

Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

Think tankers mouth Soviet strategic line

Four think tank contributors to the just-released compilation of essays, published under the title, *Containing the Soviet Union* (Washington: Pergamon-Brassey, 1987), appeared at the National Press Club to plug their book Aug. 3. All contradicted basic components of U.S. strategic policy as stated publicly by Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger.

When this reporter confronted the panel on this matter, they dug themselves deeper into their implausible and outrageous misconceptions, which reflect the current "New Yalta" thinking of the Eastern Liberal Establishment.

A clinical exposition of relevant symptoms of this "New Yalta" policy emerged from these think tankers' reactions to Weinberger's view of the Soviets in three specific areas:

1) **Convergence of strategic interests between the U.S. and Soviets.** Jerry F. Hough, a "Soviet expert" from Duke University and the Brookings Institution, asserted that the U.S. and Soviets have a common interest in: a) ganging up on "right-wing movements wherever they crop up," such as in Iran—he said the Soviets should be providing the minesweepers in a joint deployment with the U.S. to keep the shipping lanes open in the Persian Gulf; and b) containing Japan (!), which, Hough asserted, is a greater threat to the United States than the Soviets, because they are "already

winning World War III" by virtue of their economic growth.

Hough argued that Gorbachov "represents a new generation of Soviets, who no longer view communism as a mystical, messianic movement adhering to belligerent economic and cultural isolationism." On the contrary, Gorbachov, like others in his generation, "yearns for Western values," such that Soviet "isolation" is being replaced by a process of "normalization."

This view is in direct contrast with the perception of Weinberger, who wrote a "Letter to the Editor" published in the July 22 *New York Times* attacking the same U.S.-Soviet "convergence" idea expressed by George Ball in a June 19 *Times* commentary.

Weinberger said, "To believe we can now join the Russians in some great-power game to decide the fate of nations disregards the history of at least the last 70 years." He noted that convergence of interests among nations depends upon "shared fundamental values," and, thus "balance of power politics . . . cannot be reconstructed because of the birth of the very thing Mr. Ball ignores—ideological politics."

2) **Soviet preoccupation with gains in the Third World.** Donald S. Zagoria, a fellow at the Harriman Institute for Advanced Study of the Soviet Union at Columbia University, asserted that Gorbachov is more interested in chipping away at the Third World than in a direct military confrontation with the U.S. or a weakening of the NATO alliance.

This view was challenged directly by Weinberger during his testimony before the congressional Iran/Contra hearings July 31, when he asserted that Soviet operations in Central America "have as their goal the diversion of U.S. troops and military concentration away from the defense of Western

Europe," and thus are basically a diversion operation to weaken NATO.

When confronted with Weinberger's view, Hough jumped up and said, "Nonsense. The Soviets do not have a goal of breaking up NATO. NATO was, in fact, set up as a mechanism to stop conflicts among the allies, not to defend against threatened Soviet aggression."

3) **Soviet flexibility on SDI.** In speaking on "containing" Soviet strategic objectives, the four speakers failed to mention once what the Soviets, themselves, define as their primary concern in strategic arms control negotiations with the United States—containing research into ballistic missile defense.

Asked why they ignored this issue altogether, Zagoria insisted that the Soviets would eventually de-link the containment of U.S. SDI research from their offer for a 50% reduction in long-range missiles. He used recent Soviet so-called concessions in the Geneva talks on INF as evidence. He said the Soviets would de-link the issues because it would have the effect of hurting funding for the SDI in the United States by making it seem less vital.

Again, this argument contrasts sharply with Weinberger's perspective, which is based on evidence of at least 18 years of Soviet research on application of lasers to ballistic missile defense, the recent Soviet experiment of tracking a Soviet missile launch with a laser directed from the Soviet space station, and the Soviets' breakout from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty by the completion of a ring of phased-array radars around Soviet territory.

The relentless Soviet effort to contain the U.S. SDI can only be seen as an attempt to retain their "first strike" nuclear warfighting capability, as described in *Soviet Military Power 1987* put out by the Pentagon this spring.