

## BUSH LOST HIS WAY AT THE WASHINGTON SUMMIT

The Washington summit meeting on May 30-June 2 between George Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev was not a great success. Gorbachev received U.S. concessions on strategic arms control and trade without giving anything in return. Such critically important issues as the future of Germany, conventional arms reductions in Europe, and the fate of Lithuania not only were left unresolved, but actually were made more intractable as the Soviets dug in their heels. Nothing was done to end Soviet military aid to Cuba, Angola, Ethiopia and other Third World clients. And Bush seems to have fallen into the trap of measuring progress in U.S.-Soviet relations not by how well concrete U.S. interests are advanced, but by his personal rapport with the Soviet leader.

The summits between Bush and Gorbachev have followed an unfortunate pattern. As also happened at the Malta summit last December 2-3, Gorbachev came to the Washington meeting asking for payment for good behavior. This pattern made sense at Malta. It was the first summit meeting since the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and the emergence of democracy in parts of Eastern Europe. But since then Gorbachev has blockaded Lithuania, slowed economic and political reform, backslided on conventional arms control in Europe, stonewalled on German unification, and stepped up military aid to Angola. There was no need to grant the Soviets further concessions at the Washington summit because Gorbachev had done nothing to earn them.

But this is precisely what Bush did. He promised his support for granting most-favored-nation trading status to Moscow once the Soviet legislature passed laws institutionalizing free emigration. He agreed to concessions on nuclear and chemical arms control. And he presented a slew of assurances to Gorbachev on the unification of Germany, including accelerated negotiations on short-range nuclear forces (which only last year was rejected as harmful to NATO's interests) and approval of a Soviet demand that the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) be "upgraded" by creating a permanent CSCE bureaucracy.

**"Old Thinking."** Bush's performance is particularly disappointing because, as Soviet newspaper columnist Aleksandr Bovin said during the summit, "Bush had all the trump cards and he didn't play them." Bush came into the Washington meeting as the leader of an ascendent nation, while Gorbachev is presiding over a dissolving empire. Unwilling to press his advantage, Bush fell back on some "old thinking" about Gorbachev: He acted as if Gorbachev personally was the key to further progress in reform and that he should be supported for this reason alone.

But as astute observers of the Soviet Union today know, the process of democratic and economic reform has left Gorbachev behind. Whenever free elections are held, democratic forces in favor of faster and more radical reform win most of them. Gorbachev opponent Boris Yeltsin, for example, was elected to head the Russian Republic's Supreme Soviet, not Alexander Vlasov, who was Gorbachev's candidate. Yeltsin repeatedly has said he favors more radical reform than does Gorbachev. Moreover, not only has Yeltsin rejected Gorbachev's blockade of Lithuania (negotiating directly with Lithuania to bypass it), but so too have the leaders of the Republic of

Moldavia who voted to recognize the independent Lithuania. Even the Moscow City Council is in the hands of those who favor a quick transition to a market economy.

The mystery is why Bush refuses to open a dialogue with these forces, which are surely the wave of the future, and why he still insists that the unelected Gorbachev, and not these new democratic forces, are the key to further political and economic reform inside the Soviet Union.

**Unverifiable Limits.** The misconception about the need to help Gorbachev led Bush to make concessions on nuclear and chemical arms control. At the summit Bush agreed to numerical limits on sea-launched cruise missiles that are unverifiable. He also bent over backward to accommodate the Soviets by agreeing to allow the deployment of more mobile missiles than the U.S. was previously willing to accept. And a chemical weapons accord was reached which is unverifiable because it does not allow for suspect-site inspections and is based on unreliable data. It also constrains modernization of the U.S. chemical weapons arsenal.

But the most surprising concession at the summit was the U.S. agreement to a trade treaty with the Soviet Union. Only five weeks ago Bush sent Gorbachev a letter saying that a trade deal was impossible because of congressional opposition. But all that changed during the summit because Gorbachev convinced Bush that the Soviet leader needed a trade treaty in order to survive politically. As Gorbachev told a congressional delegation during the summit, "I think it is very important that you make this gesture [of support for a trade agreement], mostly from a political standpoint."

Bush also made concessions on German unification without getting anything tangible in return. He soothed Soviet anxieties with his "Nine Points" on the future of Germany. Yet all he got in return was lectures from Gorbachev about how threatened the Soviets felt from Germany and how the future of Europe would not be decided without his approval. But if anybody needs reassurance in Europe, it is the Germans, and not the Soviets. The Germans want the 380,000 Soviet troops removed from their territory because they desire an end to Soviet occupation. Ending the Soviet occupation of Germany will not endanger the security of the Soviet Union, which has over 5 million men under arms and some 25,000 nuclear weapons, compared to the around 650,000 troops and no nuclear weapons for West and East Germany combined.

**Man of the Past.** It is not too late for Bush to correct course. He is a man with keen political instincts and much international experience. He needs first to update his thinking about the Soviet Union. He needs to understand how far the Soviet Union has disintegrated. Gorbachev is fast becoming a man of the past, and his replacement could be an even more radical reformer, not the hard-line communist reactionary some in the State Department fear. The sooner Bush realizes that new democratic alternatives to Gorbachev are emerging, the less inclined he will be to make U.S. concessions on trade and arms control in the hopes of consolidating democracy in Central Europe and furthering reform inside the Soviet Union.

Bush also needs to downplay the importance of personal diplomacy with Gorbachev. Bush puts a great store in his personal relationship with world leaders, but this works better with friends and neutrals than it does with adversaries. The Soviet Union is not a friend of the U.S., and personal relationships with its leaders should not be overemphasized. Far more important than personal rapport is the concrete advancement of U.S. and Western interests.

Bush has done a relatively good job handling the Soviet Union until now. He needs to get back on track. He needs a strategy that looks beyond the political fortunes of Mikhail Gorbachev.

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