

National News

Space center head attacks commission

The director of the Kennedy Space Center charged March 14 that the presidential commission investigating the Challenger Space Shuttle disaster has needlessly damaged the reputations of space agency officials, and warned that this might mean a "mass exodus" of top-level personnel that could "cripple the agency."

Roger Smith, a colleague of the late rocket scientist Wehrner von Braun, said that the Rogers Commission could cause "long-term damage [to the space program] that cannot be repaired. I'm getting a lot of people who would like to retire, that want to leave," he said, noting that while most top NASA people plan to stay through the next Shuttle launch, there will be a "mass exodus" of key people afterward.

Smith also charged that "98% of the pressure" to launch the Challenger came from the news media, which openly ridiculed the agency whenever there was a launch delay. "Every time there was a delay, the press would say, 'Look . . . here's a bunch of idiots who can't even handle a launch schedule,'" Smith said. "If you think that doesn't [have an impact], you're stupid."

Abrahamson pledges U.S. support for Europe

Lieutenant-General James Abrahamson, director of President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), told reporters in West Germany after briefing NATO defense ministers that Washington was committed to finding technologies to combat the short- and medium-range weapons threatening Europe.

West German Minister of Defense Manfred Wörner said this showed that the "insistent pressure of the European [govern-

ments], and particularly of us Germans, has been successful."

British officials said Abrahamson told the NATO Nuclear Planning Group meeting that his office would invite proposals within 30 days for studies on intercepting short-range missiles. The offer would be open to European as well as American firms and institutes.

Two senior U.S. officials explained to the ministers Washington's uncompromising rejection of Soviet proposals for a ban on nuclear-weapons tests. The officials declared that, even if such a treaty could be adequately verified, it would be against NATO interests since the West needed to experiment with improved warheads.

General Abrahamson stated that the SDI program was making startling technological progress, adding that the political problems were harder to overcome than the technical. Among recent breakthroughs, he cited super-miniaturization of components, the projection of laser beams accurately through the atmosphere, and the development of infrared detectors secure against radiation. British officials said Abrahamson's message appeared to be that those allies who did not join the SDI research drive soon would miss advances in a broad range of defense technology.

The ministers, treated to video recordings, slide shows, and displays of SDI components, also discussed the program's implications for NATO strategy. Wörner said a permanent dialogue was now under way but that he still thought that "Star Wars" would not provide an alternative to the alliance's strategy of nuclear deterrence for at least another decade. "I don't even see a distant alternative," he said.

Eastern Airlines faces large fine over safety

Eastern Airlines faces a "substantial" penalty, perhaps the largest ever levied against a commercial airline, for alleged maintenance and safety violations, officials of the

Federal Aviation Administration said March 14.

The fine will be \$9.5 million, according to a report appearing in the *New York Times*.

The most serious infraction involved was the use on several Boeing-727 flights of landing gear that were supposed to have been removed from the fleet.

Radio interviews with Transportation Secretary Elizabeth Dole quoted her saying that the violations were "probably" related to Eastern's financial problems, and that certain lack of reporting had occurred.

With the bankrupting of airlines over the years since the Carter administration introduced deregulation, cost-cutting and skimping on maintenance procedures made 1985 the year with the highest number of air passenger fatalities in the history of flight.

U.S. says Soviets have SDI program

U.S. Delegate to Geneva Donald Lowitz charged on March 20 that the Soviet Union has secretly conducted a "Star Wars" anti-missile program of its own for the past two decades. He disputed Soviet charges that Washington seeks a first-strike capability and that the United States will cause an arms race in space with its SDI.

"The Soviet Union is heavily involved in strategic defense, with programs that go well beyond research," he said. "In fact, over the last two decades, the Soviet Union has spent roughly as much on strategic defense as it has on its offensive nuclear forces."

He claimed the Soviets have "the world's most active military space program," including the 1960s "development and testing of what remains today the world's only operational anti-satellite system." He maintained: "The U.S. is not expanding the military competition into new areas. The Soviet Union has been pursuing the same technologies for two decades."

Moscow has "an in-depth national air

defense force, an extensive political leadership survival program, and nationwide civil defense forces and programs, he said. "Since the 1960s, the U.S.S.R. has also been pursuing research on advanced technologies for strategic defense. These technologies include those for high-energy lasers, particle beam weapons, radio-frequency weapons, and kinetic energy weapons. It is these same types of technologies that are being researched in the SDI."

Howitz added, "The strategic defense program of the Soviet Union has been largely overlooked in the recent public debate," because "due to the closed nature of Soviet society, their strategic defense efforts have proceeded free from debates of the sort that are occurring now in the West over the utility and implications of our program."

U.S. Senate candidate on Guatemalan TV

Webster Tarpley, the "LaRouche Democrat" challenging the Senate seat now held by Republican Alfonse d'Amato in New York, was on Guatemalan national television for 15 minutes on March 18 as the lead news item. He used the occasion to blast President Reagan's "Contra aid" policy toward Nicaragua, expose the State Department plot to destabilize Panama, and called for regional development along the lines proposed by Peruvian President Alán García.

Tarpley, an *EIR* contributing editor, also spoke at a conference at the Guatemalan Center for Military Studies, with *EIR* Ibero-American Editor Dennis Small and Counterintelligence Editor Jeff Steinberg. The 70 attendees included the entire military command, government officials, and students of the Center.

Tarpley spoke on the Soviet culture and military strategy for a global confrontation with the West, emphasizing the critical role of the President's Strategic Defense Initiative. One Guatemalan official present also emphasized the importance of the SDI—as

Guatemala's oil fields are a target of Soviet missiles.

Small outlined *EIR*-founder LaRouche's proposed monetary reforms for development, contained in a 1982 booklet, *Operation Juárez*, stressing the importance of an Ibero-American Common Market.

Crocker: terrorists are 'freedom fighters'

Chester Crocker, assistant secretary of state for African affairs, called the Soviet-backed terrorists of the African National Congress in South Africa "freedom fighters in a generic sense," in testimony to a subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, March 12.

He also called the recent offer of the South African government to negotiate an end to apartheid with black leaders "a sham."

On March 11, another State Department official told an inquirer: "Reconciliation in southern Africa is not our goal." He was replying to queries concerning current U.S.-Angolan negotiations over Namibian independence.

The source stated that since there can be no military solution to the regional situation—affirming that Dr. Jonas Savimbi's UNITA rebel movement against the Soviet-controlled government will most likely be left up a certain creek—the State Department's only concern will be a pullout of South African and Cuban troops from the area.

"Reconciliation has never been our concern. Once the foreign troops are out, UNITA and Luanda can fight it out themselves, if they want," he said.

When asked whether the Soviet presence in Angola might represent a threat to Namibia and South Africa, despite a Cuban pullout, the official replied: "Well, yes, the Soviets do tend to poison the water and foul things up . . . but I don't see any reason to worry. . . . There is, of course, the possibility of continued conflict . . . but that's no reason for holding up the process."

Briefly

● **CASPAR WEINBERGER** met during the week of March 11 with Rep. Jim Courter (R-N.J.) and Rep. Nick Mavroules (D-Mass.), two leading proponents of defense reform, to discuss Packard Commission and other defense restructuring proposals. Courter later told *Defense News* that Weinberger "was generally quite supportive" of the Packard panel findings.

● **THE HOUSE** of Representatives has allocated \$4.4 billion to enhance U.S. embassy security around the world. The bill also provides funds to be paid to Americans taken as hostages by terrorists.

● **NAVY SECRETARY** John Lehman in mid-March told the Senate Armed Services Committee that he was generally in agreement with a bill being pushed by Sen. Dan Quayle (R-Ind.) that would set up an elite civilian procurement service within the Pentagon and would establish special "enterprise" programs to be run by managers with experience in weapons acquisition.

● **THE UNITED STATES** "desires better relations with East Germany," Rozanne Ridgway, former U.S. ambassador to East Germany and current under secretary of state for European affairs, told the American Council on Germany in Washington in mid-March. Using the watchwords of the "New Yalta" crowd of which she is a part, she said that the United States is interested in "a more pragmatic relationship" with East Germany.

● **THE STATE** Department is willing to meet with representatives of Western European allies who have complained about cutbacks in the U.S. contribution for the U.N. The complaint from 12 members of the European Community addressed to Secretary of State George Shultz was made public the week of March 10. The U.S. contribution was cut by \$70 million this year.