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REYKJAVIK SUMMIT: PRELIMINARY VIEW FROM MOSCOW

SUMMARY

1. GORBACHEV'S REYKJAVIK PRESS CONFERENCE CARRIED LIVE ON SOVIET TELEVISION BUT NO OFFICIAL COMMENT SO FAR.

2. GORBACHEV PUT AN UNEXPECTEDLY HIGH PRICE - SEVERE SDI CONSTRAINT - ON AGREEMENT IN OTHER ARMS CONTROL AREAS (AND HENCE ON AN EARLY SUMMIT) WHICH HE MUST HAVE KNOWN REAGAN WOULD BE UNLIKELY TO PAY. SDI AND THE US "MILITARY/INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX" NOW SPOT-LIT AS SOLE OBSTACLES TO MAJOR AGREEMENTS WHICH APPARENT SOVIET CONCESSIONS HAVE IN THEORY MADE POSSIBLE. IN ORDER TO MAKE THIS PROBABLE PROPAGANDA THEME EFFECTIVE, GORBACHEV WILL HAVE TO SHOW WILLINGNESS TO KEEP THE DIALOGUE OPEN.

DETAIL

3. ALTHOUGH SOVIET TELEVISION CARRIED GORBACHEV'S PRESS CONFERENCE ON 12 OCTOBER LIVE, THERE HAS AS YET BEEN NO OFFICIAL PUBLIC COMMENT AND THE LOGISTICS OF THE SOVIET CENTRAL MEDIA IN ANY CASE PRECLUDED THIS. THE FOLLOWING PRELIMINARY COMMENTS ARE THEREFORE SPECULATIVE AND SUBJECT TO CORRECTION WHEN THE OFFICIAL LINE EMERGES, PERHAPS LATER TODAY (13 OCTOBER).

4. SEEN FROM MOSCOW, THE SURPRISES FROM REYKJAVIK ARE THAT GORBACHEV WAS APPARENTLY PREPARED TO CONCEDE SO MUCH IN EVERY ARMS CONTROL AREA EXCEPT THE SDI; BUT THAT HE SET SUCH A HIGH PRICE, NAMELY THE VIRTUAL FREEZING OF THE SDI, ON THE TRANSLATION OF CONCESSIONS INTO AGREEMENTS AND CONSEQUENTLY ON HIS READINESS TO ATTEND A FULLSCALE SUMMIT IN THE US. GORBACHEV MUST HAVE KNOWN THAT HIS CHANCES OF PRESSURING REAGAN INTO BACKING AWAY FROM THE SDI IN REYKJAVIK WERE MINIMAL. BUT, ALTHOUGH (AS WE HAVE REPORTED) THE SDI HAS NOT FOR SEVERAL MONTHS BEEN IN THE FOREFRONT OF SOVIET PROPAGANDA, SUCCESS IN CONSTRAINING IT IS EVIDENTLY STILL THE CONDITION WHICH THE POLITBURO HAS SET UPON CONCRETE PROGRESS TOWARDS STRATEGIC AND INTERMEDIATE-RANGE REDUCTIONS; AND THE CRITERION BY WHICH IT JUDGES A "PRODUCTIVE" SUMMIT ASSUMING THAT

CRITERION BY WHICH IT JUDGES A "PRODUCTIVE" SUMMIT. GORBACHEV WAS NOT AIMING SIMPLY AT PROPAGANDA ADVANTAGE (HE MAY HAVE ACHIEVED THIS) THE CONCLUSION MUST BE THAT HE DOES NOT SEE HIMSELF AS UNDER COMPELLING PRESSURE (EG ECONOMIC) TO SECURE ARMS CONTROL AGREEMENTS (OTHER THAN ON SDI) FOR THEIR OWN SAKE; AND /OR THAT - DESPITE THE SCEPTICISM OF SOME EMINENT SOVIET, AS US, SCIENTISTS - THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP IS STILL MORE DEEPLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE SDI THAT HAS LATELY BEEN APPARENT.

5. THE SOVIET LEADERSHIP APPEARS, AT REYKJAVIK, TO HAVE THROWN VERY SIGNIFICANT WEIGHT INTO THE SCALES AGAINST THE SDI. THE BROAD PRINCIPLE OF ABMT OBSERVANCE FOR AT LEAST 10 YEARS NOW SEEMS TO BE ESTABLISHED (ALTHOUGH PRESIDENT REAGAN'S VISION OF SDI DEPLOYMENT EVENT AFTER AN ELIMINATION OF STRATEGIC WEAPONS LEAVES ROOM FOR CLARIFICATION). THE OFFER OF DEEP, IE 50%, CUTS IN STRATEGIC WEAPONS REMAINS ON THE TABLE, APPARENTLY COMBINED WITH SOME SOVIET MOVEMENT ON SUB-CEILINGS. AN AGREEMENT ON INF INVOLVING NO THIRD-COUNTRY CONSTRAINTS APPEARS TO BE ON OFFER (WHATEVER RESERVATIONS WE - AND PERHAPS THE JAPANESE - MAY HAVE ON A EUROPEAN ZERO-OPTION). THERE WAS EVIDENTLY SOME MOVEMENT ON NUCLEAR TESTING. THE SDI SUDDENLY LOOKS - AS GORBACHEV EVIDENTLY INTENDS IT TO - VERY EXPENSIVE AND NOT SIMPLY IN TERMS OF DOLLARS.

6. THE APPARENT EXTENT OF SOVIET MOVEMENT ON NON-SDI ISSUES, AND GORBACHEV'S PUBLIC COMMITMENT NOT TO WITHDRAW HIS PROPOSALS, MAKES IT UNLIKELY, IN MY VIEW, THAT HE WENT TO REYKJAVIK SIMPLY IN ORDER TO SET REAGAN UP, IN PROPAGANDA TERMS. HE MAY HAVE BELIEVED THAT THERE WAS AT LEAST A SLENDER CHANCE OF SCOOPING THE POOL AND LAYING THE BASIS FOR WHAT WOULD HAVE BEEN, FOR HIM, A TRIUMPHANT SUMMIT IN WASHINGTON. IF, AS WAS MORE PROBABLE, HE FAILED TO BRING THIS OFF HE WOULD AT LEAST HAVE CAPTURED THE PROPAGANDA HIGH GROUND AND PUT THE US "MILITARY/INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX" IN THE DOCK. THIS GAME-PLAN MUST, I THINK, HAVE BEEN ENDORSED BY THE POLITBURO BEFORE GORBACHEV LEFT FOR REYKJAVIK AND POSSIBLY EVEN BEFORE HE PROPOSED THE MEETING. I DO NOT, THEREFORE, SEE REYKJAVIK'S NEGATIVE OUTCOME AS LIKELY TO DAMAGE GORBACHEV'S POLITICAL STANDING WHERE IT MATTERS. HIS PUBLIC IMAGE IN THE SOVIET UNION, HOWEVER, MAY BE SOMEWHAT TARNISHED - AT LEAST IN THE SHORT-TERM - BY THE FACT THAT HE HAS RETURNED FROM HIS SECOND MEETING WITH REAGAN EMPTY-HANDED, DESPITE HIS SELF-PROCLAIMED CONCESSIONS. THIS COULD REINFORCE GRASS-ROOTS VIEWS THAT IN DEALING WITH THE AMERICANS IT DOES NOT PAY TO BE REASONABLE OR TO TURN THE OTHER CHEEK.

7. IF GORBACHEV DOES LOSE ANY GROUND AT HOME IN THIS WAY, HOWEVER, I WOULD EXPECT HIM TO RECAPTURE IT QUICKLY WITH AN ENERGETIC PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN DESIGNED BOTH TO REINFORCE THE SOVIET UNION'S IMAGE AS THE LEADING FORCE FOR PEACE, AND FOR FREEDOM FROM NUCLEAR TERROR ON EARTH OR IN SPACE, AND TO MOBILIZE WESTERN OPINION AGAINST THE SDI AS, APPARENTLY, THE ONLY OBSTACLE TO THE GREATEST BREAKTHROUGH IN ARMS CONTROL FOR DECADES (THIS WILL DOUBTLESS BE KARPOV'S MAIN OBJECTIVE IN LONDON, AND OTHER SOVIET EMISSARIES TO OTHER EUROPEAN CAPITALS). SUCH A CAMPAIGN WILL HAVE TO BE MATCHED BY A CONTINUING SOVIET WILLINGNESS TO TALK AT GENEVA AND ELSEWHERE; IT WOULD BE SELF-DEFEATING FOR GORBACHEV NOW TO PUT UP THE SHUTTERS ON EAST-WEST DIALOGUE. IN THE LONG TERM, REYKJAVIK MAY PROVE TO HAVE BEEN VALUABLE.

CARTLEDGE

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