

GORBOMANIA: THE SEQUEL

VIRGINIA I. POSTREL

George Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev are having a state dinner, perhaps at their first official summit. Ceremonial toasts are offered. Gorby raises a glass to prosperity and world peace. It's George's turn. Remembering an old line from his vice presidential days, he stands and proposes his toast. "We love your adherence to democratic principles," he tells the Soviet leader. After all, it worked with Marcos...

Well, it probably wouldn't happen exactly that way. But it could. In George Bush's Washington, there's a disturbing tendency to confuse Soviet reform with democracy, reformers with democrats. (The same was true for China not too long ago.) Rooting for Gorbachev is even more popular than denouncing drugs or deficits. No praise is too extravagant—and no criticism is allowed.

This is an unfortunate, and potentially dangerous, attitude. Gorbachev's reforms have certainly released powerful forces for freedom and independence throughout Eastern Europe. But in our euphoria at the sight of Berliners freely climbing back and forth over the Wall, in our excitement at elections in Hungary and Poland, in our joy at the possibility that not only the Cold War but the tyranny at its root may at last be coming to an end, it is important that we consider just what we'd like to see happen in Eastern Europe—and to remember whose side we're on.

As Bush gets acquainted with Gorbachev, it would be nice to think that the president understands that American interests do not inevitably and always lie with the status quo. But his near-unequivocal support for Chinese officials against their people does not inspire confidence that he will challenge, even privately and politely, anything Gor-

bachev does to consolidate power.

Consider the administration's response to Gorbachev's recent campaign against the press. Attorney General Dick Thornburgh was visiting the Soviet Union when Gorbachev fired the conservative editor of *Pravda* and pressured the liberal editor of *Argumenti i Fakty* to quit. (The guy had had the audacity to publish a survey ranking Andrei Sakharov the most popular member of Parliament—and omitting Gorby from the top 10.)

Thornburgh, no doubt expressing his own annoyance with free press, said that the administration "could sympathize with" Gorbachev's frustration "with regard to some of the reporting on restructuring." It's bad enough to send the nation's top lawman on a junket to consult with the KGB and various other organs of state security. But if he can't uphold American values, couldn't he at least keep his mouth shut?

Our policy toward the Soviet Union, both in rhetoric and action, ought to flow from a few basic goals, facts, and values. First of all, we must keep in mind that it is Gorbachev's reforms, not Gorbachev himself, that merit support. Our interests, strategic and moral, lie not with the Soviet leadership but with those who want to be independent of that leadership.

Nor are the reforms irreversible. True, Soviet Marxism has lost its luster as a credo. But, unlike the citizens of Mao's China, East Bloc residents have been cynics for decades. That communism doesn't work is no big surprise to them.

And if the ideology doesn't work, the tanks still do—and they are still in place in large numbers. Soviet officers still control the military forces of the Warsaw Pact, stationed throughout even the liberalizing countries. Leaving the War-

saw Pact is not an option; neither is letting, say, Poles control the Pact forces in their country.

That East Germany has suddenly liberalized is wonderful. That it happened after Gorbachev had a little chat with Egon Krenz should make it clear who still runs Eastern Europe. Krenz "was deeply impressed," said a Soviet "journalist" about the meeting. I'll bet he was.

All of which leads to a concrete, though probably long-term goal: splitting the nations of Eastern and Central Europe (including the Baltic states) from the Soviet empire to form a neutral community at the heart of Europe. At present, Soviet policy is that Warsaw Pact nations can do what they want internally as long as they don't try to leave the Pact. And as long as they don't—and can't—leave the Pact, "what they want" will pretty much be determined in Moscow.

Neutral countries, while they couldn't go around deliberately antagonizing the Soviets, would be far freer to determine their own internal destinies. A neutral band around the Soviet Union would also significantly reduce the likelihood of Soviet expansionism and, as a result, of war between the superpowers.

Of course, the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe can't just up and declare themselves neutral. Neutrality will come about only if the United States and the Soviet Union can agree to guarantee it, as they guarantee the neutrality of Austria. And the status of Germany—East, West, or reunified—will remain problematic for some time.

Right now, however, U.S. policymakers can take steps toward these longer-term goals. On the rhetorical front, administration officials should make it clear that the United States believes that the

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nations of Europe, including Central and Eastern Europe, ought to be free and independent states. Instead of constantly reiterating how the United States believes in freedom but abhors violence and supports order, George Bush, Jim Baker, and pals ought to unequivocally endorse democracy. Violence is not, of course, desirable; but it is far less likely to come from those working toward liberty than from those who would suppress them (and who, after all, have the guns, tanks, and soldiers).

Second, we should support freedom and democracy while remembering that independence is not freedom, any more than elections are democracy. As countless Third World dictatorships have proved, throwing off a colonial yoke without establishing protections for individuals hardly amounts to freedom. And electing officials who exercise near-absolute power over political and economic life merely creates a milder form of dictatorship.

The United States should make sure it weighs *in for* freedom, not merely *against* communism—or against only pre-Gor-

bachev communism. (As Gorbachev's skillful manipulation of Russian nationalists, such as the fascistic Pamyat, demonstrates, groups that do not respect individual liberties are natural allies not for pro-freedom change but for existing tyrannies.)

The United States's own security would certainly be boosted by a smaller Soviet Union surrounded by neutral states. So it would not be out of place for the U.S. government, as well as for private groups, to provide financial assistance and advice on institution-building to those groups that are working to free their countries. We should not, however, try to prop up socialist economies by pumping money into the planners' projects, even those projects deemed "reformist." Subsidizing socialism will only postpone true reform.

These are exhilarating times. History seems to be moving in the direction of liberty. But there are no historical inevitabilities. If we abandon our principles, fail to set firm goals, or place excessive faith in the goodwill and permanence of Mikhail Gorbachev, we cannot hope to see freedom prevail. ■

belongings before their homes were bulldozed. Too risky, officials said. They never considered allowing the people at risk to make that judgment for themselves.

Such official arrogance was also apparent following Hurricane Hugo. After the storm passed through the Charleston area, Mayor Carmen Bunch of the Isle of Palms declared martial law and barred residents from returning to the barrier island to secure their property. In the meantime, heavy rain poured through torn roofs, causing further damage to homes and possessions.

In Charleston, one of Mayor Joseph Riley's first responses to the devastation caused by the hurricane was to impose price controls. The move followed reports that storekeepers had jacked up prices for goods that were in great demand, selling blocks of ice for \$100 or more and generators for thousands of dollars. As morally reprehensible as such gouging might be, the city did not do the people of Charleston a favor by outlawing it, thereby eliminating the incentive for outside suppliers to bring in equipment and provisions. Had the city allowed the market to work, competitors from nearby towns would have been attracted by the potential for profit, expanding the supply of sought-after goods and bringing prices down.

The resilience of the market was demonstrated by the performance of northern California's Safeway stores, which continued supplying essential goods following the earthquake. The chain arranged emergency shipments of water, canned food, batteries, and other necessities, while employees immediately began cleaning up the stores and repairing the damage. By 5 P.M. the next day, most of the 140 outlets affected by the quake were open. In addition to supplying its own stores, Safeway distributed food to private relief agencies.

By their nature, organizations such as the American Red Cross and the Salvation Army are far better equipped to respond quickly and effectively to a disaster than is a lumbering agency such as FEMA. After Hurricane Hugo, it took FEMA a week to set up an office; local charitable groups pitched in right away.

DISASTROUS RELIEF

JACOB SULLUM

There's nothing like a good disaster to bring glee to the heart of a statist. Just as there are no atheists in foxholes, there are no skeptics of big government in the wake of an earthquake or hurricane. They all fall to their knees before the Federal Emergency Management Agency and shout, "I believe!"

Then again, maybe not. Sorting through the rubble of Hurricane Hugo and the northern California earthquake, we find more evidence of effective private action than of government omnipotence. Too often, in fact, government stood in the way of rescue and recovery, frustrating private efforts and violating the rights of property owners.

The contrast between private and

government action was nowhere more glaring than at the scene of the Nimitz Freeway collapse in Oakland. Immediately after the earthquake, passers-by and neighborhood residents spontaneously set to work, using forklifts and ladders to rescue at least 50 motorists within the first half hour. Firefighters and police did not arrive for 90 minutes, but once the authorities took charge, they cleared the area and set up barricades to keep out all those pesky intruders who had dared to save people's lives without permission.

In San Francisco, the authorities prevented many people from entering their damaged homes and businesses after the earthquake. In some cases, residents were not even allowed to recover a few