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FM MOSCOW

TO DESKBY 181700Z FCO

TELNO 1657

OF 181545Z NOVEMBER 87

INFO PRIORITY NATO POSTS, EAST EUROPEAN POSTS, PEKING

MY TELS NOS 1638-1641: THE ELTSIN AFFAIR: A FURTHER ASSESSMENT

SUMMARY

1. AN ATTEMPT, NECESSARILY TO SOME EXTENT SPECULATIVE, TO RECONSTRUCT THE COURSE OF EVENTS WHICH CULMINATED IN ELTSIN'S FALL. GORBACHEV PROTECTED ELTSIN FOR AS LONG AS HE COULD: BUT ELTSIN'S SPEECH AT THE 21 OCTOBER PLENUM GAVE GORBACHEV NO CHOICE BUT TO THROW HIM TO THE WOLVES. PUBLICATION OF A FULL ACCOUNT OF THE MOSGORKOM MEETING WHICH DISMISSED ELTSIN HAS INCREASED RATHER THAN LIMITED DAMAGE TO GORBACHEV'S AUTHORITY AND IMAGE: AND HAS ENGENDERED CONSIDERABLE PESSIMISM ABOUT THE FUTURE OF PERESTROIKA AND GLASNOST'.

DETAIL

2. WHAT HAPPENED ?

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THE FOLLOWING ATTEMPT TO CHART THE COURSE OF EVENTS WHICH CULMINATED IN THE INDICTMENT AND DISMISSAL OF ELTSIN ON 11 NOVEMBER IS BASED ON AN AMALGAM OF INTERNAL EVIDENCE FROM THE PUBLISHED ACCOUNT OF THE MOSGORKOM PLENUM, INFORMATION FROM LOCAL WESTERN AND EAST EUROPEAN SOURCES, CONVERSATIONS WITH RUSSIANS AND THE MORE PLAUSIBLE OF THE MANY RUMOURS WHICH HAVE BEEN CIRCULATING IN MOSCOW SINCE THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE PLENUM ON 21 OCTOBER. I CANNOT GUARANTEE ITS ACCURACY BUT IT IS PROBABLY AS CLOSE TO THE TRUTH AS WE ARE LIKELY TO GET FOR THE TIME BEING.

3. FOLLOWING HIS APPOINTMENT AS FIRST SECRETARY OF THE MOSCOW PARTY COMMITTEE AND CANDIDATE MEMBER OF THE POLITBURO IN DECEMBER 1985 ELTSIN QUICKLY ESTABLISHED HIMSELF AS THE MOST OUTSPOKEN AND RADICAL PROPONENT IN THE LEADERSHIP OF REFORM AND OPENNESS AND AS THE SCOURGE OF PRIVILEGE AND CORRUPTION. HIS SPEECH AT THE 27TH PARTY CONGRESS, IN WHICH HE ATTACKED 'ONE INERT -634 9% 58.3-SERVERS WITH PARTY TICKETS' AND THE MATERIAL PRIVILEGES OF

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THE LEADERSHIP, WAS THE HIGHLIGHT OF THAT OCCASION. ALL THIS WON FOR IM IN MOSCOW THE SAME HIGH PROFILE AND GENUINE POPULARITY AT GRASS ROOTS LEVEL WHICH HE HAD ACHIEVED FOR MUCH THE SAME REASONS IN SVERDLOVSK, WHENCE GORBACHEV HAD SUMMONED HIM TO TAKE ON THE MUCH MORE CHALLENGING TASK OF RUNNING THE CAPITAL. THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT THAT ELTSIN WAS IMPATIENT, ABRASIVE, HIGH-HPNDED IN DEALING WITH HIS SUBORDINATES, FOND OF PUBLICITY AND THAT HE HAD ALL THE DEFECTS, AS WELL AS THE VIRTUES, OF A NATURAL POPULIST. MUSCOVITES, NEVERTHELESS, APPRECIATED AND ENJOYED THE CONTRAST WITH GRISHIN'S GREY AND CORRUPT REGIME. ELTSIN'S ENEMIES LAY PRINCIPALLY AMONG THE MANY SURVIVORS FROM THAT ERA IN THE PARTY APPARATUS AND MUNICIPAL BUREAUCRACY, WHO WERE THE FIRST TO SUFFER FROM HIS STYLE. ALTHOUGH, EVEN BY GORBACHEV'S ACCOUNT IN HIS OPENING SPZOA AT THE GORKOM PLENUM ON 11 NOVEMBER, ELTSIN'S FIRST YEAR IN MOSCOW WENT WELL, HE ENCOUNTERED MOUNTING RESISTENCE TO THE SWEEPING (AND NECESSARY) PERSONNEL CHANGES OF WHICH HE OPENLY BOASTED: BY THE END OF 1986, THESE HAD BECOME A MAJOR BONE OF CONTENTION BETWEEN HIM AND THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE SECRETARIAT, TO WHOM MANY OF ELTSIN'S VICTIMS HAD DOUBTLESS APPEALED.

4. BEFORE THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE PLENUM IN JANUARY, 1987, THE POLITBURO FORMALLY WARNED ELTSIN THAT HIS CADRE POLICY WAS GOING TOO FAR: IT WOULD HAVE BEEN NATURAL, IN FUNCTIONAL TERMS, FOR LIGACHEV TO TAKE THE LEAD IN ADMINISTERING THIS REBUKE. ELTSIN APPARENTLY PROMISED TO MEND HIS WAYS. ELTSIN CAME IN FOR FURTHER CRITICISM FROM HIS COLLEAGUES DURING THE JANUARY PLENUM ITSELF, PROBABLY AS A RESULT OF HIS FORTHRIGHT SPEECH, WHICH LIGACHEV BY IMPLICATION CRITICISED IN HIS OWN CONTRIBUTION. ELTSIN RECEIVED A FURTHER CHIDING SHORTLY BEFORE THE CC PLENUM IN JUNE AND AT VARIOUS STAGES GORBACHEV HAD PRIVATE MEETINGS WITH ELTSIN AT WHICH THE LATTER PROBABLY GAVE VENT TO HIS FRUSTRATIONS OVER THE BLOCKING ROLE OF THE PARTY SECRETARIAT AND AT WHICH GORBACHEV ENDEAVOURED TO COOL HIM DOWN. IN MID-AUGUST OR EARLY SEPTEMBER, ELTSIN SENT A LETTER TO GORBACHEV, THEN ON HOLIDAY, WHICH RAISED THE QUESTION OF HIS POSSIBLE RESIGNATION FROM THE POLITBURO AND FROM HIS MOSCOW PARTY POST. THIS MAY HAVE RESULTED FROM A FURTHER CLASH WITH LIGACHEV, WHO WAS RUNNING THE PARTY IN GORBACHEV'S ABSENCE AND PERHAPS USED THIS OPPORTUNITY TO PUT THE BOOT IN. TOWARDS THE END OF SEPTEMBER, GORBACHEV DISCUSSED THE POSITION WITH ELTSIN AND URGED HIM TO POSTPONE THE QUESTION OF HIS PERSONAL POSITION UNTIL AFTER THE 70TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS.

5. THE IMPRESSION GIVEN BY THIS PHASE OF THE SAGA IS THAT GORBACHEV ATTEMPTED TO MEDIATE BETWEEN LIGACHEV AND ELTSIN AND TO PROTECT THE

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LATTER FROM THE CONSEQUENCES OF HIS IMPATIENCE, HOT TEMPER AND POLITICAL IMPRUDENCE. IT WAS POLITICALLY IMPORTANT TO GORBACHEV TO HAVE AT LEAST ONE MEMBER OF THE LEADERSHIP WHO WAS OUT AHEAD OF HIM IN TERMS OF RADICALISM AND REFORMIST ZEAL.

6. IN EARLY OCTOBER, AT ONE OF THE REGULAR MEETINGS OF THE MOSCOW PARTY 'AKTIV', ELTSIN AS USUAL RESPONDED TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS HANDED UP FROM THE FLOOR. ONE OF THESE, WHICH HE READ OUT, ASKED WHETHER IT WAS TRUE THAT THERE WERE DIVISIONS WITHIN THE POLITBURO AND, SPECIFICALLY, DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HIM AND LIGACHEV: HIS ANSWER WAS 'YES, BUT PERESTROIKA CONTINUES'. ANOTHER QUESTION ASKED WHETHER ELTSIN APPROVED OF THE POLITICAL ACTIVITY OF RAISA GORBACHEVA: ELTSIN REPLIED, TACTFULLY FOR ONCE, THAT HE SAW NOTHING TO CRITICISE IN THIS. ACCOUNTS OF THESE QUESTIONS (POSSIBLY PLANTED BY HIS OPPONENTS) AND ANSWERS WOULD HAVE QUICKLY FOUND THEIR WAY BACK TO LIGACHEV AND POSSIBLY TO GORBACHEV AS WELL.

7. AT THE CC PLENUM ON 21 OCTOBER, ELTSIN EXERCISED THE RIGHT OF THE MOSCOW PARTY SECRETARY TO SPEAK FIRST AFTER GORBACHEV'S INITIAL REPORT, WHICH DEALT BOTH WITH THE 70TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS (PARTICULARLY THE DRAFT OF HIS OWN MAIN SPEECH) AND WITH THE PROGRESS OF 'PERESTROIKA'. I BELIEVE THAT THE DESCRIPTION OF ELTSIN'S MAIN THEME GIVEN BY ZAMYATIN IN LONDON ON 10 NOVEMBER, NAMELY THAT PUBLIC EXPECTATIONS OF 'PERESTROIKA' HAD BEEN HEIGHTENED MUCH TOO FAR BEYOND THE POINT AT WHICH THEY COULD REASONABLY BE MET, IS PROBABLY CORRECT. ELTSIN DOUBTLESS ARGUED THAT, UNTIL THE PARTY WAS BETTER ABLE TO SATISFY THE DAILY NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE - WHICH WOULD REQUIRE GREATER SUPPORT FROM THE PARTY SECRETARIAT FOR THOSE LIKE HIMSELF WHO WERE WORKING AT THE PIT FACE OF 'PERESTROIKA' - THE LEADERSHIP WOULD DO WELL TO TONE DOWN ITS RHETORIC. GORBACHEV APPARENTLY INTERRUPTED ELTSIN AT ONE POINT TO SAY THAT HE WAS PAINTING TOO BLACK A PICTURE, TO WHICH ELTSIN IS SAID TO HAVE REPLIED 'MIKHAIL SERGEEVICH, YOU DO NOT KNOW THE REALITIES'. IT IS LIKELY THAT ELTSIN THEREAFTER BECAME HEATED AND EMOTIONAL AND CRITICISED SOME OF HIS POLITBURO COLLEAGUES, PARTICULARLY LIGACHEV, IN SHARP AND PERSONAL TERMS. THIS INAUGURATED A DEBATE IN WHICH, IF GORBACHEV IS TO BE BELIEVED, NO CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEMBER SUPPORTED ELTSIN: IT IS INDEED LIKELY THAT MOST OF THOSE PRESENT THOUGHT DISCRETION THE BETTER PART OF VALOUR ALTHOUGH ARBATOV IS RELIABLY CREDITED WITH ATTEMPTING TO POUR OIL ON TROUBLED WATERS. THE RESULT WAS A FORMAL RESOLUTION CONDEMNING ELTSIN'S SPEECH AS POLITICALLY MISTAKEN AND INSTRUCTING THE POLITBURO AND MOSGORKOM 'TO CONSIDER COMRADE ELTSIN'S RESIGNATION' (IT IS NOT AT ALL CLEAR WHETHER THIS HAD ACTUALLY

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BEEN OFFERED) FROM HIS MOSCOW POST.

8. ACCORDING TO PLAUSIBLE RUMOURS, GORBACHEV AND LIGACHEV MET ALONE FOR HALF AN HOUR IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE PLENUM ENDED. IF SO, LIGACHEV MAY HAVE DEMANDED ELTSIN'S HEAD AND PERHAPS THREATENED TO SPLIT THE POLITBURO IF THIS WAS NOT FORTHCOMING. BUT GORBACHEV HAD DOUBTLESS ALREADY CONCLUDED THAT ELTSIN WOULD HAVE TO BE SACRIFICED IF HE AND ''PERESTROIKA'' WERE TO SURVIVE. HE THEREFORE AGREED TO LEAD FOR THE PROSECUTION AT THE FORTHCOMING PLENUM OF THE MOSGORKOM - INDEED, TO HAVE ALLOWED LIGACHEV TO DO SO WOULD HAVE BEEN IN ITSELF A BLOW TO HIS OWN AUTHORITY. THE SCENARIO FOR THE MOSGORKOM MEETING (MY TURS) WAS DOUBTLESS CAREFULLY PLANNED IN ORDER TO ENSURE BOTH THAT THE INDICTMENT WAS SAVAGE AND UNANIMOUS: AND THAT IT CONCENTRATED ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY ON ELTSIN'S PERSONAL SHORTCOMINGS IN ORDER TO DISTANCE THE POLICIES OF ''PERESTROIKA'', AND QUESTIONS SURROUNDING THEM, FROM ELTSIN'S DISCRACE. THIS STRATEGY NEVERTHELESS HAD THE DISADVANTAGE FOR GORBACHEV THAT, AS HE HAD PERSONALLY SELECTED ELTSIN IN THE FIRST PLACE, HIS OWN JUDGEMENT WAS BY IMPLICATION CALLED INTO QUESTION. ELTSIN HIMSELF IS REPORTED TO HAVE ENTERED HOSPITAL ON 8 NOVEMBER (ALTHOUGH HE LOOKED FIT ENOUGH AT THE KREMLIN RECEPTION ON THE PREVIOUS DAY) SUFFERING FROM ANGINA AND TO HAVE LEFT HIS HOSPITAL BED TO BE PRESENT AT THE MOSGORKOM PLENUM ON 11 NOVEMBER: IF SO, THIS COULD ACCOUNT FOR THE UNCHARACTERISTICALLY MUTED TONE OF HIS APOLOGIA, IF THIS WAS FULLY AND ACCURATELY REPORTED. HE THEN RETURNED TO HOSPITAL (REPORTEDLY THE KREMLIN CLINIC) AND IS APPARENTLY STILL THERE.

9. IT IS DIFFICULT TO INTERPRET OR ATTRIBUTE THE DECISIONS, FIRST, DELIBERATELY TO LEAK THE ROW AT THE CC PLENUM ON 21 OCTOBER TO THE WESTERN MEDIA (MY TELS NOS 1572 AND 1588 AND, SUBSEQUENTLY, TO PUBLISH WHAT APPEARS TO BE AN UNPRECEDENTEDLY FULL ACCOUNT OF THE MOSGORKOM MEETING ON 11 NOVEMBER. SOME REPORTS ATTRIBUTE BOTH DECISIONS TO YAKOVLEV, IN THE INTERESTS OF GLASNOST': OTHERS SEE THE HAND OF LIGACHEV, WHO WISHED TO MAKE ELTSIN'S DISGRACE AS COMPREHENSIVE AS POSSIBLE, AND TO ENSURE THAT THE TERMS OF THE INDICTMENT WERE KNOWN THROUGHOUT THE PARTY (ALTHOUGH THIS COULD EASILY HAVE BEEN DONE BY INTERNAL MEANS). WHATEVER THE PROVENANCE OF THESE DECISIONS, HOWEVER, THEY HAVE HAD IMPORTANT CONSEQUENCES.

#### REACTIONS TO ELTSIN'S FALL

10. MY EXPECTATION THAT THE PUBLICATION OF THE MOSGORKOM PROCEEDINGS MIGHT LIMIT THE DAMAGE TO GORBACHEV'S AUTHORITY CAUSED BY ELTSIN'S

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FALL (MY TELNO 1638) HAS NOT BEEN BORNE OUT IN THE EVENT. ON THE CONTRARY, IT APPEARS TO HAVE MADE MATTERS CONSIDERABLY WORSE FROM GORBACHEV'S STANDPOINT. SPECIFICALLY:-

I) MUSCOVITES ARE ASKING WHY, IF THE MOSGORKOM MEETING COULD BE GIVEN THE FULL GLASNOST' TREATMENT, THE LEADERSHIP HAS NOT RELEASED THE CONTENT OF ELTSIN'S OFFENDING SPEECH AT THE CC PLENUM ON 21 OCTOBER: WHAT ARE THEY TRYING TO HIDE ? (THE ANSWER TO THIS IS PROBABLY THAT ELTSIN'S COMMENTS ON THE GULF BETWEEN RHETORIC AND RESULTS WERE TOO TRUE FOR COMFORT).

II) ANOTHER FREQUENT COMMENT IS THAT, EVEN IF THE ACCOUNTS GIVEN AT THE MEETING OF ELTSIN'S PERSONAL SHORTCOMINGS WERE ACCURATE, THESE DID NOT JUSTIFY SUCH DRASTIC PUNISHMENT: AS ROY MEDVEDEV HAS REMARKED, THEY ARE COMMON TO MOST SOVIET LEADERS ANYWAY AND ARE NOT IN THEMSELVES SUFFICIENT GROUNDS FOR POLITICAL DISGRACE. MUSCOVITES ASK WHY ALIEV, WIDELY BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN LARGE-SCALE CORRUPTION UNDER BREZHNEV, WAS ALLOWED TO RETIRE WITH HONOUR ON HEALTH GROUNDS WHEREAS ELTSIN, THOUGH HOSPITALISED AT THE TIME, WAS DISMISSED WITH IGNOMINY.

III) GORBACHEV IS SEEN BY MANY AS HAVING BETRAYED THE MAN WHO WAS THUGHT TO HAVE BEEN HIS STAUNCHEST AND MOST COURAGEOUS ALLY.

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