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27.1-86.

BILATERAL TALKS ON NUCLEAR MATTERS

SUMMARY

1. AT YOUR TALKS WITH DUMAS ON 30 JANUARY, HIS MAIN OBJECTIVE WILL BE TO CEMENT COOPERATION OVER THIRD COUNTRY NUCLEAR FORCES, PARTICULARLY IN RESPONSE TO THE NEW, MORE SUBTLE SOVIET TACTICS.

DETAIL

2. THE FRENCH AND WE SEEM TO HAVE CONCLUDED AT ABOUT THE SAME MOMENT IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE GENEVA SUMMIT THAT SOVIET INSISTENCE ON LINKING OUR NUCLEAR FORCES TO AN INF AGREEMENT WAS LIKELY TO BE ONE OF THE KEY ISSUES IN ARMS CONTROL NEGOTIATIONS DURING 1986 AND THAT IT WOULD BE USEFUL TO HAVE DEEPER AND MORE FREQUENT CONTACTS ON THE SUBJECT. THE FRENCH SEEM TO BE PARTICULARLY ANXIOUS BECAUSE OF THEIR OLD NIGHTMARE THAT THE TWO SUPERPOWERS MIGHT DO A DEAL OVER THEIR HEADS AND BECAUSE OF SCEPTICISM ABOUT THE ABILITIES OF THEIR PRESENT TEAM IN WASHINGTON. NOT ONLY DO OUR INTERESTS CLOSELY COINCIDE WITH THEIRS, BUT THEY ARE AWARE OF THE CLOSENESS OF OUR CONTACTS WITH WASHINGTON ESPECIALLY ON NUCLEAR MATTERS (AND, THOUGH LESS IMPORTANT, THAT WE BELONG TO SOME FORA, SUCH AS THE SCG, WHICH THEY DO NOT). THEY MAY PRIVATELY FEEL SOME NERVOUSNESS ABOUT WHETHER WE WILL CONTINUE TO TAKE AS HARD A LINE AS THEY WOULD WISH. THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN OUR AND THEIR CONDITIONS FOR TAKING PART IN NEGOTIATIONS ON OUR OWN FORCES AND BETWEEN OUR AND THEIR RESPONSES TO GORBACHEV'S PROPOSALS FOR DIRECT TALKS, HAVE SHOWN THAT OUR POSITIONS ARE NOT IDENTICAL AND THAT HMG IS UNDER PUBLIC/POLITICAL PRESSURES WHICH DO NOT EXIST IN FRANCE. THE SUBJECT IS OF SUCH NATIONAL INTEREST HERE THAT A MINISTERIAL CONTACT WITH US MAY BE SEEN AS ESSENTIAL TO UNDERLINE THE NEED FOR THE CLOSEST POSSIBLE COOPERATION.

3. IN SPITE OF THE ELECTORAL ATMOSPHERE HERE, I DO NOT THINK THESE EXCHANGES SHOULD BE SEEN AS PART OF THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL GAME. IT IS CLEAR THAT THE OPPOSITION WOULD APPROVE OF THEM AS WELL. THE RECENTLY PUBLISHED RPR/UDF ELECTION PLATFORM CALLS FOR A REAL DIALOGUE WITH US AND THE GERMANS ON DEFENCE QUESTIONS. TO THAT EXTENT, BILATERAL CONTACTS SUCH AS THESE UNDERLINE THE CONSENSUS ON DEFENCE ISSUES AND COULD HAVE SOME SIGNIFICANCE IN THE PROSPECTS FOR COHABITATION. BUT IT WOULD BE WRONG TO EXAGGERATE SUCH ASPECTS SINCE I BELIEVE THE FRENCH ARE PRIMARILY MOTIVATED BY THEIR JUDGEMENT OF WHAT THE NATIONAL INTEREST REQUIRES.

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4. A MAJOR TOPIC WILL NOW BE THE LATEST GORBACHEV PROPOSALS. THE NEW FLEXIBILITY AND IMAGINATION SHOWN BY THE RUSSIANS HAVE CAUSED ANXIETY HERE. OFFICIAL COMMENT IN PUBLIC HAS BEEN LOW-KEY AND ON THE LINES THAT THE LATEST PROPOSALS ARE UTOPIA AND THAT THE NEAR-SILENCE ON CONVENTIONAL FORCES IS A SERIOUS OMISSION. THE PROPOSALS DO HOWEVER TOUCH A NUMBER OF RAW NERVES, INCLUDING:-

(A) THE AIM OF ABOLISHING ALL NUCLEAR WEAPONS. THE FRENCH WERE PARTICULARLY HOSTILE TO REAGAN'S RHETORIC, WHICH THEY REGARD AS HAVING NOW BEEN TURNED AGAINST HIM BY THE RUSSIANS. AFTER SOME INTERNAL DEBATE, THEY SEEM TO HAVE DECIDED THAT THE BEST COUNTER-ARGUMENT IS TO STRESS THE NEED FOR DISARMAMENT TO INCLUDE CONVENTIONAL, AS WELL AS NUCLEAR, WEAPONS (REFLECTED IN MITTERRAND'S CONVERSATION WITH THE PRIME MINISTER ON 20 JANUARY).

(B) THE NUCLEAR TEST-BAN

(C) THE CONCEPT OF A EURO-STRATEGIC BALANCE WHICH CONTINUES TO UNDERLIE THE INF PROPOSALS

(D) THE FREEZE ON FRENCH AND BRITISH NUCLEAR ARSENALS, WHICH APPEARS TO RULE OUT THE M4 MISSILE PROGRAMME FOR THE FRENCH SSBNS. FRENCH OFFICIALS POINT OUT THAT THIS PROGRAMME IS ONE OF CATCHING UP - TO COPE WITH SOVIET ABM DEFENCES. MOREOVER THE BAN ON SPACE STRIKE WEAPONS DOES NOT GO SO FAR AS A TOTAL BAN ON NEW DEFENSIVE SYSTEMS SINCE THERE IS NO REFERENCE TO GROUND-BASED SYSTEMS.

5. DISCUSSION WITH THE QUAI (NOT TO BE REVEALED TO THIRD PARTIES) HAS REVEALED IMPORTANT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE MESSAGES TO THE PRIME MINISTER AND TO MITTERRAND. THESE CONCERN PRINCIPALLY SDI, NUCLEAR TESTS, CDE AND REGIONAL CONFLICTS. THE MESSAGES HAVE BEEN CAREFULLY TAILORED TO MATCH HOW THE RUSSIANS SEE OUR NATIONAL POSITIONS. DETAILS FOLLOW SEPARATELY.

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