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FM WASHINGTON
TO PRIORITY FCO
TELNO 2672
OF 031820Z DECEMBER 87
INFO PRIORITY MOSCOW

MOSCOW TELNO 1714 : US/SOVIET RELATIONS : GORBACHEV'S INTERVIEW
WITH NBC

SUMMARY

1. MIXED REVIEWS HERE. GORBACHEV GIVEN GOOD MARKS FOR A POLISHED PERFORMANCE. BUT GENERAL RECOGNITION THAT BENEATH THE NEW PACKAGING THERE WAS A GOOD DEAL OF FAMILIAR SOVIET SUBSTANCE. HIS REMARK ON HUMAN RIGHTS WENT DOWN PARTICULARLY BADLY.

DETAIL

2. THE PUNDITS AND EDITORIAL WRITERS HERE HAVE BEEN DIGESTING GORBACHEV'S 30 NOVEMBER TV INTERVIEW. THE GENERAL VERDICT IS THAT IT WAS IMPRESSIVE AS A PERFORMANCE: INTELLIGENT, ARTICULATE, AT POINTS COMBATIVE, ALWAYS POISED, AND WITH A REFRESHINGLY PRACTICAL APPROACH IN MANY AREAS.

3. BUT LEADING POLITICAL COMMENTATORS HAVE URGED THE PUBLIC NOT TO TREAT HIM AS A POP HERO. THEY HAVE POINTED OUT THAT IT WAS SALUTARY FOR AMERICAN VIEWERS TO SEE, AFTER ALL THE TALK OF GORBACHEV THE REFORMER, THAT HE REMAINED A DEDICATED SOVIET COMMUNIST, DEFENDING WITH CONVICTION TRADITIONAL SOVIET POSITIONS ON OTHER ISSUES. MOST AGREED THAT THE OLD THINKING SHOWED THROUGH MOST CLEARLY IN THE PASSAGES ON HUMAN RIGHTS, THE BERLIN WALL AND AFGHANISTAN. AS THE WASHINGTON POST PUT IT IN AN EDITORIAL QUOTE TO TAKE WESTERN INTEREST IN EMIGRATION AS A TRICK TO STEAL SOVIET SCIENCE WOULD BE LAUGHABLE IF IT WERE NOT SO WRONG AND MEAN. TO PRESENT THE AFGHAN CRISIS AS FIRST AND FOREMOST THE RESULT OF OUTSIDE INTERFERENCE IS, AT BEST, MISLEADING AND EVASIVE UNQUOTE.

4. GORBACHEV'S COMMENTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS HAVE HAD A PARTICULARLY COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE EFFECT. A CONTACT IN STATE TELLS US THAT SHULTZ'S REACTION WAS THAT GORBACHEV HAD FAILED TO UNDERSTAND THE STRENGTH OF AMERICAN FEELING ON THIS ISSUE, AND THAT THE PRESIDENT SHOULD THEREFORE BEGIN WITH GORBACHEV ON HUMAN RIGHTS. WE UNDERSTAND THAT A NUMBER OF SPEAKERS AT A SEMINAR ON HUMAN RIGHTS AT THE WHITE HOUSE ON 3 DECEMBER, ATTENDED BY PRESIDENT REAGAN, SPOKE OUT STRONGLY AGAINST GORBACHEV'S REMARKS. THE PRESIDENT TOOK A FIRM LINE IN HIS OWN REMARKS THERE (QUOTE WE WILL NOT BE LULLED INTO IGNORING THE FACT THAT THE APPARATUS OF STATE

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REPRESSION REMAINS INTACT IN THE SOVIET UNION UNQUOTE).
5. IN SHORT, GORBACHEV'S COMMENTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS SEEMED TO HAVE
ACCENTUATED THE SENSE OF DISAPPOINTMENT WHICH HAS BEEN GAINING
GROUND HERE IN RECENT WEEKS AT THE LACK OF PRACTICAL ACTION BY
THE SOVIET UNION TO GIVE EFFECT TO THEIR MORE FORTHCOMING
ATTITUDE ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN BILATERAL DISCUSSIONS.

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