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**Georgy Shakhnazarov's Preparatory Notes for
Mikhail Gorbachev for the Meeting of the Politburo**

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Summary:

Georgy Shakhnazarov's Preparatory Notes for Mikhail Gorbachev for the Meeting of the Politburo regarding the need for change in socialist countries and how the Soviet Union should respond to instability in these countries

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

Mikhail Sergeevich!

Maybe you will find these thoughts useful.

Today we are discussing the results of our talks with the leaders or prominent figures from a number of socialist countries—[Laotian Prime Minister] Kaysone K. Phomvihane, [East German leader] Erich Honecker, [Romanian leader] Nicolae Ceaucescu, [former Polish Leader Eduard] Gierek. Now [Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party leader Jambyn] Batmunkh is asking for a meeting.

Each country has its unique situation and we would be correct not to approach them across-the-board [chokhom]; we are seeking to figure out the specifics of each of them, and to build our policy on the basis of such an analysis.

At the same time today's exchange and, broadly speaking, everything that we know, all the information we receive, encourages us to take a multi-faceted evaluation of the situation in the socialist commonwealth. Notwithstanding all their differences and nuances, there are multiple signs that some similar problems are increasingly plaguing the fraternal countries. The very similarity of symptoms of the disease testifies to the fact that its catalyst [vozbuditel] is not some kind of a malignant germ that has managed to penetrate their lowered defenses, but some factors rooted in the very economic and political model of socialism as it had evolved over here, and had been transferred with insignificant modifications to the soil of the countries who had embarked on the path of socialism in the post-war period.

We have already laid bare weaknesses of this model and are beginning to remove them in a systematic way. This is actually the super-task of perestroika—to give socialism a new quality. A number of countries have followed us and began, even ahead of us, the process of deep reforms. Some of them, the GDR [East Germany], Romania, the KPDR [North Korea] still do not admit its necessity, but they do it rather for political reasons, because their current political leadership does not want to change anything. In reality all of them need changes, although we do not tell them this publicly to avoid criticism for trying to impose our perestroika on our friends.

But the fact is that obvious signs of a crisis require radical reforms everywhere in the socialist world. And subjective factors play a huge role. For instance, in more than backward Laos, Phomvihane is acting skillfully, and there are some good results. But those who stubbornly turn a deaf ear to the call of the time are driving the malaise ever deeper and aggravate its manifestations in the future.

And this concerns us in a direct way. Although we laid aside our rights of “senior brother” in the socialist world, we cannot renounce the role of a leader, the role that will always objectively belong to the Soviet Union as the most powerful socialist country, the motherland of the October Revolution. When it came to a crisis in any of them, we had to come to rescue at the cost of huge material, political and even human sacrifices.

We should clearly see, moreover, that in the future any possibility to “put out” crisis situations by military means must be fully excluded. Even the old leadership seemed to have already realized this, at least with regard to Poland.

Now we must reflect on how we will act if one or even several countries become bankrupt simultaneously? This is a realistic prospect, for some of them are on the brink of monetary insolvency (Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Vietnam, Cuba, GDR). Even Czechoslovakia, which has so far stayed afloat, now has rapidly rising external debt.

What shall we do if social instability that is now taking an increasingly threatening character in Hungary will coincide with another round of trouble-making in Poland, demonstrations of “Charter 77” in Czechoslovakia, etc.? In other words, do we have a

plan in case of a crisis that might encompass the entire socialist world or a large part of it?

We are worried about this. When we receive from time to time alarmist cables we do what we can, but all this is at best like applying lotion to sores, not a systematic, thoughtful strategy for treatment of the disease, not to mention preventive measures.

It is high time to discuss these issues at the Politburo in the presence of experts. We should not bury our head in the sand like an ostrich, but we should look into the future with open eyes and ask ourselves the sharpest questions:

Could the socialist countries come out of the pre-crisis situation without Western assistance?

What price will they have to pay for this assistance?

To what extent should we encourage such a course of events or put up with it?

To what degree are we interested in further presence of Soviet troops on the territory of a number of allied countries (excluding the GDR)?

We should assign to the newly-established CC International Commission [the task of preparing materials for this discussion.] This is a huge problem, in scope as well as in significance, we need to tackle it continuously, but the first exchange should take place as early as late December [1988]-early January 1989. There will be a working conference of the Party leadership of the commonwealth in Prague in February, and this gives us a chance to share some of our conclusions with our friends. They are already expecting it, although each of them, of course, sees the situation from "his own angle."

[Source: Published in G. Kh. Zhakhnazarov, *Tsena prozreniia* [The Price of Enlightenment]. Translated by Vladislav Zubok (National Security Archive).]