

Moscow writes off Reagan as military moves to the fore

by Konstantin George

In the midst of the “living theater” of the Moscow summit, one devastating jolt of reality broke through. The Kremlin has announced to the world that it has given Ronald Reagan the Neville Chamberlain treatment—milked him for all that his appeasement and capitulations were worth, and now, written him off. On May 31, on a Soviet live television broadcast of Reagan’s appearance at the House of the U.S.S.R. Writers Union, a Kremlin script demolished President Reagan before the entire Russian nation.

The humiliation of Reagan is the most sensational indication of emerging policy shifts in the Soviet Union on the eve of the June All-Union Party Conference. Other signs of the shift in the weeks leading up to the summit included:

- The placing of Soviet-American arms control negotiations directly in the hands of the Soviet military. The Soviet working group on arms control at the summit was directed by Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev, Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov’s protégé and successor as chief of the Soviet General Staff.

- Before the summit, Akhromeyev gave a May 26 press conference where he ruled out any Soviet gesture to unilaterally withdraw troops from Eastern Europe: “I see no reason for any troop pull-out.” Akhromeyev’s statement came one week after U.S. officials, ablaze with pre-summit euphoria, were “confidently” predicting a unilateral Soviet withdrawal announcement at the summit.

- A message to Gorbachov by the military in the May 21 edition of the Defense Ministry’s daily, *Krasnaya Zvezda* (*Red Star*). A full-page feature honoring the late Admiral Kuznetsov, the head of the Navy until 1955, was used to declare that Nikita Khrushchov had been dumped in 1964 as general secretary because his policies had sabotaged Russia’s military build-up. The article revealed a *secret* leadership session “shortly after the October [1964] Central Committee

Plenum” in which Khrushchov was overthrown, where then-Defense Minister Marshal Rodion Malinovsky, and Politburo ideological czar Mikhail Suslov denounced Khrushchov. Malinovsky was quoted charging Khrushchov with having “conducted a crusade against aviation and tanks,” and blocking the planned naval build-up.

Economic preoccupations

The Soviet leadership is preoccupied with far more important questions than the summit, that require policy answers soon. For Moscow, the absolute priority is dealing with the economic breakdown crisis in Eastern Europe and its spillover effects on the Soviet civilian economy, and ensuring the uninterrupted progress of the Soviet military build-up.

In addition, the Kremlin must soon act to halt the continuous eruptions of national unrest. The Transcaucasus has again exploded, and on a scale greater in scope than in February. While the summit theater was under way in Moscow, 50,000 people were demonstrating on the streets of Yerevan, the Armenian capital on Sunday, May 29, and 300,000 on Monday, May 31. During the entire course of the summit, the general strike that began May 23 in Nagorno-Karabakh, the Armenian region of Azerbaijan, continued unabated. Any time now, mass counter-demonstrations in the Azerbaijan capital of Baku could erupt, as they did May 16-18, when 100,000 protested against the Armenian demonstrations.

Late May also marked a renewal of pro-independence protests in the Baltic Republic of Lithuania. Poland, which exploded in late April and early May, is expected to erupt again sometime this summer. Neighboring Yugoslavia (see story, next page) is also close to explosion.

Soviet policy viewed the Reagan-Gorbachov Moscow

summit as a last chance to extract the maximum possible in further strategic concessions from the Reagan administration. Moscow also used the summit to start building the institutional "dialogue" for the New Yalta process into the next administration, taking into account that the next administration need not occur first in January 1989. Reagan's faculties and physical health have markedly deteriorated; his removal from office before then, letting George Bush assume the presidency, cannot be ruled out.

Writers Union ambush

On May 31, Reagan went to the U.S.S.R. Writers Union for a live, televised talk with heads of the various Soviet cultural and artistic unions. This wasn't just a broadcast, it was an ambush.

Elem Klimov, head of the Soviet Film Makers Union, rose to address the smiling President. Klimov sarcastically cited Reagan's addiction to astrology. Then, as Soviet TV cameras zeroed in and maintained throughout a close-up of Reagan's face, Klimov escalated:

"Our own astrologers here venture the prophecy that the 21st century will be the century of the Soviet Empire. I myself don't always trust these sort of prophecies, but perhaps, in spite of that, it wouldn't be such a bad idea, if you, Mr. President, would endorse a proposal, that the government of the United States and the Soviet government set up joint commissions of astrologers, who could exchange their knowledge."

The President's face during this part switched from Hollywood smile to a petrified look, which in turn flipped into ever stronger looks of intense anger. After the following statements from Klimov, he became ashen white, almost giving the appearance that the face had vanished. If Klimov's blow at Reagan's astrological "solar plexus" sent him to the ropes, the next lines were the knockout punch.

Klimov mockingly reminded Reagan his term as President ends in January 1989. "You will very soon have the opportunity, Mr. President, to join the army of unemployed in America. And if really, in Hollywood, a role can no longer be found for Ronald Reagan, then just come here to us, we'll find a job for you."

While Klimov's demolition of Reagan was the most dramatic, other examples are available. In the June 1 *Financial Times* of London, Georgi Arbatov, head of the U.S.A.-Canada Institute and Central Committee member, is quoted on the summit, "What our side had in mind was really not to let the process be broken up because of the poor state of the presidency in the U.S. at the moment. We want to get as much as possible done with this administration and ensure continuity."

The story Western media missed

Vladimir Karpov, head of the powerful U.S.S.R. Writers Union, and host to Reagan's "last stand" on Soviet TV, was

also enjoying himself at the expense of the President, and for that matter, Gorbachov. At the Writers Union event, Karpov quipped to Reagan, "If I were an icon painter, I would paint an icon with Jesus Christ in the middle," flanked by Reagan and Gorbachov. There is more to this remark than meets the eye.

On May 23, the Soviet Central Committee held its crucial pre-conference plenum. These important proceedings were all but blacked out of the Soviet press, which simply listed who spoke and announced the one and only personnel change at the plenum. Vladimir Karpov was promoted from candidate to full membership in the Central Committee. This one line, printed in big black letters, front page in the May 24 *Pravda*, and not deemed "newsworthy" by any Western newspaper editors, was a signal of the first magnitude on the direction affairs are taking in Moscow.

In late April, Karpov had achieved seeming notoriety for having refused to issue and sign a Writers Union "letter" to be printed in *Pravda*, denouncing the March 13 *Sovetskaya Rossiya* "Opposition Manifesto" which had stridently called into question Mikhail Gorbachov's *glasnost* and *perestroika* liberalization policies. The heads of all the other cultural and artistic unions signed such "letters," which were duly printed in *Pravda*. Karpov was hauled before Soviet television to "explain" why he had not authorized a letter, and declared he "would draft one" in support of Gorbachov, but never did so. On May 9, Victory Day in Russia, Karpov, closely linked to the military, was viciously attacked in a "letter" to the local *Moskovskaya Pravda*.

Five days later, the tide turned. The May 14 *Moskovskaya Pravda* carried a letter signed by several Soviet war heroes, bearing the clear imprimatur of the Soviet military, denouncing the newspaper for having allowed, above all on Victory Day, a letter "slandering . . . a writer hero" like Karpov. *Moskovskaya Pravda* printed a full apology by its editors. Nine days later, "writer-hero" Karpov, who had ostentatiously refused to supply his voice to the April *Pravda* "letter" chorus defending Gorbachov, was promoted to the Soviet Central Committee.

The next phase

Astute Western observers of the Moscow summit theatre summarize the events in Moscow as follows: "Ronald Reagan licked the shoes of the Kremlin leadership, and they spat in his face." (For details of the summit's outcome, see article on page 64). The only thing Reagan did not give away or promise while in Moscow was the Strategic Defense Initiative, which he regards as his single achievement in office.

As for the Soviets, the All-Union Party Conference in late June is likely to end in stalemate. At that time, or in the not-distant future, Mikhail Gorbachov is slated to become the scapegoat for an economic crisis which cannot be postponed. The events in Armenia, Lithuania, Poland, and Yugoslavia are the handwriting on the wall.