

THE COSTS OF A GORBACHEV CRACKDOWN

The December 19 announcement by Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard A. Shevardnadze that he intends to resign bodes ill for a peaceful evolution of the Soviet Union toward democracy and a free-market economy. Shevardnadze was much more than a Foreign Minister. His friendship with Gorbachev goes back 35 years, when they were Young Communist Organization leaders in the neighboring areas of southern Russia and Georgia. Shevardnadze went on to become the First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party, and he became Gorbachev's confidant and one of the architects of *perestroika*. Apart from Gorbachev himself, no man in the Soviet leadership is as closely associated with such monumental developments as the Soviet withdrawal from Eastern Europe, the unification of Germany, and the Soviet support for the anti-Iraq coalition in the Persian Gulf crisis.

Several factors may have contributed to Shevardnadze's decision, but the chief reason appears to be his desire to dissociate himself from Gorbachev's impending betrayal of the revolution he had started. Like other pro-democracy leaders, Shevardnadze was likely dismayed by Gorbachev's increasingly hard line — by his December 2 appointment of hardliner Boris Pugo as the Minister of Internal Affairs, who is responsible for the police and law enforcement; by the December 11 television address by KGB chief Vladimir Kruchkov, who accused “radical nationalists” of harboring all sorts of murderous designs, supported by unspecified “foreign sources”; and by Gorbachev's incessant attacks on the pro-independence movements in the national republics, his threats to restore “law and order” there, and his repeated praise for the Communist Party, socialism, and the “union.”

As an ethnic Georgian, Shevardnadze must have found Gorbachev's inveighing against “nationalist extremists” especially distasteful. Georgian leaders, including the now-ousted Communist Party, repeatedly have declared that they would not sign a new “Union Treaty,” which Gorbachev hopes will keep the Soviet Union together. Shevardnadze may have concluded that he could not be a part of a crackdown on the republic of his birth.

Gorbachev Double-Cross. Furthermore, Shevardnadze may have felt personally betrayed by Gorbachev. Just a week before his resignation, Shevardnadze promised Secretary of State James Baker on December 12 in Houston that U.S. economic assistance to the Soviet Union would be “a boost to Mr. Gorbachev's political and economic policies.” Based in part on these assurances, and ignoring the evidence of Gorbachev's switch to the hard line, George Bush approved U.S. credit guarantees for Soviet loans up to \$1 billion for food aid. Now both Shevardnadze and the Bush-Baker team seem to have been double-crossed by Gorbachev.

Shevardnadze's resignation shows how badly Bush and Baker miscalculated with their single-minded support for Gorbachev. Bush's support for Gorbachev, at the expense of other, more democratic reformers like Boris Yeltsin, was predicated on the assumption that U.S. assistance would strengthen Gorbachev and the reform process against the hardliners. The opposite has occurred. Gorbachev has moved away from reform, instead promoting so-called "law and order" and threatening a possible dictatorship, and he has done so less than a week after Bush promised \$1 billion in credits to the U.S.S.R. All support for Gorbachev has done is give him still more breathing room to appease the communist old guard because he and they do not fear any backlash from the U.S. and the West if they crack down on democrats and independence movements in the republics.

A man of considerable personal courage and integrity, Eduard Shevardnadze would not have abandoned the Gorbachev ship if he saw any hope for Gorbachev and the continuation of *perestroika*. Instead, in announcing his resignation, he warned that "dictatorship is coming" to the Soviet Union. Shevardnadze apparently did not want to be a party to a hardline coup.

From the point of view of the Soviet hardliners, the most convenient timing for such a coup would be at the beginning of a war in the Persian Gulf. Therefore, it may come as early as mid-January. Shevardnadze's resignation thus sends an urgent message that the Bush Administration can ignore only to the detriment of U.S. interests. A crackdown in the Soviet Union appears to be coming, and the Bush Administration no longer can assume that Gorbachev is the man who will stop it.

Putting Moscow on Notice. The Administration should immediately put Moscow on notice that if Gorbachev or any other Soviet leader suspends the reform process and imposes martial law or direct presidential rule on the republics and local governments, the U.S. will:

- ◆ Cancel the U.S.-Soviet summit in Moscow, scheduled for February 11 to February 13, 1991;
- ◆ Revoke immediately U.S. guarantees for up to \$1 billion in private loans to the Soviet Union;
- ◆ Announce a broad program of assistance directly to democratic pro-independence movements, providing them with printing, copying and communication equipment, and money, as well as direct humanitarian aid;
- ◆ Call for an emergency session of the United Nations Security Council to condemn Moscow;
- ◆ Delay negotiations on a Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty and refuse to submit the signed Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty to the Senate for ratification;
- ◆ Seek an allied agreement on using NATO's monitoring and intelligence gathering capabilities to monitor and publicize Soviet repressive measures.

Shevardnadze's announcement is a momentous event, the implications of which go far beyond the usual intrigues of Kremlinology. It is a cry of despair over the direction in which Soviet President Gorbachev is dragging the country. A serious blow to U.S. interests, Shevardnadze's departure might have been avoided if the Bush Administration for the last twelve months had not pursued a "Gorbachev-can-do-no-wrong" policy in the name of helping to preserve "stability." It may be too late now to undo the damage, but there still may be time to limit it by telling Moscow, loud and clear, that there will be a steep price to pay for denying the yearning of the peoples of the fifteen republics for democracy, national dignity and a productive market economy.

Edwin J. Feulner, Ph.D.
President

Dr. Feulner recently returned from his sixth trip to the Soviet Union over the last twenty-five years.