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MY TELSNOs 1205 AND 1206: REYKJAVIK MEETING: GORBACHEV'S TELEVISION STATEMENT

COMMENT

SUMMARY

1. AN IMPRESSIVE, CONFIDENT, NON-POLEMICAL (THOUGH CRITICAL) PERFORMANCE DESIGNED TO SHOW THE EXTENT OF SOVIET EFFORTS TO SECURE AGREEMENT AT REYKJAVIK. A FACTUALLY ACCURATE ACCOUNT OF THE DISCUSSIONS WHICH NEVERTHELESS MISREPRESENTED SOVIET CONCESSIONS TO US POSITIONS AS SOVIET INITIATIVES. GORBACHEV'S PRESENTATION SUGGESTS A GENUINE ATTEMPT AT REYKJAVIK TO PULL OFF AN AGREEMENT. BY LEAVING THE DOORS OPEN HE IMPLIES THAT AGREEMENT CAN YET BE POSSIBLE. ECONOMIC CONCERNS WERE PROBABLY A DEFENSIVELY SIGNIFICANT FACTOR IN SOVIET DETERMINATION BUT THE POLITICAL REQUIREMENT FOR A MAJOR SUCCESS FROM A WASHINGTON SUMMIT MAY BE THE KEY. GORBACHEV EAGER TO DEMONSTRATE WIDE LEADERSHIP SUPPORT FOR HIS STRATEGY AND TACTICS. EVIDENT SOVIET DESIRE TO BUILD ON REYKJAVIK BUT GORBACHEV UNSPECIFIC ON WHAT HAPPENS NEXT. NO SUGGESTION THAT THE MOOD HAS SHIFTED TO LOOKING BEYOND REAGAN FOR AN ARMS CONTROL DEAL.

DETAIL

PRESENTATION AND IMPACT

2. GORBACHEV'S AIM WAS CLEARLY TO GIVE A MEASURED, STATESMANLIKE ASSESSMENT OF THE REYKJAVIK SUMMIT DEMONSTRATING BY AN EFFECTIVE

2. GORBACHEV'S AIM WAS CLEARLY TO GIVE A MEASURED, STATESMANLIKE ASSESSMENT OF THE REYKJAVIK SUMMIT DEMONSTRATING, BY AN EFFECTIVE BLOW-BY-BLOW ACCOUNT, THE RESPONSIBLE AND FLEXIBLE SOVIET APPROACH, SHOWING HOW CLOSE THE MEETING CAME TO AGREEMENT, PLACING THE BLAME FOR THE LACK OF SUCCESS ON US INTRANSIGENCE, BUT LEAVING DOORS FIRMLY OPEN. DESPITE A NUMBER OF TELLING POINTS CRITICAL OF THE US POSITION AT REYKJAVIK, GORBACHEV'S TONE WAS SURPRISINGLY NON-POLEMICAL. HE WAS CAREFUL NOT TO ATTACK REAGAN TOO DIRECTLY.

3. THE STATEMENT WAS OBVIOUSLY INTENDED TO MATCH REAGAN'S OWN TV ADDRESS. ADDRESSED TO BOTH AN INTERNATIONAL AND A DOMESTIC AUDIENCE, INCLUDING BOTH SPECIALISTS AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC, IT INEVITABLY FELL BETWEEN TWO STOOLS. FOR THE DOMESTIC AUDIENCE, IT WAS PERHAPS TOO LONG AND TOO DETAILED, PARTICULARLY FOR THOSE WHO HAD ALREADY SAT THROUGH GORBACHEV'S REYKJAVIK PRESS CONFERENCE. THE INTERNATIONAL AUDIENCE MAY WELL HAVE MISSED SOME DOMESTIC NUANCES, MOSTLY CONCERNED WITH THE ECONOMY (SEE BELOW). GORBACHEV WAS CAREFUL, HOWEVER, TO FORESTALL ANY POTENTIAL CRITICISM OF HIS HAVING BEEN READY TO GIVE TOO MUCH AWAY BY EMPHASISING AT THE OUTSET OF HIS STATEMENT THAT HE WENT TO REYKJAVIK WITH A POSITION AND EVEN WITH A PAPER APPROVED BY THE POLITBURO, THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE SECRETARIAT AND THE MINISTRIES OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENCE.

3. ALTHOUGH GORBACHEV READ MOST OF HIS STATEMENT, AND DESPITE THE OCCASIONALLY AWKWARD PAUSE AND STUMBLE, HIS PERFORMANCE WAS IMPRESSIVE, CONFIDENT AND FIRM. I THINK IT WILL HAVE SERVED HIS PURPOSE WELL.

DID GORBACHEV TELL THE TRUTH ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED AT REYKJAVIK ?

4. ACCORDING TO MY AMERICAN COLLEAGUE, WHO WAS A MEMBER OF THE US DELEGATION, GORBACHEV'S ACCOUNT OF THE COURSE OF THE DISCUSSIONS WAS GENERALLY ACCURATE APART FROM HIS CONSISTENT MISREPRESENTATION OF SOVIET CONCESSIONS FOR LONG-STANDING U S POSITIONS (E.G. 50% STRATEGIC REDUCTIONS) AS SOVIET INITIATIVES. HIS ALLEGATION THAT REAGAN HAD DONE THE SAME IN REVERSE WAS BRAZEN BUT WILL BE BELIEVED BY THE SOVIET PEOPLE.

DOES GORBACHEV'S STATEMENT SHED LIGHT ON SOVIET AIMS AT REYKJAVIK ?

5. GORBACHEV'S CAREFUL, FACTUAL AND LARGELY NON-POLEMICAL PRESENTATION REINFORCES MY VIEW (MY TELNO 1195) THAT HE WENT TO REYKJAVIK WITH THE FIRM INTENTION OF MAKING EVERY POSSIBLE EFFORT TO SECURE THE BASIS FOR A PACKAGE OF AGREEMENTS, WHILE RECOGNIZING THAT THE ODDS WERE AGAINST IT. THE ACCOUNT WHICH MY US COLLEAGUE HAS GIVEN ME (AND MY FRENCH AND FRG COLLEAGUES) OF THE ATMOSPHERICS OF THE RYKJAVIK DISCUSSIONS FURTHER STRENGTHENS THIS INTERPRETATION. GORBACHEV'S TEAM, AND MARSHAL AKHROMEYEV IN PARTICULAR, WERE UNUSUALLY BUSINESSLIKE IN THEIR APPROACH, GENUINELY CONCERNED TO ENLARGE AREAS OF AGREEMENT THROUGH COMPROMISE AND (WITH THE EXCEPTION OF ARBATOV) UNINTERESTED IN SCORING PROPAGANDA POINTS.

EXCEPTION OF ARBATOV) UNINTERESTED IN SCORING PROPAGANDA POINTS. IN THE VERY SMALL NUMBER OF HOURS WHICH THE DELEGATIONS HAD AT THEIR DISPOSAL, A REMARKABLE DEGREE OF PROGRESS WAS ACHIEVED INCLUDING THE RESOLUTION OF SOME PROBLEMS, E.G. THAT OF WHETHER A STRATEGIC BOMBER SHOULD BE COUNTED AS ONE WARHEAD OR WHETHER THE COMPONENTS OF ITS PAYLOAD SHOULD BE COUNTED SEPARATELY, WHICH HAVE BEEN BONES OF CONTENTION AT GENEVA SINCE THE NST NEGOTIATIONS BEGAN. SOVIET AGREEMENT TO 50% CUTS IN EACH LEG OF THE STRATEGIC TRIAD, THUS CATCHING THE 'HEAVIES', WAS ALSO A SIGNIFICANT CONCESSION. AGAINST THIS BACKGROUND, IT IS HIGHLY IMPROBABLE THAT GORBACHEV WAS AIMING ONLY AT A PROPAGANDA VICTORY.

6. DESPITE THE REAL PROSPECT, AS GORBACHEV ACKNOWLEDGED IN HIS SPEECH, OF A HISTORIC BREAKTHROUGH IN ARMS CONTROL AND EVEN OF PROGRESS ON NUCLEAR TESTS, HE NEVERTHELESS FELT OBLIGED TO FOREGO IT SIMPLY BECAUSE HE COULD NOT SECURE AN UNDERTAKING FROM REAGAN TO CONFINE SDI RESEARCH TO THE LABORATORY FOR TEN YEARS. WHY? THERE ARE, I THINK, THREE POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS FOR THE RENEWED (OR MORE ACCURATELY NEWLY PROMINENT) SOVIET PREOCCUPATION WITH THE SDI. THEY ARE, IN ASCENDING ORDER OF PROBABILITY:-

I) ECONOMIC

THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP MAY HAVE REACHED A CRUCIAL DECISION-POINT ON THE ALLOCATION OF FUNDS TO A RESPONSE TO THE SDI IF THE US PROGRAMME CANNOT BE CONSTRAINED. GORBACHEV'S REFERENCES TO THE FUTILITY OF BELIEVING THAT THE ARMS RACE COULD BRING THE SOVIET ECONOMY TO ITS KNEES MAY BE SIGNIFICANT; AND HIS REFERENCE TO THE US DESIRE TO FOMENT DOMESTIC DISSATISFACTION WITH THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP IS CERTAINLY REVEALING. ECONOMIC CONCERNS ARE UPPERMOST IN GORBACHEV'S MIND (CF. THE APPARENTLY IRRELEVANT ECONOMIC POSTSCRIPT TO HIS SPEECH) AND REYKJAVIK MAY HAVE BEEN HIS MOST DESPERATE (BUT NOT NECESSARILY FINAL) ATTEMPT TO AVOID THE DRAIN ON RESOURCES WHICH A RESPONSE TO SDI WOULD INVOLVE.

II) MILITARY

GORBACHEV AND HIS MILITARY ADVISERS MAY GENUINELY BELIEVE THAT THE SDI IS DESIGNED TO HAVE AN OFFENSIVE, AS WELL AS A DEFENSIVE, CAPABILITY AGAINST WHICH THE SOVIET UNION HAS NO FORESEEABLE PROTECTION. THE SOVIET MILITARY MAY BE ALARMED AT THE SPEED WITH WHICH SDI RESEARCH APPEARS TO BE PROGRESSING; THEY MAY BE PREPARED TO GO ALONG WITH CONCESSIONS IN OTHER ARMS CONTROL FIELDS WHICH THEY HAVE HITHERTO OPPOSED IN ORDER TO STAVE OFF THE GREATER THREAT. (A MORE ARCAIC VARIATION ON THE MILITARY EXPLANATION COULD BE THAT SOVIET RESEARCHERS ARE THEMSELVES WITHIN SIGHT OF A BREAKTHROUGH AND WISH U S SCIENTISTS TO BE CONSTRAINED WHILE THE SOVIET PROGRAMME FORGES AHEAD.)

III) POLITICAL.

GORBACHEV'S POLITBURO COLLEAGUES, AND PERHAPS GORBACHEV HIMSELF, MAY BE PROFOUNDLY APPREHENSIVE OF THE POLITICAL RISKS IN HIS PROSPECTIVE VISIT TO THE US. THEY MAY BELIEVE THAT IN PROPAGANDA

MAY BE PROFOUNDLY APPREHENSIVE OF THE POLITICAL RISKS IN HIS PROSPECTIVE VISIT TO THE US. THEY MAY BELIEVE THAT, IN PROPAGANDA TERMS, HE IS ON A HIDING TO NOTHING UNLESS HE CAN BRING BACK NOT MERELY A SATISFACTORY SUMMIT OUTCOME BUT A SENSATIONAL ONE, IE. THE PACKAGE FOR WHICH HE ATTEMPTED TO PREPARE THE GROUND AT REYKJAVIK. GORBACHEV'S MOTIVES MAY BE A MIXTURE OF ALL THREE ELEMENTS -

(I) AND (II) ARE CLEARLY LINKED - BUT I WOULD ATTACH THE GREATEST WEIGHT TO (III).

7. THE RESTORATION OF GROMYKO'S ORIGINAL INF/SDI LINKAGE MAY HAVE BEEN DESIGNED NOT ONLY TO INCREASE THE PRESSURE ON REAGAN TO BE MORE FLEXIBLE ON SDI BUT ALSO TO INCREASE THE UNPOPULARITY OF THE SDI IN WESTERN EUROPE, WHERE IT COULD NOW BE SEEN AS THE SOLE OBSTACLE TO AN INF ZERO SOLUTION. THIS COULD BACKFIRE, HOWEVER, GIVEN THE LACK OF LOGIC IN THE LINKAGE.

WHAT NEXT ?

6. ALL THE INDICATIONS, BOTH IN THE POLITBURO COMMUNIQUE (MY TELNO 1205) AND IN GORBACHEV'S SPEECH ARE THAT GORBACHEV WISHES IN DUE COURSE TO BUILD ON PEYKJAVIK RATHER THAN RETURN TO THE STATUS QUO ANTE.

KARPOV'S REMARKS IN LONDON (YOUR TELNO 1767 TO WASHINGTON) CONFIRM THIS. GORBACHEV NEVERTHELESS SAID NOTHING ABOUT THE TIMING OF ANY FURTHER MOVE OR OF A FUTURE SUMMIT. IT MAY WELL BE THAT HE HAS NOT YET DESPAIRED OF ENCOURAGING OR PRESSURING REAGAN INTO SUFFICIENT MOVEMENT ON SDI TO MEET SOVIET CONCERNS. I WOULD THEREFORE EXPECT THE DIALOGUE TO CONTINUE, NOT ONLY AT GENEVA BUT ALSO, FOR EXAMPLE, IN VIENNA WHERE SHULTZ IS LIKELY (IN MY US COLLEAGUE'S VIEW) TO MEET SHEVARDNADZE WHEN HE GOES THERE ON 5 NOVEMBER.

CARTLEDGE

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