

Mikhail Gorbachov tips the balance

by Linda de Hoyos

It is highly appropriate that the January visit to Moscow of Henry Kissinger, should become the occasion for a breakthrough in the condominium of "regional deals" Moscow has attempted to place over the globe. The contents of Kissinger's talks and chessboard moves indicate that the "offers" posed by General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachov at the United Nations in December and at the city of Krasnoyarsk, Siberia, in September, have been acted upon.

Kissinger arrived in Moscow as a representative of the Trilateral Commission, an entity that in Kissinger's eyes, as he informed former Mexican President José López Portillo, "runs" the United States. Kissinger delivered a letter to Gorbachov on behalf of then-President-elect George Bush, and according to a Tass report cited by Reuters, the two discussed international relations, bilateral ties, and "some considerations on the development of Soviet-American relations, which were set forth by Kissinger on behalf of U.S. President-elect George Bush." A second meeting with Gorbachov followed, in which the two were joined by former French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and former Japanese Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone.

The Soviets took the occasion to announce their intention to carry out broad cuts in their military deployments. In Vienna, Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze informed West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher that the Soviet Union "will withdraw from Central Europe military formations and units with all their organic armaments, including tactical nuclear systems."

Meanwhile in Moscow, Gorbachov informed the Trilateral Commission delegation that the Soviet Union intends to cut approximately 12% of its troop strength, 14% from its military budget, and 19% from its defense production capabilities. Gorbachov also stated that, with respect to his uni-

lateral troops cuts, 200,000 would be pulled from the eastern district (Far East); 240,000 from the west; and 50,000 from the south. He also reported that the Soviets were prepared to begin phase two of withdrawals from Mongolia, including the removal of air force units—a key demand from the People's Republic of China as a precondition for the full normalization of relations between Beijing and Moscow.

Kissinger then met with Warsaw Pact commander Viktor Kulikov, to discuss the troop reduction plan. However, despite the fanfare, Soviet plans remain vague, as Kissinger put it. Although Soviet Deputy Defense Minister Vitaly Shabanov had told Austria radio Jan. 16 that Russian troop withdrawal from Eastern Europe would begin in April, he was later corrected by Foreign Ministry spokesman Gennadi Gerassimov, who reported that Moscow's troop withdrawal plan would only be "prepared" by April, not executed. And, as each day passes, Soviet plans become vaguer. London *Daily Mail* correspondent John Dickie Jan. 18 asked Shevardnadze to specify how many tactical nuclear weapons the Soviets would be destroying; the Soviet foreign minister refused to give answers, stating, Russian-style, "All this will be made public, but not now."

Despite the strategic deception involved from the Soviet side, such "offers" represent the Soviet steps in the intricate diplomatic maneuverings necessary to pin down the details on "the new era" in which the Soviet Union and the United States are no longer to perceive the other as the enemy, but in which the two superpowers stand united against third parties—notably the underdeveloped countries. The newly appointed ambassador to West Germany, Vernon Walters, was quoted as advocating this in a recent issue of the Paris review, *Lettre d'Afrique*.

On the Western side, the *quid pro quo* to Moscow's

“offers” to Kissinger et al. came from Asia.

America to take a back seat

A view of the future for the American presence in Asia was presented by Kissinger, in his “Memo to the Next President” published in *Newsweek* Sept. 19, 1988. “The balance of power in Asia involves the United States less directly than in Europe,” Kissinger stated. “. . . In Asia, Korea excepted, no American troops are in the front line. In the 90s, two balances of power will exist in Asia: between China, Japan, and the Soviet Union in Northeast Asia; and between Japan, India, and (to some extent) the Soviet Union in Southeast Asia. The American role with respect to these two balances should be similar to Britain’s historical stance vis-à-vis the European continent: we are the guarantors of the equilibrium. . . . Such a policy has to be carried out despite the fact that we may not be able to count on our Philippine bases over the next decade, and that we will need to restructure our forces and command arrangements in Korea.”

Aside from the general view that the United States will withdraw itself as a “power” in Asia, the above paragraph is significant for the fact that it virtually takes for granted the removal of the American military presence in the Philippines and on the Korean peninsula. Far from the “vagueness” of Gorbachov’s offers, the removal of the U.S. troops or nuclear umbrella from the Republic of Korea and the removal of the U.S. bases at Clark Field and Subic Bay in the Philippines have very well-known and dire strategic consequences.

Yet, it is on those issues that the United States, through its allies, appears prepared to match Gorbachov’s diplomacy.

The cue came first from Philippines Foreign Minister Raul Manglapus. In a foreign-policy speech in Manila, Manglapus predicted the withdrawal of both superpowers from the region. “The United States and the Soviet Union could even be now drawing up their own separate timetables for a withdrawal of military installations from this region.” Announcing that the Philippines government is already preparing for the conversion of the bases to civilian use, Manglapus said: “Our own Department of National Defense as well as various U.S. officials have issued alerts to that possibility.”

It is the case that Manglapus issued his prediction on the occasion of a visiting Soviet delegation to Manila. A day before Manglapus’s speech, Philippine Defense Minister Fidel Ramos (the U.S. embassy’s current choice to succeed Corazon Aquino) met with Soviet Colonel General Lobov, first deputy chief of the Soviet general staff. The meeting was reported to be the first high-level military contact between the Soviet Union and the Philippines, a strong U.S. ally. Manglapus further announced that he would be going to the Soviet Union soon to prepare for a spring visit by Philippines President Aquino.

However, such visits by the Soviets, carrying out “confidence-building measures” in Southeast Asia, where other-

wise the Soviet backing for Vietnam has not made the Russians welcome, is only the appropriate backdrop for Manglapus’s statement. Manglapus’s career has been strongly tied to the United States since his days under Ramon Magsaysay, the former President close to Edwin Lansdale; such ties remain strong through Manglapus’s association with Ambassador Robert White’s Center for International Development Policy. Manglapus’s references to the U.S. bases at Clark and Subic do not reflect the bilateral relations between the United States and the Philippines, but U.S. reactions to the September offer of Mikhail Gorbachov that the Soviet Union might withdraw from its “usage” of bases at Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam, if the Philippine bases were to be dismantled.

The idea is definitely in the Southeast Asian air. In an interview with the *Manila Chronicle*, Singapore President Lee Kuan Yew, who has emphatically and publicly stated his belief that the bases are a strategic requirement for Asean defense, asserted that Southeast Asia is now preparing for the withdrawal of the U.S. bases in the Philippines “in the not too distant future.” Last year’s protracted negotiations on the bases prepared the nations in the region for further difficult negotiations and “maybe even an unfavorable outcome,” Lee said. The view of Philippines Foreign Minister Raul Manglapus that the U.S. bases are “stunting” his nation, “is a fundamental point, not a tactical or bargaining point,” Lee said. “So we have been emotionally prepared for an end to the bases in the not too distant future.”

The *London Times* reported that an ASEAN spokesman noted that Lee’s statements did not mark an end to Singapore’s support for the bases, but the U.S. is considered a declining power in the region, and the ASEAN nations want the power vacuum filled “smoothly” by the new power, Japan. Lee said he did not think the U.S. would make a total withdrawal from the Pacific. “That would arouse great consternation. Every country would then have to reassess its position. . . . [But U.S. forces will likely be redeployed] to less strategic or less convenient locations.”

The Korean imbalance

Military negotiations are also moving apace on the Korean peninsula. Amid rumors that South Korea and the United States will reduce the scale of their annual “Team Spirit” military maneuvers, as per demands from North Korea, on Jan. 16, senior American and South and North Korean military officers held secret talks to fix an agenda for reducing tensions along the North-South border. It is the first time since the 1953 truce ending the Korean War, that delegations from the North and from the U.S.-led United Nations Command have met in closed session without prior announcement.

At the same time, South Korean President Noh Tae Woo predicted that he would be meeting with North Korean dictator Kim Il-Sung in a summit “in the not too distant future.” On Jan. 16, North Korea bowed to Soviet pressure and pub-

licly agreed to hold border talks with the South. The border talks are to prepare the way for a meeting of the prime ministers of both Koreas.

There is an acute imbalance, however, in the progress of the Korean peninsula talks. The "Northern Policy" of Noh Tae-Woo is centered on ending the isolation of Pyongyang and using the South's economic might as the leverage to reunite the divided peninsula. Despite the preponderance and offensive posture of North Korea's armed forces over the South, Noh Tae Woo has placed no military pressure on Pyongyang. From the North and from Moscow, however, the demands are repeatedly issued that the U.S. must remove its 40,000 troops from the South, end the Team Spirit exercises, and withdraw strategic defense from the peninsula.

These demands have become a point of discussion in the South. In a September bilateral security conference, American Lt. Gen. John Cushman declared that it is time to dispense with the nuclear weapons issue "by making the flat statement that nuclear weapons are no longer necessary for the defense of [South] Korea—and acting accordingly"—that is, removing the U.S. nuclear weapons assumed to be in the South. "It is time to dismantle the obsolete structure of weapons storage, special-weapons support teams, emergency-action consoles, and permissive-action links that have been put in place over the past 30 years," Cushman said. "It exacerbates North Korea's tendency to reckless behavior, it is not needed to deter them from invasion, it raises justifiable anxieties in the South, and the actual use [of them] would be an appalling catastrophe even to the victor."

This pronouncement of peace-through-weakness was endorsed at the conference by Amos Jordan, of Kissinger's Center for Strategic and International Studies. Cushman's call is the substance of Kissinger's assertion that the United States will "restructure our forces and command arrangements in Korea."

Peace marches on

In Southeast Asia, the predictions coming from ASEAN's Manglapus and Lee Kuan Yew to prepare for the evacuation of the U.S. from the Philippines is combined with strides taken over the course of January to settle the ten-year-old Cambodian conflict. The major actors in that diplomatic drama indicate the powers that will dominate the region: the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China.

On Jan. 14, Vietnamese Deputy Foreign Minister Liem arrived in Beijing for the first direct talks between Vietnam and China in over nine years. His current trip is preparation for a visit to Beijing by Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach.

It is believed that the way might have been prepared for such talks on Jan. 11, when Thach told visiting Thai Foreign Minister Siddhi Savestila that Vietnam was prepared to pull its troops out of Cambodia by September 1989—moving forward Hanoi's target date for withdrawal by three months.

However, as reported by various wire services, an agreement for China-Vietnam direct talks was reached during hallway discussions between Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze and Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen, Jan. 9 at the chemical weapons conference in Paris. Moscow is extremely anxious to provide a timetable for Vietnam withdrawal, as per China's preconditions for a Sino-Soviet summit.

Also in Paris, Qian Qichen met with Prince Sihanouk, the leader of the non-communist resistance forces against the Vietnamese-backed Phnom Penh government, and also met with leaders of the Khmer Rouge, whom he reportedly asked to be "more flexible" in dealing with negotiations.

With the backing of the United States, Thailand has also acted to play a mediating role in the Indochina conflict. In stunning moves over the last month, Thailand has sent its foreign minister to Hanoi, and in late December, Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan announced that he had invited Phnom Penh Prime Minister Hun Sen to Bangkok, although there are no diplomatic relations between Phnom Penh and Bangkok. That invitation was promptly accepted. Hun Sen will be arriving in Thailand Jan. 21. The visit was arranged by Thai Army Commander-in-Chief Gen. Chavalit Yongchaiyudh during a visit to Laos last week; Chavalit had secretly met Hun Sen in Laos in October 1988.

Interestingly, the visit will overlap that of Chinese Defense Minister Qin Jiwei, who arrives in Bangkok for a ten-day visit Jan. 20. This visit was also arranged by Chavalit, who otherwise is known to have extensive ties to Thailand's leftist Revolutionary Council.

The entire projected settlement for Indochina is to have the financial backing of Japan. In Paris, also for the chemical weapons conference, Japanese Foreign Minister Sousuke Uno met with Prince Sihanouk, who would presumably be the nominal leader of a refurbished Cambodia. Uno pledged that Japan would exert economic pressure on Vietnam to force its withdrawal from Cambodia, and also said that Japan would grant Cambodia and Laos \$12 billion in aid, if there were a settlement, and another \$1 billion to Vietnam. Soviet aid to Vietnam is approximately \$1 billion annually.

There have as yet been no substantial guarantees forthcoming from the People's Republic of China to ensure that the genocidal Khmer Rouge does not launch a civil war to take full power in Phnom Penh once the Vietnamese troops have left the country, nor is there agreement among the four Cambodian factions on the face of a new government. But the appearance of a Cambodia settlement is a crucial ingredient in Moscow's overall Asian gameplan: to exert its power over Asia through a full normalization of relations with the P.R.C. and to weave the environment of deception that will lead to American acceptance of the Gorbachov offer for the removal of the U.S. bases in the Philippines. With that, Moscow will have managed to decisively break the U.S. strategic defense line in Asia.