

In Iceland, Soviets don't like talking about SDI

by Nicholas F. Benton

This special report was filed at the midpoint of the Reagan-Gorbachov summit in Reykjavik, Iceland by EIR Washington Bureau Chief Nicholas F. Benton.

While none of the more than 1,000 international press gathered here yet know the contents of the private talks between President Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachov after the first day, the world was publicly exposed to the Soviet intransigence on the main issue of those talks, the President's Strategic Defense Initiative. I, as *EIR* correspondent on the scene, had two exchanges on the subject with leading Soviet spokesmen during their two press briefings Oct. 10 and 11.

President Reagan arrived in Iceland with the purpose of explaining the contents of his July 25 letter to Gorbachov face to face. According to reports received by *EIR*, President Reagan sought to address his proposal for joint deployment of the SDI, the essential new proposal contained in his letter, directly with Gorbachov, and was willing to accept Gorbachov's suggestion for a so-called pre-summit summit, with that in mind.

But it is unclear how far the President is willing to go to reach an "understanding" with Gorbachov. The more so inasmuch as a costly deal was struck with House Democrats by the President, a deal announced shortly after his arrival here.

On the eve of his first encounter with Gorbachov, White House spokesman Larry Speakes announced that Reagan had reached an agreement with the Congress that resulted in the removal of some significant military prohibitions House Democrats had hoped to saddle on the President. The prohibitions, attached to a long-delayed congressional spending package, sought to force the President to remain in compliance with the never-ratified SALT-II treaty, to ban nuclear and anti-satellite (ASAT) weapon testing; ban production of

chemical weapons; and enforce a 40% cut in funding for the SDI.

After threatening to veto this bill, the President won an agreement by House Democrats to lift most of the prohibitions on the eve of the summit. How costly was this compromise? The President was willing to agree to the ban on ASAT testing; to agree not to produce the Bigeye chemical weapon, and to agree to allow the SDI budget to be slashed to \$3.4 billion—not the \$3.1 billion the House wanted, but still \$2 billion lower than the President had originally requested.

He also agreed to submit to Congress for ratification early next year two unsigned treaties from the early 1970s, one banning testing of peaceful nuclear explosives (PNEs) and the other limiting the size of nuclear tests.

Surly Russians

The contents of the Reagan-Gorbachov talks were subjected to a formal press blackout by agreement of both sides, except for a single remark by National Security Adviser John Poindexter that they were "businesslike." But the mood of Soviet spokesmen accompanying the Gorbachov delegation was surly.

Georgii Arbatov, head of the U.S.A.-Canada Institute in Moscow and the Kremlin's chief "America handler," held a press conference with Yevgenii Velikhov, of the Soviet Academy of Sciences and reputed head of the Soviets' own "SDI" program. Arbatov attacked an earlier Reagan proposal for step-by-step reductions in nuclear testing, linked to real reductions in offensive weapons, as "a fake." Arbatov, knowing that Reagan's main objective in the meeting was to push his SDI proposal, gave a glum view of the prospects for the talks, saying they were being held "not as a symptom of improvement in U.S.-Soviet relations, but as a symptom of

concern that relations are worsening.”

Arbatov was particularly displeased with a question this reporter put to Velikhov during the same press briefing. It was a standing-room-only assemblage of media from around the world. In keeping with the recent barrage of Soviet media attacks on Lyndon LaRouche, founder and contributing editor of *EIR*, Arbatov is wont to refer to LaRouche as a “fascist”—and he is usually shaking and sputtering as he does so. This time, Arbatov bellowed, in English, “This is Lyndon LaRouche”—when this reporter identified his affiliation with *EIR* and then proceeded to confront Velikhov with the question.

“Isn’t it true that, given the fact that we have had no real progress in what has been identified as the most substantial issue of the arms race, namely the issue of strategic defense, isn’t it time that the Soviets are willing to admit that they have been working on military applications of laser systems for at least 17 years? Given that your colleague, Dr. Rudakov, came to the U.S.A. in the early 1970s to discuss directed energy capabilities, why shouldn’t the United States assert that the Soviets would be developing a first-strike capability by their work on the SDI. Why don’t you start admitting that you are doing this and accept President Reagan’s offer for joint development of the Strategic Defense Initiative?”

Velikhov’s answer was the stock Soviet reply: “Now, there are two questions. Why don’t you start a new round of nuclear arms race which would be unpredictable; in fact a new round of a nuclear arms race will lead to a new dangerous nuclear spiral of space research and of space weapons. I would like to recall to you the step taken by the Soviet Union for several years, that the Soviet Union does not conduct any tests of weapons in outer space, and this shows our attitude toward the establishment and development of space weapons. And the rest of your question is a very strong misunderstanding.”

At that point, Arbatov interjected, again in English, “And technical nonsense!”

Spokesman: Greenpeace

Following the press conference, a heated exchange between this correspondent and Velikhov on the issue of Soviet development of strategic defense, as well as on the issues of nuclear testing and verification, occurred at the head table surrounded by over 50 press reporters.

The exchange concluded, when Velikhov sought to defend one of his points by pulling a document produced by Greenpeace out of his briefcase. This correspondent exclaimed, “Do you mean to say that Greenpeace speaks for the Soviet Union?”

This statement so destabilized Velikhov that he quickly shoved the paper back into his briefcase in embarrassment. It was reported later the same day that an Icelandic gunboat turned away a Greenpeace vessel that was trying to make its way into the Reykjavik harbor for a “peace demonstration.”

This correspondent was subsequently interviewed by Soviet television, the newspaper *USA Today*, and BBC radio on the charge of Soviet lying about its SDI program. The latter did a 15-minute interview that was scheduled to follow an interview with Velikhov on its international broadcast Sunday.

Source: McNamara

Velikhov’s use of a “foreign” source of documentation for an official Soviet position was not unique. The day before at another Soviet-sponsored press briefing, Nikolai Yefimov, deputy editor of *Izvestia*, did the same thing in response to another question on the SDI from this correspondent. In this case, the question asked was how the Soviets could continue to assert that the SDI was an attempt by the United States to develop a first-strike capability, given the assurances President Reagan had made in his July 25 letter, which was revealed in his speech at the United Nations, and Reagan’s offer for simultaneous deployment.

Yefimov’s answer was, “For the same reasons that your former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara gives,” and he went on to accuse Reagan of using “only words and assurances” rather than “serious proposals.”

Later in the day, this correspondent asked Assistant Secretary of State Rozanne Ridgway whether Yefimov’s categorical rejection of Reagan’s offer meant that ultimately, arms negotiations could not go anywhere. Ridgway stated publicly that it was her hope that one could distinguish between Soviet public pronouncements, and what Gorbachov might say to Reagan in private.

The so-called new Gorbachov approach to Soviet diplomacy was exhibited in a seemingly outgoing nature of the Soviet presence here, with Soviet “experts” holding daily press briefings on key issues each day. However, the thug, Alexander Bovin, editor of *Pravda* whose appearance befits his name, grunted only, “I don’t speak English,” to anyone he didn’t want to talk to. And when pushed, the Soviets displayed a characteristic paranoia. To anyone watching, it was clear that their pleasant public relations image was only skin deep. Their ugliness went to the bone.

Meanwhile, “peace groups” rushed into town to try to boost the Soviet effort. The Greenpeace ship was turned away. Joan Baez was not. She came in to desecrate the small Reykjavik opera house stage only one night after this tiny country outdid itself with a superb performance of Verdi’s *Il Trovatore*, featuring entirely local performers on the same stage.

Recent Soviet hostage, journalist Nicholas Daniloff was also present. He, however, sounded more concerned to get the Soviets off the hook for his kidnapping than in talking substantive issues. He told this correspondent, “You cannot blame all Soviet society for what the KGB did. I am of a Russian background. I love the Russian people, and we’re going to have to find a way to live together.”