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## Philippines

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# Moscow intrudes into bases negotiations

by Linda de Hoyos

The tension-filled negotiations between the Republic of the Philippines and the United States over the retention of the U.S. bases at Clark Field and Subic Bay have handed the Soviet Union a tactical advantage in their diplomatic efforts in Southeast Asia, an area in which Moscow otherwise has little influence. The bases conflict between Manila and Washington was undoubtedly the reason why Moscow sent Oleg Sokolov, number-two man in its Washington embassy, to the Manila posting last September.

The issue is whether the bases will be retained in the Philippines beyond the 1991 expiration of the bases treaty. Manila and Washington, along with Japan and the other ASEAN countries of Southeast Asia, are contending over the price for which the U.S. and its allies might pay the Republic for the bases. U.S. rent payments to the Philippines for the bases are far below the price paid to Spain and Turkey. Manila has poured more grease on the fire with a bill passed by the House of Representatives, now facing some trouble in the Senate, which follows the mode used by New Zealand to break the Anzus alliance in 1984. The bill bans ports of call by nuclear-powered or fueled ships in the Philippines and the storage of nuclear weapons. U.S. policy is to neither confirm nor deny any presence of nuclear weapons or fuel on its ships.

Sokolov used this particular point to insert Moscow into the fray. On April 28, in a highly publicized statement, Sokolov queried: "Would the 'neither confirm nor deny' policy have been invented by the Americans in the first place, had it not been for the purpose of covering up something?" Sokolov then praised what he called "the initiative" of the Southeast Asian countries to create a "zone of peace, freedom, and neutrality." The creation of such a nuclear-free zone, he said, "is a major step along the way to nuclear disarmament." Such a nuclear-free zone has been pushed by Philippine Foreign Minister Raul Manglapus and in part by Indonesia, but is not viewed as practicable by ASEAN given the superpower tensions in the region and the presence of the Soviet bases at Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam.

Sokolov then put forward five points which he said Moscow deems "an indispensable and integral element of the

comprehensive security system" the Soviet Union has been unsuccessfully seeking in Asia since Secretary Mikhail Gorbachov's July 1986 Vladivostok speech. These are the Soviet *quid pro quos*, should the United States and its allies destroy their defenses in the Southeast Asia arena:

- no increase in the number of Soviet-nuclear capable aircraft in the Asian part of the U.S.S.R., "provided the U.S. does not deploy in the region additional nuclear systems capable of reaching [Soviet] territory;
- talks on reducing Soviet and American naval activities in the Pacific to avoid confrontation;
- restriction of areas plied by nuclear-carrying vessels;
- curbing rivalry in antisubmarine warfare; and
- limiting the scale of naval exercises in the Pacific and Indian oceans.

These offers come after the Soviet Union has built up its Pacific fleet—from 1983 through 1986—to surpass U.S. force presence in the region. Yet, Sokolov claimed that "there is no build-up in the Soviet missile-carrying submarines. These remain at the 1986 level. There is not a single warship near the U.S. Pacific Coast and in the South China Sea. It would be dishonest to pretend, as some still do," Sokolov added, "that the INF treaty has no bearing on the security of this region or to attempt to draw a sort of 'bamboo curtain' against the positive winds of change blowing across the world, including Asia and the Pacific, as a result of the treaty."

Sokolov's intervention has not been without effect. Led by former Deputy Foreign Minister Leticia Shehani, the sister of Defense Minister Fidel Ramos, 10 senators from the Philippines are heading for Moscow July 2-15. Shehani, in announcing the trip, suggested that since the Soviets are allowed verification of U.S. military facilities in other countries, why not in the Philippines?

### What about Cam Ranh Bay?

The wrinkle in the Soviet effort, however, is that although Moscow demands the removal of the U.S. bases from the Philippines, it is adamant that any *quid pro quo* from the Kremlin will exclude the Soviet naval and air presence in Vietnam. Noting that the bases in Vietnam are used "to justify the perpetuation of foreign military presence in the region," Sokolov claimed that they are not bases of the Soviet Union. "It is a facility of Vietnam . . . which is used by our Navy only for technical maintenance, supplies, and recreation."

Sokolov was seconded in this affirmation by Vietnamese Deputy Foreign Minister Tran Quang Co, who visited Bangkok in late April. Co told the press that Vietnam is willing to sign a "non-aggression pact" with the Philippines, but under no circumstances will the bases at Cam Ranh Bay and Danang be dismantled in exchange for U.S. withdrawal from the Philippines. U.S. satellite information to the contrary, Co said: "I have to state categorically that Cam Ranh Bay is a Vietnamese military operation under the full sovereignty of Vietnam and is operated by Vietnamese experts."