
Great Britain

Margaret Thatcher's new 'détente' policy

by Laurent Murawiec

The iron of Mrs. Thatcher is melting down to welcome Politburo member and heir-apparent Mikhail Gorbachev, the highest-level Soviet visitor in seven years. His British sojourn will last one week, beginning Dec. 15, and the new fashions in London are "renewed dialogue with the East" and threats against President Reagan if he does not abandon his plans for new defensive weapons that will make nuclear weapons obsolete, the Strategic Defense Initiative.

Admiral Sir James Eberle, chief of the Royal Institute for International Affairs (Chatham House), writes that "1985 [is] a window of opportunity. [It] offers hope of agreements to check the seemingly endless rise in the cost of defense. Without such hopes, West European political leaders will find it increasingly difficult to mobilize public support for adequate levels of defense spending." He alleges "serious concern in Europe that Mr. Reagan's 'strategic defense initiative' threatens the one relatively successful arms control agreement, the 1972 treaty strictly limiting ABM systems."

Do the "women of Greenham Common" demanding unilateral disarmament say anything else?

Interviewed, Eberle comments: "If Reagan continued [with the SDI], Europe would become more restive about U.S. policy. If Reagan turned out to be unserious about reaching an arms control agreement with the Soviets, then, the SDI will become a *major* irritant."

Treading the thinner ice of official position, NATO Secretary-General Peter Lord Carrington told the German daily *Die Welt*: "Many discussions will still be needed among the Allies before an eventual decision is practically taken" concerning the SDI.

The same views were aired in Moscow by visiting Labour Party leaders Neil Kinnock and Dennis Healey. Kinnock went to Moscow on Nov. 24 for a week, meeting chief America-handler Georgii Arbatov and President Chernenko himself. He emerged with a "triumph": a Soviet offer to give Britain "immunity" from nuclear attack if a Labour government undertakes total nuclear disarmament.

A well-informed British intelligence expert commented: "Kinnock will come back with a 'real offer' from the Soviets, and in turn, the Thatcher government will go on its knees to beg Reagan to negotiate a super-Yalta. Kinnock went to Moscow to prepare Gorbachev's visit to London."

Meanwhile, the Nov. 25 *Sunday Times* reported that Defense Minister Heseltine had "ordered £10 billion of cuts in defense . . . the biggest defense spending crisis since the Second World War."

Mrs. Thatcher, the alleged Iron Lady, is now reserving her "iron" for domestic conflicts, as when she told the Conservative audience of the Carlton Club in London about the "enemies of democracy," referring to the violent miners' strike and its riot-support apparatus. She tried to don a predecessor's mantle, railing against "consensus politicians [who] certainly mocked Churchill in a comparable case. . . ."

But Mrs. Thatcher's "Churchillian" posture stops at the British beaches. Her own pronouncements on the SDI, last July and in early November, have been wholly hostile, as she stressed that "an extension of war to a horrible theater of space" and "weapons that will be so costly to develop" should be averted at all costs.

It was Mrs. Thatcher who "warned" President Reagan of the dire consequences of budget deficits, and she again who initiated the "renewed dialogue with the East," even as British media wrote: "The Soviets are making no secret that they hope to drive a wedge between Britain and the United States." Still, Chatham House's Eberle warmly recommends that she back George Shultz and "the liberals in the Reagan administration." After Gorbachev's visit and offerings, Mrs. Thatcher is expected by Moscow—and by Whitehall—to pressure President Reagan into bargaining away "Star Wars."

She bears the carrot. The stick was darkly hinted at in "Haunted by Hoover," the *Financial Times'* Nov. 24 editorial. "If [Reagan's] luck runs out, he could turn out to be another Herbert Hoover. . . . In the last week, the ghost of the Depression President has rattled its chains quite audibly . . . memories of 1929, when a great Republican boom collapsed in ruin. . . ."

David Watt, former Chatham House director, writes: "Reagan's luck is going to run out, in finances, monetary affairs, the economy, or the Middle East, Central America. . . . Disaster will strike with a vengeance."

"Britain's official position in the strategic game at present is hopeless," a London strategic analyst said. "There is not a ray of hope with the Prime Minister," added a retired Royal Air Force officer.

But then, there was the resounding editorial published by the Nov. 26 *Times*, the British newspaper of record. It contained a vigorous denunciation of "the world-wide attempt to induce President Reagan to change the policies and attitudes on which he has twice been elected. . . . One can see it even in Dr. Kissinger's recent article in the *Sunday Times*."

The editorial, which strongly endorsed the Strategic Defense Initiative, is the first tangible sign that highly placed British circles have decided to move against the Chamberlains in Whitehall. However, Britain's rapprochement with the Kremlin has gone so far that much more will be needed to bring it back to the West.