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Former CIA chief arrives in Moscow

By GERALD NADLER

MOSCOW (UPI) Former CIA director William Colby stepped off the overnight train Tuesday from Leningrad and promptly gave Mikhail Gorbachev high marks for handling East-West negotiations and the Baltic crisis.

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"I have great respect for his political skills," Colby said. "I don't think he is a great ideologue with a specific vision for the Soviet Union, but he is masterful at his way of working through problems. I think that is what he is doing and I wish him all the success in the world."

Colby, 70, who will participate in a two-day panel by New York University's Center for War, Peace and the News Media, said Gorbachev's dilemma will be in handling the unemployment and inflation his economic reforms will spawn.

"How much turbulence can you handle that is Mr. Gorbachev's dilemma," Colby said. "That is the most difficult problem he has and consequently it is the most important problem."

"The most positive is the way he has approached some of the major East-West problems such as the positions he has taken in strategic arms talks and conventional forces reduction talks and the way he has handled the problem in the Baltic states," Colby said.

"That's a problem, but he seems to be handling it with a great deal of finesse," Colby said of Gorbachev's attempt to moderate the drive for independence of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The three states were annexed by Moscow in 1940.

To illustrate Gorbachev's bold and common-sense approach in weapons talks, Colby noted the Soviets have offered to rid Europe of 10 times as many tanks as the U.S. side - 30,000 versus 3,000.

Colby, sitting in a large suite in the massive Ukraine Hotel that was built on dictator Josef Stalin's orders, expressed amazement at being in the capital of the archenemy he used to analyze as head of U.S. intelligence.

"I obviously followed the Soviet Union for years," he said. "I wouldn't have dreamed that I could come here. But that is an indication of how things have changed."

"I don't feel embarrassed about coming here. I certainly don't feel very worried about it, and on the other hand I have been very nicely received."

Colby said he often wanted to visit the Soviet Union.

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"I have thought of visiting the Soviet Union in previous years but (that) was turned away as not a very good idea," he said. "I obviously have been interested in the Soviet Union, very interested for many years.

The fact that I have been able to visit is not only a personal satisfaction of curiosity, but is also a mark of how far we have come," he said.

Like any tourist, Colby said he wanted to visit the Kremlin and Red Square "to get a feel for it." And if the opportunity arose, he would visit the headquarters of the archrival KGB.

A spokesman at the KGB, answering a recently installed telephone number for press queries, said Monday "higher-ups" would decide whether Colby would meet KGB director Vladimir Kryuchkov at the secret police headquarters.

As for meeting Gorbachev, Colby said, "He is a busy man and he doesn't need to see me." Colby noted Secretary of State James Baker is arriving Wednesday for vital negotiations less than three weeks before the superpower summit in Washington.

The thought of an ex-CIA chief taking the famed "Strela," or "Arrow," overnight sleeper from Leningrad to Moscow would have been spy fantasy before glasnost.

"I like trains," Colby said. He also expressed his fondness for the tea he was served in the morning in a glass with a traditional Russian filigreed metal holder while the train sped to Moscow's Leningrad station.

He said he found Leningrad "a spectacular city ... but a tired one" and blamed the downtrodden look of the once magnificent Czarist-era capital on the poor state of the Soviet economy.

Colby is not the first former CIA chief to visit Moscow. George Bush, who headed the CIA briefly, visited officially as vice president to attend the funeral of Leonid Brezhnev, one of Gorbachev's predecessors, in November 1982.

Colby, who headed the CIA from 1973 to 1975, said he was not bitter about being asked to step down by President Ford after disclosures of some CIA activities. But Colby said he takes pride in the man who was his immediate successor at CIA.

"I should be flattered that I was replaced by (now) President Bush," he said.

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