

## Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

### Gorbachov's 'gift' was no surprise

Gorbachov's touted "Christmas gift" announcement of a unilateral cut should have come as a surprise to no one. The official White House record shows that in press briefings from Nov. 15, when the Reagan-Gorbachov summit meeting was first announced, onward, this *EIR* reporter repeatedly sounded the alarm about the impact of a Soviet offer to reduce conventional arms.

The height of irony came when Vice President George Bush answered my question at a Dec. 6 press conference, just hours before the summit, by saying that the idea of such a Soviet ploy was "so hypothetical that I see no likelihood of that happening whatsoever."

That was the afternoon prior to the summit. Cable News Network was carrying the President-elect's press conference live, and cut away from it only moments later to announce the first rumors that Gorbachov was planning a conventional arms cut, using almost the exact language I had used in my question.

CNN also said at the time that Jack Matlock, the U.S. ambassador to Moscow, said the rumor "came as a total surprise to him."

Here are some samples from the record:

### Nov. 22: Bush says 'I would wait'

Benton: "Mr. Vice President, there's a lot of speculation, given the pressure on you to reduce the federal deficit, that Secretary Gorbachov will be coming to the United States with the

idea in mind that he can make you an offer that you can't refuse. That is, a conventional force reduction proposal that will allow you to cut the defense budget, thereby to lower the deficit without having to raise taxes. What would your reaction be if Gorbachov made a proposal of that kind?"

Bush: "My reaction would be that I will not accept or reject any proposals until I become President of the United States. . ."

### Nov. 30: Fitzwater says 'it won't happen'

Benton: "The concern was expressed that Gorbachov could gain a significant advantage in shaping public opinion in Western Europe if he made a proposal for even an asymmetrical reduction of tanks or troops in Europe. If the West was not prepared to address the proposal immediately, if we waited until next March to make a counterproposal, in the meantime Gorbachov's proposal would simply be sitting there on the table gaining greater and greater support from the Europeans when in fact this proposal would not represent an actual parity. How are you going to counter that obvious advantage that Gorbachov would gain?"

Fitzwater: ". . .The purposes of the meeting, the length of the meeting, the participants, the setting and all tend to dictate that we won't have the kind of result you're suggesting. . . ."

### Dec. 2: Powell says 'no specific proposals'

Benton: "It has been speculated that if he [Gorbachov] were to make a new proposal, either in his U.N. speech or in his meeting with the President, that it would regard even an asymmetrical reduction of conventional forces in

Europe. The question is how much asymmetry would have to be overcome to have a proposal represent parity, or to be equitable, from our point of view?"

Powell: "A lot of asymmetry would have to be overcome, and I speak not only from a Washington perspective, but having been a corps commander and looking at that asymmetry on a day-to-day basis. . ."

(Another reporter): "Do you expect a surprise from Gorbachov?"

Powell: "No, I don't, I really don't."

### Dec. 6: Fitzwater says 'I can't see'

Benton: "What's the administration's reaction to the concern that if Gorbachov was to make a proposal for a troop withdrawal in Europe tomorrow, Congress would leap at the opportunity to begin reacting to that proposal, preempting negotiations?"

Fitzwater: "I can't see long distance."

### Dec. 6: Bush sees 'no likelihood whatsoever'

Benton: "Mr. Bush, you may be prudent, but if Gorbachov makes a Christmas surprise tomorrow to propose some kind of grandiose, but self-serving, conventional arms reduction, for example, Congress may not be prudent. The public opinion may not be prudent and in fact, may try to preempt an orderly negotiating process by even beginning in January to discuss troop reductions in response to that proposal. What would you do to prevent that kind of stampede?"

Bush: ". . .I see no likelihood of that. That is so hypothetical that I see no likelihood of that happening whatsoever."