

Gorbachov must let the Baltics go, or face civil war, Scherer warns

Below are excerpts from a press conference given by West German Gen. Paul-Albert Scherer (ret.) on May 16 at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. General Scherer is the former director of West Germany's military intelligence service, the Militärischer Abschirmdienst, and is one of the world's leading experts on the Soviet empire, the Soviet Union, and Eastern Europe. Last autumn, General Scherer predicted the fall of the East German regime by the end of 1989, and Gorbachov's demise by the end of 1990. His comments, delivered in German, were translated by Webster Tarpley.

My starting point is that in the last two years, the situation in the Soviet Union and in the entire Soviet bloc has changed in a very basic way.

The Yalta period of world history has come to an end this year at the latest; perhaps it will be seen to have come to an end in 1989. Yalta, of course, meant the division of Europe through Central Europe. Yalta meant the victory of Stalin; and this victory by Stalin psychologically seduced the Great Russians and the Soviets to develop a fundamentally wrong picture of the world. . . .

We have two very bad preconditions in the Western world. We have a smokescreen of psychological warfare that has been wrapped around us, and we've also been blinded. I assume that everybody in the room has a driver's license and that you know that this combination of a smokescreen and blindness is a very bad combination for somebody who wants to stay on the road.

I would also point to the fact that the Gorbachov group, since March 10, 1985, has had a very strong public relations radiation effect in the Western world. This goes for the public side as well as for the underground or less public side of things. For the preservation of the Soviet empire, and for the saving of the Soviet system, the Gorbachov group has launched three approaches, three tactics to give them leverage, which I would now mention.

The first is the Soviet pretension that Gorbachov is a founder of world peace. With this, anti-communists were deprived of the ground under their feet, and the peace movement was greatly favored. The second point of Soviet leverage was to hype the question of nuclear madness, the danger

of nuclear war, and to exploit that. I would regard this as a partial hypnosis of all of us in the West. And the third point of Soviet leverage was the slogan that the Europeans and the Great Russians live in one European house. . . .

What we've seen in the Soviet Union since March, with the beginnings of pluralism and the creation of parties, really takes us back to a time in the Russian world, let us say, before World War I, back to about 1908, with the foundation of the Duma [the Russian parliament]. What we've had in the Soviet Union since the March 31 of this year has been a small beginning of a pluralistic process. Parties have been founded; the first of these parties is called the Liberal Democratic Party, and it seems to be spread over the 15 Soviet republics. This party is already represented in the Supreme Soviet, with three votes; that's not much, but it's there. Then we have the party calling itself the Social Democratic Workers' Party, or Social Democratic Labor Party, which came out of an underground phase, a clandestine phase, and which is now public. The Social Democratic Labor Party says that it has 40,000 members in 15 Soviet republics. . . .

There are now between 180 and 200 organizations, which are attempting to obtain the status of political parties. And there are six of these that have already received some kind of an official approval, and I would like to mention one or two more of these. That is, first of all, the Christian Democratic movement. One member of this Christian Democratic party was actually the only opposition to Gorbachov in the Council of People's Deputies, when Gorbachov was elected President most recently. There's one more party, which is a right-wing extremist party with fascist or fascistoid characteristics; this is called the Republican Party of the Soviet Union. . . .

Jumping off the Soviet ocean liner

At the same time, we can observe in the Soviet Union a paralysis of the Soviet sovereignty of the central government through the secessionist attempts that are now emerging on the borders of the empire. I would beg your indulgence as I compare the situation in the Soviet Union today to a giant ocean liner.

Now, imagine, if you will, this very large transatlantic ocean liner, and imagine that the railing around the edges of the deck is filled with passengers who are standing there;

they've put their life vests on, they've gotten their life savers under their arms. On the bridge of this ship, among the commanding officers, a dispute has broken out among the people who are allowed to participate in such a dispute. There's a great disorder on the top decks, and the military police, or the constables of the ship, have been sent into action to try to quell the chaos on the decks, and also to keep people in their cabins below.

By the end of 1989, we've got the situation where some of these passengers actually jump off the ship, and they're now in the water. At that point, the submachine guns of the guards on the ship begin to have their say, and they begin to shoot at the passengers who are attempting to swim away from this ship in the water.

With this metaphor I am indicating the peoples of the Transcaucasus. And in January, February, March of this year, further passengers jumped overboard, although the captain had already gone down into the steerage and had tried to convince them not to do this; he'd given them a speech, but they jumped overboard anyway. And they are now swimming in the water; and these are the Baltic peoples, the Lithuanians, the Latvians, and the Estonians. The guards have now been mobilized, and they've got their submachine guns ready, they're pointing them at these three Baltic swimmers, but they haven't opened fire yet.

Now, to fill out this metaphor, just imagine what happens when a large tanker lets out a large quantity of crude oil. What seems to be happening is that the commanders of the ship, up on the bridge, are telling people to let out a large amount of crude oil into the water, so that the passengers will either come back on board ship, or they're going to be drowned in the oil slick.

There are 15 decks on this ship; and down in these other decks, in the brig, if you will, too, there are passengers who have been locked up there, and they are now screaming their protests. These are the nationality conflicts in the 15 Soviet republics, but also, in addition to that, in the various autonomous regions and so forth. . . .

Will the U.S. remain a paper tiger?

For the year 1990, the Baltic question is the life-and-death question for the entire Soviet Union, and you can see that clearly in Gorbachov's reactions.

The wrong evaluation, which is based primarily on the smokescreen, has led to this idea that Gorbachov is indispensable; and that is what leads us to this wrong conception, despite the fact that Gorbachov does nothing positive.

At the end of this month, we'll have another summit here in Washington. And this will be the test of whether the West is able to resist the Soviet countermeasures against the independence movements, or whether the West is incapable of resisting those Soviet pressures.

Now, imagine that you are a member of the Soviet elite, in one of the four principal pillars of power that make up that

Soviet elite. The big question that is now being debated in these four Soviet power elites . . . is, "Is the United States, and is the Atlantic Alliance, a paper tiger, as Mao had asserted that some years ago?" I would say that the answer to that question . . . is, first of all, the life-or-death question for the 1990s. And that question about the paper tiger will also decide, during the 1990s, whether the Soviets are willing to change their policies even more, or not.

Gorbachov cooked up 'Bonapartist threat'

I now have to treat the question that has come up in the Western world about the alleged Bonapartist tendencies inside the Soviet Union. What I understand, under this heading of Bonapartism, is the readiness of leading soldiers to attempt to solve political questions through conspiracies or through a military coup d'état, a putsch.

There are many dramatizations or exaggerations that are circulating in regard to this point, so we have to very carefully examine the question I would pose, whether the Red Army, the military establishment . . . is considering or attempting to overthrow Gorbachov.

I would start with the idea that the military elite of the Soviet Union, the Red Army, and all of the service branches, have suffered under a tremendous increase in their burdens in the last 10 to 15 years.

Things have gotten much worse for them. I would mention the example of Afghanistan, stressing that this was a rout of the Red Army. . . . Back in the days of [Soviet Defense Minister Dmitri] Ustinov, in the early 1980s, the group around the Defense Ministry already showed signs of intense consternation about the very poor performance of the Red Army in Afghanistan. And the cost burden that the Soviets had to bear in this area, was simply tremendous. And the Soviets began to reflect very early on: How could they liquidate this war, and get out?

It turned out that the new Red Army was simply incapable of mastering the techniques of partisan warfare which the Red Army had understood several decades earlier. So I am mentioning this in order to stress that the Soviet military, because of their very bad experience in Afghanistan, has suffered a great deal, primarily because they simply failed to bring home victory. They lost. . . .

Gorbachov himself has conjured up this picture of a plug-ugly of the Red Army with the big grim face, who comes in and saws off the legs of Gorbachov's chair and then takes over that chair itself. The Soviet top leadership is obviously busily at work with a deception operation, which is designed to convince the West that there is a Bonapartist threat from the military forces. I think that this development is extremely improbable. . . .

Heading toward civil war

The Russians cannot live through 400 years of Western history that they've missed, or even 70 years of Western

history that they've missed; they can't live through that in four months. The economic catastrophe is there now, you can see that in their inability to pay. . . . At this point the Russians have reached the end of their rope. And, at this point we've got to mention the two principal scenarios for the immediate future.

Let us assume that Gorbachov is still capable, when he comes to Washington for the summit at the end of the month, of giving up the Baltic—giving up the Baltic in the sense of a very liberal autonomy, independence, on the model of Finland: the Finlandization of the Baltic states, if you will, with independence. That, in my view, is Gorbachov's absolute last chance. That was the point about the ship, and the shipwreck metaphor, of earlier on. There is simply no way to drag those people out of the water and back on to the decks of that sinking ship.

I would say that there is no reversibility in the Baltic. It's irreversible. The unification of Germany is already irreversible as well. There is complete irreversibility in the Transcaucasus also. The only way you get these people back in the brig, is you can get them back into the brig for a very short period, if you're willing to pay the price of an all-out civil war.

Does the West intend to give up all of its principles, and all of its convictions? Do we want to give up all of our principles, and convictions, because we're not tough enough, or because we're cowards? I am in touch with quite a number of people in the Baltic States and the Transcaucasus and other areas that I've been talking about today. You should hear what the people there are saying. There is no more bitter disappointment anywhere than in those areas. And especially in regard to the policies of the United States of America. Unfortunately, I have to say that with great seriousness, because these are the reverberations that are now propagating in those areas.

There's still a chance to make good these things at the Washington summit. But, when we get into the summer, and into the autumn, we will certainly have the first general strikes throughout the Soviet Union, because of the collapse of the transportation system, and because of the scarcity of food: the famine. . . .

The year 1990 is decisive, and not any successive or later year. I would say that if Gorbachov proves to be incapable of using these last chances that are still offered, or if a successor group to the Gorbachov group proves to be incapable of exploiting these opportunities, then my prediction is a civil war in the Soviet Union, under extremely bloody circumstances that will last from three to four years.

Concerning the disarmament exertions that are now still taking place in the Western world, I would say that with a view toward that very likely coming civil war, a diminishing amount of weapons is not the way to make peace more secure.

I would like to conclude by giving you a quote from the German poet Hölderlin. This was Friedrich Hölderlin writing

in 1797, at the time when he had not been introduced to communism, of course:

"Those people always make the world into hell; and the ones who do it, are the ones who claim that they're trying to create a paradise on Earth."

The signals the West ought to be sending

In response to a question from Voice of America on what the U.S. reaction to Gorbachov ought to be:

. . . I would say that the only serious policy is to put the Russians under pressure: not military pressure. What kind of pressure is meant? That would be, on the one hand, to make very precise offers to the Russians, offering them things that they need to come out of their extreme, desperate, situation, their scarcities. There are, in the course of being formed, as I was pointing out before, perhaps 200 different party initiatives, associations, and parties.

If you look at the Soviet population, there's a very large group, and it's a growing group, concentrated in particular in the large cities, as a result of the postwar modernization, urbanization. These people, in the large Soviet cities, are essentially pro-Western; they're Westernizers. And those are the people that you've got to engage in a dialogue. . . .

What are we doing? What was Malta?

I would say that Malta was something extremely unpleasant, and it reminded me immediately of Munich 1938, which I lived through as a young officer in the German Army. These are very unpleasant feelings that are evoked by these things today also. What I can't go along with, is appeasement. . . .

You've got to engage these Westernizing groups in a dialogue. Your dialogue is not with the Russian Orthodox Church—that's your enemy. Your dialogue is not with the military—that's your enemy. You've got to get in touch with these Westernizing groups, and you've got to say, "Guys, we want to cooperate with you, work with you."

And still on Gorbachov: Can Gorbachov stop a civil war? He absolutely cannot stop a civil war. So, why support him? It is simply a wrong evaluation that has taken root among us. We have got to stop seeing the Soviet Union exclusively through Western eyes. I would say that the development of civil war could still be stopped. . . . But in order to do that, you would have to have some courage; you would have to be willing to run certain risks.

You would have to have a very fine tactile sense for these new pluralistic developments that are emerging. For example, what stops us from taking a trip to Leningrad, to Moscow, to Kiev, to Minsk, and so forth, and getting into contact with those pro-Western groups? You can go there now, you're not going to be immediately arrested and thrown in jail. What prevents the West from getting in contact with these Westernizing groups? That would be worth some work; in other words, people of good will ought to begin thinking about this stuff, to try to avoid an all-out civil war. . . .