

The Political Forum

*A review of social and political trends and events
impacting the world's financial markets*

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Friday, August 23, 2002

A REPRINT FROM A PIECE PUBLISHED APRIL 25, 1990

One Thing Gorby Can Count On In Lithuania, Is A Sympathetic Bush

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As Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev tightens the screws on Lithuania and the world watches, one question eclipses others, so far as the financial markets are concerned. What will the United States do if things really get nasty over there? Or, to put it another way, will the cold war heat up again, proposed military spending cuts evaporate, and the so-called "strides" we've made toward "world peace" dissipate?

The answer is that relations between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. will be just fine, no matter what Gorbachev does. Bush and the Congress will talk tough for a while, and certain trade, investment, tax and other kinds of formal discussions with the Soviets will slow down. But, serious arms negotiations will continue apace, as will personal summitry between Gorbachev and Bush. And the perception of impending world peace, while tarnished somewhat, will still glow brightly on the front pages of the world press.

In the final analysis, George Bush, not Congress, will set the tone for the U.S. reaction to the Soviet squeeze play in Lithuania. And Bush will do everything he can within the law to patch things up with Gorbachev as quickly as possible. This will all be done under the rubric that on-going disarmament talks and commercial agreements are simply too important to abandon over such a small thing as Soviet brutality against a group of obstreperous citizens who, after all, are the real instigators of the trouble, out of some sort of selfish desire for freedom.

How do I know this? Well, of course, I don't know it for certain. But, one can draw some pretty strong conclusions about the tolerance that President Bush and his Secretary of State Jim Baker have for intimidation and murder on the part of foreign governments from their insistence on cozying up to China following Tiananmen Square and, probably more importantly, from their recent dealings with Iraq.

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I am aware that one can put too fine a point on such an observation. But, it is reasonable to assume that if Iraqi President Saddam Hussein does not turn the stomach of Bush and Baker, and he apparently does not, it is hard to imagine that anything Gorbachev might do would offend them.

In fact, a look at U.S.-Iraqi relations not only perfectly illustrates the Bush-Baker "hear no evil, see no evil" approach to foreign policy, but also provides fascinating, if horrifying, insights into the current tilt of U.S. policy in the world's most explosive region, the Middle East. Consider the following.

According to a recent comprehensive report on human rights in Iraq, published by Middle East Watch, a "senior State Department official" describes the Iraqi government as "possibly the worst violator of human rights anywhere in the world today." The report amply documents this charge. In the interests of space, I will quote only a few passages.

In September and October 1985, some 300 Kurdish children and teenagers were reportedly arrested in Suleimanieh. The bodies of three children were reportedly found afterward on the outskirts of the city, bloodstained and bearing the marks of torture. Some of these children were transferred to a security prison in Baghdad, according to the testimony of a detainee released at the end of 1985, who described in these terms what he saw:

"Each hour, security men opened the door and chose 3 to 5 of the prisoners--children or men--and removed them for torture. Later, their tortured bodies were thrown back into the cell. They were often bleeding and carried obvious signs of whipping and electric shocks In January 1987, it was reported that 29 of these children had been executed and their bodies returned to their families, some with eyes gouged out and other marks of torture."

Relative to chemical warfare, Middle East Watch relates the following.

The testimony repeated itself with numbing regularity in over two hundred interviews conducted by U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee staffers Peter Galbraith and Christopher Van Hollen, Jr., in September 1988, with Kurdish refugees dispersed in five separate camps in southeastern Turkey.

Bechet Naif from Berkule village related the following.

At 6:00 a.m. on August 25, eight planes flew over our village. All eight dropped weapons When they dropped the bombs, a big sound did not come out--just a yellowish color and a kind of garlic smell. The people woke up, and some of them fainted. Those who poured water on themselves lived: those who could not reach the water died. I went into the river. Almost 50 women died. Some died who went to help their families. Seventy-five people died. My brother died

The son of Iskender Ahmad said the following.

Animals and children died. Blood came from their mouths and a yellow liquid from their mouths and noses. The noise did not sound like regular bombs. They would just drop and make a weak sound and then this cloud. Always expanding: a yellow cloud. Those who escaped managed to go to the water.

Ramazan Mohammed, 19, from Mangesh, near De hok, in northern Iraq said the following.

The first body I saw when I came down from the heights was completely black. I heard the cries of a few survivors which were incomprehensible . . . Most of the people there were sprawled around dead. There must have been many more than 3,000. They were all huddled together in family groups, and they had died like that . . . We spent the night in the mountains, and I didn't know how it passed, I have never, never been so scared in all my life . . . (The next day) I had binoculars and saw thousands of soldiers with gas masks and gloves entering the gorge. From my hiding place, I saw them dragging bodies into piles and then setting fire to them. I saw over a hundred fires.

According to Middle East Watch:

Many of the men were, by their own admission, Barzani Pesh Merga guerrillas. But the great majority of victims were unarmed civilians, including women, children and the elderly, because, according to the testimony of the refugees, Iraqi warplanes and helicopters for the most part did not drop their bombs on the Pesh Merga camps but on nearby villages.

Iraq, of course, denies these reports, but dismissed out of hand a 1988 U.N. request to allow a delegation into Northern Iraq to investigate. Middle East Watch says Iraqi Defense Minister Adnan Khairallah commented at the time that "the Kurds are Iraqis and it is an internal issue." Khairallah added that "I want to deal with certain segments of my population in the way I want."

"The way he wants" is, of course, to destroy the Kurdish culture and population base. Middle East Watch relates the following.

Estimates of the number of Kurdish towns and villages destroyed by the government vary widely, and the Iraqi government is not known to have issued an official figure. Iraqi opposition spokesmen say that at least 4,000 of approximately 5,000 Kurdish towns and villages--some 80 to 85 percent--have been destroyed since the Baath regime first instituted its program of forced relocation in the mid-1970s. The figure cited by U.S. State Department officials is much lower, approximately 1,200, but these officials are uncertain how it was arrived at or whether it was meant to be comprehensive. A noted expert on Kurdish issues estimates that approximately 75 percent of the villages and towns in the Kurdish area of Iraq have been destroyed and their inhabitants forcibly relocated.

As for the U.S. reaction to all of this, in September, 1988, Reagan's Secretary of State George Shultz launched a vigorous, public protest against Iraq. Middle East Watch says that some official U.S. sources noted that the "vigor" of Shultz's reaction "stemmed in large part from his

own personal revulsion over Iraq's use of poison gas." However, Middle East Watch says, "many in the State department felt that he had acted impulsively," and in the words of one official, they "proceeded to 'walk the Secretary back' to a more conciliatory position."

This new position led Shultz to approve a recommendation that the administration oppose congressionally mandated sanctions against Iraq and to accede to the urging of "his Middle East professionals" not to punish Iraq for what it had done, but rather to "try for 'deterrence' by holding out the threat of policy (not legislative) sanctions should Iraq use chemical weapons again."

Shultz's ire, though muted by his "Middle East professionals" was apparently the last truly discouraging word that issued forth from a U.S. administration. In the following year, the Bush crowd doubled the U.S. Commodity Credit Corporation's (CCC) credit-guarantee programs to allow Iraq to purchase U.S. agricultural products, raising credits to a level exceeding \$1 billion in 1989. In addition to these credit guarantees, the CCC program also included some interest-free loans and some direct sales at prices subsidized by the U.S. government.

Bush's State Department did manage to describe recent threats by Hussein to "let our fire eat half of Israel" as "inflammatory, irresponsible, and outrageous." Bush himself even entered the fray, urging Hussein to "forget about talk of using chemical and biological weapons" and to stop making "bad" statements.

This criticism by Bush, though perhaps forceful by his standards, was muted by a *Los Angeles Times* story a few days earlier reporting that the State Department has been trying to blunt attacks on Iraq. According to the article, a Pentagon official said that State, alone among U.S. agencies, opposed the sting operation which recently prevented Iraq from obtaining 40 nuclear warhead detonators from California to Iraq via Britain.

And, according to the April 9 issue of Near East Report, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, John Kelly, "pressured the Voice of America to tone down an editorial accusing Hussein of using police-state methods to defend his regime."

Also, "a few weeks ago, the administration issued a waiver to resume Export-Import Bank credits, worth approximately \$200 million to Iraq." Near East Report notes that "this comes after allegations (currently under investigation) last year that a portion of the \$2 billion in American agricultural loans to Iraq were being used to purchase arms."

It should be noted that all of this financial assistance and moral support is not only going to a nation with a recent history of mass murder and torture, but to one that is, to the horror of most of the free world, conducting an all out effort to develop nuclear weapons and the capability of delivering them to anywhere in the Middle East. And, one might add, to a nation that can apparently afford to spend approximately 35% of its GNP on the military and keep 5% of its population in the armed forces.

Now, far be it from me to question the wisdom of Bush, Baker and the State Department's "Middle East Professionals." There are presumably many reasons, too arcane for an ordinary

mortal like me to understand, why the United States would actively support a guy like Saddam Hussein with credits, loans, direct grants and a tender approach to criticism. The purpose of this article was simply to point out that Gorbachev and the financial markets need not worry that Bush will overreact to a little force (or even a lot of force) in Lithuania, or anywhere else in the rot that has become the Soviet Empire.

Paul Johnson, in his best selling history, *Modern Times*, notes that the essence of geopolitics is "to be able to distinguish between different degrees of evil." As long as Bush, Baker and their State Department "professionals" have trouble recognizing and responding to even the purest and most blatant forms of evil, as practiced by the likes of Saddam Hussein, Gorbachev can do pretty much what he wants in the Soviet Union without any real danger of upsetting relations with the United States.

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