

Asian illusions about U.S. friendship fade, as Moscow mops up in region

by Linda de Hoyos

One year ago, on Dec. 31, 1986, a Thai commentator wrote in the *Bangkok Post* that protectionist pressure coming from Washington was transforming relations between Thailand and the United States: "The Thais used to think that America would continue to help and be sympathetic to our needs. Most of all, America was our good friend for years and we took it that the country was bound to help us, no matter what. But that kind of illusion has disappeared. . . . It wasn't until the past two years, more specifically this year, that Thailand truly came to grips with the harsh reality of the Thai-U.S. ties that we better save our own neck, come what may."

Despite continuing strong security ties with Washington, the commentator noted, the clash on economic issues threatens to spill over into the strategic arena. Furthermore, he noted, "Let us face it, the Thai government and people spent 1986 worrying what the U.S. would do next. . . . Simply by virtue of the stalemate in Thai-U.S. ties emanating from the ongoing economic conflicts, Thai-U.S.S.R. ties took a new turn for the good in the latter half of 1986, and without any concession from Moscow."

Tracing the course of Thailand's foreign policy over the intervening 12 months bears out the *Bangkok Post's* prognosis.

In March, Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze opened the new era in Soviet-Thai relations with a stopover in Bangkok during his Asia tour that took him to Australia, Indonesia, and Indochina. In May, Thai Foreign Minister Siddhi Savestila returned the compliment with a trip to Moscow, "something he has tried to avoid for the past two years," according to the *Bangkok Post* writer. The trip resulted in the creation of a Thai-Soviet Commission on Trade. The volume of Soviet-Thai trade has increased by sixfold since 1976, to \$80.49 million in 1986. In 1986, trade between the two increased by 51%, with the Thais holding a trade surplus since 1979.

In July, Thailand decided to open air and sea links with the Soviets, and to draw up transport links between Bangkok and Vladivostok. In August, Thai Army Commander in Chief

Chavalit Yongchaiyudh became the first high-ranking Thai military officer to visit Moscow. "This will be a friendly visit for talks on issues of common interest," General Chavalit told the press Aug. 5. "The Soviet Union is a superpower, we want to show our friendship."

Chavalit's visit was soon followed by the Aug. 13-16 arrival of the head of the Soviet Foreign Ministry's Southeast Asian Affairs division, Anatoli Zaytsev, and in October with a delegation led by August E. Voss, chairman of the Supreme Soviet.

In October, the Russians appointed a new ambassador to Bangkok, Anatolii Valkov, the head of the South Asia directorate and reportedly a close confidant of Shevardnadze—definitely a cut above his predecessor.

By the end of the year, relations between Moscow and Bangkok had so improved that Soviet Commander in Chief of Land Forces, Gen. Yevgeni Ivanovsky, arrived in Bangkok on Dec. 5, on an official visit. According to the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, the Thais opened the gates to Ivanovsky in a fit of pique at the United States' refusal to send a high-level official to the celebration of King Bumipol's 60th birthday. Nevertheless, in an interview with the *Bangkok Nation*, General Ivanovsky said that he and General Chavalit, with whom he had established personal contact during the latter's trip to Moscow, were "pioneers" in establishing military contacts between the two countries. The Thai-Soviet military relationship "has just been started," General Ivanovsky said.

Early in 1988, Thai Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda will make a precedent-setting visit to Moscow.

Listing this roster of exchanges, the Thai daily *Matichon* commented on Dec. 9, 1987, that "those who study Thailand's foreign policy must have detected a certain change from the early part of 1987, namely, the increased contacts with the Soviet Union." Aside from the more pragmatic considerations—such as new markets to counterbalance protectionist pressures from the "free world"—*Matichon* explained the perceptible shift in Thai foreign policy with a brief ex-

amination of Thailand's traditional approach:

"Thailand is the only country in Southeast Asia which was able to safeguard its independence in the pre-World War II period of colonialism. . . . This is because of the wisdom and farsightedness of the Thai leaders in the past. Especially, thanks to Kings Ram IV and Rama V who realized that Thailand would be able to preserve its independence by making use of the world powers' interests and efforts to exert influence on Thailand by adopting an equidistant relationship with all of them. . . .

"Thailand's closer relations with the Soviet Union can be viewed as a change of direction in its post-World War II diplomacy. This new direction should be in the interest of Thailand, in the same way as the policy we followed during the period of colonialism before World War II."

Shifting ground

Situated precisely at the center of the span from Islamabad to Tokyo, Thailand has historically served as a barometer of the strategic balance in Asia. Is Thailand now moving away from the West toward the East bloc? By no means. However, Thailand has shifted its position from being an exclusively close ally of the United States to now opening up relations with both the Soviet Union and China, in an effort to adjust its lines of national security as the perceived balance among the superpowers in Asia also shifts. Or, as Social Democracy's Bob Hawke, prime minister of Australia, put it during his December trip to Moscow: "The Soviet Union is a Pacific power and therefore has a legitimate interest in the region."

Thailand's story efficiently summarizes the net result of the events of 1987 in Asia: The vacuum created by the U.S. policy of strategic withdrawal is tilting the strategic balance toward the Soviet Union.

The parameters of the shift in Asia are as follows:

1) The Western-allied nations of Asia must realign their foreign and economic policies in recognition of deterioration of the United States' economic and strategic strength.

2) The most active players on the scene are the superpowers themselves, including junior partner Beijing. The initiatives shaping events include Washington's continuation of the Project Democracy "Reagan doctrine" by which the United States is actively complicit in the internal destabilization of its allies, with the Philippines as the most "successful" model. From the Russian side, this pressure is augmented by rapid-fire diplomatic initiatives, based on General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachov's "Vladivostok doctrine" speech of July 1986. Behind the diplomacy and the talk of "regional conflict settlement" negotiations with Washington, the Soviets continue their military build-up in the region.

3) Few initiatives have been taken by the governments of the Asian nations themselves. Policies are more often carried out as defensive reflex actions to the effects of superpower policies. Although Japan is working to create a "yen bloc" of

countries under its economic wing—Taiwan, South Korea, Thailand, the Philippines, Singapore, and Hong Kong—none of Japan's actions has challenged the "rules of the game" set by the superpowers.

Project Democracy exposed

In 1986, the United States military coup against Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos, carried out in the name of democracy, sent a shockwave throughout the region. In the intervening 22 months, the "people's power" revolution has been shown to be a fraud, and served as an object lesson for other Asian countries.

In the Philippines, all the promises guaranteed by the overthrow of Marcos have been exposed as a sham, as the country's military, economic, and political fabric is in the process of being destroyed. By the end of the summer of 1986 and the attempted coup against Corazon Aquino carried out by Gringo Honason, it was apparent that the U.S. intelligence community had split on the Philippines, that the across-the-board consensus in Washington that had backed Marcos's overthrow, had been broken. But the right-wing meddling in the Philippines did nothing to ameliorate the situation, and only succeeded in exposing the weakness of the Aquino government without offering any viable alternative.

Efforts to create that nationalist alternative, in contrast, have met with little welcome in Washington. In March, the Grand Alliance for Democracy (GAD) was formed of political leaders from four parties, to run against Aquino's hand-picked slate for the House and Senate in the first Filipino Congress since the EDSA Revolution. Many of the full slate of 24 leaders running on the GAD ticket, including Juan Ponce Enrile, GAD chairman Vicente Puyat, and Francisco Tatad, had been instrumental in bringing down Marcos, and had since become bitterly disillusioned with the Aquino regime.

"We have been promised democracy, but we do not have it," Puyat said at the press conference announcing the slate. The Alliance will take issue with Aquino on three points: the government's "cavalier manner with the handling of the rapidly deteriorating insurgency problem"; the "inadequacy of the Aquino government's economic program"; and the "dis- mal reemergence of corruption in government."

In campaign speeches throughout the country, Puyat concentrated his attack on the disastrous economic policies of the government—particularly its obeisance to the International Monetary Fund and foreign banks. "The Philippines must not carry out a carbon-copy of the prescriptions of the World Bank and the IMF on the domestic economy," he said. "The Peru or Brazil model should be followed by our government. The Latin Americans . . . are telling the banks, 'We either pay you according to our capability or we don't pay at all.' We should follow their example." Puyat and many in the GAD slate also stressed that the counterinsurgency policy cannot be carried out on the basis of military force alone, but

“must be based on nation-building” permitted only by a repudiation of Aquino’s economic policies.

By the May 11 elections, however, Aquino’s machine had prepared gross computer fraud—what her press secretary called “that Cory magic”—ensuring a victory to all but two of the Aquino candidates. U.S. complicity in the election fraud was signaled by the near-total blackout of the GAD campaign in the U.S. press, even in the CIA’s Foreign Broadcasting and Information Service compilation of Filipino press clippings.

The bid to rebuild a truly Filipino consensus around policies of national sovereignty and economic development were thereby at least temporarily suppressed. But even in the Aquino-controlled Senate, within three months, there were two bills before the Senate calling for the Peru model to be followed on the nation’s \$30 billion debt. The political steamroller that was building against Aquino’s economic policies was brought to a halt by the traumas of the Aug. 28 attempted coup against Aquino—by far the most serious attempt so far.

The real fruits of Washington’s Project Democracy for the Philippines, however, was yet to come. On Oct. 29, gunmen of the New People’s Army shot and killed three American servicemen outside of Clark Field, the first time that Americans were the target of the NPA’s terrorist “sparrow units.”

In the meantime, the Philippines is breaking up into regional and political warlordism, both within the military and out. This breakdown of the nation’s political fabric—including the defection of Aquino’s own Vice President Salvador Laurel—presents no match for the NPA, which now, authoritative sources report, controls 20-30% of the country. In those areas under its control, the NPA supplies the administration and collects the taxes without challenge from the Armed Forces of the Philippines. While the Philippines drains its economy to pay its creditors at a rate of 45% of its export earnings this year, the NPA is receiving upwards of \$8 million a year in funds and supplies from 25 governments, including monies from Western governments filtered through various “human rights,” “solidarity,” and “religious” organizations.

The disintegration of law and order in the Philippines is a condition that has not been lost on the other leaders of Asia. To Aquino’s embarrassment, in early December, when Manila hosted the heads-of-state summit of ASEAN nations, ASEAN governments insisted on their own security, amid fears that the NPA, Gringo Honason, or the Japanese Red Army would carry out terrorist attacks on the summit.

ASEAN leaders and Japan and Australia also made clear, officially or otherwise, that no matter what the desires of the Philippine Congress or pro-Soviet attachments of Foreign Minister Raul Manglapus, the allied Asian nations view the U.S. bases at Clark and Subic as essential to the region’s security.

The unraveling situation in the Philippines, however,

may have served as a warning to voters in South Korea, the next big target for the Project Democracy forces in the U.S., in conjunction with the Soviet Union and the World Council of Churches.

Since Marcos’s fall, meddlers in Washington and Korea’s opposition have been calling for bringing the “Philippines model” to South Korea. Riots in South Korean cities in June forced the government to call for direct presidential elections for Dec. 16. In the last month of the campaign, the race became a bitter war between ruling party candidate Roh Tae Woo, who promised to liberalize Korean society within a continuity with the administration of Gen. Chun Doo Hwan; Kim Young Sam, an opposition leader with his own ties to the military; and the World Council of Churches candidate Kim Dae Jung, who promised to make an unconditional visit to Pyongyang as one of his first acts as President.

Kim Dae Jung promised an “uprising” if Roh Tae Woo were elected, charging that only through gross fraud could the government candidate be elected. But when election day came, the split opposition of “the two Kims” could not defeat the 35% vote for Roh Tae Woo. Despite sporadic rioting from students—who mustered no supporters from the broad population—South Korea has been quiet in the aftermath of election day. For many, despite their desires for a more open society, national security comes first, a task that the incumbent party can be completely relied upon to fulfill.

Moscow’s double game

In the case of the United States, complicity in the destabilization of its allies is a point of implementation for the State Department’s policy of strategic withdrawal from the region. However, the Soviet Union plays the same games with India, as a means of exerting leverage points of blackmail over the Rajiv Gandhi government.

In November 1986, General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachov visited India heralding a new era in Indo-Soviet relations. In May 1987, Anatolii Dobrynin, the former Russian ambassador to the United States who has become secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, arrived to meet with Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and other Indian leaders. However, Dobrynin took time out to meet with the heads of both the Communist Party of India and the Communist Party (Marxist).

Reportedly, in these conversations, he encouraged the parties to support Rajiv Gandhi’s foreign policy, but also gave the green light for the Communist parties to continue their agitation against Gandhi domestically. By the end of the year, the two Communist parties—who are now mooted reunification under Moscow and Beijing’s aegis—held a 500,000-person rally in Delhi against the Gandhi government.

It is through the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party that the Russians run their new Comintern (Communist International). In July, Dobrynin presided over

a conference of all Asian and Pacific Communist parties in Ulan Bator, Mongolia. Representatives of 21 parties agreed to step up efforts to promote Soviet proposals for a collective security system in the region, and to bring "new political forces" into "anti-war and anti-imperialist activities and the struggle for social progress."

New deals

With India, Moscow's aim has been to force Delhi's consent to Moscow's design for an Asian security arrangement. As put forward by Gorbachov at Vladivostok, the pact would include the United States and the P.R.C. This "Helsinki arrangement" which is designed to lead to "nuclear free zones" would codify the domination of the region by the two and a half empires and the "regional conflict" settlements to be executed by the three.

The vehicle by which Moscow intends to gain its "collective security pact" is through the regional conflict negotiations with the United States, and to some degree, China. These negotiations, carried on at the level of the assistant secretary of state for the U.S., are designed to create a "crisis management" team for the key regional conflicts—Afghanistan and Pakistan; Indochina; and the Korean peninsula.

In the past year, given Project Democracy's focus on South Korea, Moscow and Washington have had repeated contacts over the Korean peninsula. In May, Gaston Sigur's Sino-Soviet Institute at George Washington University broke new ground with a conference on the Korean peninsula in Tokyo, with delegates from Beijing, and Pyongyang, as well as Moscow, Tokyo, Seoul, and Washington. Former Soviet deputy foreign minister Mikhail Kapitsa used the occasion to call for a "Helsinki-style" Asia and Pacific conference, arguing that the Asian zone "represents a zone of political instability which even today has the world's highest concentration of hot spots and potentially explosive sub-regional problems." Kapitsa was seconded by Makoto Momoi, fellow at the Yomiuri Research Institute, who called for the creation of a "regional crisis management mechanism."

In September, Assistant Secretary of State Gaston Sigur visited Moscow for consultations on Korea with Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Rogachev. The State Department also sent unofficial envoys to Pyongyang, including Carnegie Endowment for Peace hand Selig Harrison, who returned with news that North Korea was changing and ready to "open" to the West.

But despite all the talk of crisis management among the superpowers on the Korean peninsula—a region in which Beijing also has definite interests, the year saw a continuing tightening of the Moscow-Pyongyang military alliance. In 1986, North Korea received MiG-23 jet fighters from the Soviets. Early in 1987, Moscow delivered the short-range (70 miles) SS-21 missiles to North Korea. In 1986, the Russians were given permission for Korean overflights, meaning Soviet fighters can now cut through North Korea on their way

from Vladivostok to Cam Ranh Bay. A Moscow-Pyongyang rail line has been opened, and an air route from Pyongyang through Moscow to East Berlin. In the past year, Pyongyang has hosted a Soviet army-navy group; a delegation from the Supreme Soviet; the Soviet vice defense minister; a Soviet naval delegation; and the Soviet interior minister.

This transformation of North Korea into a Soviet military-client state, with Beijing's approval, upsets the post-Korean War balance of forces in North Asia, but this strategic tilt has been skillfully obscured by Soviet and Pyongyang's proffers of negotiations for a "regional settlement."

In contrast, the Soviets have met with no success in attempting to "Finlandize" Japan, as it is attempting to do with West Germany. In November, newly elected Prime Minister Noboru Takeshita declared that any idea that Japan might leave its military alliance with the United States were "unthinkable." This year, Japan and the U.S. formally signed their joint cooperation agreement on the Strategic Defense Initiative, an action that elicited Moscow's vituperation against a "Tokyo-Washington" axis.

But for U.S. policy, successes have been limited to such arrangements around military cooperation and technology sharing, most conducted by former Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger and the Pentagon.

If current trends continue into 1988, then it cannot be expected to be too long before the Soviet Union achieves its aims of a "collective security [imperial] pact" over Asia, with economic and political destabilizations against the Asian countries put into operation as the enforcing mechanism. What can be reversed in the early months of 1988 from within Asia, is bringing an end to the passivity. The situation of Asian governments, Lyndon LaRouche stated in a policy document for Asia released in August, is "likened to a man compelled to employ a certain sort of passenger motor vehicle. All of the devices and instruments accessible to the driver of any ordinary such vehicle are placed in proper position, at his disposal. However, the steering wheel, gear-shift, accelerator, and so on, are not connected to the actual steering of the wheels, the gear-train, or the engine. An alien actually controls these things, leaving the driver to enjoy free exercise of his democratic will over devices which actually control important items as the ashtrays, windshield wipers, and cigarette lighter. . . .

"An analogous state of mind is sometimes observed among governments of developing nations. They do control some things, of course—except as the superpowers or international monetary authorities taken even this margin of control out of their hands."

Given the strength of the Asian economies—relative to the rest of the world—Asian Rim governments are in a good position to take actions in their own national interests, in community of principle with their regional allies, in which case the Asian governments can work positively to solve the current global strategic crisis.