

Top CIA Official Speculates About Gorbachev

By Malvina Stephenson

WASHINGTON — The embattled president of the Soviet Union is fortified to thwart his internal opposition; according to the optimistic estimates of the U.S. intelligence community.

Mikhail Gorbachev has been hoarding executive power as head of state, planning ultimately to resign his leadership of a weakened Communist Party and looking to a broader base. The fierce political tug-of-war could come to a climax at the current meeting of the Central Committee in Moscow.



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More of such views are in store for the Oklahoma Press Association in convention this weekend in Oklahoma City. The deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Richard J. Kerr will make a rare appearance to speak and answer questions at the Friday luncheon.

Kerr's Oklahoma date was arranged by Sen. David Boren, chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee. The savvy, professional analyst will serve up the same kind of candid, informed views (with some restrictions) that go into President Bush's daily intelligence briefings and guide Boren and his committee in their important decisions.

A native of Fort Smith, Ark., the respected Kerr has spent 30 years at the CIA, steadily climbing the ladder of professional performance. In a new era of conformity and cooperation, Kerr pairs with William H. Webster, the former Missouri judge who first came to Washington as FBI director and was tapped to head the CIA after the violations of Iran-Contra.

Does Boren worry about a possible repetition of that off-the-shelf, out-of-control arms deal? Not involving CIA, as long as it's being run by the "absolute integrity" team of Webster-Kerr.

"The words for both of them are total commitment," Boren said. "They are really committed to the professional approach. They would never 'cook' intelligence to support policy. They are real Boy Scouts kind of people."

The Washington Post _____
 The New York Times _____
 The Washington Times _____
 The Wall Street Journal _____
 The Christian Science Monitor _____
 New York Daily News _____
 USA Today _____

The Chicago Tribune
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What will Kerr talk about to the OPA? They asked him to discuss the "meaning" of the swift, dramatic changes in Eastern Europe and the impact on the United States and the Soviet Union. The most questions undoubtedly will focus on the survival of Gorbachev and his policies.

Boren generally agrees with the CIA conclusions. "I think we feel that most of these trends are pretty irreversible," Boren said about the impact of Gorbachev. "I feel the chances are more than 50-50 that he will last long enough to set a direction that can't be reversed."

Boren sees a preponderance of evidence to support the belief about Gorbachev's strategy to gather executive power. For one thing, he has a fixed term as president, four more years now. Under the old system, his tenure as general secretary has been subject to the whims of the old party bosses. He could be dumped any time. Why not defang them and hold independent power as president?

Those with a pipeline inside the CIA may get a different slant from what is crackling on the news wires. For instance, Gorbachev was recently reported on the defensive, trying to hang on to his title as Communist general secretary. At the same time, Boren saw just the opposite situation — Gorbachev shrewdly maneuvering from a position of comparative strength.

In all the uproar, Gorbachev did announce that he would not resign as general secretary at the meeting of the Central Committee early this week in Moscow. However, his denial did not say never.

About that time, some signs began to show supporting the analysis of the CIA and Boren. A Moscow dispatch reported that Gorbachev "supporters" were urging the creation of a "quasi-presidential system of government" which would concentrate the power of government with Gorbachev.

Regardless of who seems to be scoring at the moment, Boren cites the real trump cards which have been overlooked in the flood of current speculation. The Soviet defense minister, Yazov, and the KGB chief, Kryuchkov, are still "firmly loyal" to Gorbachev, according to Boren.

"As long as Gorbachev has the army and the KGB (intelligence and secret police) on his side, it doesn't really matter what they call him. He could call himself president, secretary of the Communist Party, or even archbishop."

As Boren notes, a number of leaders in Eastern Europe have seen the insecurity of hanging on to Communist connections. They settled in their positions of state. These examples must have impressed Gorbachev in setting his own strategy.

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At the OPA, Boren expects Kerr to start with a broader discussion of the new demands on intelligence to match the changing times. In the increased global competition, there is more emphasis on economic than military. But Boren warns that we must not let down our security guard, just in case some "crazy" should succeed Gorbachev. The Soviets still have loads of missiles.

"Previously, the emphasis was on protecting our military secrets," Boren reminded. "Now, we need to know more about the politics inside the Soviet Union. It looks like we are going into arms control and that would require more counter-espionage."

In economic competition, Boren expects global rivals to spy more on business, looking for profitable new technology. This could lead to production aimed at appropriating foreign markets now dominated by America — a whole new area of challenges stressing the need of education for international commerce.

Kerr's remarks can both inspire and inform, similar to the briefings he regularly gives for Boren's intelligence committee in closed sessions. Speaking publicly in Oklahoma, he must be cautious not to spill "some very sensitive things," but it will still be an earful and one of the few times a top CIA official emerges on an Oklahoma platform.

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