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GORBACHEV BEFORE MALTA: EXTERNAL POLICY
SUMMARY

1. A SYNOPSIS, BEFORE THE PRIME MINISTER'S MEETINGS IN WASHINGTON
2. GORBACHEV'S POSITION REMAINS STRONG. IN PRIVATE HE IS RELAXED, IN PUBLIC DOMINANT. HIS FOREIGN POLICY IS IMAGINATIVE AND - DESPITE THE RISKS - SUCCESSFUL SO FAR. BUT GLOOM AND CONFUSION ABOUT THE FUTURE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL SHAPE OF THE SOVIET UNION DEEPEN. GORBACHEV IS FULLY AWARE OF THE EXTENT OF HIS DIFFICULTIES AT HOME: AND OF THE RISKS AND FRAGILITY (AS WELL AS THE ADVANTAGES), OF THE PROCESS OF CHANGE ABROAD. HE APPEARS CONFIDENT OF HIS ABILITY TO MASTER THESE GREAT MOVEMENTS OF HISTORY. BUT - WITHOUT WANTING TO APPEAS AS DEMANDEUR - HE NEEDS WESTERN UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORT. HE REACTS SHARPLY TO WHAT HE SEES AS WESTERN CLAIMS OF VICTORY IN THE COLD WAR: TO ANY SIGN OF WESTERN INTERFERENCE IN THE AFFAIRS OF EASTERN EUROPE OR THE SOVIET UNION ITSELF (EG THE BALTIC): AND TO WESTERN PREDICITONS THAT PERESTORIKA IS DOOMED. ALL THESE, HE FEARS, COULD UNDERMINE HIS DOMESTIC POSITION AND POLICIES.
3. AS FOR THE MALTA SUMMIT ITSELF, WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE THAT GORBACHEV INTENDS TO LAUNCH ANOTHER SPECTACULAR. NOR - ON HIS PREVIOUS FORM - WOULD WE EXPECT TO. MEANWHILE THE RUSSIANS ARE STILL SURPRISINGLY NERVOUS AOBUT THE SLOWNESS AND APPARENT LACK OF ENTHUSIASM WITH WHICH PRESIDENT BUSH HAS TAKEN UP THE SUPERPOWER RELATIONSHIP SINCE HIS ELECTION. GORBACHEV'S MAIN OBJECTIVE IN MALTA WILL BE TO DEMONSTRATE, TO HIS OWN PEOPLE AND THE WORLD, THAT THE PRESIDENT REGARDS HIM AS AN EQUAL PARTNER IN COOPERATION, AND AS A STATESMAN WITH A LONG AND SUCCESSFUL CAREER AHEAD OF HIM ABROAD, AND ABOVE ALL AT HOME.
4. THIS TELEGRAM EXAMINES GORBACHEV'S EXTERNAL AIMS IN MORE DETAILS. MIFT COVERS THE DOMESTIC BACKGORUND.

DETAIL (EXTERNAL POLICY)

5. GORBACHEV IS PLAYING HOST THIS WEKE SUCCESSIVELY TO PRIME MINISTERS MULRONEY OF CANADA AND MAZOWIECKI OF POLAND. AFTER A BRIEF PAUSE, HE SETS OFF ON 30NOVEMBER FOR ITALY, THE POPE AND MALTA.

MEANWHILE, THE FRENCH ARE TRYING TO PIN DOWN DATES FOR A VISIT BY MITTERRAND, PREFERABLY IN DECEMBER WHILE HE STILL ENJOYS THE PRESIDENCY. GENSCHER IS COMING HERE ON 5 DECEMBER.

6. THE RUSSIANS HAVE GIVEN FEW CLUES TO WHAT GORBACHEV MAY RAISE WITH PRESIDENT BUSH. THEY ASSERT THAT MALTA WILL BE MORE THAN A FRIENDLY CHAT. (SHEVARDNADZE ON 17 NOVEMBER: "I WOULD NOT EXCLUDE THE POSSIBILITY OF A DEPARTURE BY THE TWO LEADERS INTO IMPORTANT POLITICAL AREAS AND SERIOUS CONCEPTUAL MATTERS"). POSSIBILITIES INCLUDE NAVAL DISARMAMENT, ACCELERATED PROGRESS TOWARDS A 50PERCENT CUT IN STRATEGIC ARMS AND A CFE AGREEMENT SIGNED AT SUMMIT LEVEL, AND SOME FORM OF COMMITMENT TO AN EXPANDED CSCE PROCESS FOLLOWING 'HELSINKI TWO' IN 1992. THE RUSSIANS ARE DEFENSIVE ABOUT THE SELF-EVIDENT TRUTH THAT THE LEADERS WILL DISCUSS STABILITY AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN EASTERN EUROPE, AND ALMOST CERTAINLY WITHIN THE SOVIET UNION ITSELF. WE KNOW THAT SOVIET FOREIGN MINISTRY PLANNERS HAVE FLOATED THE IDEA OF A FOUR-POWER CONFERENCE ON GERMANY (WITH OR WITHOUT GERMAN PARTICIPATION): BUT THIS WOULD PUT REUNIFICATION ON THE AGENDA, AND THEREFORE DOES NOT LOOK LIKE AN EARLY STARTER.

EASTERN EUROPE

7. GORBACHEV HAS LIT THE TOUCHPAPER AND IS STANDING BACK. HE IS RUNNING RISKS BY LIFTING THE ENFORCED HEGEMONY IN EASTERN EUROPE, WHICH FOR 40 YEARS WAS SEEN AS A KEystone IN SOVIET SECURITY POLICY. HIS REASONS MIX CALCULATION WITH GUESSWORK:

(A) SECURITY: GORBACHEV HAS EVIDENTLY CONCLUDED THAT SOVIET SECURITY ULTIMATELY DOES NOT REQUIRE THE MAINTENANCE OF SOVIET DIVISIONS IN THE GDR OR ELSEWHERE IN EASTERN EUROPE. BUT THIS CALCULATION WILL BE UPSET IF HE HAS TO REMOVE THESE FORCES UNILATERALLY RATHER THAN IN THE FRAMEWORK OF MULTILATERAL AGREEMENTS.

(B) ECONOMIC: THE SOVIET UNION WILL PROFIT IF IT CAN SHARE OR DIVEST THE BURDEN OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR FAILING EASTERN EUROPEAN ECONOMIES. HENCE SOVIET DETACHMENT WHEN THE COMMUNISTS LOST POWER IN POLAND. HENCE ALSO THE OPEN WELCOME TO SUPPORT OFFERED BY THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES. THIS CALCULATION, TOO, WOULD BE UPSET IF THOSE ECONOMIES DEVELOPED RAPIDLY AND INTEGRATED INTO WESTERN EUROPE WHILE THE USSR REMAINED UNRECONSTRUCTED AND STRANDED ON THE MARGINS. GORBACHEV MAY WELL ASSUME THAT IN MOST EAST EUROPEAN CASES RAPID REANIMATION IS IMPOSSIBLE: AND THAT PRESENT CMEA MEMBERS ARE DOOMED TO HANG TOGETHER BECAUSE THEY CANNOT COMPETE IN THE WEST.

(C) POLITICAL REFORM: NOW THAT PERESTROIKA HAS ESTABLISHED A MAJORITY SHAREHOLDING IN EASTERN EUROPE, A REVERSION TO ORTHODOX MARXISM IN THE SOVIET UNION ITSELF BECOMES ALL THE HARDER.

(D) THE GERMAN QUESTION: THE RUSSIANS DO NOT WANT GERMAN REUNIFICATION. THEY BELIEVE THEY CAN HOLD IT OFF BY NON-MILITARY

MEANS. WITH HINDSIGHT, THEY THINK THEY SHOULD HAVE BREACHED THE EAST GERMAN DYKE SOONER (GORBACHEV WAS APPALLED BY HIS EXPERIENCES IN EAST BERLIN IN EARLY OCTOBER). THEY HOPE THAT THE FLOOD OF EVENTS IN THE GDR WILL SUBSIDE INTO A MORE MANAGEABLE STREAM. THEY THEN CALCULATE THAT:

- THE SHORT TERM POSITION CAN BE HELD BY DECLARING (WITH WIDE INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENT) THAT GERMAN REUNIFICATION IS NOT AT PRESENT ON THE AGENDA, AND THAT STABILITY AND EXISTING AGREEMENTS MUST BE PROTECTED:

- IN THE MEDIUM TERM, THE EAST GERMANS WILL BE PREOCCUPIED WITH INTERNAL PROCESSES (PARTY CONFERENCE, POSSIBLY FURTHER LEADERSHIP CHANGES, ELECTIONS, NEW GOVERNMENT, DEVELOPMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL LINKS WITH THE FRG ETC). SO LONG AS THE EAST GERMANS HAVE THIS AVENUE FOR SELF-EXPRESSION, THE RUSSIANS HOPE PRESSURE FOR REUNIFICATION WILL BE DEFLECTED FOR MANY YEARS: AND THAT THE ADVANTAGES OF INDEPENDENT STATEHOOD WILL IMPLANT THEMSELVES. THIS CALCULATION ASSUMES THAT THE GERMAN PEOPLE WILL CONTINUE TO ACCEPT A MEASURED PACE AND WILL NOT BE INFECTED EN MASSE BY UNSTOPPABLE REUNIFICATION FEVER.

(E) RELATIONS WITH NEIGHBOURING STATES: NATIONAL INTERESTS COULD PROVIDE A STRONGER AND CHEAPER BOND WITH THE USSR'S NEIGHBOURS THAN IDEOLOGY AND GARRISONS. FEAR OF A REUNITED GERMANY, CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC AFFINITIES AND BILATERAL ECONOMIC LINKS COULD CONSOLIDATE EASTERN EUROPE.

(F) FROM THE POST-WAR SETTLEMENT AND WARSAW PACT TO THE COMMON EUROPEAN HOME: THE DIVISION OF GERMANY AND EXISTENCE OF NATO AND THE WARSAW PACT ARE 'POST-WAR REALITIES.' BUT TO SUGGEST THEY CAN NEVER BE CHANGED RISKS CONSOLIDATING OPPOSITION AND ADVANCING THE GERMAN QUESTION. BETTER, THEREFORE, TO HOLD OUT THE PROSPECT OF THE COMMON EUROPEAN HOME. (SHEVARDNADZE AGAIN: 'EVEN EUROPEAN REALITIES WILL UNDOUBTEDLY CHANGE. BUT THESE REALITIES ARE HELD IN A FINE BALANCE, DISTURBANCE OF WHICH COULD CAUSE THE MOST SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES FOR ALL EUROPEAN PEOPLES AND FOR PEACE AS A WHOLE. NOR WOULD IT BE CORRECT TO SAY THAT THE GENERAL SITUATION IN EUROPE IS NOT CHANGING').

8. SOVIET PREOCCUPATION WITH DOMESTIC PROBLEMS AND THE RESTRAINED AND SUPPORTIVE WESTERN REACTION HAVE ENABLED GORBAHCEV TO GET AWAY THUS FAR WITH THIS HIGH-RISK POLICY. HE HAS PERSONALLY FOUND REASSURANCE IN HIS CLOSE CONTACTS WITH WESTERN LEADERS OVER THE PAST TWO WEEKS, INCLUDING HIS EXCHANGE OF MESSAGES WITH THE PRIME MINISTER. A FURTHER MESSAGE FROM THE PRIME MINISTER AFTER HER TALKS WITH PRESIDENT BUSH COULD GO DOWN WELL.

OTHER INTERNATIONAL QUESTIONS

9. AT THE TOP LEVEL, SOVIET INTEREST IN QUESTIONS PERIPHERAL TO EAST/WEST RELATIONS HAS PALED. GORBACHEV AND SHEVARDNADZE ARE PUTTING LITTLE ENERGY IN TO AFGHANISTAN, OR IMPORTANT SOVIET RELATIONSHIPS SUCH AS THOSE WITH INDIA AND IRAN. THE RUSSIANS HAVE NOT TURNED AGAINST CHINA, BUT INTERNAL MATTERS HAVE TAKEN OVER IN BOTH COUNTRIES. DESPITE A VISIT BY ALEXANDER YAKOVLEV TO TOKYO LAST WEEK, THEY ARE GOING NOWHERE FAST WITH JAPAN. SHEVARDNADZE'S MIDDLE EAST TOUR EARLY IN 1989 HAS NOT BEEN FOLLOWED UP EFFECTIVELY. THE THRUST OF SOVIET FOREIGN POLICY IS TO DEVELOP THE MOST IMPORTANT POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIPS, WHICH ARE THOSE WITH WESTERN COUNTRIES AND MIULTILATERAL INSTITUTIONS

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MIFT: GORBACHEV BEFORE MALTA: THE DOMESTIC BACKGROUND

1. POLITICAL REFORM CONTINUES, WITH HICCUPS. IT IS THIS YEAR'S SUCCESS STORY. BUT ECONOMIC REFORM IS LOSING ITS WAY IN A WELTER OF TALK. NO ONE IS TRYING TO SOLVE THE NATIONALITIES PROBLEM. THE TENSIONS INHERENT IN PERESTROIKA ARE COMING TO THE SURFACE. THE PROBLEMS ARE OBVIOUS. THE SOLUTIONS ARE NOT. THERE IS NEVERTHELESS A POSITIVE SIDE.

POLITICAL CHANGE

2. THE RESTRUCTURING OF THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A (FAIRLY) EFFECTIVE PARLIAMENT HAVE MARKED A QUALITATIVE CHANGE IN SOVIET POLITICAL LIFE THIS YEAR. THE SUPREME SOVIET IS BEGINNING TO EXERCISE REAL, IF NOT YET DECISIVE, INFLUENCE ON THE ACTS OF GOVERNMENT AND THE PASSAGE OF LEGISLATION. ITS DEPUTIES SPEAK FREELY, AND ARE BEGINNING TO DEVELOP WORKABLE PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURES. NO ONE FORESAW THIS A YEAR AGO.

THE COMMUNIST PARTY

3. IN PARALLEL, THE PARTY HAS SEEN A MAJOR DECLINE IN ITS PRESTIGE AND AUTHORITY. IT IS NOW MASSIVELY UNPOPULAR, EVEN HATED. PEOPLE BLAME ITS PRIVILEGED OFFICIALS FOR THE CATASTROPHIC RESULTS OF SEVENTY-TWO YEARS OF MISRULE, FOR ALL THE MASSACRES AND FOR THE ECONOMIC MISERY. GORBACHEV'S STATED POLICY IS TO BUILD 'SOCIALISM' (NOW SIMPLY A BENIGN WORD RATHER THAN A POLITICAL PROGRAMME OR AN IDEOLOGY) THROUGH THE INSTRUMENT OF A REJUVENATED PARTY. BUT BY FORCING PARTY OFFICIALS TO FACE THE NATIONAL ELECTORATE LAST MARCH, AND LOCAL ELECTORS IN THE COMING MONTHS, HE HAS SET IN TRAIN A PROCESS WHICH COULD LEAD TO THE PARTY'S DEMORALISATION AND EVEN COLLAPSE. FEW OUTSIDE THE NOMENKLATURA WOULD MOURN THIS. THE PAST WEEK HAS SEEN BOTH STRIKING MINERS AND A MEETING OF THE STUDENT ELITE CALL FOR THE ABOLITION OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISION FOR SINGLE PARTY RULE. AS THE EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES DEVELOP MULTI-PARTY

SYSTEMS, THE SOVIET PEOPLE MAY INCREASINGLY WONDER WHY THEY ALONE SHOULD BE UNDERPRIVILEGED.

ALTERNATIVE POLITICAL GROUPINGS

4. THE PROBLEM FOR GORBACHEV IS THAT IT HAS BEEN THE SINGLE PARTY WHICH HAS HELD THE EMPIRE TOGETHER, AND PROVIDED THE RUTHLESS DRIVING FORCE OF SUCH MILITARY AND ECONOMIC PROGRESS AS THE COUNTRY HAS ACHIEVED. AS THE PARTY'S AUTHORITY DECLINES, NEW POLITICAL GROUPINGS APPEAR: LIBERALS WHO WANT POLITICAL PLURALISM AND A MARKET ECONOMY; AND A GROWING NUMBER OF REACTIONARY POPULISTS, WHO WANT TO SOAK THE PRIVILEGED, CLOBBER THE MAFIA BY FAIR MEANS OR FOUL, AND RESTORE THE POLITICAL DISCIPLINES OF EARLIER DAYS. THESE LAST ARE MAKING A DELIBERATE APPEAL TO THE CHAUVINISM AND ANTI-SEMITISM OF THE RUSSIAN WORKING CLASSES. THEY ARE SAID TO BE BACKED BY REACTIONARIES IN THE PARTY AND THE POLICE. THEY COULD BECOME A REAL COUNTERWEIGHT TO THE WESTERN-ORIENTED LIBERALS WHO HAVE HITHERTO DOMINATED THE POLITICAL DEBATE. PERHAPS THESE ARE THE FIRST SIGNS OF A DEVELOPING PARTY SYSTEM. BUT - GIVEN THE TRADITIONS OF RUSSIAN HISTORY - THEY COULD ALSO BE SYMPTOMS OF DISINTEGRATION.

THE NATIONAL MINORITIES

5. THIS AUTUMN GORBACHEV HAS HELD A MAJOR PARTY MEETING ON THE NATIONALITIES. HE HAS HELD FREQUENT DISCUSSIONS WITH THE SUPREME SOVIET. BUT HE IS NO NEARER SECURING AGREEMENT ON WHAT SORT OF FEDERATION THE SOVIET UNION SHOULD BECOME. THE SHOTS ARE BEING CALLED BY THE MINORITIES. GEORGIA AND AZERBAIJAN HAVE JOINED THE BALTS IN ANNOUNCING THAT THEY WILL VETO ANY MOSCOW LAWS THEY DO NOT LIKE. THEY HAVE IGNORED MOSCOW'S CLAIM (POSSIBLY CORRECT) THAT THIS IS UNCONSTITUTIONAL. THE SITUATION EVOLVES, BUT POLICY MAKING AT THE CENTRE SEEMS PARALYSED.

THE ECONOMY

6. THE PROBLEMS ARE LEGION. AMONG THE MOST PRESSING IS INFLATION - THE VAST ACCUMULATION OF MONEY BY FIRMS AND INDIVIDUALS WHICH IS LOSING ITS VALUE BECAUSE THERE IS NOTHING TO BUY. INCENTIVES ARE DESTROYED. ECONOMIC TRANSACTIONS BETWEEN FIRMS ARE INCREASINGLY BASED ON BARTER. THE INFRASTRUCTURE - ROADS, SOCIAL SERVICES, HOUSING - IS VISIBLY FRAYING. GORBACHEV AND HIS ADVISERS ARE PUTTING TOGETHER A RESCUE PROGRAMME. AN AUSTERITY PACKAGE IS PROMISED FOR THE CONGRESS OF PEOPLE'S DEPUTIES IN DECEMBER. MASTERMINDED BY THE GLOOMY BUT ABLE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER ABALKIN, IT IS PROBABLY AT OR BEYOND THE LIMITS OF THE POLITICALLY TOLERABLE. YET MANY ECONOMISTS THINK IT WILL ONLY SCRATCH THE SURFACE. IF GORBACHEV DOES NOT PUT AN END TO THE TALK, AND ACT EFFECTIVELY AND SOON (THE MAIN DEMAND OF AN

INCREASINGLY CRITICAL PUBLIC), THE PROSPECT THIS WINTER IS OF FALLING OUTPUT AND LIVING STANDARDS. SOME WORKERS HAVE ALREADY LEARNED THAT THEY CAN GET WHAT THEY WANT IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES BY GOING ON STRIKE.

THE PRESS

7. UNDER THESE PRESSURES GORBACHEV HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY IRRITATED BY PUBLIC CRITICISMS. HE REACTS ANGRILY TO THE PROPOSITIONS - IN THE WESTERN PRESS AND IN HIS OWN - THAT SOCIALISM HAS BEEN DEFEATED, THAT THE PARTY HAS HAD ITS DAY, AND THAT HIS REFORMS ARE ILL-CONCEIVED. HE DOES NOT LIKE PERSONAL CRITICISM. PRESSURE ON THE LIBERAL PRESS AND TV HAS INCREASED. SOME LIBERAL EDITORS HAVE BEEN QUIETLY SACKED. THESE MEASURES HAVE BEEN DESIGNED IN PART TO PLACATE THE DISCIPLINARIANS WITHIN THE PARTY LEADERSHIP. SO FAR THIS HAS BEEN POLITICAL IN-FIGHTING, RATHER THAN A REAL TREND. GORBACHEV PRESUMABLY KNOWS HOW MUCH HE WOULD INJURE HIMSELF IF GLASNOST WENT INTO REVERSE. BUT THE MATTER BEARS WATCHING.

PROGNOSIS

8. THE CONVERGENCE OF RAPID POLITICAL CHANGE, ECONOMIC STAGNATION, AND THE UPHEAVAL IN CENTRAL EUROPE POSES OBVIOUS RISKS FOR PERESTROIKA. RADICAL LIBERALS AND REACTIONARY POPULISTS CALL FOR A 'STRONG HAND' - TO IMPOSE DEMOCRACY OR DISCIPLINE. GORBACHEV HAS NOT LISTENED TO THESE SIREN CALLS. BUT NEITHER HAS HE YET SHOWN THE ECONOMIC GRASP AND LEADERSHIP NEEDED TO PREVENT ECONOMIC FAILURE LEADING TO SERIOUS POPULAR UNREST. PESSIMISTS IN MOSCOW ARE CURRENTLY IN A MAJORITY.

9. THEY HAVE MUCH JUSTIFICATION. BUT THERE ARE FACTORS ON THE OTHER SIDE TOO. THE DIRECTION OF CHANGE - IN EASTERN EUROPE OR IN THE SOVIET UNION - CANNOT EASILY BE REVERSED WITHOUT RISKING MASSIVE BLOODSHED AND PERHAPS A MAJOR CONFRONTATION WITH THE WEST. FOR ALL THE UNCERTAINTIES, THERE ARE STILL NO SERIOUS ALTERNATIVES TO THE BROAD STRATEGY BEING PURSUED BY GORBACHEV. THE SOVIET PEOPLE ARE, FOR THE MOST PART, NOW WELL ENOUGH EDUCATED AND INFORMED TO UNDERSTAND THIS: AND TOUCH AND PATIENT ENOUGH PERHAPS TO BEAR THE STRAIN OF THE LENGTHY TRANSITION WHICH - EVEN IN THE BEST CASE - STILL LIES AHEAD.

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