

Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

Yeltsin visit: a Soviet deception

Gen. William Odom is "astounded" that more Americans don't seem to see the real purpose of the Soviet politician's trip.

The high-profile trip to the United States by Boris Yeltsin, the alleged factional opponent of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachov, fits in the category of Soviet "active measures," in the view of Gen. William Odom, former head of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.

Responding to a question from this reporter following his address to a Hudson Institute conference at the National Press Club here Sept. 13, General Odom made clear that what he meant by "active measures," was simply deception.

"Obviously, to enhance his own credibility in the eyes of the U.S., Yeltsin had to say some bad things about Gorbachov, but the bottom line was that he came here singing for an infusion of U.S. consumer goods into the Soviet Union in order to help Gorbachov get through the next year or two," Odom said.

"He wants to get \$50 billion from the U.S. over to the Soviet Union, and the real evidence of what he came here for will be shown when we see the results of that request."

Odom said he was "astounded" that Yeltsin's game was not obvious to all. "It is so transparent to me that it barely needs identifying. From everything I can see, Yeltsin is well-controlled, well-briefed, and his script well-rehearsed, with enough latitude to permit some of his own personality to dictate his responses."

Odom told the conference that while the Soviets may be seriously committed to altering their military strategic policy, this is only in an effort to enhance their ultimate objec-

tive of world domination.

This single-minded objective, he said, has been threatened by the internal economic breakdown crisis, and rising internal dissent within the Soviet Union, which may well lead to a new wave of repression.

Odom said he was particularly concerned for Eastern Europe in this regard, where the pace of reforms is occurring "too fast," to the point that the situation is seen by Soviet leaders as getting out of hand.

However, while these developments are contributing to a rethinking of Soviet priorities ("Even the most tough-minded Bolshevik might be willing to tolerate a shift in Soviet strategy if it will improve results," the general pointed out), there has been no sign of any shift in the ultimate Soviet strategic aims.

On the contrary, even the most defensive-sounding talk of Soviet military doctrine retains a potent "counteroffensive capability" that can be launched within 20 days of an attack. "It is hard to tell the difference between preparations for an offensive and counteroffensive," Odom pointed out.

He said that the Soviets have gone through three periods of a qualitative upgrading of their military capability: the first in the 1920s with the advent of aviation, motorization, and chemical weapons; the second in the 1950s with the introduction of nuclear weapons and rocketry; and the third in the 1970s with the development of directed energy, microcircuitry, and genetic engineering.

Odom pointed to the interest expressed particularly by Soviet Mar-

shal Nikolai Ogarkov in applying the most advanced new technologies to build new weapons, and that this has resulted in the development of capabilities which, he said, "are seen as operationally more attractive for warfare than nuclear weapons," because they can be used with great targeting precision and without threatening to trigger an all-out nuclear exchange.

Soviet contingency plans for war remain, even with the claims of a shift in Soviet military doctrine toward "defensive sufficiency," Odom said, and this requires the Soviet forces to be able to occupy all of Western Europe, southwestern Asia, the Middle East, and the rim areas of Asia within one month.

The old Soviet plan allowed two months to accomplish that feat, he said, but advances in technology have moved their schedule ahead by a full month.

He said that any reduction in Soviet force strength has to take into consideration a number of factors.

First, he said that the Soviets view winning the war on the diplomatic front, through their "peace offensive," as just as useful a means as military ones for gaining their final objectives.

Second, any drawdown in Soviet active forces only swells the ranks of their reserves, which can be called up very swiftly. In fact, every Soviet male remains liable to reserve callup to age 49.

As far as arms control efforts are concerned, the Soviets go by an old proverb, he said: "Paper will put up with anything written on it."

If arms control treaties permit the Soviets to spend less on force strength, they will take advantage of it, he said, although any such reductions should never be confused with an abandonment of the ultimate Soviet objective.