELATIONS

Mr. RUHFUS began by apologising for the fact that Mr. van Well, State Secretary at the German Foreign Ministry, who would have liked to introduce this report on East-West relations in person, was unable to be present. His absence was due to meetings that were to be held in the next day or two in Vienna and elsewhere, and in particular was linked with the decision to be taken the following day by the German Olympic Committee about its attitude towards the Olympic Games.

Coming to the matter of East-West relations itself, Mr. Ruhfus said that these had deteriorated considerably since the end of December. The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan represented a fresh element in Soviet foreign policy, and was confronting the West with a Soviet concept of security which went beyond its previous ideas on the subject. The armed Soviet incursion in Afghanistan, which was totally unjustifiable, had been a severe blow to the policy of détente. The German Government had, together with their partners, called on the Soviet Union several times to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan. On the other hand his Government shared in the disquiet at the unwelcome fact that voices were being heard in public discussion, talking about abandoning and withdrawing from the policy of détente. A way had to be found of getting

/back to détente ...

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Mr. Ruhfus concluded by saying that, in the opinion of his government, the existing bilateral relations with these countries ought to be put to further use, to help improve, or at least stabilise, relations between East and West at the present time.

Mr. BLAKER agreed with Mr. Ruhfus that Afghanistan had to be taken as the starting point for any discussion of East-West relations at the present time. Before tabling a report on the United Kingdom's bilateral relations with the Soviet Union and eastern European countries, Mr. Blaker wished to concentrate on the general British approach towards East-West relations.

So far as contacts were concerned, United Kingdom policy was to make a distinction between the Soviet Union on the one hand, and the other countries of eastern Europe on the other. With the latter, a policy of continuing contacts was being pursued. Soon after the events in Afghanistan, these countries had appeared unwilling to have these contacts, but this now seemed no longer to be the case and exchanges of visits would be taking place. The level at which the visits would be arranged would tend to reflect the judgment made by the British Government of the degree of support that the individual countries had given to the Soviet aggression in Afghanistan. With the Soviet Union, all significant contacts had been cut off on the political and cultural levels after the events in Afghanistan, but the view was now taken that the time had come to have some resumption of a dialogue with the Soviet Union and Lord Carrington would be meeting Mr. Gromyko in Vienna later that week.

Recalling Mr. Ruhfus' comment that Afghanistan represented a new element in Soviet foreign policy, Mr. Blaker could agree insofar as policy since the Second World War was concerned because clearly the Soviet aggression was taking place in a country outside the recognised limits of Soviet

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domination. It was different therefore from the action which the Soviet Union had taken in Czechoslovakia in 1968 or in Hungary in 1956. But it was not the first time that the Soviet Union had invaded with military forces a country which was outside its own sphere: it had done that in the Baltic countries and in Poland before the Second World War.

Special attention should therefore be paid to the Soviet interpretation of détente. The British Government, for its part, supported détente but believed that the interpretation which the Soviet Union had put upon it in recent years was not acceptable, because they seemed to have been securing arrangements which avoided nuclear war in western Europe and which diminished the risk of hostilities in western Europe, while reserving to themselves the right to expand their power in other parts of the world by any means available to them. The Soviet Union had been seen pursuing their desire to expand by various means until Afghanistan, and now had been seen using force on a massive scale. This was not an acceptable interpretation of détente, and the West should be devoting their efforts to persuading the Soviet Union, and this might take some time, that this was the case.

The development of a new approach on the part of the Soviet Union towards the third world could also be observed. Perhaps this was the development of a policy which laid down that progress made towards socialism as defined by the Soviet Union was an irreversible process. It would be very undesirable for the West to accept such a policy. This was why the British Government had supported all the efforts which had been made in the West since the aggression in Afghanistan to show a vigorous reaction to the Soviet invasion. This was why they had thought it right to sever all important political and cultural contacts, why they had thought it right to make sure that their trading arrangements did not unduly favour the Soviet Union, why they had thought it right to look at the credit arrangements for trade with the Soviet Union, why it had been thought right to look at the arrangements governing the export of high technology to the Soviet Union,

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and in particular why they had urged British athletes not to take part in the Olympic Games. These athletes seemed unwilling to respond so far, but the position of the Government had been absolutely firm.

The United Kingdom Government believed that it was necessary to react strongly to the Soviet Union, not simply in order to punish that country, but in order to demonstrate to the Soviet Union that a repetition of the action that it had taken in Afghanistan would not be accepted by the West. It was believed that if the West had reacted more vigorously in the case of Angola, or in the case of the massive Soviet military move into Ethiopia, then perhaps the Soviet Union might have thought a little more carefully before invading Afghanistan.

With regard to the proposal of the Nine for a neutral and non-aligned Afghanistan, the United Kingdom authorities attached importance to this proposal for two reasons. The first was that it would give the Soviet Union the opportunity to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan if the Soviet Union decided at some point that this was necessary, although there was no great optimism about the Soviet Union taking such a view in the near future. The second reason was that, even if the Soviet Union was not prepared to withdraw its forces, the proposal did put pressure on the Soviet Union in the face of the world and it provided the Soviet Union with some difficult questions to answer about why its forces were present in Afghanistan. The British Government had the impression that the concept of a neutral and non-aligned Afghanistan was gathering support in other parts of the world. Certainly some of the Islamic countries were interested in the proposal, and Mr. Habib Chatti, the Secretary-General of the Islamic Conference which was going to be meeting in a few days time, had made it clear that he was interested in the concept. It might therefore be that support would be seen at the Islamic Conference for the idea of a neutral Afghanistan.

/Summarising the position ...

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Summarising the position as far as the Western reaction to the Soviet invasion was concerned, Mr. Blaker said that it was clear that the consultation in the West could have been better than it had been, between the Nine and in NATO, and more concerted. Nevertheless, if viewed from Moscow, the Minister suspected that the reaction of the West had been stronger than the Soviet Union might have expected, as were the reaction of the non-aligned countries at the United Nations General Assembly and the strong resolution passed by the Islamic Conference. What was important now was that pressure on the Soviet Union should be maintained over a long period - it was very easy in democratic countries to allow important issues to fade from public opinion, and ways had to be found of keeping this issue in front of public opinion.

So far as détente was concerned, the British Government believed in it provided it was a real détente. They believed it was right that the SALT II Agreement should be ratified, if possible, and that it was right to proceed with the Madrid Review Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. Western governments would have to see exactly how to conduct that Conference. It was inevitable that there would have to be a thorough examination of the performance by all the parties of their obligations in all three baskets. There was likely to be agreement on the fact that the Soviet Union had broken all the principles in Basket 1, and therefore it would be unrealistic to look for decisions on new actions in the Helsinki context until a thorough examination of the past performance by the various parties to the Helsinki Final Act had been carried out. But it was hoped that it would be possible, having had this examination of past performance, to move on to obtain agreement on some future steps at least, so as to keep the Helsinki process going.

/Concluding his remarks ...

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Concluding his remarks, Mr. Blaker believed that a dialogue must be maintained between East and West on the matters which concerned the survival of mankind, such as the prevention of nuclear war, disarmament and arms control. His Government believed that it was necessary also to accompany that dialogue with a demonstration of robust resistance to the Soviet Union's desire to expand at the expense of the West. This was the best way of sustaining a real détente.

Mr. Blaker then submitted the following account of the United Kingdom's bilateral relations with the Soviet Union and eastern European countries.

With regard to the USSR, relations at the end of 1979 were cool following a number of ministerial statements critical of repressive Soviet domestic policies and the high level of Soviet military expenditure. The USSR was also critical of Britain's active role in supporting the NATO decision last December to modernise its theatre nuclear forces. The deterioration in relations since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan had been exacerbated by the intensified persecution of Soviet dissidents in recent months, exemplified by the banishment of Dr. Sakharov in January.

The immediate measures taken by the British Government following the invasion of Afghanistan were as follows.

Bilateral measures consisted of cancellation, at Britain's request, of a visit by the Soviet Minister for the coal industry; cancellation of a visit to Britain by the Red Army Choir; cancellation of a planned tour of the Soviet Union by the English Chamber Orchestra; and postponement of the annual review meeting (due in the first half of 1980) of the bilateral environmental protection and medicine and public health agreements.

/On the military ...

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On the military front, the British proposal for an exchange of naval ship visits had been withdrawn. A Soviet proposal to negotiate an agreement on the avoidance of (naval) incidents at sea had been rejected. And there had been a withdrawal of a proposed exchange of airforce staff college visits.

With regard to trade, the British Government had not renewed the U.K./Soviet Credit Agreement of 1975. They were also reviewing with their partners a tightening and widening of COCOM.

Other bilateral events were being reviewed case by case.. The United Kingdom had also pressed for a boycott of the Moscow Olympics; had maintained pressure in the European Communities for the abolition of subsidised sales of agricultural products, especially butter; and was engaged in consultations within COCOM on tightening procedures governing exports of sensitive technology to the Soviet Union.

There had been no high level visits in either direction since the last meeting of the W.E.U. Ministerial Council in May 1979, although the Prime Minister had had a brief talk with Mr. Kosygin during a stopover at Moscow airport (26th June) on her way to the Tokyo economic summit, and Lord Carrington had met Mr. Gromyko in New York in October. Late in 1979 the Secretary of State had invited Mr. Gromyko to visit the United Kingdom in February or March but, following the invasion of Afghanistan, the USSR had informed the United Kingdom Government that these dates were not convenient, thus pre-empting a British decision to postpone the visit. However, Lord Carrington was intending to meet Mr. Gromyko in Vienna on 17th May when both would be there for the Austrian State Treaty 25th Anniversary Celebrations. Outstanding invitations to Mr. Brezhnev and Mr. Kosygin had been renewed last year but neither was likely to come in the foreseeable future.

/Bilateral relations ...

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Bilateral relations were unlikely to improve so long as Soviet troops remained in Afghanistan. The Russians had been clearly irritated by the support given to proposals by the Nine of 19th February, 1980 for a neutral and non-aligned Afghanistan, which were formulated by the Foreign Secretary, Lord Carrington. They had been at pains to link British policy with that of the United States as part of their effort to undermine unity of Western response.

It was still too soon to judge whether the deterioration in political relations would have any impact on Anglo-Soviet trade. The British trade deficit with the USSR had widened in 1979 from £265m (1978) to over £410m. The trade turnover in the first quarter of 1980 had been higher than in the corresponding period last year, but this reflected the fulfilment of contracts signed well before the invasion of Afghanistan.

Mr. Blaker had visited Poland in November 1979, and the Polish Ministers of Engineering Industry and Power had made visits to Britain in October 1979 and February 1980 respectively. Anglo-Polish trade continued to expand; exports had reached £261m in 1979, and total trade over £500m. Over 40,000 Poles had visited Britain in 1979. The Anglo-Polish Round Table (an informal non-governmental seminar with high level participation) had been held in Poland in November.

Hungary had been visited by the Archbishop of Canterbury in May 1979, and by Sir Michael Palliser, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in October 1979. A meeting of the Anglo-Hungarian Round Table had taken place in Cambridge in July 1979. The level of bilateral trade had been largely maintained in 1979, with U.K. exports at £61m and imports at £52m.

/The Czechoslovak Deputy ...

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The Czechoslovak Deputy Foreign Minister, Mr. Jablonsky, had visited London for talks in June 1979, and the Czechoslovak Minister of Fuel and Power, Mr. Elverberger, in October 1979. The United Kingdom had made clear to the Czechoslovak authorities both bilaterally and in concert with the Nine its views over their treatment of supporters of Charter 77. The recent expulsion from Czechoslovakia of the Master of Balliol College, Oxford, for taking part in one of Professor Tomlin's informal philosophy seminars had further impaired the atmosphere of Anglo-Czechoslovak relations.

United Kingdom relations with the G.D.R. were cool but correct. They had not been helped by the G.D.R.'s strong support for the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, nor by the initially unhelpful comments on the situation in Teheran nor by hostile G.D.R. media reports on Rhodesia in the pre-election period. But United Kingdom policy post-Afghanistan was one of conducting routine business as usual.

Trade with the G.D.R. remained at a low level. In 1978, U.K. exports to the G.D.R. had amounted to £47.5m, while imports from the G.D.R. had been valued at £38.4m. The corresponding figures for 1979 were £58.2m and £111.7m. G.K.F. had signed a contract worth £50m during the successful visit to the Leipzig Spring Fair of Mr. Parkinson, Minister for Trade; this might be the beginning of improved trade relations. But these clearly depended in G.D.R. eyes, to a substantial extent, on the state of bilateral political relations.

/Sir George Young, ...

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Sir George Young, Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Department of Health and Social Security, had visited the G.D.R. in September 1979 and signed a Health Agreement. Dr. Beil, Deputy Minister for Foreign Trade, would visit the United Kingdom from 29th May to 2nd June. No concrete plans existed for further inward or outward visits, although an invitation to visit London had been extended to Herr Axen, the Politburo expert on Foreign Affairs, and accepted in principle.

With regard to Albania, there were two outstanding financial problems in the way of a resumption of diplomatic relations. Firstly, the Albanians had not so far been prepared to discuss the resumption of relations before the return to them of the gold formerly belonging to the pre-war Bank of Albania which was now in the custody of the Tripartite Commission for the Restitution of Monetary Gold. There were two other members of the Commission (the United States and France) and a number of claims on the gold. A resolution of the problem did not therefore rest with the United Kingdom alone. Secondly, the Albanians had not paid to the United Kingdom the compensation awarded by the International Court of Justice in respect of the Corfu Channel incident in 1946. A new attempt to reach a settlement was now under way.

So far as Romania was concerned, since May 1979 there had been visits to the United Kingdom by the Romanian Minister of Labour and three Deputy Ministers (for Agriculture, Machine Building and Foreign Affairs). Lord Carrington had visited Romania in March, 1980 for talks with President Ceausescu and Foreign Minister Andrei. The Minister for Trade, Mr. Parkinson, was to visit Romania in October, and Mr. Burtica, as Deputy Prime Minister with responsibility for trade, had been invited to visit the United Kingdom.

In February, the centenary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries had been celebrated in London and Bucharest.

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The level of trade had been maintained in 1979. United Kingdom exports to Romania were £70.4 million and imports from Romania £65.9 million.

As for Bulgaria, the Bulgarian Deputy Foreign Minister, Mr. Tsvetkov, had visited London in November 1979 for talks with Mr. Blaker, and Mr. Lukanov, Deputy Prime Minister with responsibility for foreign trade, had been invited to visit the U.K. later this year.

Bilateral trade remained modest. British exports to Bulgaria in 1979 amounted to £27.3 million and imports from Bulgaria £12.1 million.

M. CAGIATI observed that, as Mr Ruhfus had said, international affairs had entered a difficult phase. The doubts now felt throughout the world because there was no longer a credible system of balances were all destabilising factors. The process of détente seemed to be caught in a tightening spiral and to be moving towards a disquieting state of paralysis. It was this process which had aroused so much hope among the peoples and which Italy had helped to promote by participating actively in the many forms which it had taken - and first and foremost in Europe, the Conference on Security and Co-operation.

In recent years it had become obvious in Europe that the East, while pretending to consolidate equilibrium, was seeking to impose an unbalanced force relationship. This had unfortunately been demonstrated not only by the continuous deployment of new longer range missiles, but also by the USSR's shirking of immediate substantive negotiations on the limitation and reduction of armaments as proposed by the NATO countries last December.

On that occasion it had been decided to restore, with European missiles, the balance of forces in Europe which had been threatened by the installation of new Soviet weapons systems.

/No considered review ...

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M. SAUVAGNARGUES said he would be brief because he had little to add to what had already been said and because he had no wish to restate French policy on this issue less well than the President of the French Republic or the Minister for Foreign Affairs. From the outset this policy had been spelled out with extreme clarity and had been reiterated to Mr. Gromyko in the clearest terms when he was last in Paris.

What struck the Ambassador in all this was that, contrary to what had been said too many times, consultation had been reasonably good if perhaps not as swift as it should have been. The position of the member governments of W.E.U. and of the Nine had quickly become very clear and a genuinely joint view had been reached on the subject. Contrary to what was being said by many people, there were grounds for satisfaction at being able to speak with one voice. There had of course been the question of the Olympic Games which had perhaps been thrust forward somewhat rashly without prior consultation and might possibly have given the impression that views differed. In reality, however, everyone was in the fullest agreement on the fundamental issues: in agreement in considering that the invasion of Afghanistan had created an unacceptable situation and could not be tolerated, and that extremely vigorous and continuous pressure should be brought to bear on the Soviet Union. Admittedly, the violation of the international rules had dealt a heavy blow, not perhaps to the policy of détente, but to the hopes reposed in it which General de Gaulle had set as the original aim of a policy of détente leading on to understanding and co-operation. Quite obviously, understanding was at present a long way off and co-operation was light years away. But the policy of détente, as the French Government had understood it from the outset, was a policy which had the balance of forces as its second element. It had never been a policy of appeasement towards a stronger military power. It was a policy which sought to maintain the military balance but at the same time to avoid the development of confrontation policies in Europe; and quite certainly the fact that the Soviet Union was pushing its pawns forward was no reason for abandoning the policy of détente or, in any case, its fundamental achievements such as Berlin and the policy of the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany.

/The dialogue with ...

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The dialogue with the Soviet Union must clearly be continued because a political solution must be found in order to get the Soviet forces withdrawn from Afghanistan. A political solution involved a dialogue. It was completely wrong to say that countries like the Federal Republic of Germany, because of its Ostpolitik, or France because of a desire for a so-called special relationship with Moscow, were out of line. The western countries agreed on the need for a dialogue. It was quite certain that in the tense situation created by the invasion of Afghanistan a dialogue was more than ever necessary on a political solution for the Afghan problem and on the armaments control policy which was more useful than ever because the fact that the Soviet Union was behaving badly was no reason why the others should resign themselves to mutual nuclear suicide. In reality, therefore, the various positions were so close as to be almost identical and M. Sauvagnargues regretted that commentators in the various western countries did not stress this vital point.

Contacts with the eastern countries must of course be maintained and intensified particularly because every one of those countries had had serious doubts concerning the behaviour of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. They were all extremely embarrassed by the affair. The dialogue was therefore continuing without it being apparent where it would lead. What was certain was that an extremely firm position must be maintained, with the continuing determination not to allow the balance of force to be affected in any way and to restore it when it was threatened. That seemed to be self-evident. Regarding the Soviet Union, the Ambassador agreed with the British representative's view that the overall picture, as seen from Moscow, was probably not particularly good. The hostile posture in which the Soviet Union now found itself in relation to the whole Islamic world was bound to create an extremely serious problem for the Russians, and it was regrettable that the absence of a solution, or even the lack of progress, in the Middle East made it very difficult for the West to exploit that situation.

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