

Civil war danger in former Soviet Union

by William Jones

A number of illusions were shattered for many people on Capitol Hill by the time Brig. Gen. Paul Albert Scherer (ret.) concluded a week-long visit to Washington. Scherer, the former head of the West German Military Intelligence and Counterintelligence Service (MAD), briefed numerous congressmen, senators, committee staffers, and military analysts on the current situation in the former Soviet republics, concluding his visit with a packed press conference at the National Press Club on April 30.

Washington has been locked in a debate over whether or not to help the republics, and, among those who want to provide aid, the majority are convinced that it must be monitored and distributed through the International Monetary Fund (IMF). General Scherer was critical of both these views.

General Scherer stressed that the West was in a race against time to integrate the former Soviet republics into the western political and economic spheres. At his press conference in Washington, Scherer expressed it in the following words: "We are presently at a disadvantage with regard to the strategic factor of time, since we wasted six years with Gorbachov, and now have lost a further nine months with Yeltsin." Scherer also noted that the western insistence on the IMF "shock therapy" of Harvard's Jeffrey Sachs was a major blunder.

Critical of U.S. policy

In spite of what many people in the West believe, the former ruling *nomenklatura* (Soviet state bureaucracy) "is only apparently dead," Scherer said. It represents around 20 million people; combined with the 2 million soldiers and the 12 million or so members of the military-industrial complex, it provides the major countervailing force to the "reformers," who in Scherer's estimate, comprise somewhat less than 30% of the population. Scherer predicted that Yeltsin would be out of power before the end of the year.

Scherer also described the growing disillusionment in Europe over U.S. foreign policy, sparked initially by the U.S. attempts to bolster the hated Serbian regime (see p. 41). "Baker went to Belgrade and said that Yugoslavia must remain united," said Scherer. "That was a signal to the 30 Serbian generals in charge to move for opening up two corridors, through Croatia and through Bosnia, in order to establish a Serbian presence on the coast." This was a plan, Scherer confirmed, which had been developed in Moscow and was presented to the Serbian generals

by Gen. Dmitri Yazov, who secretly visited Belgrade several times. (Yazov, the former chief of staff of the Soviet Armed Forces, is now in prison in Russia for his part in the August 1991 coup.) Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic was appointed by these generals, said Scherer.

Scherer touched upon some very sensitive points for his U.S. listeners as he warned, "No circus in Libya!" He pointed out that any military action by the United States against Libya would set off such a reaction that it could bring down the pro-western regimes in all of North Africa, particularly in Egypt and in Morocco. "The North African coast is just opposite the 'soft underbelly' of NATO," said Scherer. "If fundamentalist regimes take over there, how would the Sixth Fleet be able to function?"

Support the 'westernizers'

When asked how the West should react in the face of the growing danger of civil war (or wars) in the former Soviet Union, Scherer continually stressed the need to support the "westernizers" in each of the republics. In the very sensitive southern Muslim belt of the Soviet Union, Scherer emphasized the important role of Turkey, describing the area as an ideological battlefield between the western-oriented Turks and the anti-western Iranians, who were fomenting civil unrest in the area. "Word has gone out from Iran to Tadjikistan that they should reconquer the holy cities of Samarkand and Bukhara in Uzbekistan," said Scherer. This would pit the 4.5 million Tadjiks, predominantly Shiite and Persian-speaking, against the 20 million Uzbeks, predominantly Sunni and Turkic-speaking. This would erupt into a bloody civil war in the region. Scherer felt that there would be more than one civil war in the now-dismantled Soviet Union, in this "process of purgation" by peoples enslaved by the communist regime for 74 years.

With regard to the question, which has been given much attention on Capitol Hill, of the possible emigration of thousands of Russian scientists, Scherer offered no easy solution. To try to bring them to the West, he considered rather utopian. "You are talking about a scientific and technical cadre of about 100,000 people, about 3,000 of whom were initiated into the secrets of nuclear weapons." His greatest fear was that many of these scientists would emigrate to China, where native Chinese diligence, combined with Russian know-how, could transform that nation into a superpower by the year 2010.

The solution was not, however, simply giving more aid to the republics (especially not "aid" monitored by the IMF) but rather something more programmatically oriented: 1) "help for self-help," aid which was aimed at building up their own capabilities, including a variety of joint ventures and technical advice to deal with the growing hunger and poverty; 2) infrastructure programs; and 3) a program of management training. Continued support for the shock therapy of the IMF would mean further loss in the West's "race against time," and might just trigger the threatening civil wars.