

## Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

### Everyone had jitters about Malta

*Washington analysts displayed unprecedented alarm over chances of a summit fiasco.*

In all the superpower summits that have occurred since Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachov came to power in 1985, never was so much nervousness openly expressed from so many quarters of the Washington establishment in the period preceding them as occurred before the Dec. 2-3 Malta summit between President Bush and Gorbachov.

From the moment the summit was first announced in early October, expressions of caution and alarm rang out. Almost no one but the President and his closest minions looked upon the meeting as an opportunity to improve relations, the way so many commentators characterized each of the Reagan-Gorbachov encounters.

This time, the redundant theme was that the summit has very little good to offer the United States, and a great deal of potential harm. Even ardent supporters of ending the so-called Cold War were worried that this meeting would become a repeat of the near-disaster at Reykjavik in October 1986, when Gorbachov induced Reagan, in a similar setting of an informal, personal meeting, to make sweeping weapons cuts over the heads of America's NATO allies.

The sources of concern lay in Bush's personal ineptness, and the uncertainty of Gorbachov's future and Soviet policy in a time of crisis.

Characteristic of this mood was a seminar entitled, "Gorbachov's Strategy for Malta" given Nov. 27 at the American Enterprise Institute. "Malta could be a disaster for the West, and Bush's main objective should be to avoid trouble," warned Patrick Glynn. Other speakers were Vladimir Brovkin of the Kennan Institute, Leon

Aron of the Heritage Foundation, and Nicholas Eberstadt of AEI.

I asked the panelists to comment on Gorbachov's lengthy essay asserting the necessity of one-party rule published in *Pravda* a few days before, which was a warning against carrying reform too far, and a precursor to the crackdown that many felt Gorbachov would be asking both Bush and the Pope to condone.

Brovkin responded, "Gorbachov never means what he says. He says it for the moment, to preserve stability. It is so unstable within his own party now that if he didn't say it, the party would fall apart even faster than it already is. By the CP [Communist Party] Congress next year, the party could split, if not sooner. Gorbachov was buying time with his pronouncement. Remember, last January he said the opposite, that a multi-party system might be healthy. Even so, now he is not saying this about Eastern Europe, only the Soviet Union, itself, and he could change his line in the future."

I also asked whether the recent escalation of regional conflicts, assassinations, and other expressions of "irregular warfare" represented a breakaway from Gorbachov by factions opposed to his policies. Glynn said the Soviets are pursuing a "two-track policy," wherein the government promotes normalization, while the party pursues covert operations. With indications that armaments are still flowing out of the East bloc to regional hot spots, he said, "Bush must make it clear to Gorbachov that he can not have it both ways."

On whether or not this is a breakaway phenomenon, he said, "It is pos-

sible, but it doesn't matter, because none of these countries can survive without Soviet support, and there is no indication the Soviets have broken with these countries."

Brovkin said Gorbachov would accommodate to German reunification by trying to "harness it with a bold proposal," i.e., reunification under conditions of German neutrality. This attempt to destabilize NATO and tilt Germany to the East would cohere with all earlier Russian economic revitalizations, which all depended heavily on Germany—under Peter the Great in the early 1700s, the efforts of Count Witte at the end of the 19th century, Lenin's "New Economic Policy" in the early 1920s, and now.

Eberstadt said, "The chances of war are higher now in Europe than ever before, although not direct East-West conflict: rather among elements within the bounds of the old Austro-Hungarian empire, such as Hungary versus Romania."

Glynn cautioned that Malta could be a disaster for NATO in three ways: 1) It could lead to a rift with the allies, 2) it could lead to a condominium over the heads of the allies, which would be disastrous, and 3) it could lead to cooptation by Gorbachov of Bush. He said the summit would be "full of minefields," and that Bush should walk very carefully. Nothing good, he said, but a lot bad could come from it, and his advise to Bush was to "do nothing," but "concentrate heavily on avoiding trouble."

Brovkin added that any agreements reached at the summit would be irrelevant because, "There are forces now unleashed that neither Bush nor Gorbachov can control."

The singular point missing from all these assessments, no matter how pessimistic, was that Gorbachov might try to regain control with the use of sheer force.