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FM MOSCOW

TO DESKBY 150930Z FCO

TELNO 584

OF 150845Z MAY 86

INFO PRIORITY WASHINGTON, BONN, PARIS, UKDEL NATO

INFO PRIORITY STOCKHOLM, WARSAW, UKMIS VIENNA.

MIPT: CHERNOBYL NUCLEAR ACCIDENT: GORBACHEV'S SPEECH

SUMMARY

1. GORBACHEV OFFERED LITTLE NEW INFORMATION AND NO REAL REASSURANCE TO THE SOVIET POPULATION ON HEALTH HAZARDS. HE WAS FAR FROM CONCILIATORY ABOUT INTERNATIONAL REACTIONS. THE TEST BAN MORATORIUM EXTENDED YET AGAIN TO 6 AUGUST, AND THE OFFER REPEATED TO MEET REAGAN ANYWHERE, INCLUDING HIROSHIMA, TO AGREE ON A TEST BAN.

DETAIL

2. GORBACHEV SPOKE FOR 25 MINUTES AND GAVE A COMPETENT RATHER THAN POLISHED PERFORMANCE. THIS WAS THE FIRST PUBLIC STATEMENT ON THE DISASTER AT CHERNOBYL BY HIM OR ANY MEMBER OF THE LEADERSHIP (APART FROM ELTSIN'S COMMENTS IN THE FRG), SINCE IT OCCURRED 19 DAYS AGO. IN FACT, ALTHOUGH GORBACHEV SOUGHT TO EMPHASISE THE POLITEURO'S CLOSE INVOLVEMENT IN HANDLING THE CRISIS THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE EVIDENCE OF THIS, APART FROM THE VISIT BY RYZHKOV AND LIGACHEV TO THE AREA ON 3 MAY, UNTIL THE MAIN DANGER WAS OVER.

3. GORBACHEV GAVE SOME NEW DETAILS ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE ACCIDENT AND REVEALED THAT THE DEATH TOLL HAD RISEN TO 9 AND THE NUMBER OF RADIATION VICTIMS IN HOSPITAL TO 292. OTHERWISE HE OFFERED LITTLE NEW INFORMATION. IN PARTICULAR HE SAID NOTHING ABOUT RADIATION LEVELS OUTSIDE THE IMMEDIATE AREA OF THE ACCIDENT AND GAVE NO REASSURANCE ABOUT POSSIBLE HEALTH DANGERS TO THE POPULATION IN THE UKRAINE, BELORUSSIA OR ELSEWHERE, OR PRECAUTIONS ABOUT FOOD SUPPLIES ETC.

4. THERE WAS NO REAL HINT OF APOLOGY OR ADMISSION OF POSSIBLE FAILURE OR DELAY IN HANDLING THE ACCIDENT, INFORMATION ABOUT IT OR THE EVACUATION. THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE EVACUATED WAS NOT MENTIONED.

FOREIGN REACTION

5. ON INTERNATIONAL REACTIONS GORBACHEV TOOK ESSENTIALLY THE SAME AGGRESSIVE LINE WHICH HAS BEEN PEDDLED IN THE SOVIET PRESS. A BRIEF TRIBUTE TO THOSE WHO HAD RESPONDED WITH SYMPATHY, INCLUDING A MENTION OF THE WORK OF THE AMERICAN

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Doctors

DOCTORS, WAS FOLLOWED BY A HAPSH ATTACK ON THE ALLEGED ANTI-SOVIET CAMPAIGN IN THE WEST. IT IS INTERESTING THAT HE SINGLED OUT THE FRG AS THE USA'S MAIN ACCOMPLICE WHEREAS UP TO NOW THE UK HAS CLEARLY FEATURED AS THE PRINCIPAL SECONDARY TARGET IN THE SOVIET MEDIA. GORBACHEV SAID NOTHING ABOUT RADIATION LEVELS ABROAD AND THE PRECAUTIONS TAKEN BY FOREIGN COUNTRIES.

6. THE PROPOSALS ABOUT AN INTERNATIONAL NUCLEAR SAFETY SYSTEM, CONFERENCE IN VIENNA, STRENGTHENING OF THE IAEA ETC MAY GO SOME WAY TO MEET INTERNATIONAL CONCERN BUT AS A WHOLE THE TONE AND SUBSTANCE OF GORBACHEV'S SPEECH WAS FAR FROM CONCILIATORY.

TEST BAN MORATORIUM

7. IN THE CONCLUDING PART OF HIS SPEECH GORBACHEV CYNICALLY SOUGHT TO EXPLOIT THE INTERNATIONAL CONCERN AROUSED BY THE ACCIDENT IN ORDER TO BOOST SOVIET ARMS CONTROL PROPOSALS. HE MAY HAVE PATHER OVER-EGGED THE PUDDING HOWEVER BY YET ANOTHER EXTENSION OF THE SOVIET MORATORIUM ON NUCLEAR TESTS AND ESPECIALLY THE BLATANTLY PROPAGANDISTIC GIMMICK OF LINKING IT AGAIN TO THE HIROSHIMA ANNIVERSARY AND PROPOSING HIROSHIMA AS A POSSIBLE VENUE FOR A MEETING WITH REAGAN TO DISCUSS A TEST BAN. INDEED, DEPENDING ON THE WAY THE WESTERN PRESS REACTS, HE RISKS INCREASING PUBLIC SCEPTICISM OVER THE VALUE, AND PERHAPS MOTIVATION, OF SUCH 'INITIATIVES'.

CARTLEDGE

SOVIET NUCLEAR ACCIDENT

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