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AN OUTSTANDING SOVIET DIPLOMAT

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VERY MANY people, if not all, who in the 70s and 80s had to do with Soviet foreign policy, not only knew very well who Georgii Markovich Kornienko was but also identified this name with those concrete persons who directly formulated and implemented that policy. First deputy foreign minister of the USSR for ten years and deputy foreign minister and member of the Foreign Ministry's Collegium before that, Kornienko rightfully holds a prominent place in the history of our diplomacy of the second half of the 20th century. He deservedly enjoyed, and continues to enjoy, great prestige not only among the Foreign Ministry staff: All the institutions with which the Foreign Ministry used to cooperate at that time - the CPSU Central Committee, the USSR Council of Ministers, the KGB, economic agencies and so on - put a premium on his erudition, lucidity of mind, profound knowledge of the most diverse international problems, and his skills. Kornienko made a major contribution to upholding and promoting the USSR's state interests. At 75 he has something to be proud of as he looks back over his diplomatic career and entire active life.

The son of an agronomist, he was fascinated with natural sciences and nothing indicated that he would finally attain great heights in diplomatic service. When the war broke out he was drafted, found unfit for frontline service and assigned to monitor Japanese Russian-language radio broadcasts. This in a manner exposed the future diplomat to the world of international affairs. Later he studied languages at the Central School of the NKGB [People's Commissariat of State Security] and was appointed translator-consultant to the Information Committee of the USSR Council of Ministers. Kornienko developed an absorbing interest in American studies and they became his lifetime career. Soon the Information Committee was incorporated into the USSR Foreign Ministry system and thus he came to work for the ministry.

He was rather rapidly rising in his profession thanks to his great diligence and excellent mental faculties. In 1959 he was appointed deputy head of the US division of the USSR Foreign Ministry where his diplomatic talent later gained in power. But before

taking over as head of this key division of the Foreign Ministry, Kornienko had to receive solid diplomatic grooming at the Soviet Embassy in Washington first as one of the counselors and then minister counselor, ranking only below the ambassador. It was during those years that the brilliant Dobrynin-Kornienko tandem emerged. Anatolii Dobrynin who served as Soviet ambassador remained in the United States for nearly twenty-five years whereas Georgii Kornienko went back to Moscow and rather soon after was put in charge of US affairs in the Foreign Ministry's central apparatus. Mutual understanding on the professional level between these two first-rate diplomats facilitated reliable and fruitful cooperation between the center and the embassy in putting Soviet-American relations on an even keel.

It would be appropriate in this connection to describe some of Kornienko's qualities as an individual and leader. My job at some other Foreign Ministry subdivision had to do with the United States for many years, and I had a chance to see Kornienko in action, including the drawing up of materials for all the Soviet-US summits in the 1970s and for other talks that were laying the legal foundations of relations between this country and the United States. Kornienko was always distinguished for his thoroughness, professionalism and comprehensive approach. He appeared to have worked in an unhurried manner but he worked fast, clearly formulated his ideas and his position, gave precise assignments to his subordinates, rationally organized work inside his own department and its cooperation with other Foreign Ministry subdivisions, central institutions and agencies.

While there was constant pressure of urgent assignments and surprise situations, which entailed rush work, I cannot recall any occasion on which Kornienko should have lost his cool. His manners were ever correct and only on rare occasions he would pass ironic comment with regard to some or other actions by Henry Kissinger or some other world figure aimed at outplaying the Soviet side. Kornienko's hard and fast principle of work was determination in trying to achieve requisite understandings with Washington but with no unilateral concessions on our part. I cannot think of any other Foreign Ministry department that handled the same prodigious amount of work all the year round. There was an objective explanation: there was nearly always an American angle to whatever serious international problems you take. Therefore, rare issues were sorted out without some help from Americanists not to mention the fact that the Soviet-American relations per se represented an enormously involved complex and called for unflagging attention both at the height of the Cold War and during the periods of thaws and détente.

On the other hand, members of the US division were very closely studying a broad spectrum of questions and thus widened their political horizons honing their skills which, naturally, the Ministry's leaders, and not only them, valued highly. As the Foreign Ministry did not have a special subdivision for military policy and disarmament at that time, a large amount of practical work in this important area was shouldered by the US division which also drew up directives and instructions for negotiations and not infrequently took direct part in them. I remember that the 70s and 80s were precisely the period when disarmament issues and, consequently, negotiations with the United States were in the foreground of Soviet foreign policy. Suffice it to cite the difficult talks with regard to ABM, SALT, underground nuclear testing, limitation and reduction of arms and armed forces in Central Europe, and a number of other aspects of limiting the arms race and disarmament. The realities made Kornienko to study all these formidable problems

thoroughly and become in fact the Foreign Ministry's foremost expert in this delicate and extremely responsible sphere.

The ten years Georgii Kornienko headed the US division taught him so much as to enable him to later do well as deputy foreign minister at first and, beginning in 1977, as first deputy foreign minister. By that time he already had a thorough knowledge of all the main structures of the ministry's central machinery, the support and senior personnel of diplomatic representative offices abroad. All that enabled him to effectively coordinate the operation of the machinery, have a supervisory charge of directorates and departments, and fulfill numerous assignments from the minister and not infrequently he was in charge in the absence of Andrei Gromyko when the latter was abroad or on leave.

Kornienko's talents as a farsighted politician, able organizer, skilled and persistent negotiator became revealed to the full precisely during that concluding period of his work at the USSR Foreign Ministry. His role in the Foreign Ministry's activities that, among other things, consisted in drafting proposals for the country's top people was in fact very important and evident to everyone. In appreciation of that Georgii Kornienko was elected member of the CPSU Central Committee and deputy of the USSR Supreme Soviet. His services to the country also earned him the title of Hero of Socialist Labor, and many people know that very few career diplomats were favored with such high honors. The more honorable for that is this rare award received for his hard daily labor full of physical and mental exertion.

I know from the experience of my contacts with Georgii Markovich that his sense of responsibility for work assigned him in this or that area is inherent in him. He always put state interests before ideological considerations or political opportunism. As a realist and pragmatist he tried to make reasonable concessions, but if there was danger of making the wrong decision that could harm the state, he crossed swords with his opponents without hesitation regardless of their status or rank to uphold his own point of view even during Politburo foreign policy, economic or defense issue meetings he was called upon to attend. Let me cite just one of the most revealing, perhaps, facts. In 1983 a tragedy happened when a Soviet fighter-interceptor shot down a South Korean Boeing 747 with passengers on board near Sakhalin mistaking it for a US spy plane. Kornienko was convinced that the world had to be told the truth and that would do less harm than insisting on the misleading account of circumstances of the plane's destruction. He even called on the phone then General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee Yuri Andropov at the hospital. Achieving no desired effect he voiced his objections before the Politburo meeting chaired by Konstantin Chernenko. His appeal remained a voice crying in the wilderness. The country had to clear up the resulting mess for a long time.

Let me mention yet another special but fully justified stance taken by Georgii Markovich. In 1979, I was in charge of the US department of the Foreign Ministry's foreign policy planning agency. Once in the early fall, when I was nearly winding up my regular report to the first deputy foreign minister, he suddenly asked me whether I knew that the Afghan leaders had asked for what was the fifth or sixth time for bringing Soviet troops in Afghanistan. Admitting that I had not even heard anything about such a thing, I nevertheless said straight off that troops should not be sent there on any account. He wanted to know why I thought so. (Why should Georgii Markovich who, as he explained right there and then, long took a negative stance on the Afghan request, discuss this subject with me? I understood why he did it only at the end of our discussion when he

gave me a concrete assignment). There were two sets of arguments in the course of our discussion. One had to do with Afghanistan's special nature (the bringing in of troops would only spur on the civil war; our forces would inevitably become bog down in it; the war promised to be long and bloody; we would be at a disadvantage fighting a war in a mountainous country whose population never tolerated foreign presence throughout history; the civil war would also assume an unfavorable for us religious complexion of Muslims' struggle against the infidels, and so on). In a word, our troops did not get the ghost of chance in Afghanistan while the general prospects were more than nebulous.

The other set of arguments was that sending troops would affect the USSR's foreign policy positions and interests (it would sharply aggravate its relations with the United States, NATO's Europe and neutral Europe; there would be an extremely negative reaction from Afghanistan's neighbors Iran and Pakistan and provide them with a good additional pretext to meddle in Afghan affairs; Afghanistan's neighbor China would look askance; we would have a political confrontation with the Nonaligned Movement and Muslim countries as a whole). In a word, the whole exercise would put the country at a disadvantage. The general conclusion was the following: Assistance to Afghan leaders should continue in the already existing forms and, if necessary, be stepped up, but bringing in troops should be totally opposed.

At the end of our discussion I was instructed to present all these arguments and conclusions in the form of a memorandum of the USSR Foreign Ministry to the CPSU Central Committee. I drew up the memorandum together with another two Foreign Ministry staffers I.S. Spitskii (as deputy head of the Middle East department he was in charge of Afghan affairs) and I.I. Val'kov (Asia Department of the Foreign Ministry's foreign policy planning agency). The memorandum was endorsed by head of the Middle East department V.K. Boldyrev and thus became a document reflecting the combined opinion of the ministry's apparatus. Kornienko approved the memorandum and sent it to Andrei Gromyko for signing. My impression was that everything was all right, and was I surprised hearing that Soviet troops were brought in Afghanistan in December. It turned out later that the minister had never passed our memorandum on to the Central Committee and, as Kornienko writes, Gromyko had completely stopped discussing Afghanistan with him some time in October. I think Gromyko knew very well the stance of his first deputy and preferred not to let him into the evolution of his own ideas.

Kornienko wrote in this connection in his book about the Cold War: "Looking back I have more than once asked myself: Would it not have been better - because of my negative attitude to sending the Soviet troops - to resign at once and have absolutely nothing to do, even indirectly, with the Afghan affairs? In other words, not to be a party to implementing the decision which I thought wrong and simply irrational from all points of view. I have never found a "yes" or "no" answer to this question. On the one hand, I thought, you would not be tainted by the Afghan tragedy, and that would be good, of course. But on the other hand, it occurred to me right away: would it be better if my place in that case were taken by a more zealous and thoughtless person who would carry into effect that same wrong decision? Do you have any moral right to wash your hands of it and quit whereas in carrying into effect the decision that disagrees with your own views you can not only influence its implementation in some way but also work toward reversing the course of events with the passage of time? Whether my choice was right or wrong, it is not for me to judge but I decided to stay in my job."

Let me add here that Georgii Markovich really did his utmost to hasten and facilitate the pullout of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. He lived through some other bitter moments where he had to do things in spite of himself owing to party and performance-of-duty discipline. He writes about those things in the above book. In this sense, Kornienko is not only a diplomat who has achieved much in the chosen field through hard work and ability but also someone to whose lot fell a big share of drama and even tragedy.

Each era brings forth its heroes. But eras come and go and some do it with a bang. The latter happened to the era in which Kornienko's diplomatic activities were unfolding. His career ended in April 1986 in the wake of Andrei Gromyko's leaving the Foreign Ministry the previous fall. Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze was called upon to drastically renovate the USSR's foreign policy and that, according to his ideas, required the "changing of the guard." He did not try to bring in "outsiders" and rather preferred career diplomats, some of whom had served in the US division and the embassy in Washington and were a relatively younger generation of Soviet diplomats.

Kornienko worked for further two years, now in the capacity of first deputy head of a CPSU Central Committee department. His responsibilities included as before international affairs including Afghanistan and disarmament problems. But the nature of his job and possibilities were not the same as before: the CPSU Central Committee, as the country's center of power, was already on the verge of collapse. In 1988 Kornienko was asked to retire which he finally did.

Later he and Marshal of the Soviet Union S.F. Akhromeev published a book that I think is very interesting. Entitled *Through the Eyes of a Marshal and a Diplomat* (Mezhdunarodnye otnoshenia, 1992) it presents their view of Soviet foreign policy before and after 1985. They describe this view as "critical." One can agree or disagree with their assessments of some or other events but, without a doubt, even an informed reader will find the book useful in many ways. The already mentioned Kornienko's book about the Cold War was published three years after and it includes some of the material found in the previous book but is replete with additional detail, facts and observations. The book is also rather interesting and sheds more light on many historic events in which Georgii Markovich took part. Every now and then he, fortunately, appears on television to tell some new things about what happened in the past but what is of contemporary relevance. Let us hope for hearing more from Georgii Markovich in the press and on television since this is a person of vast experience he is prepared to share.

Kornienko's 75th birthday is a happy occasion not only for the man himself but also for all his fellow diplomats of all generations in and outside the Foreign Ministry.

From the bottom of my heart, I would like to wish dear Georgii Markovich many happy returns of the day and continued good health and long life.