

Strategic policy shakeup under way in Washington

by Edward Spannaus

Two major events occurring during a 24-hour period on Dec. 15-16 suggest that a major shakeup is taking place in U.S. strategic policy. The first was the dumping of Defense Secretary Les Aspin on the afternoon of Dec. 15, and his immediate replacement the next morning with military-intelligence career official Adm. Bobby Ray Inman. The second was the attack on International Monetary Fund (IMF) policies made by Vice President Al Gore in Moscow on the same morning, which followed a series of meetings Gore held with Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin in the wake of the Russian elections.

In a statement issued Dec. 17, economist Lyndon LaRouche said that the Inman appointment, and the "rather sudden innovations in policy outlook" being expressed by Gore, indicated at the very minimum, "a fundamental shakeup . . . with possibly some significant degree of reversal" of strategic policy.

LaRouche commented that it is very clear, as reflected in these two events, that "Washington perceives, partly perhaps through the advice of its contacts, confidants, in Russia, that the recent policy toward Russia, first launched under Bush, in late 1989, has been proven a catastrophic failure in the eyes of Washington itself, or in the eyes at least of some very influential people around Washington."

This, LaRouche went on to say, "coincides also with the turn in policy outlook expressed in France by President [François] Mitterrand on the question of the privatization of the airlines in France, and in the public statements particularly in *Le Figaro* by French economist Maurice Allais and similar expressions."

"We have reached a breaking point in the policy of the past four to five years," said LaRouche; "it is bankrupt in fact, and obviously Washington perceives this to be the case, to one degree or another. Also, there are other elements, if minority elements, of elites of nations elsewhere, who also perceive the Bush policy as continued until recently, to be a catastrophic failure."

It has yet to be seen, LaRouche continued, whether these changes are for the better or not. "The very fact that Washington perceives a catastrophic policy to be no longer tolerable . . . is a refreshing development," said LaRouche, but "it's not an absolutely reassuring one." Or, as he put it, "If the change hadn't occurred, we should have been alarmed."

Pentagon policy issues

The forced resignation of Aspin has to reflect in some degree the deep policy differences between the "utopians" around the Clinton national security establishment, and many in the Pentagon itself. The fact that it was Inman who was immediately appointed to replace Aspin suggests—without being conclusive—that those policy differences may be resolved in favor of the more traditional military view. Much of the press "spin" on events was nonsense, such as suggestions that Aspin's frumpy "managerial style" didn't fit in at the Pentagon. The oft-cited dispute over the Pentagon budget may have been a factor, but only insofar as it reflected a deeper dispute over the size and mission of U.S. forces in the "post-Cold War" world.

There is undoubtedly more truth, as a reason for his departure, in the failure by Aspin to deploy armored equipment for U.S. troops in Somalia when it had been requested by commanders on the ground there. After 18 U.S. servicemen were killed in October, there were widespread calls for Aspin's resignation. The Pentagon is known to have been in opposition to the placing of U.S. troops under U.N. command for U.N. "peacekeeping" and ill-defined "nation-building" in Somalia, Haiti, and elsewhere.

Aspin had reportedly opposed the ill-fated troop deployment to Haiti in October, but he had failed to aggressively take the Pentagon's disagreements to the President. In fact, numerous sources report that Pentagon officials were extremely unhappy with Aspin's inability to forcefully represent their views to the administration.

Furthermore, military officials have also been increasingly outspoken on the administration's confrontation with North Korea; and have been warning that if the U.S. stumbles into a war on the Korean peninsula, allied forces will suffer high casualties, and they cannot guarantee a swift victory.

Probably most indicative of the process which is now under way is Clinton's recent about-face on the ABM treaty. By calling for a modification of the ABM treaty in order to permit the development of projected, theater ballistic missile defense programs, Clinton undertook what one Republican commentator called "a fundamental shift in the nuclear weapons philosophy of the Democratic Party." LaRouche said that the anti-ABM move reflects the fact that some are saying, "We've got to have the Strategic Defense Initiative." Repub-

licans hailed the move as a step toward junking the ABM treaty which "handcuffs" U.S. efforts to develop a viable missile defense system. Predictably, the *New York Times* promptly attacked Clinton's move as tearing a "gaping hole" in the ABM treaty.

It is clear that the replacement of Aspin with Inman was not a sudden, impulsive move by Clinton; in fact, it was carried out in a manner totally out of profile with the way his administration has handled other high-profile appointments. Aspin's departure had been quietly planned for weeks—at least four weeks, and possibly as long as six. Clinton's Chief of Staff "Mack" McLarty said on Dec. 16 that the President had asked him four weeks earlier to "initiate a careful process to look at possible candidates" to replace Aspin. Some press reported that Clinton held a late-night meeting with Inman almost six weeks earlier at the White House.

One real test of whether the Clinton crowd's "globaloney" policies are really being scuttled, will be the fate of Morton Halperin. Halperin's nomination, to be assistant secretary of defense for spreading "democracy" around the world, was sent back to the White House by the Senate without action last session; many observers now expect that Halperin will also be dumped.

Gore hits International Monetary Fund

Gore's criticisms of IMF policy toward Russia, which were downplayed by the U.S. press, came as the West was being forced into a reevaluation of its Russia policy in the wake of the Dec. 12 elections. During a joint appearance with Prime Minister Chernomyrdin, Gore described the "devastating" effects of the loss of defense industry jobs in Russia. In response to a question from an AP reporter about an earlier statement he had made, that some western nations needed a wake-up call to come to Russia's help, Gore first said that he would do his best to avoid a diplomatic incident by listing nations one by one. "So if you will permit me to refer to them as a group," he went on, "I would say every country that has representatives on the World Bank board has been slow at removing the so-called negative pledge requirement. I would say that every country that has representatives on the IMF board has been slow to recognize the hardships that are caused by some of the conditions that have been overly insisted upon in the past."

"Now that right there may be enough to create a diplomatic incident," Gore continued, "but I don't care, because the world has to recognize the gravity of this situation and the enormity of the opportunity for the world to integrate this magnificent nation with these wonderfully talented working men and women, scientists and engineers and professionals into the common effort of humankind to build a better way of life for the peoples of our world."

Within a day or two, Chernomyrdin unequivocally said that "shock therapy" was at an end, in an interview published in the Russian trade union newspaper *Trud*. "I said it a year

and a half ago, and I am ready to repeat it now: It was wrong to jump into the river without testing the water first, as was done in January 1992," Chernomyrdin said. "We should face the truth and admit that many people voted against the hardships and mistakes of the current reforms, rather than for any specific [political] platform. Naturally, any 'shock' methods must be precluded in the future," Chernomyrdin declared.

There are no plans for stronger measures in the direction of tighter monetary policy, he said: "Now investment and production rise are becoming the main issues. These are the spheres where the key emphasis of future reforms will lie." He specified that the government would concentrate on launching high-technology projects and helping the most competitive of existing companies to overcome their difficulties, saying, "All funds we have . . . we will put in investment. We will not keep hopeless enterprises afloat, but will instead create new industries." Chernomyrdin declared that Russia "must carry out an industrial revolution" much as Germany and Japan did after World War II, in order to produce modern, competitive products. (But, sneered the *New York Times*, "Washington is hardly likely to provide a Marshall Plan for Russia these days.")

'Less shock and more therapy'

Financial circles in the West were not all happy with Gore's comments. The next day, the London *Financial Times* warned that Gore's remarks were "badly misguided," and urged that the West should "not throw out the baby with the bathwater." A few days later, the authoritative Swiss daily *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* termed Gore's statements "naive."

Some top U.S. officials, such as Treasury Secretary Lloyd Bentsen, distanced themselves from what Gore said, but there was little doubt that the former's statements were closely coordinated with the White House, and that a basic reassessment of U.S.-Russia policy is now under way.

In a press briefing given on Dec. 20, the U.S. special envoy to the Community of Independent States, Strobe Talbott, made it clear that "less shock and more therapy" is what the United States is going to try to help Russia accomplish, because "that's what we heard from the Russian leadership . . . that's what they intend to do." It appears at this point that the West has little choice but to go along, and the United States is now taking the lead in publicly acknowledging that fact.

But, other than ameliorating the most odious features of IMF policies toward Russia, the administration seems to have little if any notion of an alternative policy. Even Chernomyrdin's call for an "industrial revolution" would require a dumping of the "free-trade/free-market" axiomatic assumptions which have led to the current policy impasse. It is clear that some of the axioms of the past 25-30 years are now being questioned in some circles, but what is needed is to overturn them entirely.