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Gorbachev

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COMMS OFFICE REF NO.....
D.T.R. 20th DECEMBER 1984 1220HRS.

FM WASHINGTON 192345Z DEC 84

TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 3806 OF 19 DECEMBER

MW

INFO IMMEDIATE HONG KONG (FOR PRIME MINISTER'S PARTY)
MOSCOW UKDEL NATO ROUTINE BONN PARIS TOKYO ROME

INFO SAVING OTHER NATO POSTS

GORBACHEV'S VISIT TO BRITAIN: US PRESS COVERAGE

1. SUMMARY

HEADLINE TREATMENT IN US PRESS, BUT LITTLE COMMENT SO FAR. COVERAGE FOCUSED ON AUGURIES FOR THE GENEVA TALKS AND THE SOVIET CAMPAIGN ON SPACE WEAPONS. BRITISH ROLE IN PROMOTING BROADER EAST/WEST CONTACTS NOTED.

2. DETAIL

GORBACHEV'S VISIT HAS BEEN FRONT PAGE NEWS IN ALL THE MAJOR US DAILIES FOR THE LAST FOUR DAYS. REPORTING HAS BEEN BASED PRE-
DOMINANTLY ON BRITISH OFFICIAL BRIEFING, WITH LITTLE COMMENT BY LOCAL CORRESPONDENTS. ONLY THE QUOTE BALTIMORE SUN UNQUOTE HAS SO FAR OFFERED EDITORIAL COMMENT (SEE PARA 5 BELOW). THE EXTENT OF COVERAGE REFLECTS THE INTENSE INTEREST HERE IN THE VISIT AS AN INDICATOR OF THE TEMPERATURE OF EAST/WEST RELATIONS, AN AUGURY OF THE GENEVA TALKS, AND A GLIMPSE OF THE PRESUMED SUCCESSOR TO CHERMENKO.

3. ALL NEWSPAPERS REFLECTED THE BRITISH VIEW THAT CONTACTS WITH SOVIET UNION AT ALL LEVELS WAS NECESSARY TO BUILD A CLIMATE OF CONFIDENCE IN WHICH ARMS CONTROL NEGOTIATIONS COULD PROSPER. THEY NOTED THAT BRITAIN'S FIRST OBJECTIVE WAS TO CONTRIBUTE TO THIS PROCESS, BUT THAT THE VISIT WAS ALSO SEEN IN LONDON AS A POTENTIAL TURNING POINT IN BILATERAL ANGLO-SOVIET RELATIONS. THE UNUSUAL LENGTH OF THE VISIT, THE EXTENDED OFFICIAL TALKS, AND THE RELAXED AND FRIENDLY ATMOSPHERE WERE FREQUENTLY MENTIONED AS WERE BRITISH HOPES FOR AN INCREASE IN ANGLO-SOVIET TRADE.

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-2-

4. THE PRIMARY FOCUS OF COVERAGE HAS BEEN ON ARMS CONTROL AND PARTICULARLY THE DISCUSSION OF QUOTE SPACE WEAPONS UNQUOTE. EARLY COVERAGE GAVE PROMINENCE TO COMMENTS ATTRIBUTED TO BRITISH SOURCES THAT THERE WAS A SHARED BRITISH AND SOVIET CONCERN TO PREVENT AN ARMS RACE IN SPACE, AND THAT THE PRIME MINISTER WOULD RAISE THIS WITH PRESIDENT REAGAN AT CAMP DAVID. THERE HAVE BEEN FREQUENT REFERENCES TO GENERAL EUROPEAN CONCERN ABOUT SDI. LATER COVERAGE INCLUDED YOUR INTERVIEW ON 17 DECEMBER AND OFFICIAL COMMENT STRESSING THAT THE ISSUE SHOULD NOT BECOME A WEDGE BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND ITS ALLIES. THE PRIME MINISTER'S STATEMENT THAT QUOTE OBVIOUSLY YOU CAN'T STOP RESEARCH FROM GOING AHEAD, BUT I THINK ONE DOES NOT WANT TO GO INTO A HIGHER AND HIGHER LEVEL OF ARMAMENTS UNQUOTE HAS BEEN WIDELY QUOTED.

5. IN AN EDITORIAL ENTITLED QUOTE STAR WARS OVER EUROPE UNQUOTE THE QUOTE BALTIMORE SUN UNQUOTE SAID THAT THIS STATEMENT, AND PRESIDENT MITTERRAND'S RECENT CRITICISM OF THE SDI CONCEPT INDICATED THAT THE RUSSIANS MIGHT HAVE GREATER SUCCESS IN DIVIDING THE ALLIES ON THIS ISSUE THAN THEY DID OVER INF, BECAUSE UNLIKE INF, SDI HAD DECOUPLING IMPLICATIONS AND THREATENED TO UNDERMINE THE CREDIBILITY OF BRITISH AND FRENCH INDEPENDENT DETERRENTS.

6. THE QUOTE WASHINGTON POST UNQUOTE SAID THAT GORBACHEV'S FIRM REMARKS ON ARMS CONTROL IN SPACE INDICATED THAT THE ISSUE COULD BECOME AN IMMEDIATE PROBLEM IN THE FORTHCOMING GENEVA TALKS. IT REPORTED THE STRONG LINK WHICH GORBACHEV MADE BETWEEN MAINTAINING THE ABM TREATY AND FUTURE AGREEMENTS ON ARMS CONTROL. AND VELHIKOV'S THREAT THAT COMPLICATIONS COULD DEVELOP IF THE US PROCEEDED WITH ASAT TESTING IN MARCH. BUT IT ALSO CARRIED GORBACHEV'S STATEMENTS OF PREPAREDNESS FOR QUOTE RADICAL UNQUOTE ARMS CONTROL AGREEMENTS. THE GENERAL CONCLUSION, IS THAT, WHILE VERY DIFFERENT IN HIS PRESENTATION, GORBACHEV HAD OFFERED NOTHING NEW OF SUBSTANCE, AND BRITISH SOURCES WERE QUOTED AS WARNING THAT THE WEST SHOULD NOT EXPECT AN EARLY BREAKTHROUGH.

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-3-

7. ALL PAPERS NOTED GORBACHEV'S COMBINATION OF AUTHORITY AND INFORMALITY. THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR SUMMED HIM UP AS QUOTE CHARMING BUT A FORMIDABLE NEGOTIATOR UNQUOTE. IT WAS NOTED THAT THE BRITISH QUOTE GAVE HIM HIGH MARKS UNQUOTE AND THE PRIME MINISTER'S COMMENT QUOTE I LIKE MR GORBACHEV: WE CAN DO BUSINESS TOGETHER UNQUOTE WAS WIDELY REPORTED.

8. THE PRIME MINISTER'S INTERVENTION ON BEHALF OF SOVIET JEWRY, YOUR OWN MENTION OF SAKHAROV, AND THE EXCHANGE WITH MR ST JOHN STEVAS IN THE MEETING WITH THE HOUSE OF COMMONS SELECT COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS WERE ALSO PROMINENTLY REPORTED, THE LATTER BEING SEEN AS A USEFUL COUNTERPOINT TO THE ATMOSPHERE OF SWEETNESS AND LIGHT WHICH GORBACHEV WAS SAID TO BE TRYING TO CONVEY.

9. THE US PRESS HAS NOT YET ATTEMPTED TO MAKE AN OVERALL JUDGEMENT ON THE VISIT. IT IS BOUND TO FEATURE AT THE PRIME MINISTER'S PRESS CONFERENCE HERE ON 22 DECEMBER - SEE MY TEL NO 15 TO PEKING: (NOT TO ALL)

10. I AM REPORTING SEPARATELY A MAJOR SPEECH BY WEINBERGER TODAY ON THE SDI.

FCO PASS SAVING: ANKARA ATHENS BRUSSELS COPENHAGEN LISBON LUXEMBOURG OTTAWA OSLO ROME REYKJAVIK THE HAGUE UKDEL VIENNA

A: PM'S PARTY
D: NIL
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