

Bush's State of the Union: a U.S. strategic retreat

by William H. Harrison

President Bush's first State of the Union address Jan. 31 was so lacking in substance that four veteran news commentators who gathered on ABC-TV's "Nightline" program afterwards found themselves confessing they'd run out of things to say after about 15 minutes.

Bush sewed together all the rhetoric he'd developed during his campaign and the non-stop campaign-like speaking schedule he's maintained since taking office. Who could find fault with all those glorious words? But where were the dollars to back them up in the Fiscal Year 1991 budget that Bush had proposed two days before?

It was enough to cause Washington pundits to long for the days of President Reagan. As a former actor, at least Reagan could read a letter from an American soldier on the front lines of the defense of freedom with enough feeling to get almost everyone a little choked up. President Bush's delivery succeeded in choking up no one but himself, except for those who focused on the speech's substance, who were choking up in a different way, contemplating the consequences of, especially, the "bold" unilateral initiative for deeper conventional forces cuts in Europe that was the centerpiece of Bush's remarks.

When Bush announced his proposal for a further reduction in U.S. and Soviet military manpower in Central and Eastern Europe to 195,000 on each side, network television cameras switched to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, sitting together. While most of the Congress was into one of its 35 interruptions of heavy applause that occurred during the address, half the Joint Chiefs were sitting glum-faced and unmoved.

The size of the cuts Bush proposed for defense in his budget is unprecedented, as Richard Darman, director of the Office of Management and Budget, bragged during a press briefing when the budget was released Jan. 29.

A journalist asked, "In addition to having your budget dependent upon certain economic assumptions you make, it seems that it's based on the national security assumptions that you must be making to make up this budget. How can you do that, given that President Bush last week himself said that there is a great deal of uncertainty about the future of the leadership of the Soviet Union and what kind of policies might follow on if Gorbachov, for example, were to fall from power?"

Darman replied: "I think it is now rather generally agreed that the Warsaw Pact is in radically different condition than it was a year ago, and that the prospect of that being quickly reversed is very, very small. So, there's some downward adjustment that one can make without having it be viewed as excessively risky or irresponsible. The President's budget, as you know, involves a -2.6% proposed rate of real growth for defense for fiscal year '91 and then -2% every year thereafter. I believe it's the first time a President has ever recommended five years' worth of negative growth for defense."

White House Chief of Staff John Sununu, during a press briefing at the White House the day after the State of the Union address, cited as an example of the "radically changed situation" in Eastern Europe which forced a basic change in Bush's strategic military thinking in the last two months, "the request by the new government of Czechoslovakia that Soviet troops leave its country, and indications that the new government of Hungary will do a similar thing."

It goes without saying that no Soviet troops have left yet, and that there is a big difference between a verbal request and any actual force changes.

No 'peace dividend'

Furthermore, the "peace dividend" that is supposed to result from the defense cuts for use in domestic programs in

Bush's proposed budget simply did not appear.

With all his talk about a commitment to make America first in the world in education by the year 2000, for example, Bush's \$1.23 trillion budget provides \$24 billion for education, which is an actual cut in the education budget over FY90, taking inflation into account and subtracting the \$500 million Bush includes in new money for Head Start programs for children.

When Education Secretary Lauro Cavazos came to the White House to brief reporters on the education initiative the day after the State of the Union speech, he argued that the education budget's discretionary spending component actually rises 6.2% in the Bush budget, but when asked what steps, specifically, are envisioned to bring up U.S. high school math and science scores from the bottom to the top of the list among industrialized nations by the year 2000, he talked vaguely about "changing structures," but had no specific agenda.

About all Darman said on health care was that media reports of an \$8 billion cut in Medicare in the new budget were "rumors," since the cut was "only" \$4.4 billion. In his address, Bush talked about a Domestic Policy Council review of the high cost of health care, but this will probably result only in more harassment of health care providers.

Responses from Foley, LaRouche

The official Democratic response to the President's speech, presented by House Speaker Rep. Thomas Foley (D-Wash.), offered no substantial alternative.

Some, however, did offer real alternatives, and therefore had something important to say. A statement circulated in Washington, D.C. the day of the State of the Union by Democratic congressional candidate Lyndon LaRouche offered the following response:

"Today is the day that President Bush is to present his State of the Union. Look again at the Foreword to a congressional program which I authorized for publication on the Fourth of July in 1989, just last year, midway between George Bush's inauguration last year and the State of the Union address this year.

"I would have to say, and I think if the rest of you look at the facts of the matter you will agree, that everything I outlined as the evolving state of the world, and naturally of our nation, on July 4, 1989, is not only true, but is the most essential fact about the state of the Union and the world right now, whereas everything that President George Bush so far has said does not correspond to reality.

"It's simply this: First of all, the world economic collapse proceeds. The United Kingdom is an economic refuse pile. The Soviet economy is collapsing as a physical economy, as the result of bottlenecks resulting from the total mismanagement and incompetence of both communism and Gorbachov. Meanwhile, the Soviet Empire is being torn apart by the insurgency of national movements, movements of national

aspirations. This is spreading around the world.

"The Old Age which President Bush, so far, and his administration represent, is coming to an end. It's sinking, and those who cling to it will go down with it. One hopes that George Bush will abandon his crazy crush on Gorbachov, and his delusion that he can control the economic crisis without providing a cure for that crisis.

"The time has come to return to Western civilization's values, together with the kind of economic recovery program we remember from World War II during the Roosevelt period, and which we remember from the early 1960s under President John Kennedy. The time has come to scrap all the delusions which have reigned in Washington for about 25 years and get back to the old-fashioned values which used to work. The investment tax program would be a boon right now, and the aerospace program of the kind that Kennedy supported would be a boon right now. We need to build infrastructure, we need to put our unemployed to work in building infrastructure as Roosevelt did during the 1930s.

"One part of this, an indispensable part, is my program for rapidly building up high-speed rail and other essential infrastructure in the Paris-Berlin-Vienna triangle of Europe. This region of 90 million population, linked to a European market of 430 million, already has the densest industry, and highest average cultural level, of any major area on this planet.

"It includes the highly skilled work forces of East Germany and Czechoslovakia, who can rapidly be brought to West German standards of productivity, given the basic infrastructure to do so. By putting in, in this Paris-Berlin-Vienna triangle, the most modern high-velocity transportation systems for passengers and containerized freight, by providing advanced forms of nuclear energy, and channeling investment into high-technology capital goods production, my program will make that region into the greatest concentration of industrial potential the world has ever seen.

"The effects of this program will radiate immediately to such areas as Poland and Hungary, to the Mezzogiorno of Italy and other underdeveloped regions of Europe, then down into Africa and to the rest of the developing sector.

"Without that, there is no hope for the U.S. and other collapsed economies of the world. The Volcker policies, and the economic follies which the Bush administration continues to cling to, have eroded U.S. industrial capacities to the point of no return. No U.S. recovery would be possible today, without massive injections of capital goods from abroad.

"We must therefore develop the few remaining economically sound areas in the world—those, like West Germany and Japan, that have not been ruined by communism, or the post-industrial idiocies embraced by the Bush administration—as the basis for world economic recovery.

"We have terrible problems, but none, I think, that we can't solve if we'll give up the crazy ideas which George Bush so far and his administration are trying to defend, and get back to the good old ideas which worked for us in former times."