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FM WASHINGTON
TO PRIORITY FCO
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OF 042350Z NOVEMBER 87
INFO PRIORITY MOSCOW, PARIS, BONN, UKDEL NATO, UKDEL CSCE VIENNA

OUR TELNOS 2349-50 : US/SOVIET SUMMIT IN WASHINGTON
SUMMARY

1. THE APPROACHING SUMMIT SHARPENS US INTEREST IN THE SIGNS OF TURBULENCE IN MOSCOW. PRELIMINARY US CONCLUSION IS THAT GORBACHEV'S AUTHORITY IN THE FOREIGN POLICY FIELD UNIMPAIRED. INTENSIVE PREPARATIONS UNDER WAY FOR THE SUMMIT.

DETAIL

2. THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE SUMMIT HAS BEEN GENERALLY WELL RECEIVED IN THE US PRESS, WITH SOME SELF-CONGRATULATION THAT AMERICAN NERVES HELD STEADY WHILE GORBACHEV FLIP-FLOPPED (ADMINISTRATION SPOKESMEN CONTINUE TO PLAY DOWN THAT ASPECT).
3. WITH THE SUMMIT DRAWING NEAR, OBSERVERS HERE ARE WATCHING THE SIGNS OF STRAIN WITHIN THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP OVER DOMESTIC POLICY WITH PARTICULAR ATTENTION. THE ANALYTICAL COMMUNITY ARE INEVITABLY DEBATING WHETHER GORBACHEV IS NOW IN A WEAKER POSITION AND IF SO WHAT THE IMPLICATIONS ARE FOR HIS FOREIGN POLICY. ACCORDING TO OUR CONTACTS AT STATE AND THE CIA, THEIR PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS ARE THAT WHILE THE STRUGGLE OVER DOMESTIC POLICY HAS CERTAINLY SHARPENED, GORBACHEV'S AUTHORITY HAS NOT BEEN UNDERMINED. BUT THE LIMITS OF PERESTROIKA AND GLASNOST HAVE BECOME CLEARER AND THE MOMENTUM OF THE REFORM CAMPAIGN MAY NOW BE LESS.
4. ON THE POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS FOR US/SOVIET RELATIONS, THE GENERAL VIEW HERE IS THAT THERE IS NO DIRECT RELEVANCE. THE DISPUTE BETWEEN LIGACHEV AND ELTSIN DOES NOT APPEAR TO HAVE CONCERNED FOREIGN POLICY. BUT IN THE VIEW OF OUR CONTACTS THAT ROW ON THE EVE OF SHULTZ'S VISIT MUST HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO GORBACHEV'S HESITATION OVER SETTING THE DATE FOR A SUMMIT. (OUR CONTACTS HERE ALSO AGREE - MOSCOW TELNO 1583 - THAT ANOTHER FACTOR WAS GORBACHEV'S PERSONAL IRRITATION THAT SHULTZ FAILED TO PRODUCE ANY SHIFT IN US POLICY ON START/ABMT.) THE MAIN LESSON WHICH THE AMERICANS ARE DRAWING FROM THIS EPISODE IS THAT GORBACHEV WAS ABLE TO PUT THINGS BACK ON TRACK SWIFTLY, WHICH SUGGESTS THAT POLICY TOWARDS THE US IS NOT IN CONTENTION IN THE POLITBURO AT PRESENT. BUT WE ARE ALSO TOLD THAT THIS EVIDENCE OF GORBACHEV'S UNPREDICTABILITY HAS DISCONCERTED SHULTZ.
5. INTENSIVE PREPARATIONS FOR THE SUMMIT ARE NOW UNDER WAY.

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IN ADDITION TO THE GENEVA ARMS CONTROL NEGOTIATIONS, ARMACOST AND VORONTSOV WILL MEET IN GENEVA IN THE WEEK BEGINNING 16 NOVEMBER TO REVIEW REGIONAL ISSUES. THE MAIN ITEM IS LIKELY TO BE THE GULF (OUR TELNO 2369). IN ADDITION, THEY WILL COVER THE USUAL LIST OF REGIONAL TROUBLE-SPOTS, WITH EMPHASIS ON AFGHANISTAN, AND SOUTHERN AFRICA (WHERE STATE SEE SOME POSSIBILITY THAT THE RUSSIANS WILL BE WILLING TO TALK MORE CONSTRUCTIVELY ABOUT ANGOLA FOLLOWING THE FAILURE OF THE FAPLA OFFENSIVE).

6. DEPUTY SECRETARY WHITEHEAD WILL BE IN MOSCOW IN MID-NOVEMBER FOR TALKS AT SOVIET INITIATIVE ON HUMAN RIGHTS. THIS SUBJECT WAS COVERED IN DETAIL IN THE MARGINS OF SHULTZ'S VISIT TO MOSCOW AND STATE ARE NOT EXPECTING THE NOVEMBER SESSION TO YIELD ANY NEW INSIGHTS. THEY ASSUME THAT THE RUSSIANS PROPOSED THE MEETING WITH THE PRIMARY AIM OF DEFUSING HUMAN RIGHTS AS AN ISSUE AT THE SUMMIT. BUT THEY ARE ALSO EXPECTING THE RUSSIANS TO PRESS HARD - BOTH AT THE WHITEHEAD TALKS AND IN VIENNA - FOR SOME COMMITMENTS FROM THE WEST ON A HUMAN RIGHTS CONFERENCE IN MOSCOW BEFORE THE DECEMBER SUMMIT.

7. A SOVIET ADVANCE TEAM IS EXPECTED HERE NEXT WEEK TO START PLANNING THE PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR A SUMMIT THE PROGRAMME IS LIKELY TO BE CONFINED TO WASHINGTON AND (AT SOVIET REQUEST) TO HAVE FEW FRILLS. AN ADDRESS TO A JOINT SESSION OF CONGRESS LOOKS UNLIKELY, BUT GORBACHEV HAS MADE PLAIN THAT HE WANTS TO HAVE SUBSTANTIVE SESSIONS WITH CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS.

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