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April 1990

Bush's stance raises eyebrows

WASHINGTON TIMES

April 4, 1990

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By Xan Smiley
LONDON SUNDAY TELEGRAPH

Washington's sense of powerlessness during the nerve-jangling Lithuanian crisis has begun to raise doubts about President Bush's hitherto successful brand of cautious foreign-policy pragmatism.

An influential slice of Washington opinion, from both left and right, is angered by Mr. Bush's reluctance to criticize the Kremlin and has started to accuse him of falling hostage to the charms of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Underlying the criticism is the fear that Mr. Bush and his team of advisers, led by Secretary of State James A. Baker III, lack a deeper vision of what they want the Soviet Union eventually to become, preferring to tackle short-term problems based on the assumption-and-hope that Mr. Gorbachev will survive: fixing arms deals, arranging summit meetings, "managing" a new understanding, all clinched by an amiability between leaders.

Suddenly, prodded by Mr. Gorbachev's dilemma over Lithuania, many are beginning to question Mr. Bush's reliance on the Kremlin magician.

The critics imply that Mr. Bush's desire to keep Mr. Gorbachev sweet and to preserve a supposedly stabilizing balance of power between East and West betrays a lack of commitment to the building of a genuine democracy in the U.S.S.R.

"It's almost as if we don't believe in democracy in the West, as if we prefer to believe in an enlightened

despot," complained a leading figure at Radio Liberty, which beams Russian-language programs into the U.S.S.R.

While the U.S. military intervention in Panama received virtually unanimous acclaim from both parties in Congress and across the spectrum of editorial comment, Mr. Bush's handling of Lithuania — "the first post-Cold War crisis," as Sen. Patrick Moynihan calls it — is proving remarkably divisive.

Part of the sudden surge of criticism is aimed at Mr. Bush's foreign policy team, which is portrayed as disciplined, unusually harmonious and managerially skilled, if obsessively secretive. It is said to be clever at tactics and cutting deals, but bereft of long-term strategy or a deeper understanding of the Soviet Union's rapidly changing political makeup.

Several of Mr. Bush's leading counsels, such as National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft, are, like the president, products of the Nixon-Kissinger foreign-policy school, where U.S. missionary idealism gave way to a harder-nosed realpolitik, perhaps better suited to dealings with dictators and communist regimes and geared more to creating an old-fashioned balance of power between great nations.

"It's a return to the Kissinger approach: Countries are governments. You didn't have to think about the people below," explains a former State Department Soviet expert.

But in today's Soviet Union, the "people below" increasingly do matter. There lies the flaw in the Bush approach.

The end result — and fundamental paradox — of the Gorbachevian

"democratization process" is that full multiparty democracy probably would mean Mr. Gorbachev's defeat. Yet that would not currently be welcomed by a U.S. president who "believes in a very personal style of foreign policy."

"There is this misconception," says the same Soviet expert, "that everything good that's happened in the Soviet Union is due to Gorbachev, and if he goes, it'll all be bad."

"But there's another contradiction here. If he's so powerful and effective, why must we always say he's under threat from the conservatives, which is why we mustn't challenge him? He can't have it both ways. If he's so weak that we're always having to save him, then he's not savable."

Should Mr. Gorbachev, whose legitimacy as czar rests chiefly on his selection by a dozen geriatric Politburo members in 1985 and on his recent validation by a parliament whose own election a year ago was largely fraudulent, submit to a genuine poll?

An influential State Department official argues that Mr. Gorbachev needs time to "institutionalize" the emerging changes, to give the new parliament a chance, and so on. "He's got four years to do it," argues the official.

Yet it is more likely that burgeoning democratic pressures will demand proper multiparty elections and a presidential referendum far sooner.

In the end, Mr. Bush is surely right that there is little the United States can do to help set the Lithuanians free, although a message of unequivocal moral support might have given Mr. Gorbachev greater pause.

Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

Desk Officer Bush

George Bush is personally micromanaging the worst U.S.-Soviet crisis since Mikhail Gorbachev took over, imposing his own judgment about Lithuania on working-level State Department diplomats and nearly eliminating the Pentagon's strategic input.

Described by one sympathetic, pro-Bush insider as "his own Baltic desk officer," the president is said by officials to be using Brent Scowcroft more as personal aide than national security adviser. Gen. Scowcroft, a product of military discipline, often relays Bush's decisions to State without submitting them to tightly-honed strategic analysis—or, indeed, any analysis at all.

Bush's refusal to utter a word in public that might undermine President Gorbachev at home is similar to his self-defeating handling of China after Tiananmen Square. Retreat from principle has not improved China. That raises the prospect that Bush's reading of Gorbachev is as flawed as his reading of China. But the president alone decides.

That Bush is a self-confident, hands-on president who wants to guide policy himself is beyond criticism. His judgment that the professionals can be and often are very wrong comes from more than 20 years in key government posts. But carried to excess, that mind-set is disruptive. It is not easy to revise or even fine-tune policy when the president views himself as the desk officer.

That explains silence from the Pentagon. Defense Secretary Dick Cheney's souped-up policy-planning outfit is no player in the Lithuania crisis, even though

the outcome of Gorbachev's tough demands in the Baltics could very much affect U.S. arms policies.

Similarly, awaiting the arrival yesterday of Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, the Commerce Department had no clear policy guidelines for the simple reason that none had been discussed. Strategy on Soviet high-tech requests for fiber optics and digital switches has not been thrashed out since Lithuanian independence. Bush had not revealed his policy before Shevardnadze's arrival.

The president's conviction that he knows more than anybody else in his administration about how to play great-power politics is also at the root of his decision to dismantle the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board. Though it has not yet been announced, he is in the process of limiting its scope. With former senator John Tower becoming chairman, PFIAB will no longer roam over the strategic landscape but pretty much be restricted to scientific intelligence questions.

Starting in the last few Reagan years, an administration adviser told us, "PFIAB became involved in post-Cold War strategy, particularly in Afghanistan and Eastern Europe, and in questioning Soviet objectives on START [strategic arms treaty]. That gets under Bush's skin. He thinks he knows more than they do."

Working-level diplomats at the State Department are troubled by this concentration of policy-making inside the Oval Office, but that does not apply to Secretary of State James A. Baker III. Baker gets to know Bush's mind as soon as Scowcroft does and, after that, closes off kibitzing from his foreign service officers, no matter how much they disagree.

Such smothering of ideas in the Lithuania crisis was behind Baker's unreported rejection of strong urgings by working diplomats for a Bush letter to Gorbachev a week before one was actually sent. They wanted to lay down a red-letter marker limiting Soviet intimidation of Lithuania. If Moscow went beyond that, the United States would retaliate—perhaps by withholding economic aid and trade assistance, delaying arms talks or even postponing the June superpower summit that is a must on Gorbachev's domestic political agenda.

Baker, aware of Bush's refusal to offend Gorbachev with what might be seen in the Kremlin as pressure tactics, killed the idea cold. But after Soviet troops manhandled Lithuanian boys who will not serve in the Soviet army, Bush and Baker changed their minds. The president sent Gorbachev a letter described by a key diplomat as "reasonably tough," but it arrived unreasonably late with no visible impact on the Soviet decision to strangle Lithuania's independence.

The sweep of Bush's personal policy-making embarrassed Estonian independence leader Tunne Kellem, due here Friday. Without any strategic analysis, National Security Council officials refused even to discuss with Kellem's representatives the possibility of an NSC meeting with him. When the desk officer for such matters sits in the Oval Office, what is there to discuss?

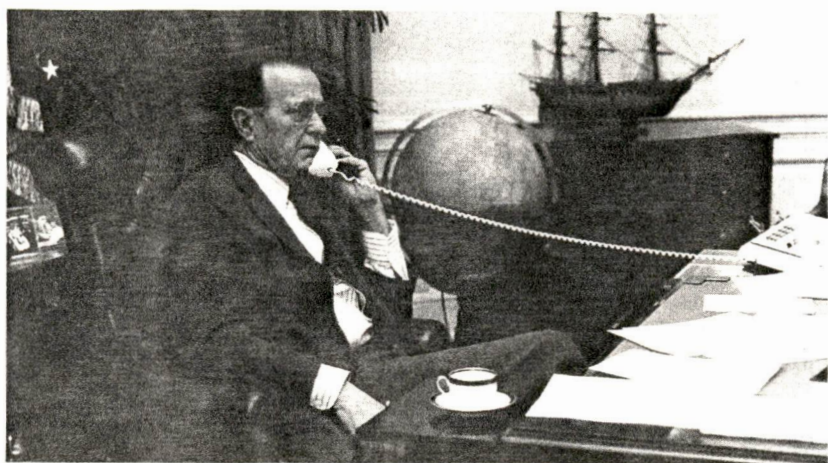
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The Presidency

Hugh Sidey

Getting Gorby on the Line



Long-distance diplomacy: Bush chatting with Gorbachev last January

Just decided. Just placed the call, and his phone rings. It works." That was from George Bush. He was talking in the filtered sunlight of the Oval Office about the three times he has reached out and touched Mikhail Gorbachev. The first time was just after Bush took over the presidency. The second call came in January, when German unification was hot, the third in February, after the Nicaraguan elections.

Last week, with the Lithuanian situation coming to a boil, Bush noted that Britain's Margaret Thatcher had phoned Gorbachev. Bush wondered aloud to aides if he should call Gorbachev again. Bush was walking a high wire, supporting both Lithuania's right to be independent and Gorbachev's leadership. His message had been conveyed in public statements, diplomatic channels. But phoning is different. "Just to call," Bush explains, "say, 'Look, how's it going? What do you think about this?' I learn from it. I mean, it's a two-way street. It's better than a cable."

Bush has elevated the phone to new virtuosity. "Interesting diplomacy," he says. "If there are going to be disagreements between the Soviet Union and the U.S.—and there will be—I want to be sure they're real and they're based on fact, not on misunderstanding. If [Gorbachev] knows the heartbeat a little bit from talking, there's less apt to be misunderstanding."

An echo from 30 years ago: John Kennedy held up Barbara Tuchman's book *The Guns of August*, told visitors that its story of the start of World War I and the modern age of slaughter was a tale of failed communication. Still, he never called.

"The President has a propensity for physical communication," says Brent Scowcroft, his National Security Adviser. From a phone conversation, Bush gauges things like Gorbachev's conviction and assuredness, which are beyond the printed word.

The Bush-Gorbachev phone relationship is not yet on a George-and-Mike basis, but maybe next time, says Bush. Nor, despite the President's easy "just placed the call and his phone rings," is it quite that simple yet. When Bush gets the urge to call, he signals Scowcroft, who goes to Soviet Ambassador Yuri Dubinin, who checks out Gorbachev's availability, which so far has been afternoon Moscow time and morning in Washington. The Kremlin insists on placing the call to the Signal Corps in the White House. An interpreter and a notetaker listen in on extensions in the Situation Room in the White House basement, and Bush pens personal notes on the talk.

There were no jokes, no patter in the three long-distance hookups. "It's more serious, but very open, agreeable," says Bush. And private. "Part of the reason for phone calls is that you build a relationship that is confidential, where you can speak freely [and] frankly discuss differences," he says.

Bush assesses the message and the emotion of the moment with aides. The notetaker rushes through a memo. The President's secretary, Patty Presock, copies Bush's own hand scratchings, and all of it is consigned to dark, barricaded cabinets, silent records of the next best thing to a face-to-face conversation. ■

Arms Talks: Fresh Twist

Kremlin's Complaints And U. S. Challenges

By MICHAEL R. GORDON

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, April 8 — The Bush Administration's latest initiative on strategic arms poses difficult military planning and spending questions for Moscow as well as Washington.

The Administration secretly proposed a ban last month on mobile land-based missiles with multiple warheads. The American proposal was meant as a first step toward the eventual elimination of all land-based missiles with more than one warhead.

News Analysis

The American initiative was hampered out after considerable debate within the Administration, and President Mikhail S. Gorbachev's complaint that the proposal excludes sea-based missiles is likely to lead the Administration into further discussions over what strategic forces are necessary.

The Vision and the Budget

Land-based multiple-warhead missiles represent an important component of each side's nuclear arsenal, and some experts say there is a tension between Mr. Bush's strategic vision and budgetary realities in both the Soviet Union and the United States.

Eliminating multiple-warhead missiles on land would reduce each side's offensive ability to launch a pre-emptive strike. Because each multiple-warhead missile is capable of destroying several enemy targets at one time, this group is considered to be the most dangerous nuclear weapon. And the weapons themselves represent attractive targets.

But Mr. Bush's vision would entail a costly restructuring of the Soviet and American arsenal of long-range nuclear missiles. Simply put, it is much cheaper to place several warheads on top of a missile than to build a separate missile for each warhead.

And much of the debate in Moscow as well as Washington is likely to center on the questions of whether the potential arms control gains are worth the expense and whether the costs are manageable.

Source of Instability

For proponents, such as the national security adviser, Brent Scowcroft, a ban on land-based missiles with multiple warheads would remove a source of instability in the strategic balance that has haunted the superpowers since the United States developed the Multiple Independently Target Re-entry Vehicle, or MIRV, 20 years ago.

If each side had only a force of single-warhead missiles, it would have no incentive to launch a pre-emptive strike, proponents say. Each side would have to fire at least one missile to knock out a target on the other side.

A ban on multiple-warhead missiles based on land could become even more important if Washington and Moscow eventually negotiate deep cuts in strategic arms that go far beyond those reductions provided for by the strategic arms agreement that proponents hope will be signed this year.

"If you look 15 or 20 years into the future and lower the number of strategic weapons you want to have, you don't want to have the smaller number bunched up on a few delivery vehicles," one official said. "It is better to have them distributed more widely so that there are more survivable."

The Sam Nunn Factor

More immediately, Mr. Bush's proposals enable the Administration to fend off Congressional criticism that it has missed an opportunity to strike a new strategic bargain with the Russians.

Senator Sam Nunn, the Georgia Democrat who heads the Armed Services Committee, and other influential members of Congress have urged the Administration to propose a ban on mobile land-based missiles with multiple warheads.

There has been strong resistance in Congress to paying for the Pentagon's plan to deploy two types of mobile land-based missiles — rail-based MX missiles and the costly new single-warhead Midgetman missiles. But that Congressional opposition can be overcome if the Russians rebuff the Administration's proposed ban on mobile multiple-warhead missiles, some Administration officials calculate.

Still, skeptics say that there are two main problems with Mr. Bush's wide-ranging proposal for a ban on land-based missiles with multiple warheads: its negotiability with the Russians and its potential expense.

What About Sea Weapons?

Moscow, which has placed most of its ballistic-missile warheads on such weapons, has already objected that Mr. Bush's plan is one-sided. In his letter to President Bush, Mr. Gorbachev complained that the proposal excluded sea-based ballistic missiles, which carry the majority of American ballistic-missile warheads.

The Washington Post

The New York Times **A7**

The Washington Times

The Wall Street Journal

The Christian Science Monitor

New York Daily News

USA Today

The Chicago Tribune

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And with a relaxation of tensions between Moscow and Washington, Administration officials say, it may be difficult for the Bush Administration to persuade Congress that the United States needs to undertake a costly long-term program to restructure its arsenals by building hundreds of single-warhead Midgetman missiles, as well as other more survivable weapons, such as small submarines.

Public concern over the Soviet nuclear threat has declined along with the American military budget. And the 1990's does not appear to be a decade marked by cold war fears of pre-emptive nuclear strikes.

To pursue his strategic vision, Mr. Bush would have to convince Congress that his nuclear weapons program serves the larger goal of ushering in a new era of strategic stability, a senior official said. That might require as much persuasive skill at home as with the Russians.

A policy torpedoed by China's missiles

President Bush excused one of Brent Scowcroft's secret visits to China by arguing that the national security adviser had won Beijing's promise not to sell missiles to buyers in the Middle East.

Apparently even that flimsy justification for the Scowcroft trips — which took place after Mr. Bush publicly had banned high-level contacts with China in response to the Tiananmen Square massacre — no longer holds water.

Western diplomats say that China is about to ship short-range surface-to-surface missiles and surface-to-air missile launchers to the Middle East — possibly to Iran. The Chinese Foreign Ministry dismissed the purported missile shipment as rumor, but the evidence is credible. Washington has asked for additional assurances against missile sales, but Beijing will not comply.

The U.S. policy toward China is in a shambles. In the face of public and congressional opposition, the president worked hard to normalize relations with Beijing after the government's violent repression of the pro-democracy movement last year. The president argued that China should not

be isolated or treated as a pariah, that only through normal contact would China eventually respect human rights and perhaps change its rigid system.

But Mr. Bush's blandishments have not worked, as even he ruefully admitted recently. The regime lifted martial law in the capital in name only, and it still persecutes anyone it suspects of dissent. The authorities, hearing rumors of peaceful demonstrations, recently rushed more troops and police to the center of Beijing, cleared Tiananmen Square and tore down the few opposition posters that students have put up.

When the administration admitted to the Scowcroft missions after Secretary of State James A. Baker III untruthfully denied they had taken place, Mr. Bush sought to justify them. One benefit, he said, was Beijing's promise not to sell missiles in the Middle East.

If the reports about the missile shipment are true, China's aging hardliners will have played Mr. Scowcroft and Mr. Bush for fools. China also will have contributed to greater instability in the Middle East.

DEFENSE FOCUS/DAVID C. MORRISON

Coining what promises to be the dominant defense cliché of 1990, House Armed Services Committee chairman Les Aspin, D-Wis., has said that the Pentagon budget "is in free-fall." That is also a pretty good description of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) as it lurches past the seventh anniversary of President Reagan's startling March 1983 "Star Wars" speech.

"The President and I are bullish about SDI; we are convinced that the program is on track," Defense Secretary Dick Cheney told an American Defense Preparedness Association SDI symposium last month. But "we stand at a crossroads," Cheney warned. "We want to move forward; our critics want to cut back. The issue between us is almost entirely political."

Not exactly. Fiscal, strategic and technical controversies continue to beset SDI. Even inside the executive branch, the political indicators do not bode well for the program. This is not the Reagan Administration, after all, in which paying homage to the commander in chief's vision of rendering nuclear weapons "impotent and obsolete" was something of an oath of ideological fealty. Today, Cheney and Vice President Dan Quayle are true believers, but the Bush crowd generally evinces less than Reaganesque enthusiasm for SDI. Brent Scowcroft was an outspoken "Star Wars" skeptic before becoming Bush's national security adviser, and Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) chairman Army Gen. Colin L. Powell is viewed as lukewarm at best on SDI. More ominously for the Star Warriors at the Pentagon's SDI Organization (SDIO), antimissile money must be sliced from a shrinking Pentagon pie from which the military services are also vying to extract their plums. (See *NJ*, 3/31/90, p. 809.)

SDI is a program that "people are clearly giving up on," a House Armed Services aide said in an interview. "It just doesn't get mentioned [in Defense Department testimony]. I also haven't seen the contractor community hysterical about this. And the JCS, or the services, they just give a genuflection to it. It's not mentioned in plans. It's not taken seriously anymore. I attribute this to them looking at their budget figures and saying, 'This thing has to go.'"

This fall from programmatic grace is reflected in SDI's annual allowance from Capitol Hill. Last year, for the first time, Congress awarded the program less than it had won the year before—\$3.6 billion in fiscal 1990, down from \$3.7 billion in 1989. Early last year, SDIO planned to request \$6.7 billion for fiscal 1991; this January, it asked for only \$4.5 billion. Fiscal hand-cappers, moreover, predict that the final number for 1991 could well get knocked down to \$3 billion or so. In nominal (before-inflation) terms, that is about where the SDI budget stood back in 1986; in real dollar terms, that is not much more than what antimissile research was getting before Reagan's speech.

Another sign of SDI's mounting irrelevance was the Soviet Union's announcement last September that it would "delink" limits on SDI from any agreement on cutting strategic arms. Scowcroft has acknowledged that a factor in this new Soviet thinking may have been the more modest goals now set for SDI. The program's target, Bush declared in National Security Directive 14 signed last June, is to develop "options for strengthening deterrence and stability." That is a more technically feasible goal than making nuclear weapons "impotent and obsolete." It is also a far less politically compelling one. As former arms negotiator Bruce W. MacDonald, now an aide to Sen. Dale Bumpers, D-Ark., noted in *Arms Control Today* last September, NSD 14 throws SDI "in the midst of a budgetary jungle competing for scarce program resources against a host of other programs with the same objective."

Similarly, as U.S.-Soviet relations warm up, the rationale for SDI is shifting, from fending off a massive Soviet nuclear attack toward defending against missiles that may be deployed by hostile smaller nations. Given the unlikelihood that terrorists determined to unleash nuclear or nerve gas attacks on the United States would or could do so with costly long-range ballistic missiles, however, that is a mission of dubious urgency.

It is also a mission that, arguably, can be approached by other means. In January, a group of international luminaries urged that the dangers of accidental launch and terrorist attack be addressed not with missile defenses but with bolstered technical controls over

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siderations make the use of gelled propellants attractive.

All these developments were drawn from a propulsion technology base generated in the '60s. SDI has provided the incentive and resources for its application to real-world propulsion systems. Tactical weapon systems will be revolutionized as the miniaturized SDI sensor, autopilot,

and propulsion technologies are applied to ground- and aircraft-based systems. Possible applications include the addition of divert propulsion to missiles and aircraft for enhanced maneuverability and the use of maneuvering propulsion on submunitions, air-to-ground and air-to-air weapons, and electromagnetic gun and cannon-launched projectiles. ■

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