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FM BONN 241615Z AUG 84
TO PRIORITY FCO
TELEGRAM NUMBER 791 OF 24 AUGUST
AND TO PRIORITY MODUK
INFO PRIORITY WASHINGTON, UKDEL NATO, MOSCOW,
INFO ROUTINE EAST BERLIN, CICC(G), PARIS

ANTI-TANK PIPELINE EXPLOSIVES

SUMMARY

1. A PUBLIC SQUALL HAS BLOWN UP TODAY ABOUT REPORTS FROM WASHINGTON OF PLANS TO INSTALL A PIPELINE FILLED WITH LIQUID EXPLOSIVES ALONG THE INNER GERMAN BORDER. VIGOROUS, ALMOST OVER-SENSITIVE, DENIAL FROM FEDERAL MOD.

DETAIL

2. MOST OF THE SERIOUS DAILIES TODAY RUN A STORY THAT THE PENTAGON RECOMMENDS A NEW DEFENCE SYSTEM FOR EUROPE BASED ON AN UNDERGROUND PIPELINE FILLED WITH LIQUID EXPLOSIVES. IT IS BASED ON REMARKS BY PENTAGON SPOKESMAN BURCH, FOLLOWING A COMMENT BY GENERAL SMITH OF THE PENTAGON TO VISITING NATO PARLIAMENTARIANS.

3. THE FACTS ARE THAT US AND GERMAN ARMIES TESTED IN BAVARIA EARLIER THIS YEAR AN UNDERGROUND PIPELINE FILLED WITH LIQUID EXPLOSIVES (BASED IN THE GERMAN TESTS ON NITROMETHANE). THE PURPOSE OF THE EXPLOSIVES WOULD BE TO CREATE AN IMPENETRABLE ANTI-TANK DITCH. IF DEPLOYED, THE PIPELINE WOULD REPLACE EXISTING PLANS FOR CONVENTIONAL MINEFIELDS (THEREBY SAVING CONSIDERABLE TIME AND LABOUR IN MINEFIELD LAYING IN THE SHORT CRUCIAL PERIOD OF TRANSITION TO WAR). IF THE PIPELINE IS EVER DEPLOYED, PLANS WOULD BE FOR SELECTIVE AND VULNERABLE STRETCHES OF THE FEDERAL GERMAN BORDER TO BE PROTECTED, AND THERE IS NO SUGGESTION OF ONE SINGLE CONTINUOUS MAGINOT-STYLE PIPELINE (AS MANY OF THE CRITICS HERE HAVE ASSERTED). FURTHER DETAIL IN REPORTS FROM THE BRITISH LIAISON OFFICER AT GERMAN ARMY ENGINEER SCHOOL, HELD IN GS(OR) 13 MODUK.

4. THE FMOD SPOKESMAN SAID YESTERDAY THAT NEITHER NATO NOR THE GERMAN ARMY HAD PLANS FOR A CONTINUOUS SYSTEM OF BARRIERS ALONG THE BORDER. ANY SUCH INFORMATION FROM THE PENTAGON WAS 'ABSURD'. SUCH PLANS HAD BEEN REJECTED IN THE PAST AND WOULD BE IN THE FUTURE, THERE WERE NO CONTACTS BETWEEN GOVERNMENTS OR ARMIES IN NATO ABOUT SUCH PROJECTS. RESEARCH WAS HOWEVER CONTINUING INTO LIQUID EXPLOSIVES INCLUDING THEIR POSSIBLE USE AS ANTI-TANK MINES OR FOR CREATING TACTICAL OBSTACLES. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE BUNDESWEHR WERE INVOLVED IN SUCH TESTS.

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STATE SECRETARY WUERZBACH SAID PLANS (FOR A CONTINUOUS PIPELINE) NEITHER WERE APPROPRIATE FOR THE CONCEPT OF DEFENCE AGAINST A CONVENTIONAL THREAT NOR CONFORMED TO NATO OPERATIONAL PLANS.

5. PRESS COMMENT IS MOSTLY HOSTILE. THE BONN GENERAL ANZEIGER ASKS HOW EUROPE CAN TAKE THE US MILITARY LEADERS SERIOUSLY IF THEY COUNTENANCE SUCH IDEAS. THE PENTAGON'S PLANS AROUSE MORE FEAR IN ALLIANCE PARTNERS THAN IN THE SOVIET ARMED FORCES. THE RIGHT WING, NORMALLY PRO-GOVERNMENT FRANKFURTER ALLGEMEINE QUOTES FROM A US REPORT TO CONGRESS WHICH WARNS THAT ANY GOVERNMENT IN BONN WOULD OPPOSE SUCH INSTALLATIONS IF THEY INVOLVED MAJOR ENGINEERING WORK, AND IN PARTICULAR IF THEY CREATED A NEW BARRIER WHICH DEEPENED THE RIFT BETWEEN THE TWO GERMANIES.

COMMENT

6. THE EXCITEMENT WITH WHICH THE GERMAN MEDIA HAVE SEIZED ON THIS SUBJECT MAY SEEM SURPRISING, BUT WITH A HONECKER VISIT LOOMING, THE POLITICAL SENSITIVITY OF SUCH ISSUES IS NATURALLY HIGH HERE. BUT THE VIGOUR OF THE DENIALS BY THE FMOD IS SLIGHTLY DISINGENUOUS GIVEN THE PROFESSIONAL INTEREST OF THE BUNDESWEHR IN TESTING PIPELINE LIQUID EXPLOSIVES FOR SELECTIVE USE IN BLOCKING A TANK ATTACK AT KEY POINTS. GIVEN RECENT US/GERMAN PUBLIC DIFFERENCES ON DEFENCE (INFRASTRUCTURE, SDI) FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SPOKESMEN WOULD HAVE DONE BETTER TO PLAY DOWN SUCH A STORY.

BONN WILL PASS TO MODUK AND CICC(G)

FCO PLEASE PASS ALL OTHER ADDRESSEES

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