

Superpowers bait Manila on U.S. bases

by Linda de Hoyos

Sen. Robert Dole (R-Kan.) arrived in Manila on Nov. 14 with the purported mission of reaffirming U.S.-Filipino friendship, but it is not believed he succeeded. The senator loudly proclaimed that there is no guarantee that Congress will come through with the \$1 billion promised to the Philippines, for the retention of the U.S. bases there.

The \$1 billion was promised in a pact signed by Foreign Minister Raul Manglapus and Secretary of State George Shultz in October, affirming that the United States will maintain the bases through the contract expiration in 1991. But Dole stuck a big question mark on the pact with his protests of U.S. poverty. "It is not what we would like to do," he told Manila reporters. "It is what we can do. We have our own limitations. . . . We are trying to find out, where do we find the money?" The United States, he claimed, had not only met but exceeded its previous commitments to the Philippines.

Dole's actions must have brought smiles in Moscow. The signing of the U.S.-Philippines agreement took the wind out of the sails of Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachov's Sept. 16 proposal that if the United States were to give up the bases, Moscow would answer in kind by discontinuing its usage of the bases at Cam Ranh Bay and Danang in Vietnam.

However, as one astute reporter asked Soviet Ambassador Oleg Sokolov, how can the U.S.S.R. propose dismantling the facilities of Cam Ranh Bay and Danang in Vietnam as an offer, when those bases are supposedly Vietnamese to begin with. "That is a technicality," Sokolov answered loftily. "These are Vietnamese facilities which we use. . . . Vietnam fully supports this proposal."

Soviet comfort

Since Gorbachov's proposal, reports from Manila indicate, Moscow has been trying to edge sideways into the negotiations around the two U.S. bases, Clark Air Field and Subic Bay naval base. The *Manila Chronicle* reported Nov. 16 that Moscow had sent a "sympathetic" letter to the Philippines Foreign Ministry urging that Manila attempt work to as much money as possible from the United States as compensation for the bases. The Philippines has always received about one-third of the rent sums the U.S. pays for its bases in Spain and Turkey.

The note was delivered through Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Kapitsa, and according to the *Chronicle*

read: "We know that you need economic assistance very badly and that you view the bases primarily for this purpose. We want you to get all that you can from the United States by way of economic assistance, and we are trying to help you do this by this" (Gorbachov's Sept. 16 speech). The benignly toned letter then went on to say: "As for getting rid of the bases, there is no hurry. We can wait. When the year 2000 comes, you might be economically stronger and the international situation might have changed. We can wait and talk about it then."

Manglapus denied that any note had ever been received, but Philippines President Corazon Aquino neither confirmed nor denied the letter's existence, saying: "It is the national interest and welfare of our sovereign people that we have to consider. . . and not the views advanced by foreign powers."

Although the agreement with the U.S. was signed, the bases are still a point of negotiations among third parties. On Nov. 2, Philippines Foreign Secretary Raul Manglapus declared that he will visit Vietnam later in November for talks that will touch on the U.S. bases. President Aquino has publicly stated that Moscow and Washington should fully discuss Gorbachov's offer to withdraw Soviet forces from Vietnam, if Washington dismantles Clark and Subic.

"The Philippines thinks the proposal, if implemented, would lessen the tensions and could prepare us for the achievement of the ultimate goal in the area of a zone of peace, freedom, and neutrality," Manglapus told the press. Manglapus himself is a "fellow" of the Center for International Development Policy in Washington, which has served as a left-wing back-channel to Moscow. Others have also put forward the notion that the Soviet Union should take a more active part in Filipino affairs. One of them is Leticia Shehani, sister of the Armed Forces chief Fidel Ramos (a favorite with the U.S. embassy). As chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Shehani had traveled to the Soviet city of Vladivostok in September, and came back urging that the Philippines take up offers of trade with Moscow. It is in the national interest that the Philippines be part of the dialogue and economic activity in the Soviet Far East—as called for in Gorbachov's 1986 Vladivostok speech, he said.

It would appear that number of Filipino politicians are operating under the belief that it is the presence of the U.S. bases—and not the Soviet drive for domination that threatens the Philippines. "I think Aquino should back up the statement of Gorbachov," said Sen. Joseph Estrada, "because it involves the lives of Filipinos here. So if the bases are out, we'll feel very safe. Nobody has the right to risk the lives of our people."

However, surveys show, the Filipino people do not agree. A November public opinion poll taken by the Ateneo University showed that 74% of the Filipinos want the bases to stay. The poll showed a dramatic leap in the number of pro-bases respondents, compared with the number reported in previous polls done in March and October of 1987.