

Ignoring the danger in Eastern Europe

By J. Michael Waller

Today in Detroit, President Clinton will tell ethnic voters of Central and Eastern European heritage what they want to hear: How he has helped secure freedom's gains among the former captive nations. The ugly reality is different.

In a Moscow television address two years ago, Mr. Clinton approvingly told Russian revanchists what they wanted to hear: "I think there will be times when you will be involved, and you will more likely be involved in some of these areas near you, just like the United States has been involved in the last several years in Panama and Grenada near our area."

That telling statement — a veritable green light for aggression — was made four days after Mr. Clinton formally announced in Prague that extension of NATO security guarantees to former Soviet-occupied nations would be put on hold. The president's announcement unveiled the "Partnership for Peace," a half-measure that specifically denied the protections many countries had been seeking. Undercutting the momentum that had built through 1993 to expand the alliance while Moscow was more of a partner with the West, Mr. Clinton needlessly gave the former Red Army a formal voice in NATO-related security matters.

Russian revanchists were not appeased. In late 1994, President Boris Yeltsin and his so-called Party of War sent troops into Chechnya. Vice President Al Gore, then in Moscow, pooh-poohed the carnage as an "internal affair." Instead of leveraging an early end to the war, the Clinton administration pressured the International Monetary Fund to approve \$17 billion in cash transfers to the Russian Central Bank while the war progressed.

Chechnya reverberated to Poland and the Baltic states. In May 1995, Russian military leaders stated Moscow would not comply with the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty because new security concerns required the massing of forces in the volatile Caucasus region. During a four-hour meeting with Mr. Yeltsin, Mr. Clinton failed to register any objections to Chech-

nya or to the treaty violations. Instead, he went along with revanchists' insistence on flouting CFE further by massing more troops, armor, tanks and artillery near the Baltic states and Poland. Asked about it by reporters upon emerging from the Kremlin, Mr. Clinton announced, "We're supporting the Russian position there."

And how. The bellicosity of the

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"Russian position" intensified. Officials openly talked of attacking Estonia. President Yeltsin warned that if NATO included new members, "the flame of war could burst out across the whole of Europe." Atomic Energy Minister Viktor Mikhailov made a drunken threat to rain nuclear terror on Poland.

In June 1996, after Defense Minister Pavel Grachev revealed plans to increase the number of armored combat vehicles (ACVs) on Latvia's border from 400 to 600, the presidents of Estonia and Latvia, along with their (Communist) Lithuanian colleague, flew to Washington to sound the alarm. "We only have 15 ACVs in all of Latvia," said the Latvian ambassador. "It is clearly incomprehensible to us why Russia needs 600."

The Clinton administration, fearful of upsetting Moscow, tried unsuccessfully to discourage the Balts from visiting. Some senators began to awaken to what was happening, and cautioned that the Senate would not endorse the administration's Kremlin-dictated revisions. Five weeks ago, in a last-ditch effort before Congress adjourned, the administration drew up a one-sentence amendment to grant the president exclusive power to re-negotiate CFE and remove the Senate from the process. With the help of two senators, the White House hoped to sneak the amendment into a late-night continuing resolution before adjournment. The attempt failed when the plot was exposed.

To make matters worse, the administration stood idly by as the former KGB, then led by Yevgeny Primakov, orchestrated covert campaigns to bankroll the resurgence of the re-named Communist parties in the Baltic states, Bulgaria, Poland and other countries.

The U.S. did nothing to help Central and East European political leaders to screen Communists and KGB agents from their governments. In country after country, former Communists returned to power. The Clinton administration called each transition a "victory for democracy."

Top U.S. officials personally directed aid to hard-line Communists at the expense of reformers. David H. Swartz, who served as the United States' first ambassador to Belarus, alleges that two Clinton NSC officials, Nicholas Burns and Toby Gati, instructed that millions of dollars' worth of aid be shipped to the Communists without informing the American embassy.

Then-chief of state Stanislaw Shushkevich, the highest-ranking reformer in Belarus, asked Ambassador Swartz, "If the United States wants to foster reform here, why do you keep on supporting the Communists?" The American envoy could only respond, "Good question." After realizing that top administration officials were ignoring his cables, Mr. Swartz resigned in protest in January, 1994, ending his 28-year diplomatic career. Mr. Burns and Ms. Gati were promoted: Mr. Burns to State Department spokesman, and Ms. Gati to assistant secretary of state for intelligence and research.

Prior to leaving office in December 1995, Polish President Lech Walesa exposed Prime Minister Jozef Oleksy, an old Communist hack turned "social democrat," as a Russian spy. Mr. Walesa's successor Aleksander Kwasniewski, an Oleksy ally, sacked the police leaders who unmasked Mr. Oleksy and quashed the investigation. In a subsequent visit to Washington, Mr. Walesa joined GOP leaders as they introduced a bill to speed up expansion of NATO. Not to be outdone, the White House cobbled a quick visit by Mr. Kwasniewski. Mr. Walesa thanked congressional Republicans. Mr. Kwasniewski thanked Mr. Clinton.

The president's record is clear. He went out of his way to deny NATO security guarantees to countries formerly under Soviet occupation. Then he bent over backwards to appease Russian hard-liners' demands to mass forces along the security vacuum. He failed to offer any support to regional reformers' attempts to screen Communists and KGB agents from their governments. And he cheered Communist electoral gains as victories for democracy.

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