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FM MOSCOW

TO DESKBY 061430Z F C O

TELNO 544

OF 061345Z MAY 86

INFO PRIORITY STOCKHOLM, PARIS, WARSAW, BONN,

INFO PRIORITY WASHINGTON, UKRMS VIENNA.

*Prime Minister
Please see
paragraph 12, for
poor Soviet
performance in this
subject
CPS-*

NUCLEAR ACCIDENT IN CHERNOBYL: ROUND UP OF SOVIET STATEMENTS AND COMMENT.

1. OUR TELNOS 490, 499, 509 AND 516 REPORTED IN FULL THE TEXTS OF THE FOUR CONSECUTIVE DAILY STATEMENTS BY THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT ON THE CHERNOBYL ACCIDENT. IT MAY NOW BE USEFUL TO REVIEW THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF PUBLICITY FOR THE ACCIDENT TO DATE, IN THE STATEMENTS, AND IN SUBSEQUENT OFFICIAL REPORT AND COMMENT IN THE SOVIET MEDIA.
2. THE FIRST OF THE FOUR GOVERNMENT STATEMENTS, WAS RELEASED BY TASS IN THE EVENING OF 28 APRIL (MONDAY), BUT FIRST APPEARED IN THE SOVIET PRESS IN THE FOLLOWING EVENING'S IZVESTIYA. IT MERELY DISCLOSED THAT THE ACCIDENT HAD TAKEN PLACE AT CHERNOBYL AND THAT ONE REACTOR HAD BEEN DAMAGED. IT MENTIONED MEASURES FOR THE ELIMINATION OF THE RESULTS OF THE ACCIDENT, AND HELP BEING GIVEN TO VICTIMS. NO INDICATION WAS GIVEN OF NUMBERS OF PEOPLE INVOLVED, OR THE SERIOUSNESS OF THEIR INJURIES.
3. THE SECOND STATEMENT (OUR TELNO 499), WAS ISSUED ON 29 APRIL (TUESDAY), AND IN EFFECT AMPLIFIED THE FIRST STATEMENT WITH MORE DETAILS OF THE CAUSES AND RESULTS OF THE ACCIDENT. IT REFERRED FOR THE FIRST TIME TO THE ESCAPE OF RADIOACTIVE SUBSTANCES, WITHOUT DESCLOSING THE VOLUME, DIRECTION OR EXTENT OF THE ESCAPE. THIS STATEMENT ALSO DISCLOSED FOR THE FIRST TIME THAT TWO PEOPLE HAD DIED 'IN THE ACCIDENT'. A SECOND REFERENCE WAS MADE TO HELP FOR THE INJURED, NUMBERS STILL UNDISCLOSED. THE LOCAL RADIOACTIVITY LEVEL WAS SAID TO HAVE BEEN 'STABILISED'.
4. THE THIRD AND FOURTH GOVERNMENT STATEMENTS, ON 30 APRIL AND 1 MAY RESPECTIVELY (OUR TELNOS 509 AND 516) REPORTED THAT RADIOACTIVITY LEVELS HAD DROPPED SEMICLN 'BY 1-1/2 - 2 TIMES', ACCORDING TO THE 1 MAY STATEMENT. THE 30 APRIL STATEMENT SAID THAT NO CHAIN REACTION HAD TAKEN PLACE IN THE RACTOR, WHICH HAD BEEN 'SMOTHERED'. THIS STATEMENT REAFFIRMED THAT 2 PEOPLE HAD DIED, AND GAVE THE NEW INFORMATION THAT 197 HAD BEEN HOSPITALISED, 49 OF WHOM HAD LEFT AFTER EXAMINATION. THE 1 MAY STATEMENT REFINED THIS WITH THE INFORMATION THAT 18 PEOPLE WERE IN A SERIOUS CONDITION. IT ALSO CLAIMED THAT THERE WERE NO FOREIGN CITIZENS AMONG THE VICTIMS.

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5. TASS REPORTED ON 1 MAY THE STATEMENT TO THE UN BY THE UKRAINIAN REPRESENTATIVE. IN IT HE MADE A STANDARD REBUTTAL OF WESTERN SENSATIONALIST PRESS REPORTING, AND CLAIMED THAT THE STATE OF THE WATER AND AIR IN THE KIEV REGION EVOKED NO CONCERN. HE ALSO STATED THAT THE RUSSIANS HAD OFFICIALLY INFORMED THE IAEA OF THE ACCIDENT. HIS SPEECH WAS REPORTED IN THE UKRAINIAN PRESS ON 2 MAY, BUT NOT THE CENTRAL SOVIET PRESS.

6. NO STATEMENT WAS MADE ON 3 MAY (SATURDAY). AN AUTHORISED TASS STATEMENT ON 4 MAY, REPRODUCED IN PRAVDA OF 5 MAY, CONVEYED THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT'S THANKS TO THOSE WHO HAD OFFERED CONDOLENCES AND ASSISTANCE, AND SAID THAT FOR THE PRESENT, SOVIET RESOURCES WERE SUFFICIENT TO COPE WITH THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE ACCIDENT. THE STATEMENT ALSO REVEALED OFFICIALLY, HOWEVER, THAT THE US SPECIALIST IN RADIOLOGY, DR ROBERT GALE, HAD ARRIVED FOR CONSULTATIONS, AND THAT THE GENERAL DIRECTOR OF THE IAEA, BLIX, WAS COMING, AT THE INVITATION OF THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT. ACCORDING TO THIS STATEMENT, WORK WAS STILL GOING ON TO 'ELIMINATE THE RESULTS OF THE ACCIDENT AND HELP THE VICTIMS'.

7. THE TASS REPORT OF THE VISIT BY RYZHOV AND LIGACHEV TO THE AREA ON 2 MAY (FRIDAY) (OUR TELNO 522) CONTAINED ONE SIGNIFICANT DEPARTURE FROM THE WORDING OF EARLIER REFERENCES TO THE ACCIDENT. IT REFERRED TO WORK ON THE 'LIQUIDATION OF THE ACCIDENT', RATHER THAN, AS PREVIOUSLY, TO LIQUIDATION OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE ACCIDENT. THIS

SEEMED TO SUGGEST THAT THE FIRE IN THE REACTOR HAD NOT BEEN FULLY CONTAINED BY LAST FRIDAY, 2 MAY. SUBSEQUENT COMMENT HAS, HOWEVER, REVERTED TO THE STANDARD FORMULA.

8. SOVIET MEDIA REPORTING OF ELTSIN'S REMARKS IN HAMBURG ON 3 MAY HAS AVOIDED ALL REFERENCE TO THE INFORMATION HE GAVE WHICH WENT BEYOND THAT CONTAINED IN THE OFFICIAL SOVIET STATEMENTS. (FCO TELNO 397 REFERS). INSTEAD, HE WAS MERELY REPORTED IN STANDARD LANGUAGE, TO HAVE SAID THAT THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT WAS DOING EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO ELIMINATE THE RESULTS OF THE ACCIDENT.

9. IN PARALLEL TO THE PUBLICATION OF THE OFFICIAL STATEMENTS, THE SOVIET MEDIA HAVE MOUNTED A VIGOROUS COUNTER-OFFENSIVE IN THE FORM OF ARTICLES AND COMMENT DESIGNED TO HIGHLIGHT HYPOCRISY, ALARMISM AND MALICE IN THE REACTIONS OF THE WESTERN PRESS, AND, WHERE POSSIBLE, WESTERN GOVERNMENTS ESPECIALLY THE US AND THE UK. ON 2 MAY, THE MAIN EVENING NEWS PROGRAMME BROADCAST INTERVIEWS WITH STUDENTS RETURNING TO THE UK FROM KIEV AND MINSK, AND THOMSON HOLIDAY TOURIST IN MOSCOW. ONE TOURIST AVERRED THAT THE DECISION TO REPATRIATE HIS GROUP WAS A 'PROVOCATION'. ONE STUDENT LEADER WAS QUOTED AS CLAIMING, THAT 'THE BRITISH EMBASSY INSISTED, IN A MOST CATEGORICAL FORM' THAT HE LEAVE THE

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SOVIET UNION. BRITISH AIRWAYS' RADIOACTIVITY CHECKS ON THE STUDENTS AS THEY ENTERED THE PLANE WERE PRESENTED AS AN ATTEMPT TO COMPEL THE STUDENTS TO CHANGE THEIR MINDS AND LEAVE WILLINGLY. TASS IN ENGLISH CARRIED THE SAME ITEMS.

10. COMMENT IN PRAVDA, TASS AND ON TELEVISION HAS PREDICTABLY, PICKED UP THE WESTERN REPORTS OF THOUSANDS OF DEATHS, AND MADE CONSIDERABLE HAY. SEVERAL ITEMS ACCUSED WASHINGTON OF LAUNCHING AN ANTI-SOVIET CAMPAIGN IN ORDER TO DESTRUCT PUBLIC ATTENTION FROM SUCH EVENTS AS THE LIBYAN CRISIS, THE NEVADA TEST AND THE DEPLOYMENT OF WEAPONS IN EUROPE. A TASS PIECE ON 3 MAY ALLEGED THAT THE PRIME MINISTER WAS DETERMINED, AT WASHINGTON'S BIDDING, TO MAKE AN ISSUE OF THE RUSSIANS' EXCESSIVE SECRECY AT THE TOKYO SUMMIT IN ORDER TO INCREASE DISTRUST FOR SOVIET ASSURANCES ON ARMS CONTROL VERIFICATION. A SIGNED ARTICLE IN PRAVDA OF 4 MAY, HEADED 'UNREASONABLE ZEAL' CLAIMED THAT CIRCLES IN THE US AND NATO WERE TRYING TO PRESENT THE ACCIDENT AS AN 'INTERNATIONAL CRISIS', AND THAT THOSE WHO FAVOURED PROLONGING THE ARMS RACE WERE USING THE INCIDENT TO POISEN THE INTERNATIONAL ATMOSPHERE. FOR ITS PART, THE SOVIET UNION WAS IN FAVOUR OF COOPERATION BETWEEN STATES IN THE SPHERE OF PREVENTION OF NUCLEAR ACCIDENTS. THIS PIECE AND OTHERS HIGHLIGHTED THE NUMBER OF INCIDENTS AT WESTERN ATOMIC POWER STATIONS.

11. THE MAIN EVENING NEWS PROGRAMME ON 4 MAY GAVE CONSIDERABLE AIRTIME TO THE CHERNOBYL INCIDENT, WITH FILM OF THE STRICKEN PLANT AND THE SURROUNDING AREA, SHOT FROM HELICOPTER. THE DAMAGED BUILDING WAS SHOWN FROM THE OUTSIDE AND, TO CONTRAST, OTHER BUILDINGS NEARBY WERE SHOWN TO BE STILL INTACT, IN DEFIANCE OF WESTERN CLAIMS. NO PEOPLE APPEARED TO BE ON THE STATION'S TERRITORY IN THE FILM AS IT WAS BROADCAST.

COMMENT

12. AS THE ABOVE RECORD MAKES CLEAR THERE ARE STILL A NUMBER OF SIGNIFICANT OMISSIONS IN THE INFORMATION RELEASED BY THE RUSSIANS SO FAR. ON THE ACCIDENT ITSELF, THEY HAVE NOT PUBLISHED FOR DOMESTIC CONSUMPTION ANY ACCOUNT OF WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED AT THE PLANT. NO FIGURES HAVE BEEN VOUCHSAFED FOR RADIATION LEVELS IN THE CHERNOBYL LOCALITY OR SURROUNDING AREAS, ELTSIN'S DISCLOSURES IN HAMBURG NOTWITHSTANDING. IT IS NOT YET CLEAR FROM OFFICIAL STATEMENTS THAT THE FIRE IN THE REACTOR IS IN FACT OUT.

13. NO INFORMATION HAS YET EMERGED ABOUT OTHER PARTS OF THE SOVIET UNION WHICH MAY HAVE BEEN AFFECTED, NOR HAS ANY ADMISSION BEEN MADE IN PUBLIC SOVIET SOURCES THAT OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES HAVE BEEN AFFECTED AND HAVE TAKEN PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES TO PROTECT THEIR POPULATIONS. THE NEAREST THE RUSSIANS HAVE COME TO AN OBLIQUE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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OF THIS WAS IN THE BRIEF PRAVDA REPORT OF 2 MAY WHICH DESCRIBED KOVALEV'S MEETINGS WITH AMBASSADORS, INCLUDING MYSELF (MY TELNO 508 REFERS). ACCORDING TO PRAVDA, KOVALEV MERELY 'GAVE INFORMATION ON PROGRESS IN THE LIQUIDATION OF THE RESULTS OF THE ACCIDENT', ON THE INSTRUCTIONS OF THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT.

14. THE SOVIET OFFICIAL PUBLIC REACTION HAS THUS REVERTED TO TYPE, COMBINING CHRONIC UNWILLINGNESS TO PUBLISH MORE THAN THE BAREST MINIMUM OF FACTS, WITH A HIGHLY DEFENSIVE COUNTERBLAST AGAINST FOREIGN CRITICS. THE RUSSIANS HAVE DISPLAYED THE VERY TENDENCY TOWARDS 'DOSING OUT' INFORMATION AGAINST WHICH SHEVARDNADZE SPECIFICALLY INVEIGHED IN HIS SPEECH ON THE ANNIVERSARY OF LENIN'S DEATH THREE DAYS BEFORE THE ACCIDENT.

15. MIFT SUMMARISES THE STATEMENTS IN THE SOVIET PRESS TODAY, 6 MAY.

CARTLEDGE

SOVIET NUCLEAR ACCIDENT

LIMITED	
NED	PS
SOV D	PS/MR RENTON
WED	PS/LADY YOUNG
EED	PS/MR EGGAR
MAED	PS/MRS CHALKER
CONS D	PS/PUS
NEWS D	MR BARRINGTON
INFO D	MR DEREK THOMAS
PUSD	MR GOODALL
POD	MR DAUNT
ECD (E)	MR RATFORD

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