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BUSH/GORBACHEV SUMMIT: BAKER SCENE-SETTING PRESS CONFERENCE

SUMMARY

1. BAKER SCENE-SETTING PRESS CONFERENCE ON 23 MAY. ARMS CONTROL (START, CW, CFE, PNET/TTBT) THE CLEAR PRIORITY, ALTHOUGH

AFGHANISTAN, GERMAN UNIFICATION AND SOVIET INTERNAL BALTIC DEVELOPMENTS ALSO HIGHLIGHTED. PRESS CONFERENCE SET AGAINST BACKDROP OF DOMESTIC CRITICISM OF OUTCOME OF MOST RECENT BILATERAL

MINISTERIAL MEETING IN MOSCOW (PARTICULARLY ON START). GENERALLY UNINSPIRING PERFORMANCE BY BAKER.

DETAIL

2. ON 23 MAY, BAKER GAVE A SCENE SETTING PRESS CONFERENCE AT THE WHITE HOUSE ON THE FORTHCOMING BUSH/GORBACHEV SUMMIT. AFTER AN OPENING STATEMENT IN WHICH HE REVIEWED THE COURSE OF THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP SINCE BUSH AND GORBACHEV LAST MET IN MALTA IN DECEMBER 1989, HE WENT ON TO SET OUT THE PRIORITIES FOR THE FORTHCOMING WASHINGTON SUMMIT:

1) ARMS CONTROL:

BAKER EMPHASISED THE IMPORTANCE OF GETTING A CFE AGREEMENT SIGNED THIS YEAR, SAYING THAT THE DISCUSSION BETWEEN THE PRESIDENTS COULD GIVE NEW IMPETUS TO THE NEGOTIATIONS (WHILE UNDERLINING THE ADMINISTRATION POSITION THAT A CFE AGREEMENT IS A PRECONDITION FOR US ATTENDANCE AT A CFE SUMMIT). IN RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS, HE WENT ON TO DISMISS THE IDEA THAT CFE AND START AGREEMENTS WERE LINKED IN ANY WAY, AND IDENTIFIED AIRCRAFT AS THE MAIN CFE STICKING POINT. ON START, HE WAS ON THE DEFENSIVE, POINTING TO THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF

BOTH THE BUSH AND REAGAN ADMINISTRATIONS IN ACHIEVING US GOALS AND RESTATING THE PRESIDENT'S INTENTION TO WORK TOWARDS SIGNING A START TREATY THIS YEAR, AS WELL AS INITIATING DISCUSSION OF OBJECTIVES FOR FOLLOW-ON NEGOTIATIONS. HE CONFIRMED THAT THE BILATERAL CW AGREEMENT WILL BE SIGNED, AS WOULD THE VERIFICATION PROTOCOLS TO THE THRESHOLD TEST BAN TREATY (TTBT) AND PEACEFUL NUCLEAR EXPLOSIONS TREATY (PNET). THE PRESIDENTS WOULD ALSO ISSUE A STATEMENT ON NUCLEAR, CHEMICAL AND MISSILE NON-PROLIFERATION:

II) DEVELOPMENTS IN EUROPE:

BAKER SAID THAT SINCE MALTA THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE HAD BEEN RESHAPED, BUT THE MILITARY SITUATION WAS LAGGING BEHIND. PROGRESS ON ARMS CONTROL, AND PARTICULARLY CFE, WAS IMPORTANT. BUT EUROPE COULD NOT BE MADE QUOTE WHOLE AND FREE UNQUOTE UNTIL GERMANY WAS UNITED IN PEACE AND FREEDOM. BAKER THEN WENT ON TO GIVE THE STANDARD US LINE ON INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ASPECTS OF GERMAN UNIFICATION AND SAID THAT THE PRESIDENT WOULD BE SEEKING GORBACHEV'S VIEWS:

III) REGIONAL ISSUES:

BAKER SAID THAT PRESIDENT BUSH WOULD RAISE SEVERAL REGIONAL ISSUES, PARTICULARLY AFGHANISTAN. IN RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS HE ALSO HIGHLIGHTED CUBAN SUPPORT TO THE FMLN:

IV) SOVIET INTERNAL:/THE BALTIC REPUBLICS:

BAKER SAID THAT PRESIDENT BUSH WOULD RAISE THE CONTINUING CONCERNS ABOUT THE REMAINING REFUSENIKS, AS WELL AS THE ADMINISTRATION'S GROWING FEARS ABOUT ANTI-SEMITISM IN THE SOVIET UNION. HE WOULD ALSO DISCUSS THE BALTIC REPUBLICS, EMPHASISING THEIR RIGHTS TO SELF DETERMINATION AND THE NEED FOR A SYSTEMATIC DIALOGUE, FREE OF COERCION OR INTIMIDATION, AS THE ONLY PATH TO A PEACEFUL RESOLUTION. IN RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS, HE DID NOT RULE OUT THE POSSIBILITY OF SIGNING A BILATERAL TRADE AGREEMENT. BUT HE SAID THAT THE QUESTION OF GRANTING MOST FAVOURED NATION (MFN) STATUS TO THE SOVIET UNION WOULD NOT BE CONSIDERED UNTIL SUCH TIME AS THE MORE LIBERAL SOVIET EMIGRATION POLICY HAD BEEN CODIFIED.

COMMENT

3. THE DECISION TO HOLD SUCH A PRESS CONFERENCE A FULL WEEK BEFORE THE SUMMIT REFLECTS IN PART THE CRITICISM THAT HAS GREETED THE RESULTS OF THE MOST RECENT BILATERAL MINISTERIAL MEETING IN MOSCOW. THE CONSERVATIVE REPUBLICAN PRESS IN PARTICULAR, LED BY THE WASHINGTON TIMES AND THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, HAVE PICKED UP ON THE US CONCESSIONS IN THE START NEGOTIATIONS (NOTABLY ON ALCM RANGE) AS EVIDENCE OF WEAKNESS ON THE PART OF THE ADMINISTRATION AT A TIME WHEN THE RUSSIANS ARE HOLDING BACK IN OTHER ARMS CONTROL NEGOTIATIONS (CFE, OPEN SKIES) AND WHEN THE SITUATION IN THE BALTIC REPUBLICS REMAINS CLOUDED. BAKER TRIED TO REBUT THESE CRITICISMS, BOTH BY SETTING OUT RECENT (AND NOT SO RECENT) US ACHIEVEMENTS IN START, AND BY SEEKING TO EMPHASISE THE HARD-HEADEDNESS OF THE PRESIDENT'S APPROACH TO THE SOVIET UNION (QUOTE MOSCOW'S WILLINGNESS TO MAKE HARD CHOICES INTERNALLY AND EXTERNALLY WILL AFFECT THE COURSE AND FUTURE OF THIS RELATIONSHIP UNQUOTE). BUT THIS WAS, IN GENERAL, A LACKLUSTRE PERFORMANCE BY BAKER, AND ONE GREETED WITH SOME SCEPTICISM BY THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS CORPS.

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