

Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

Democratic hawks sharpen talons

The CSIS crowd is ready to swoop down if George Bush goes overboard appeasing Gorbachov.

As President Bush prepares for his Dec. 2-3 meeting with Mikhail Gorbachov near Malta, there are signs here that some Democrats, emboldened by their victories in this November's elections, are plotting to take advantage of Bush's obsessive desire to help Gorbachov hold power in the Soviet Union.

They are preparing for a dramatic role switch if Bush appears to move too far toward deep conventional forces cuts in Europe. The response of key Democrats—especially those who fancy themselves cut of presidential cloth—would be to suddenly steal the hard-line position on defense, at least relatively speaking, from that “wimp” Bush. Such a role reversal, these Democrats may think, could be just what their party needs to reverse almost two decades of miasma on the national leadership level.

Such a development would certainly match the designs of the crowd at the Center for Strategic International Studies (CSIS)—Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and friends—whose pet politician remains Senate Armed Services Committee chairman Sam Nunn (D-Ga.). CSIS president David Abshire, the former U.S. arms control ambassador, was among those on a panel convened by the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Nov. 15 to discuss “The Future of Communism and the Western Response.”

Abshire's remarks were cut short by the arrival of Polish Solidarność leader Lech Walesa to the meeting, fresh from his historic address to a joint session of Congress. But while Walesa's hour of answering questions

stole the show, remarks made by experts on the Abshire panel underscored the concern felt both in Washington and Europe about the dangers of the Malta meeting.

Prof. Alain Besançon, of the Paris-based Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, called Gorbachov's situation “completely desperate,” and cautioned Bush “not to take any steps to bail him out.” All the reform programs that Gorbachov came into power prepared to implement have failed, Besançon said, and for the last two years Gorbachov has been reacting to events “with no coherent plans other than to profit from the incompetence of the West.”

He said that Gorbachov may be prepared now to repeat what Lenin did at the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which was to accept a much smaller territory in exchange for stability and security. Such a move, as with Lenin, Besançon said, would only be to draw back temporarily to prepare for a much greater outward thrust.

This time, he said, the Soviets may be willing to let huge chunks of territory go, since it is almost impossible to bring entire nations under control. He noted that Gorbachov is not dealing with a few thousand students demonstrating in Beijing, but with whole nations. To bring even Azerbaijan under control would require hundreds of thousands of soldiers in a Red Army which is already 37% Muslim.

Therefore, he said, the Soviets could survive as a superpower if they retained, besides Mother Russia, no more than Belorussia, Georgia, Ar-

menia, and, especially, Ukraine. He said that Ukraine, with its industry and agriculture, is key to Soviet status as a superpower. “Without it,” he quipped, “They are just like a big Canada.” In this light, Besançon said, Gorbachov is coming to Malta talking of “a new Yalta,” in hopes he can save the Soviet regime and maintain the integrity of the empire, even if it has to be scaled back temporarily.

“It is moral wisdom not to comply with him,” Besançon said emphatically. Another effort to bail out the Soviets “will be very dangerous for us,” he warned. “Do not give them legitimacy. They are collapsing. Leave them to rot in their own mess.”

A similar tack was taken by Jeane Kirkpatrick, former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, sometimes mentioned as a presidential hopeful. She predicted that Gorbachov will come to Malta with “dramatic new departures in conventional force reductions,” aimed, she said, at a hoped-for demilitarization of West Germany and the ultimate dismantling of NATO and the Warsaw Pact.

Kirkpatrick cautioned Bush that “policy based on personal relationships doesn't work,” as the Roosevelt-Stalin summits showed, and that “skillful settlements will not end politics—namely, the restless striving after power by nations.” She reminded the audience that “while we've seen the Iron Curtain being raised, this is not to be confused with the end of Soviet power.”

What has changed, she said, is not only the failure of, but the acknowledged failure of the “totalitarian project.” Its failure “has been recognized, and it is being abandoned,” she said. “The utopian and grandiose dream of power seized and exercised over a whole society and its culture through monopolistic control over all aspects of life has failed,” Kirkpatrick said.