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# Enter Yeltsin, without demands

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Washington — Think of all that we owe Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev: He has made nuclear war almost unthinkable. He has freed East-

The party no longer rules; it can't even control the outcome of an election. Leningrad, birthplace of the Bolshevik Revolution, just defied the party and voted to rename itself St. Petersburg.

The army is powerful, but it is in retreat on all fronts. If war is becoming unthinkable for Russians, it matters less who the commander in chief is. The bureaucracy can enforce poverty but not generate wealth and it knows that it is doomed. Gorbachev is the master of all that.

Enter Boris Yeltsin, newly and democratically elected president of the Russian Republic. He has no power — yet. He commands no armies and no missile forces. He has no seat in the United Nations, no ambassadors, no gold reserves. But the flag they fly at Yeltsin rallies — the white, blue and red tricolor of Russia — has no hammer and sickle on it, and this may be all the power he needs.

As Yeltsin arrived at Andrews Air Force Base yesterday afternoon, he was — barring disaster — the face of the future.

Gorbachev holds state power, but if the Soviet Union transforms itself into a normal, peaceable, functioning society, U.S.-Soviet state-to-state relations diminish in

importance. What will matter are normal commercial, human and cultural relations, unguided by governmental bureaucracies. It does not matter to you, as an American, who the president of France is, who runs its army or who controls its secret police. All you need to know is that it is a free, functioning democracy.

The differences between Gorbachev and Yeltsin are graphic. Gorbachev will fly to London next month, seeking billions of dollars in official Western governmental aid for his increasingly murky notion of economic reform.

Yeltsin, in Washington, wants no aid. He intends to create business conditions that will attract Western investment. This is the real struggle for power in a democratic Soviet Union: not over who controls the party or the army, but who has the right to tax Western business, who has the right to export diamonds.

"President Yeltsin won't be looking for a handout, like some of our leaders do on their foreign visits," said his spokesman, Viktor Yugin. "I don't think he's going to ask for anything."

Yeltsin has also abandoned the Communist ideology that keeps Gorbachev from

embarking on full-scale reform. He is trying to oust Communists from governmental positions. Yugin explained why:

"A chairman of a regional council, for example, is duty-bound to obey parliament and pursue land reform, which is giving land to those who want to work it. But if he is a member of the Communist Party, he is supposed to strengthen the collective farms and the state farms. So what kind of policy is he going to pursue when he sits in both chairs?"

The answer is clear, but unspoken: Gorbachev policies, the stop-and-go, sudden-reverse reforms that have paralyzed the Soviet Union.

Understandably, the Bush administration remains committed to dealing with Gorbachev. It is grateful to him. It needs him to negotiate arms control and to cooperate in the Middle East.

But to Sen. Bill Bradley (D-N.J.), "Gorbachev is little more than a talented TV performer trying to preserve power without political legitimacy. Because of the vote, Yeltsin has more legitimacy than Gorbachev." The hard reality is that for the moment, the U.S. has to deal with Soviet power rather than Russian legitimacy.

ern Europe and withdrawn Soviet troops from confrontation with the West.

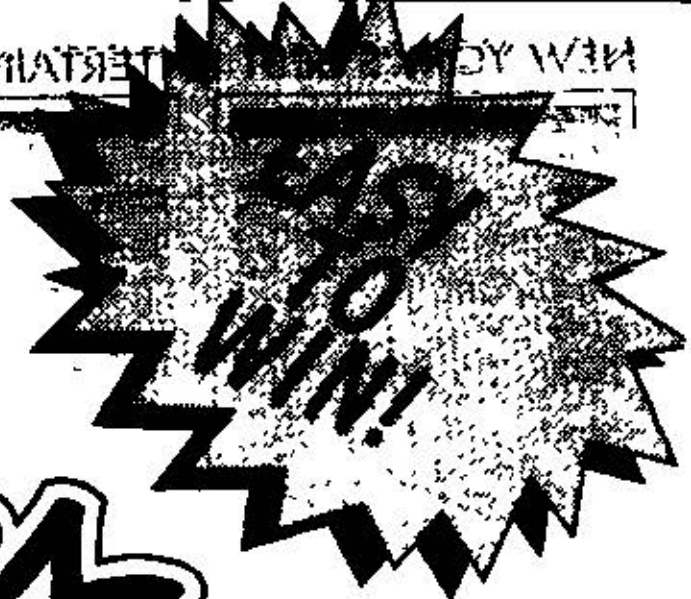
He has permitted a free press, free speech and free religion in the Soviet Union, allowed Soviet Jews to emigrate, joined us in isolating Saddam Hussein, withdrawn from Afghanistan and let the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua collapse of its own weight.

He has earned his place in history. In fact, he may be history already.

Certainly Gorbachev is still in charge of the Soviet Union. But it is crumbling at the edges and rotting at the center. Sure, he is still its most powerful politician. But the levers of power Gorbachev holds are becoming increasingly irrelevant: the Communist Party, the Red Army, the central bureaucracy, the KGB.



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