

The interest of this plan does not lie with its silly details, but with the mind that conceived it: It is the same as that of the 1815 Congress of Vienna, the 1878 Congress of Berlin, the 1919 Treaty of Versailles, and the Teheran (1943), Yalta (1944), and Potsdam (1945) series, it is the spirit of superpowers bargaining to carve out their respective spheres of influence. It is the spirit of the “balance of powers” and the “concert of nations” that kept Europe under British imperial domination, with the help of a Russian “gendarme,” throughout the 19th century. When Mrs. Thatcher demands that Poland be given a say in German reunification, and alongside Poland, Great Britain, Canada, the U.S.A., all 35 member-countries of the Helsinki Agreement, not to mention the Benevolent Association of London Taxi Drivers, she perpetuates that spirit, playing Poland against Germany, America against Europe, etc.

It is interesting in that regard to see French Socialist parliamentarian Michel Vauzelle, a longtime collaborator of President François Mitterrand, write in *Le Monde* on March 9: “The subtle diplomatic constructions of the 19th century, founded on dubious searches for equilibrium, are not appropriate to the current period. It is certainly not on the basis of mistrust toward Germany that we can base a serious European policy. We should not be thinking of creating with Eastern Europe or Southern Europe, counterweights to Central Europe.”

Similarly, Maurice Allais, French Nobel laureate for economics, polemicizes against the way in which the phony German-Polish debate (*Le Figaro*, March 12) has been conducted, and defines the real line of demarcation: “The eastern border of Europe is nothing else but the eastern border of Poland. Thus, Poland’s eastern border is nothing but the eastern border of the future Europe.” Allais’ analysis of Mrs. Thatcher’s policy is severe: “It is in the pure tradition of the nationalist policy pursued in the last century by Britain, with the aim of dominating Europe by dividing it.” It is no accident, then, that Allais should praise Havel: “A very special homage must be paid here to the exemplary, high ideals and sense of history of the Czechoslovak President Vaclav Havel.”

The Ukrainian press lavished praise on Havel, in the period preceding the March 4 elections there. His writings have been translated into Ukrainian, and are being circulated there by the Rukh, the Ukrainian national movement—in striking parallel with the inspiration earlier drawn by the independent Republic of Ukraine, after World War I, from the works of Tomas G. Masaryk, President of the first Czechoslovak Republic. When Havel proposes to integrate the Baltic Republics, already independent Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, into the new European order, he is cutting the Gordian knot of Eastern Europe: In order for independence to be effective, the small countries formerly owned or dominated by Moscow need a partnership—ranging from economics to security—which will save them from a deadly “tête-à-tête” with the former Russian colonial power.

Is the U.S. moving to dump Aquino?

by Our Special Correspondent

For weeks now, Manila has been rife with rumors of a new coup attempt by Col. Gregorio Honason and remnants of his Reformed Armed Forces Movement (RAM), the alleged perpetrators of at least six other coup attempts. In response, the Philippines Armed Forces have been on their highest state of alert. But a new rumor circulating in political circles in Manila has been the possibility of a snap election, backed, if not actively promoted, by the United States. Some observers in Manila say this “election” would be to legitimize a coup, not the one that the current state of alert is supposedly aimed at suppressing, but a “legitimate coup” or “electoral coup.” Led by whom? It is widely believed that President Corazon Aquino’s heir-apparent will be Defense Secretary Fidel Ramos, whom many think to be the preferred choice of Washington.

Since it is no longer fashionable for Washington to openly support military coups and since the Philippines is too large for a Panama solution, other means are necessary. But why get rid of Mrs. Aquino?

Debt and bases

The only considerations entertained by the Bush administration in its policy toward the Philippines are the security of the \$26 billion foreign debt and the American military bases, the Navy’s huge Subic Bay Naval Base and the Air Force’s Clark Air Base. Concerning the debt, it has become clear that the Aquino government hasn’t the wherewithal to implement the type of brutal economic policies called for by International Monetary Fund conditionalities now being demanded by the United States. With the 1989 trade deficit of \$2.69 billion, double that of 1988, the Philippines is hopelessly in arrears in its debt payments. This fact was underscored when the United States abstained from voting on a \$390 million World Bank loan in February, in protest of the Philippines’ current economic policies.

The military base question is clear: Bush is demanding freedom of action with the same Teddy Roosevelt yahoo imperialistic attitude that the world saw in Panama. If Bush wants the bases for less money, then he doesn’t want Philippine nationalism to get in the way. The only thing staying his hand is the fact that the Philippines’ 60 million people might be a bit more difficult to pacify.

If the snap election rumor is true, then Mrs. Aquino’s much-touted “get tough” policy toward the opposition looks more like eliminating the opposition not just to her, but to

her own early demise, thus clearing the way for her defense secretary, General Ramos.

Since Washington's decision to dump Ferdinand Marcos, their man has always been Fidel Ramos. It was his desertion of Marcos in 1986 that brought the Army behind Aquino, in fact providing her escort to Malacanang Palace. It was the same Washington connections that enabled Ramos to come out on top after six coup attempts since 1986.

As with Mrs. Aquino in 1986, getting the Army behind Ramos would be the decisive factor in his own bid for the presidential palace. The events of the last weeks tend to confirm this, particularly following Aquino's refusal to receive U.S. Defense Secretary Richard Cheney in February. Ramos's strong U.S. backing is joined by backing from elite business circles such as the Makati Businessmen's Club and the informal and overlapping group of Philippine businessmen and other elite circles called the Council of Trent.

The Aguinaldo affair

Taking a leaf from U.S. Attorney General Richard Thornburgh's book of judicial dirty tricks and the CIA's divide-and-conquer pacification tactics, Ramos has moved against the opposition in the military. The early March release of opposition leader Juan Ponce Enrile on orders of the Philippine Supreme Court underscored the judicial travesty of the indictments of half a dozen individuals on charges of "rebellion and murder." The linking of rebellion with murder had been thrown out in a 1950 decision of the Supreme Court. Nonetheless, such charges enabled Ramos to take out of circulation potential organizers of opposition to his own path to the presidency. Although Enrile managed to secure his release, others, such as Brig. Gen. Felix Brawner (ret.), the former commander of the elite Scout Rangers, who spearheaded the last coup, remain in custody.

The most reckless action was the attempt to serve an arrest warrant against Rodolfo Aguinaldo, the suspended governor of Cagayan Province. Aguinaldo was indicted for "rebellion and murder" for his alleged support of last December's coup attempt. A former colonel and member of the RAM, he has been a very popular governor who has ruthlessly taken on the communist New People's Army as well as the local political oligarchy. His "private army" reflects more of his grassroots support than the warlord image created in the press. As a personal acquaintance said of him, "He has guts; he would always be in the barrios taking the political pulse of the people."

The "rebellion" that resulted from the attempt to arrest him was in fact provoked by Army Chief of Staff General Villa and no doubt Ramos himself. Rather than send an officer of the court, Ramos sent in four battalions of troops and four top officers, including Brig. Gen. Oscar Florendo, chief of the Civil Relations Department of the Philippines Armed Forces. Florendo was better known as chief of the Armed Forces psychological warfare operations. He died in the

shootout in Cagayan, a death now believed by government investigators to have been caused not by his would-be hostage-takers but by a bullet fired from a gun of government troops. Others sent in to arrest Aguinaldo included Colonel Templo, deputy chief of staff in charge of civil relations; Luis Santos, cabinet secretary in charge of civil relations; and Commodore Chuck Augustine, deputy chief of staff for personnel. He was the former Philippine military attaché in Washington.

That such a high-powered group would be made responsible for simply serving an arrest warrant could only be seen by someone in Aguinaldo's position as a deployment of a task force with orders to take him "dead or alive." He obviously did not wish to accommodate them. Following a shootout lasting several hours, Aguinaldo managed to escape and remains in the hills of Cagayan Province, pursued by 2,700 government troops who stand little chance of capturing him.

Adding irony to the government's growing image of ineptitude, Romulo Kintanar, head of the New People's Army, issued a statement inviting the rebels to join the communist insurgents against the common enemy. Kintanar stated that the RAM rebels and the NPA share the same goals: anti-Americanism, anti-imperialism, anti-corruption. Some observers believe that such an alliance is not out of the question by any means, particularly among the junior officer corps.

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