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WHILE EXPECTATIONS OF REYKJAVIK WERE MODEST AND GUARDED ACROSS THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM, THE ATTENTION OF BRITISH POLITICIANS AND MEDIA BECAME FAIRLY RIVITED ON THE ICELANDIC CAPITAL. THEIR FOCUS WAS NOT JUST ON THE POSSIBILITY OF MOVEMENT ON ARMS CONTROL, AND THE IMPACT A BREAKTHROUGH MIGHT HAVE ON BRITISH AND NATO SECURITY, BUT ALSO ON EXPECTED IF UNPREDICTABLE DOMESTIC POLITICAL FALLOUT FROM ANY ARMS CONTROL PROGRESS.

THE PRESS OVERREACTS, AND THE OPPOSITION FOLLOWS

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TAGS: PREL, US, UR, UK
SUBJECT: BRITISH REACTION TO REYKJAVIK: AS THE
DUST SETTLES, PERSPECTIVE RETURNS

1. ~~ENTIRE TEXT~~

2. SUMMARY. IN THE FIVE DAYS SINCE REYKJAVIK, AN INITIAL, MEDIA-INSPIRED ATMOSPHERE OF DEEP GLOOM AND DOOM OVER THE MINI-SUMMIT'S FAILURE HAS GIVEN WAY TO FAIRLY WIDESPREAD, CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM THAT A SIGNIFICANT ARMS CONTROL ACCORD REMAINS WITHIN REACH. NEARLY ALL BUT THE LABOR PARTY ARE NOW POINTING TO THE HOPEFUL SIGNS THAT EMERGED FROM REYKJAVIK, AND THE GOVERNMENT HAS PUBLICLY DEFENDED PRESIDENT REGAN'S INSISTENCE ON PROCEEDING WITH SDI. STILL, WHO IS CONCERNED BY WHAT THEY SEE AS A LAPSE IN ALLIED CONSULTATION DURING THE SUMMIT--GIVEN THE SCOPE OF THE AGREEMENTS UNDER CONSIDERATION--AND BY THE ADMINISTRATION'S EMBRACE OF THE GOAL OF ELIMINATING ALL BALLISTIC SYSTEMS WITHIN TEN YEARS. THE TORIES FEAR THAT THE LATTER MAY LOOK TOO INCOMPATIBLE TO THE PUBLIC WITH LABOR'S CALL FOR A NUCLEAR-FREE EUROPE AND A GRADUAL ELIMINATION OF ALL NUCLEAR WEAPONS. END SUMMARY.

4. AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND, THE IMMEDIATE POST-REYKJAVIK SOVIET PR OFFENSIVE SCORED WELL IN BRITAIN, OWING LARGELY TO TWO FACTORS: (1) A GROWING--THOUGH PROBABLY STILL MINORITY--PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF WASHINGTON (SINCE THE LIBYA RAID) AS UNSTEADY, INATTENTIVE TO EUROPEAN CONCERNS, LESS INTERESTED IN REDUCING NUCLEAR ARMS THAN MOSCOW, AND OBSESSED WITH DEVELOPING "STAR WARS;" AND (2) A TYPICALLY SENSATIONALIST BRITISH PRESS WHICH QUICKLY PAINTED A FAR DARKER PICTURE OF GLOOM THAN EVEN THE SOVIETS WERE PRESENTING. EXPRESSIONS OF PROFOUND DISAPPOINTMENT, ACCOMPANIED BY FINGER-POINTING--MOSTLY TOWARD WASHINGTON--ABOUNDED FOLLOWING REYKJAVIK. IT WAS ALL BUT FORGOTTEN THAT, PRIOR TO REYKJAVIK, NO ONE HAD IMAGINED THAT THE PRESIDENT AND GORBACHEV WOULD GET ANYWHERE NEAR AS MUCH ON THE ARMS CONTROL TABLE AS THEY DID, LET ALONE THAT AN OVERALL ARMS ACCORD WAS WITHIN REACH.

5. INITIAL RHG REACTION TO REYKJAVIK WAS NOTICEABLY MUFFED, WITH DOWNING STREET DEFERRING COMMENT UNTIL MORE OF THE FACTS WERE IN. SDP LEADER DAVID OWEN QUICKLY TERMED THE RESULT "DEEPLY DISAPPOINTING," BUT QUALIFIED HIS REACTION BY NOTING THAT IN NEGOTIATIONS OF SUCH BREADTH AND IMPORT IT WAS NECESSARY TO BE PATIENT AND "GET IT RIGHT." NO SUCH RESERVE, HOWEVER, FROM THE LABOR PARTY LEADERSHIP: SHADOW DEFENSE SECRETARY DENZIL DAVIES CALLED IT "VERY TRAGIC AND SERIOUS THAT THESE TALKS HAVE BROKEN DOWN AND ESPECIALLY SERIOUS THAT THEY HAVE BROKEN DOWN OVER STAR WARS." SHADOW FOREIGN SECRETARY DENNIS HEALEY, ECHOING PAUL WARREN'S INSTANT, CAUSTIC CRITICISM OF THE PRESIDENT ON BRITISH TV, LAID THE BLAME HEAVILY ON PRESIDENT REGAN AND SDI.

REYKJAVIK IN AN ALREADY CHARGED ATMOSPHERE

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3. ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE REYKJAVIK MINI-SUMMIT CAME NEAR THE END OF ONE OF THE MORE INTERESTING AND SPIRITED PARTY CONFERENCE SEASONS IN BRITAIN IN RECENT YEARS. THE NUCLEAR DEFENSE ISSUE HAD MOVED DRAMATICALLY TO NEAR CENTER STAGE AND THE POLITICAL DEBATE HAD BECOME INCREASINGLY HEATED IN ANTICIPATION THAT PH THATCHER WOULD OPT FOR A GENERAL ELECTION IN 1987. THE POLL-LEADING LABOR PARTY HAD WARMLY EMBRACED UNILATERALISM IN A TIGHTLY-RUN CONFERENCE; THE SUPPLIBERAL ALLIANCE, IN SERIOUS DISARRAY OVER WHETHER TO REPLACE POLARIS, WAS LOSING POPULAR SUPPORT; AND THE TORIES, WITH NEWFOUND OPTIMISM, WERE PRESENTING THEMSELVES AS THE ONLY PARTY WHICH OFFERED BRITONS A CREDIBLE DEFENSE.

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