

For a Real Summit, Try Tirana

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By JOSEF JOFFE

MUNICH—Compared to Geneva a year ago, the "non-summit" at Reykjavik this week has one huge advantage already. Instead of 3,000 press folks, only 2,000 journalists will descend on Geysirland. The rest, presumably, are being kept away by the sheer dreariness of the locale and by prices that would make the most hardened of Swiss shopkeepers weep in shame. Taxis in Iceland's capital (population 86,000) go for \$200 each these days, rooms for up to \$500 a night.

Now if we could schedule the next non-summit in Tirana, Albania. . . . Unwanted all year round at whatever price, the press would have to observe the event from the mountain tops of nearby Yugoslavia—with an enormous payoff for diplomacy. The glare of publicity would be cut to near-zero, forcing Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev to neglect the medium and to concentrate on the message instead. Nor might the two superpowers have to engage in a "non-swap swap," whereby U.S. hostages like Nicholas Daniloff are exchanged for Soviet spies in a manner that casts a dark shadow over the hallowed independence of the American judiciary.

Yet there is one fact even the most inaccessible of summit venues could not change. All of us—Europeans and Americans—are forever preparing for a rendez-

vous with electoral destiny. There are midterm elections in the U.S. on Nov. 4 when President Reagan has to defend his Republican majority in the U.S. Senate against arms control-minded Democrats. On Jan. 25, elections loom in West Germany—with Helmut Kohl's Conservatives squaring off against Social Democrats and Greens who hope to capitalize on President Reagan's image as unregenerate Cold Warrior, as they are wont to portray him. Sometime later in the year, Margaret Thatcher will probably have to face Neil Kinnock's battalions, and then perhaps from a position of weakness. At this stage, at least, the polls give an edge to Labor which, in government, would banish U.S. nuclear forces from Britain and then proceed to dismantle Her Majesty's own nuclear deterrent.

This is where any summit, even a non-summit, comes in quite handy. Why?

The four key nations in the Western Alliance—the U.S., Britain, France and West Germany—are currently being ruled by conservative governments. Three of them—France being the odd-man-out, as usual—are vulnerable on their left flank when it comes to foreign policy.

In the U.S., the president has just suffered his greatest domestic defeat in the battle for the South Africa sanctions. To be

sure, his room for maneuver is far greater in the case of the Soviets, but here, too, the electorate presumably prefers a New Deal with Mr. Gorbachev to the tensions and the rhetoric warfare of the early 1980s.

Premier Thatcher and Chancellor Kohl have problems because their rivals on the left have tried to saddle them with guilt by association. The two leaders are depicted as lap dogs of American "imperialism" who neglect Europe's overriding interest in detente and arms control while supporting the president on the Strategic Defense Initiative, Euromissiles, Libya and other nasty things. Conversely, General Secretary Gorbachev has had an excellent press on the left in Britain and West Germany—the New Soviet Man who would dispense with nuclear tests and, indeed, with nuclear weapons if only Mr. Reagan would grasp his extended hand.

Clearly, then, a sigh of relief was breathed in Bonn and London once Messrs. Daniloff and Zakharov were put on their respective homeward-bound planes. With the half-derailed summit train on track again, Reagan-bashing has lost some more electoral luster in Britain and West Germany. And if the president and the general secretary actually manage to formulate some agreement in principle this week, Chancellor Kohl and Prime Minister

Thatcher will not look like lackeys of the White House (which neither has ever been) but as statesmen of great stature and influence.

The West German chancellor and his foreign minister, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, have already been spreading the word that their patient pursuit of both loyalty and pressure has finally paid off. Accordingly, it was Bonn's steady hand that put the two giants on the road to Reykjavik. So what if Moscow and Washington did quite well without any third-party help? The basic point is that every little bit of detente helps. It helps the Republicans in November, and it will help the Tories and Christian Democrats next year because it has become so much harder to taint them as the friends of the enemies of detente.

And so, there is now enormous pressure on the president to come up with more than just a Dr. Feelgood photo opportunity. Certainly, Mr. Kohl and Mrs. Thatcher expect no less so that they can shore up their left flanks. Mr. Gorbachev, on the other hand, labors under a far lighter burden. His allies in Eastern Europe do not face elections, and neither does he. Having been allowed to wiggle out of the invitation to a "real" summit in the U.S., he retains the option of walking out of Reykjavik while blaming Mr. Reagan for failing to deliver what mankind's "best hopes" demand. Remember how Nikita Khrushchev bolted from the 1960 Paris summit in a fit of calculated anger?

Which returns us to the Albanian axiom. Summits rarely create agreement; at best they merely ratify what hordes of diplomats have slugged out in months of tedious bargaining. This is why Tirana, with the Reykjavik "pre-summit" safely behind us, would make an ideal place for the "real summit." With neither cameras nor klieg lights on hand, any grandstanding would be reduced to a futile exercise in front of some dour-faced Albanian functionaries. Hence neither president nor general secretary would have any reason to go unless he had first hammered out an agreement both sides could live with. Tirana, are you listening?

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