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SOVIET VIEWS ON GERMANY: GORBACHEV'S INTERVIEW WITH PRAVDA, 21 FEBRUARY.

SUMMARY

1. GORBACHEV USES A PRAVDA INTERVIEW TO DRAW TOGETHER THE MAIN THEMES OF THE SOVIET APPROACH TO GERMANY. RESPECT FOR SELF-DETERMINATION. HISTORICAL REALITIES PLAY A PART. FOUR POWERS RETAIN RESPONSIBILITY. TWO PLUS FOUR MECHANISM RIGHT, BUT NOT EXCLUSIVE. NO FEAR OF THE NEW GERMANY, BUT THE SOVIET PEOPLE HAVE A RIGHT TO GUARANTEES. NO DIRECT COMMENT ON GERMANY AND NATO. HE ALSO GLOSSED OVER THE US-SOVIET AGREEMENT ON TROOP LEVELS.

DETAIL

2. PRAVDA OF 21 FEBRUARY PUBLISHED A FRONT PAGE INTERVIEW WITH GORBACHEV ON GERMAN UNIFICATION. THIS IS A RARE, BUT NOT UNIQUE OCCURRENCE. HE BROUGHT TOGETHER THE MAIN THEMES OF RECENT STATEMENTS.

2. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THE RIGHT OF GERMANS TO SELF-DETERMINATION. HE REHEARSED ALL THE SOVIET PROPOSALS ON UNITY IN THE 1940S AND 1950S, AS EVIDENCE OF SOVIET CONSISTENCY ON THIS SCORE. HISTORY HAD DETERMINED THE EXISTING DIVISION AND WOULD DECIDE THE FINAL FORM OF STATEHOOD FOR THE GERMAN NATION. HE REPEATED THE POINT BOTH HE AND SHEVARDNADZE (MY TELNO 282) HAVE MADE THAT HISTORY WAS MOVING UNEXPECTEDLY QUICKLY.

4. ALTHOUGH SOME QUESTIONS WERE FOR THE GERMANS TO DECIDE, UNIFICATION DID NOT CONCERN THEM ALONE. THERE MUST BE NO AMBIGUITY ON CERTAIN MATTERS. UNIFICATION SHOULD NOT THREATEN THE NATIONAL INTEREST OF OTHER STATES. ANY ENCROACHMENT ON THE BORDERS OF OTHER STATES WAS OUT OF THE QUESTION.

5. THE BORDERS WERE NOT THE ONLY CONSEQUENCE OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR WHICH HAD TO BE RESPECTED. NOBODY HAD RELIEVED THE FOUR POWERS OF THEIR OBLIGATIONS, AND ONLY THEY COULD LAY THEM DOWN. A PEACE TREATY

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WAS THE ONLY MEANS TO FIX IN AN INTERNATIONAL JURIDICAL WAY THE FINAL STATUS OF GERMANY IN THE EUROPEAN STRUCTURE.

6. THE MILITARY STRATEGIC BALANCE OF THE TWO ALLIANCES SHOULD NOT BE UPSET, ESPECIALLY SINCE WORK WAS ONLY BEGINNING ON SKETCHING OUT A NEW EUROPEAN STRUCTURE. THE ALLIANCES WOULD RETAIN A ROLE, THOUGH THIS WOULD DECREASE AS TENSION EASED. GORBACHEV SAID THAT HIS ARGUMENTS REINFORCED THE NEED TO SYNCHRONISE UNIFICATION WITH THE WIDER EUROPEAN PROCESS.

7. GORBACHEV EXPLAINED HOW THE TWO PLUS FOUR FORMULA HAD ARISEN. IT MATCHED THE NEEDS OF REALITY AND EXISTING OBLIGATIONS. IT DID NOT RULE OUT BILATERAL CONTACTS BETWEEN ITS PARTICIPANTS AND OTHER COUNTRIES. ALSO 'WE FIRMLY RULE OUT ANY APPROACH WHEREBY THREE OR FOUR COULD AGREE AMONGST THEMSELVES FIRST AND PRESENT AGREED POSITIONS TO THE OTHER PARTICIPANTS''.

8. ONE QUESTION CONCERNED THE ''CERTAIN ALARM'' FELT BY SOVIET PEOPLE, AND OTHER COUNTRIES AT THE PROSPECT OF A UNITED GERMANY AT THE CENTRE OF EUROPE. WHILE EXPRESSING UNDERSTANDING, GORBACHEV SAID THAT GERMANS HAD LEARNT LESSONS FROM THE HITLER PERIOD AND WORLD WAR II. NEW GENERATIONS HAD EMERGED IN BOTH GERMANIES, WHOSE VIEW OF THE WORLD WAS QUITE DIFFERENT FROM THAT PREVAILING IN GERMANY FOR THE PREVIOUS CENTURY - GERMAN LEADERS HAD SAID THAT WAR SHOULD NEVER RISE FROM GERMAN SOIL AGAIN, AND KOHL HAD STRENGTHENED THIS FORMULA WHEN TALKING TO GORBACHEV ''ONLY PEACE SHOULD COME FROM GERMANY''. BUT GERMANY HAD TO RESPECT THE FEELINGS OF OTHERS. THE SOVIET PEOPLE HAD AN ''INALIENABLE RIGHT TO...ASSURANCE THAT OUR COUNTRY WOULD NOT SUFFER MORALLY, POLITICALLY OR ECONOMICALLY'' FROM UNIFICATION.

9. THE LAST QUESTIONS WERE ABOUT THE US-SOVIET AGREEMENT TO REDUCE FORCES IN CENTRAL EUROPE TO 195,000 MEN. GORBACHEV SAID HE WOULD HAVE LIKED TO SEE THIS A EUROPE-WIDE FIGURE, BUT PRESIDENT BUSH'S PROPOSAL SUITED THE RUSSIANS. HE ARGUED THAT NEGOTIATIONS AND THE NEW ATMOSPHERE REDUCED THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EXTRA 30,000 US TROOPS IN EUROPE. THEY DID NOT AFFECT SOVIET SECURITY.

COMMENT

10. THE RUSSIAN LEADERSHIP OBVIOULSY FELT THE NEED TO DRAW ALL THEIR RECENT STATEMENTS ON GERMANY TOGETHER IN WHAT WILL FOR SOME TIME BE THE SET TEXT. AKHROMEEV HAS ALREADY REFERRED TO IT AS SUCH DURING A CALL ON THE MORNING OF 21 FEBRUARY.

11. GORBACHEV'S APPROACH WILL PLAY WELL WITH THE GERMANS, AND OTHERS

SUCH AS THE POLES. HE HAS LEFT THE ''EXTERNAL ASPECTS'' VAGUE. THIS IS PARTICULARLY OBVIOUS OVER GERMANY IN NATO, WHERE HIS CALL NOT TO UPSET THE BALANCE OF FORCES AT THIS STAGE GIVES HIM ROOM FOR MANOEUVRE.

12. HIS RESPONSE ON SOVIET POPULAR CONCERN ADDRESSES TWO AUDIENCES. HE WANTS TO SENSITISE THE GERMANS AND THE WEST TO THIS. BUT HE ALSO IS TRYING TO BRING THE POPULATION ROUND TO THE VIEW, WHICH WE HAVE HEARD FROM SENIOR OFFICIALS RECENTLY, THAT THE GERMANS HAVE CHANGED AND ARE NOT LINEAR DESCENDENTS OF BISMARCK AND HITLER.

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