

Let us pray Moscow rejects MBFR proposal

by George Gregory

In the first week of December 1985, the Soviet delegation to the Mutual Balanced Force Reduction (MBFR) talks in Vienna, Austria received a new Western proposal. British Ambassador Alexander tendered the offer: to withdraw 5,000 American soldiers from Western Europe (i.e., from the Federal Republic of Germany), in exchange for a Soviet withdrawal of 11,500 troops from East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia.

The withdrawal would occur over a one-year period, and each side would promise not to increase its forces for a three-year period. Only troops would be withdrawn, not their equipment.

We are reminded of West German parliamentarian Jürgen Todenhöfer's memorable statement of July 1985: "The worst thing that could happen to the West, would be the acceptance of its proposals by the East."

Many things are wrong with this particular initiative, but ultimately, it just goes to prove that there is no rational reason for the MBFR talks to exist. That the talks do exist is proof that forces in the West intend to grant the Soviet Union hegemony over Europe. The talks were initiated by Henry Kissinger on a visit to Moscow in September 1972, and commenced in Vienna, Austria, in October 1973. "Mutual and balanced force reduction?" The geographical and logistical realities of Central Europe make "balanced" force reduction impossible. Any force reduction, in any ratio, is to Soviet advantage.

Until now, since the Soviets were always as consistently stubborn in the "soldiers number game" as they are in the "missiles number game," Western defense officials did not worry about what was under negotiation in Vienna. The "numbers game" played the useful role of preventing the diplomats from producing any results for 10 years. It was only after the last official Western MBFR proposal in April 1984, that a NATO commission was established to work through the damage that would be done if results one day did emerge from the Viennese mess. The results of their studies have never been made public, but it is now to be feared that this latest little "initiative" could be the flick of the toe that starts the avalanche.

The players are all Kissinger colleagues or protégés. There is West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher,

Lord Peter Carrington at NATO, U.S. Ambassador and fellow of Georgetown University's CSIS David Abshire, U.S. Ambassador to the MBFR talks Robert Blackwell, Richard Burt at the U.S. embassy in Bonn, John Kornblum, now at the Berlin consulate, and James Dobbins at the U.S. embassy in Bonn. They have had a free hand in designing the latest MBFR initiative.

In a recent appearance at the Hanns Seidel Foundation in Munich on Nov. 18, Burt managed to make a Soviet takeover of Europe sound like a Soviet "change of attitude" for the better: "Soviet forces are not deployed to defend Eastern Europe, but to occupy it. American forces are not deployed to occupy Western Europe, but to help defend it. When Europe no longer wants our help, we will go home. When the Soviet Union adopts a similar attitude, the division of Europe will be overcome. It is this change in attitude that we must seek to effect."

Now, "encouraged by the Geneva summit meeting" (British Ambassador Alexander), the West tosses the Soviets an opportunity to accelerate their takeover, in a way that will cost the Soviets nothing at all.

The strategic reality of Europe is, that regardless of numbers of troops discussed, any Soviet agreement to withdrawal is meaningless because the Soviet troops—no matter how many are "withdrawn"—can be back with their noses at the East/West border in a matter of hours.

Under the 11,500 are insignificant. First, the Soviets, of course, would only take their forces a few hundred kilometers away, into the Western Soviet Union, while the Americans would be moved at least 6,000 kilometers. Since the Soviets have prepositioned immense quantities of new equipment for numbers of troops far beyond those now present, the Soviets can return and attack—in a matter of hours.

The Americans can also leave their equipment, but the Soviets can gain far more than the removal of American equipment would give them. Were the West to agree not to increase forces for a trial three-year period—and the "West" has now proposed this—the annual NATO exercises, "Reforger," to make sure that Western European forces can be re-enforced in event of conflict, would be scrapped.

At present, the average Soviet theatre superiority ratios are 3:1 in tanks, 4:1 in artillery, 3:1 in anti-tank artillery, more than 2:1 in fighter aircraft. In conflict, these average superiority ratios become actual superiorities of 7:1 to 10:1 along chosen axes of assault. These superiority ratios would not change one one-hundredth of a percentage point if the Soviets remove 11,500 troops.

One can imagine the headlines in the *New York Times* on the day the Soviets accept this "Western" initiative: "Demilitarization Under Way in Europe," "Fruits of the Spirit of Geneva," "Soviet Accepts Western Proposal—Withdraw From Eastern Europe." Or even "Budget Cutters Jump for Joy—5,000 Soldiers Coming Home; No More Reforger Maneuvers: Big Savings Seen!"