

# Soviets seem to squabble on SDI

by Konstantin George

There is a pronounced recent pattern in both Soviet media coverage per se, and, significantly, Soviet media censorship of General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachov, indicating a factional shift in Soviet policy-making strata. There is evidence of at least a lively discussion among the Soviet leadership on President Reagan's offer—repeated at Reykjavik—to negotiate a co-deployment of the Strategic Defensive Initiative (SDI) with Russia.

The first piece of evidence is, ironically, provided by Gorbachov himself. After his return from the Reykjavik meeting, which he had torpedoed by rejecting Reagan's SDI offer, Gorbachov gave a televised address to the Soviet population. In that speech, for the first time ever, a Soviet general secretary informed his subjects that President Reagan offered to share SDI technology with the Soviet Union and jointly deploy such an ABM system. Gorbachov promptly stated his rejection of Reagan's offer, but grounded his opposition on very shaky premises, saying: "How could we believe such an offer . . . when the United States will not even supply us modern oil drilling technology . . . or modern milk-producing equipment?"

Whether intentionally or not, Gorbachov thus left the door wide open for President Reagan to make offers in the realm of modern civilian technology transfers that would tear to shreds Gorbachov's pathetic objections.

The second important evidence of policy-making circles' anger at Gorbachov's obstinacy on the SDI question, appeared in the Oct. 30 edition of the Central Committee-controlled newspaper, *Sovetskaya Rossiya*, the leading daily for the Russian Republic of the Soviet Union, in the form of a description by *Sovetskaya Rossiya*'s Reykjavik correspondent of questioning he was subjected to at a meeting of the Union of Soviet Film Makers. He was asked: "Several years ago, Reagan declared that he would not give up his space project [the SDI]. In view of the fact that we arrived at certain compromises at Reykjavik, wouldn't it have been worth the effort to add another compromise and stop insisting on the 'Star Wars' issue?"

## Hard line on SDI questioned

The same *Sovetskaya Rossiya* carried a letter, from a woman reader in the city of Kirov, castigating Gorbachov for not having "given in" on the SDI issue at Reykjavik: "Wouldn't it have been better to have given in on the SDI? If

the documents had been signed in Iceland, the situation might have improved." *Sovetskaya Rossiya* gave, of course, the "party line" reply, that the Soviet Union will, under no circumstances, give in on SDI.

Two days before these planted items, Soviet Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov—the military commander-in-chief of Soviet forces facing the U.S. and NATO—resurfaced with his first published article since he left the post of Chief of the General Staff in September 1984. Ogarkov's article appeared on Oct. 28 in the new monthly *Military Bulletin* of Novosti. Its theme was a categorical assertion that the Soviet Union possessed a sufficient economic and technological level to "technologically solve even the most complicated defense tasks"—a singularly clear reference to the Soviet SDI—and "in the shortest possible time" add to its arsenal of weapons, "new types of weapons"—a second singularly clear reference. Ogarkov then called for equipping the Soviet Armed Forces with weapons of "the highest technological quality," through increased military expenditures to produce new weapons, equal to performing "complicated defense tasks"—the third reference to the Soviet SDI.

Central Committee member Ogarkov's demands run diametrically counter to the line advanced by Central Committee member Georgi Arbatov, head of the Moscow U.S.A.-Canada Institute, who has bemoaned the SDI as an "American attempt" to "weaken" the Soviet economy.

Prior to Reykjavik, the first (September) edition of Novosti's *Military Bulletin* contained an article by Ogarkov's replacement as Chief of the General Staff, Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev, which attacked Gorbachov's nuclear test ban policy. Akhromeyev insisted that the Soviet nuclear test ban had "inflicted a certain amount of damage on the Soviet Union." Not only the various articles of Novosti's *Military Bulletin*, but indeed the very decision to launch such a publication is evidence of possible policy shifts in the making.

There is another clinical pattern of coverage in the Soviet media over the past two to three months. Mikhail Gorbachov, in various speeches delivered in different parts of the Soviet Union, referred to the "NEP" (the "New Economic Policy" of the 1920s, the first heyday of Bolshevik-Trust collaboration). Until late October, the term NEP was invariably censored out of the text in the coverage retailed in the Soviet media. There are other equally noteworthy cases of censorship of passages from Gorbachov speeches over recent months.

The pattern of media censorship of Gorbachov is a phenomenon unknown in the Soviet Union since the time of Khrushchov. We would be very careful against drawing any rash conclusions from these phenomena. It may all be only a grand deception, or mostly deception. If so, one must comment that it represents a deception on an elaborate scale not seen before. Adding to the mystery, October has come and gone without a Central Committee Plenum, normally scheduled for the second half of October. Why?