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PEKING TELNO 799: GORBACHEV'S VISIT TO CHINA

SUMMARY

1. THE RUSSIANS HAVE BEEN CAREFUL NOT TO INFLATE EXPECTATIONS OF THE PEKING SUMMIT. BUT THE VISIT ACHIEVES A GOAL TOWARDS WHICH GORBACHEV AND HIS ADVISERS HAVE WORKED FOR FOUR YEARS, MAKING SIGNIFICANT CONCESSIONS EN ROUTE. REPLACING CONFRONTATION WITH RENEWED PARTNERSHIP IN THE WORLD COMMUNIST FRATERNITY, ALBEIT ON A DIFFERENT BASIS TO THAT OF THE 1950S, IS AN IMPORTANT GAIN FOR THEM.

DETAIL

2. THE OBJECTIVES OF GORBACHEV'S CHINA POLICY ARE:

A) NORMALISATION OF PARTY TO PARTY RELATIONS

3. AS SIR A DONALD COMMENTS IN PEKING TUR, THE FACT OF THE SUMMIT AND OF NORMALISATION OF PARTY TO PARTY RELATIONS AFTER THREE DECADES OF HOSTILITY IS ITS MAJOR ACHIEVEMENT.

4. GORBACHEV HAS WORKED TO RE-ESTABLISH A FORM OF WORLD COMMUNIST MOVEMENT ON A NEW BASIS, IN WHICH THE CPSU NO LONGER CLAIMS HEGEMONY. HE PRESIDED OVER A LARGE GATHERING OF FRATERNAL PARTIES IN NOVEMBER 1987, AT WHICH THE CHINESE STOOD CAREFULLY ON THE FRINGE. IN PARTY TERMS, CHINA IS THE BIG CATCH. THE GORBACHEVIANS REGARD THE YEARS IN WHICH THE RUSSIANS COMPETED WITH THE CHINESE IN THE THIRD WORLD AND DIVIDED THE SOCIALIST FRATERNITY AS MISTAKEN AND UNPRODUCTIVE. THE DIVISION GAVE THE UNITED STATES AND THE WEST A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY WHICH WAS DULY EXPLOITED. AND IT MULTIPLIED SOVIET BURDENS. SOVIET NEW THINKERS IN THE PARTY DO NOT EXPECT TO SEE EYE TO EYE WITH THE CHINESE, BUT THEY NOW REGARD THEIR COMMON GROUND IN THEORETICAL AND INTERNAL POLICIES AS MUCH GREATER THAN THEIR DIFFERENCES. WITH WORLD

CAPITALISM RAMPANT AND SOCIALISM AILING, THE CPSU NEEDS ALL THE SUPPORT IT CAN GET, ALBEIT IN A LOOSER CONFEDERATION.

B) REDUCING BILATERAL TENSION

5. GEOPOLITICAL FACTORS - THE LENGTH OF THE COMMON BORDER, THE DISPARITY IN POPULATION SIZE, HISTORIC GRIEVANCES OVER TERRITORY ETC - MADE A DEGREE OF MUTUAL SUSPICION INHERENT IN THE SINO-SOVIET RELATIONSHIP. THIS WILL NOT GO AWAY WITH GORBACHEV'S VISIT TO PEKING. IN THEIR HEARTS, THE DEEPLY CHAUVINIST RUSSIANS DO NOT LIKE AND HAVE A PRIMITIVE FEAR OF THE CHINESE. THE SOVIET NIGHTMARE IS THAT CHINA WILL EVENTUALLY BECOME A MILITARY AND ECONOMIC SUPERPOWER TOWERING OVER THEIR OWN UNDERPOPULATED AND VULNERABLE SIBERIAN TERRITORIES. IN THE SHORTER TERM, CONFRONTATION WITH CHINA HAS BEEN EXTREMELY EXPENSIVE TO THE SOVIET UNION, REQUIRING A MASSIVE AND EXPENSIVE MILITARY DEPLOYMENT. ALL POWERFUL REASONS FOR GORBACHEV TO MAKE CONCESSIONS NOW AND REMOVE THE DIRECT CONFRONTATION, AS HE HAS DONE STEP BY STEP. NORMALISATION HAS HELPED TO PROVIDE SECURITY AT A LOWER COST.

C) NEW ASIA POLICY

6. AS WE HAVE COMMENTED ELSEWHERE, WITH REFERENCE TO JAPAN AS WELL AS CHINA, GORBACHEV IS ANXIOUS TO DEVELOP A CONSTRUCTIVE POLICY ON THE SOVIET UNION'S EASTERN FLANK. THE SUB-TEXT OF HIS VLADIVOSTOK AND KRASNOYARSK ASIAN SECURITY INITIATIVES WAS TO TRY TO FIX A PLACE FOR THE USSR IN ASIA GENERALLY, BUT IN THE DYNAMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE PACIFIC IN PARTICULAR. THE RUSSIANS CHERISH THE DREAM OF MAKING THEIR PACIFIC SEABOARD PART OF THAT DEVELOPMENT. THEY HAVE TRADITIONALLY ASSERTED THE USSR'S RIGHT TO BE REGARDED AS AN ASIAN POWER. THIS TOO LED TO COMPETITION WITH THE CHINESE, AS WELL AS WITH OTHER ASIANS AND THE UNITED STATES: AND AS A POLICY HAD ONLY LIMITED SUCCESS. GORBACHEV IS NOW APPROACHING THE OBJECTIVE FROM A DIFFERENT ANGLE AND TRYING TO PRESENT THE SOVIET UNION IN A LESS COMPETITIVE LIGHT IN ASIA. HIS FRUSTRATION AT HIS LACK OF SUCCESS CAME OUT DURING HIS MEETING WITH THE JAPANESE FOREIGN MINISTER LAST WEEK. HIS PROBLEM IS THAT HE HAS LITTLE TO OFFER OTHER THAN MILITARY STRENGTH. AS SIR A DONALD SAYS, THERE IS NO PARTICULAR REASON FOR THE CHINESE TO HELP HIM. BUT THE RUSSIANS WILL PROBABLY PRESENT THE VISIT AS ANOTHER STEP IN THE VLADIVOSTOK CONTINUUM.

D) CAMBODIA

7. FOR THE RUSSIANS, A CAMBODIAN SETTLEMENT IS A MEANS TO THE END OF

IMPROVING THEIR POSTURE IN ASIA AND THUS PUTTING THEMSELVES IN A BETTER LIGHT THAN THE AMERICANS: AND WOULD ALSO HELP TO REDUCE THEIR EXPENSIVE COMMITMENT TO THE VIETNAMESE. THEY HAVE THEREFORE BEEN READY TO SHOW CONSIDERABLE FLEXIBILITY ON CAMBODIA, AND MAY BE EXPECTED TO DO SO AGAIN IN PEKING NEXT WEEK. BUT WHILE THEY HAVE INFLUENCE, THEY CANNOT DELIVER THE VIETNAMESE.

E) ECONOMIC CONNECTIONS AND POLITICAL REFORM

8. A YEAR AGO, THE RUSSIANS WERE SHOWING INTENSE INTEREST IN DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN CHINA AND A WILLINGNESS TO LEARN FROM CHINESE EXPERIENCES IN MODERNISING THEIR INTERNAL POLICIES. AS THE CHINESE MODEL IS NOW TARNISHED, THIS ASPECT WILL HAVE MOVED DOWN GORBACHEV'S LIST OF OBJECTIVES. HE CAN COMPARE NOTES WITH THE CHINESE LEADERSHIP ABOUT MUTUAL DIFFICULTIES, BUT NEITHER COUNTRY SEEMS TO HAVE ANSWERS TO HAND. PEKING TUR DESCRIBES WELL THE AREAS IN WHICH BILATERAL COOPERATION HAS DEVELOPED, WITHOUT A DRAMATIC INCREASE IN ECONOMIC LINKS. SOVIET EXPECTATIONS HAVE ALREADY BEEN DOWNGRADED.

CONCLUSION

9. BECAUSE, I THINK, OF THE POOR INTERNAL POSITION OF BOTH COUNTRIES, THE SOVIET PUBLICITY BUILD-UP TO THE SUMMIT HAS BEEN SOBER AND NON-TRIUMPHALIST. COMMENT ON CHINA IN GENERAL IS MORE MUTED THAN LAST YEAR. GORBACHEV IS ALSO INHIBITED BY THE FACT THAT THE CHINESE MADE VERY CLEAR IN THE RUN-UP THAT HE WAS THE DEMANDEUR. THE RUSSIAN PEOPLE AS WHOLE ARE MORE INTERESTED IN DEVELOPING RELATIONS WITH THE WEST - WITH ITS TECHNOLOGICAL ATTRACTIONS AND LANGUAGES WHICH MORE OF THEM SPEAK - THAN WITH CHINA. THEY WILL NOT BE CHEERING IN THE STREETS. BUT THE VISIT IS SET FAIR TO STAND AS ANOTHER IMPORTANT ACHIEVEMENT FOR GORBACHEV'S FOREIGN POLICY, AND AS ALWAYS WILL HELP TO DIVERT THE SPOTLIGHT FROM HIS INTERNAL DIFFICULTIES.

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