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SHEVARDNADZE'S VISIT TO CHINA: FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

SUMMARY

1. VISIT PRESENTED AS SUCCESS. GORBACHEV TO VISIT PEKING IN MID-MAY 1989. LARGE AGREEMENT ON FUTURE PRINCIPLES OF SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS, ON NEED TO IMPROVE BORDER SITUATION, AND TO DEEPEN COOPERATION. CAMBODIA STILL PLAYED UP BY CHINESE AS AN 'OBSTACLE'. FURTHER REPORT AFTER SPRING FESTIVAL.

DETAIL: PROGRAMME.

2. SHEVARDNADZE ARRIVED IN PEKING LATE ON 1 FEBRUARY, THE FIRST EVER SOVIET FOREIGN MINISTER TO VISIT CHINA IN HIS OWN RIGHT (GROMYKO CAME WITH KHRUSCHEV IN 1959). HE HAD TALKS AND A BANQUET WITH FOREIGN MINISTER QIAN QICHEN ON 2 FEBRUARY, SAW PREMIER LI PENG FOR 100 MINUTES ON 3 FEBRUARY THEN FLEW TO SHANGHAI TO CALL ON DENG XIAOPING (WHO HAS BEEN SPENDING TIME THERE FOR POLITICAL AND/OR MEDICAL PURPOSES AND ALSO RECEIVED THERE THE VISITING PRESIDENT OF MALI). SHEVARDNADZE GAVE A PRESS CONFERENCE BEFORE LEAVING PEKING LATE ON 4 FEBRUARY FOR PAKISTAN. HE SAID AT THE PRESS CONFERENCE THAT DENG SEEMED FIT AND WELL.

3. AN APPARENT GAP IN SHEVARDNADZE'S PROGRAMME ON 3 FEBRUARY GAVE COLOUR TO RUMOURS THAT HE WOULD MEET SIHANOUK. THE SOVIET EMBASSY HAVE TOLD REPORTERS, HOWEVER, THAT THIS PERIOD WAS USED FOR FURTHER TALKS WITH QIAN AND THAT SIHANOUK HAD NOT (NOT) MET SHEVARDNADZE OR ANY OTHER MEMBER OF HIS PARTY. SHEVARDNADZE SAID NO SUCH MEETING HAD BEEN REQUESTED NOR HAD THE SUBJECT BEEN

DISCUSSED.

GENERAL THEMES.

4. BOTH SIDES STRESSED THE HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE VISIT AND ITS PURPOSE IN PREPARING A SINO-SOVIET SUMMIT. THEY AGREED THAT GORBACHEV'S 'NEW THINKING' AND DENG'S CONCEPT OF A 'NEW INTERNATIONAL ORDER' PROVIDED CONDITIONS IN WHICH THEIR RELATIONS COULD BE IMPROVED ON A NEW BASIS, CONFORMING TO 'UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLES' AND NOT DIRECTED AGAINST OR DAMAGING ANY OTHER STATE. THE NEW RELATIONSHIP WOULD BE A FRIENDLY, GOOD-NEIGHBOURLY ONE BASED ON EQUALITY AND MUTUAL BENEFIT AND RESPECTING THE FIVE PRINCIPLES OF PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE.

5. SHEVARDNADZE ACCEPTED PRESIDENT YANG SHANGKUN'S INVITATION FOR GORBACHEV TO VISIT CHINA IN MID-MAY 1989. SHEVARDNADZE SAID AT THE PRESS CONFERENCE THAT THE OUTLINE OF THE SUMMIT HAD BEEN AGREED ON 3 FEBRUARY. HE DEFINED THE SUMMIT AS A MEETING BETWEEN GORBACHEV AND DENG XIAOPING. HE SAID GORBACHEV WILL MEET LI PENG AND OTHER LEADERS INCLUDING GENERAL SECRETARY ZHAO ZIYANG. SHEVARDNADZE THEN SAID 'I THINK THAT SUCH A MEETING MEANS A RESUMPTION OF PARTY TO PARTY CONTACTS. IT WAS NOTABLE THAT THE CHINESE LEADERS WERE REFERRED TO AS 'COMRADE' THROUGHOUT THE CONFERENCE.

6. THERE ARE LOCAL REPORTS THAT SHEVARDNADZE MAY HAVE PRESSED FOR A FORMAL DOCUMENT TO BE PREPARED FOR THE SUMMIT, ENSHRINING THE NEW PRINCIPLES OF THE SINO-SOVIET RELATIONSHIP (CF LUDLOW'S TELELETTER OF 020730Z FEBRUARY TO F E D). THE CHINESE ARE SAID TO SEE NO NEED FOR THIS, THOUGH WE EXPECT THEY WOULD GO ALONG WITH A PRE-AGREED FORMULA OF SOME KIND FOR PUBLIC USE AT THE TIME.

BILATERAL AND INTERNATIONAL ISSUES.

7. SHEVARDNADZE CALLED FOR THE SINO-SOVIET BORDER TO BE MADE A 'ZONE OF PEACE' THROUGH REDUCING BOTH SIDES' TROOPS TO THE MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE MINIMUM, SETTLING ALL DISPUTES AND EXPANDING CROSS-BORDER INTERACTION. THE CHINESE AGREED THAT A 'NEGOTIATING GROUP' OF DIPLOMATS AND MILITARY EXPERTS SHOULD BE SEW UP (PRESUMABLY SUBSUMING THE EXISTING BORDER EXPERTS' GROUPS) TO DISCUSS GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND SPECIFIC MEASURES INCLUDING FORCE REDUCTIONS AND CONFIDENCE-BUILDING MEASURES. BOTH SIDES STRESSED THEIR WISH FOR FURTHER PROGRESS COVERING ALL SECTORS OF THE BORDER. THE FIRST MEETING OF THE NEW GROUP MAY HAPPEN IN

ADVANCE OF THE SUMMIT. SHEVARDNADZE SAID THAT BOTH SIDES HAD GONE AS FAR AS THEY COULD UNILATERALLY AND THAT FURTHER DEEP CUTS COULD ONLY BE ACHIEVED THROUGH NEGOTIATION.

8. ON BILATERAL RELATIONS GENERALLY, THERE WAS AGREEMENT THAT MUCH POTENTIAL REMAINED UNTAPPED, THE TWO COUNTRIES' ECONOMIC REFORMS PRESENTED NEW OPPORTUNITIES, AND ECONOMIC AND OTHER PRACTICAL COOPERATION SHOULD BE FURTHER EXPANDED. SHEVARDNADZE SAID THAT GIVEN THAT CHINA AND THE USSR WERE NEIGHBOURS, SOCIALIST COUNTRIES, GREAT POWERS AND PERMANENT MEMBERS OF THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL, NORMALISATION OF RELATIONS IMPLIED A VERY HIGH LEVEL INDEED. HE MENTIONED PLANS FOR THE EXPANSION OF BILATERAL TRADE, ECONOMIC, SCIENTIFIC, ENVIRONMENTAL AND PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE LINKS SPECIFICALLY INCLUDING THE PEACEFUL EXPLORATION OF OUTER SPACE.

9. CAMBODIA WAS THE DOMINANT INTERNATIONAL ISSUE, AND THE CHINESE SIDE REPORTED AN INCREASE IN THE AREAS OF AGREEMENT, ALTHOUGH SOME DIFFERENCES STILL REMAINED. SHEVARDNADZE AGREED THERE SHOULD BE INTERNATIONAL SUPERVISION, WITH THE MAJOR COUNTRIES TAKING PART AND PROVIDING GUARANTEES, OF THE TROOP WITHDRAWALS, INTERNAL SETTLEMENT AND FREE ELECTIONS. THE CHINESE SIDE PUT GREATER EMPHASIS ON THE NEED TO LINK AN INTERNAL SETTLEMENT WITH THE EXTERNAL SOLUTION AND ON THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF "INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY" TO "MAKE POSITIVE EFFORTS FOR JUST AND FAIR SETTLEMENT OF THE ISSUE" (QIAN QICHEN). LI PENG REPEATED CHINESE SUPPORT FOR A FOUR-PARTY COALITION HEADED BY SIHANOUK. AREAS OF DISPUTE BETWEEN THE TWO SIDES WERE NOT BROUGHT OUT CLEARLY, BUT PRESUMABLY INCLUDED THE NATURE OF THE INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE (OBSERVERS OR TROOPS), THE POLITICAL AND MILITARY POSITIONS OF THE P R K AND KHMER ROUGE FOLLOWING WITHDRAWAL, AND THE ROLE TO BE PLAYED BY SIHANOUK. SHEVARDNADZE SAID THAT THE CESSATION OF MILITARY AID TO THE FACTIONS SHOULD FOLLOW A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT AND VIETNAMESE WITHDRAWAL.

10. AFGHANISTAN WAS ALSO DISCUSSED, AND SOCIALIST COLLEAGUES SUGGEST SHEVARDNADZE MAY HAVE ASKED THE CHINESE TO USE THEIR INFLUENCE WITH AND THROUGH PAKISTAN TO MODERATE REPRISALS BY THE RESISTANCE. SHEVARDNADZE WAS ASKED WHETHER HE WAS TAKING ANY SPECIFIC PROBLEMS TO PAKISTAN BUT SAID ONLY THAT HE AIMED TO DISCUSS HOW FURTHER BLOODSHED MIGHT BE AVOIDED. HE REAFFIRMED THAT THE WITHDRAWAL WOULD BE COMPLETED BY 15 FEBRUARY. HE HAD SAID EARLIER IN THE VISIT THAT HE WELCOMED THE IMPROVEMENT IN SINO-INDIAN AND SINO-VIETNAMESE RELATIONS. THERE WAS NO REFERENCE

TO KOREA, THOUGH WE SHOULD BE SURPRISED IF IT WAS NOT RAISED.

COMMENT.

11. PEKING IS CLOSING DOWN FOR THE SPRING FESTIVAL AND THE MFA WILL NOT REOPEN UNTIL 10 FEBRUARY. THE TWELVE ARE SEEKING A BRIEFING THEN AND WE SHALL REPORT FURTHER. IT MAY BE WORTH RECORDING THAT THE PRESS CONFERENCE BEGAN TWO HOURS LATE PROMPTING SPECULATION THAT THERE WAS SOME CRISIS. INSTEAD OF GOING TO THE PRESS CONFERENCE ON RETURN FROM SHANGHAI, SHEVARDNADZE WENT TO THE SOVIET EMBASSY. NO EXPLANATION WAS OFFERED FOR THE CHANGE IN PLAN.

12. FIRST IMPRESSIONS ARE OF A VISIT WHICH BOTH SIDES WANTED TO SUCCEED, AND A RELATIONSHIP ALREADY 'NORMAL' IN THE ORDINARY SENSE. THE ATMOSPHERE OF THE TALKS WAS DESCRIBED AS 'PRETTY GOOD' AND AS 'FRIENDLY, FRANK AND REALISTIC'. CHINESE PRESS COVERAGE IN THE RUN-UP (CF LUDLOW'S TELELETTER OF 020730Z FEB TO F E D) UNDERLINED THE BROAD AND MANY-SIDED NATURE OF SINO-SOVIET RAPPROCHEMENT, INCLUDING A DRAMATIC SURGE IN PROVINCE-TO-PROVINCE CONTACTS (TRADE BETWEEN THE CHINESE NORTH-EAST AND ITS SOVIET NEIGHBOURS INCREASING 3.7 TIMES IN 1988 OVER 1987), INCREASING ACADEMIC COOPERATION, CROSS-BORDER TOURISM AND RESURGENT INTEREST IN RUSSIAN LANGUAGE TEACHING. SHEVARDNADZE EXPRESSED HIMSELF WELL-PLEASED WITH THE VISIT AND THE PROGRESS ACHIEVED.

13. GORBACHEV'S VISIT TO CHINA IS NOW IN THE BAG. BUT CAMBODIA REMAINS THE KEY ISSUE ON WHICH THE CHINESE ARE PRESSING THE RUSSIANS TO DO MORE TO DESERVE THE SUMMIT AND TO MAKE IT A SUCCESS. LI PENG'S MEETING WITH SIHANOUK ON 1 FEBRUARY, THE LINE TAKEN BY WU XUEQIAN WITH THE AUSTRALIAN FOREIGN MINISTER AND CHINESE STATEMENTS DURING SHEVARDNADZE'S VISIT ITSELF ALL POINTED THE FINGER AT VIETNAM AS OBSTRUCTING A PROPER INTERNAL SETTLEMENT, INSISTED ON THE NECESSITY OF THE LATTER AND IMPLICITLY DEMANDED FURTHER SOVIET PRESSURE ON VIETNAM. LI PENG WENT SO FAR AS TO DESCRIBE CAMBODIA AGAIN AS A 'MAJOR OBSTACLE TO THE NORMALISATION OF RELATIONS BETWEEN CHINA AND THE SOVIET UNION', WHICH SHEVARDNADZE'S VISIT HAD GONE ONLY PART OF THE WAY TOWARDS RESOLVING. TAKEN TOGETHER WITH THE CHINESE LINE THAT GORBACHEV'S VISIT ITSELF WILL NOT COMPLETE NORMALISATION, THIS LOOKS LIKE TYPICAL CHINESE TACTICS FOR EXTRACTING THE LONGEST POSSIBLE SERIES OF CONCESSIONS FROM A PARTNER WHILE NOT PUTTING THE ESSENTIAL IMPROVEMENT IN SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS, WHICH THEY WELCOME AS MUCH AS MOSCOW DOES, AT RISK.

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