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TALK WITH KOHL. EAST-WEST AND DISARMAMENT

SUMMARY

1. KOHL OPTIMISTIC ON EAST-WEST RELATIONS GENERALLY, BUT CAUTIOUS ON GORBACHEV'S PROSPECTS FOR SUCCESS. HE WAS QUITE ENCOURAGING ON COMPREHENSIVE CONCEPT/SNF, ALTHOUGH NOT VERY SPECIFIC. I WARNED AGAINST PUBLICLY SETTING CW EXPECTATIONS TOO HIGH TOO SOON.

DETAIL

2. WHEN I SAW CHANCELLOR KOHL ON 14 JANUARY HE TALKED OPTIMISTICALLY ABOUT THE PROSPECTS FOR EAST-WEST RELATIONS IN 1988, WITH MORE EMPHASIS ON EASTERN EUROPE THAN ON THE SOVIET UNION. HE SAID THAT THERE WERE 2 THEORIES HERE ABOUT GORBACHEV'S RUSSIA, BOTH WRONG: THAT NOTHING HAD CHANGED, AND THAT EVERYTHING HAD CHANGED. IN FACT GORBACHEV HOPED TO CHANGE THE SOVIET UNION'S ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE WITHOUT CHANGING ITS POLITICAL SYSTEM. HE WOULD NOT SUCCEED. (ANECDOTES TO ILLUSTRATE BACKWARDNESS OF SOVIET INDUSTRY AND ATTITUDES, EVEN COMPARED WITH EASTERN EUROPE AND CHINA.) BUT IT WOULD TAKE 3 TO 5 YEARS TO SEE HOW THE GORBACHEV EXPERIMENT WOULD TURN OUT. MEANWHILE THERE WERE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE WEST WHICH WE SHOULD BE STUPID TO MISS.

3. I SUGGESTED THAT IT WAS A QUESTION OF SETTING THE RIGHT PRIORITIES, ESPECIALLY IN THE DISARMAMENT FIELD, AND LISTED THESE AS WE SEE THEM. KOHL DID NOT DISSENT. OBVIOUSLY RATIFICATION OF INF CAME FIRST, FOLLOWED BY START (HE SHOWED NO INTEREST IN THE DETAILS OF THAT). AS TO WHAT CAME AFTERWARDS KOHL DID NOT CARE AT WHAT POINT IN THE AGENDA WE STARTED. HIS GOVERNMENT WOULD DO 'NOTHING THAT IS NOT IN THE NATO PAPER' (MEANING PRESUMABLY THE REYKJAVIK AND BRUSSELS COMMUNIQUE, OR SKETCHES FOR THE COMPREHENSIVE CONCEPT). KOHL WAS CATEGORICALLY AGAINST THE DENUCLEARISATION OF

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EUROPE, ZERO-SNF OR ANY ARRANGEMENT WHICH WOULD LEAVE THE BRITISH AND FRENCH NUCLEAR WEAPONS AS THE ONLY ONES IN EUROPE. HE TOO HAD HEARD STRAUSS' STORY ABOUT THE SOVIET UNION NOT SEEKING ZERO-SNF, AND INTENDED TO QUESTION SHEVARDNADZE ABOUT THIS WHEN HE CAME TO BONN NEXT WEEK. THE MOST ONE COULD HOPE FOR IN SNF WAS THAT THE 2 SIDES WOULD BOTH COME DOWN A BIT. BUT IT WAS CONVENTIONAL DISARMAMENT THAT INTERESTED KOHL MOST: THAT WAS WHERE GORBACHEV'S INTENTIONS WOULD REALLY BE TESTED, BECAUSE THAT WAS WHERE THE SOVIET SUPERIORITY WAS SO OVERWHELMING.

4. I SUGGESTED THAT THE SAME WAS TRUE OF CW. AND MADE OUR POINT ABOUT THE WORK STILL TO BE DONE AND THE NEED TO AVOID PUTTING THE WEST UNDER TIME PRESSURE BY SETTING ARTIFICIAL DEADLINES. ONE OR TWO SPEECHES FROM THE AUSWAERTIGES AMT HAD IN MY OPINION GONE A BIT TOO FAR BY DEMANDING A CW CONVENTION THIS YEAR. KOHL SAID THAT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY WERE PERHAPS PUTTING THAT SLANT INTO THE PICTURE FOR ELECTORAL REASONS. BUT HE AGREED WHEN I SUGGESTED THAT THE COMING LAND ELECTIONS WOULD NOT BE FOUGHT ON DISARMAMENT: NOW THAT THE WORLD TREND SEEMED TO BE ENCOURAGING, THE ELECTORATE WERE BROADLY SPEAKING CONTENT AND THE UNILATERAL NUCLEAR DISARMERS NOWHERE.

COMMENT

5. KOHL WAS TYPICALLY VAGUE ON THE DETAIL AND DID NOT GIVE THE IMPRESSION OF A MAN CLOSELY AU FAIT WITH THE LATEST ARMS CONTROL SCENE. BUT EQUALLY HE WAS NOT BURNING TO LECTURE ME ON SINGULARISATION OF THE FRG, EARLY SNF DISARMAMENT OR THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF THEATRE NUCLEAR MODERNISATION. HIS ENCOURAGING COMMENTS ABOUT AVOIDING DENUCLEARISATION HAVE YET TO BE TRANSLATED INTO ANY CLEAR LEAD BY HIM EVEN WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT LET ALONE IN PUBLIC. AS USUAL I SUSPECT HE IS PLAYING FOR TIME INSTEAD OF TAKING A GRIP ON THE DISSENTING ELEMENTS WITHIN HIS COALITION. BUT IT MAY BE USEFUL LATER TO HAVE HAD HIM ON RECORD IN THESE TERMS YESTERDAY.

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