

Benign New World

By John T. Correll, EDITOR IN CHIEF

'PENTAGON Needs a Few Good Enemies," sneered a headline in the *New York Daily News* June 21. The sarcasm expresses a view that is currently gathering steam. With the Soviet Union talking peace and promising massive reductions in its armed forces, what justification remains for a costly US defense program?

Some analysts have already begun their recomputation of defense requirements. William Kaufman of Harvard University, for example, speculates for Copley News Service that we could eliminate eleven Army divisions, three carrier battle groups, and twenty Air Force fighter wings and still have plenty left to meet our needs in the future.

Despite some doubt that Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev can deliver on his promises, Americans today feel safer and more secure than they have in forty years. They seem inclined to believe that a more benign world is just around the corner. Tomorrow will certainly be different. Whether it is less threatening remains to be seen.

"For the next few years, familiar issues will predominate, but looming ahead will lie a different strategic world," the White House Commission on Long-Term Strategy predicts. "For the next decade, the basic situation is a world with two major, dominant powers and a larger number of medium-size small powers. Twenty years from now there will be three or four or possibly even five major powers."

An integrated Europe might be among the new powers. So might China and Japan. By 2010, the Chinese economy could be the world's second largest, overtaking both Japan and the Soviet Union. Other nations are projected to move up in the economic standings as well. India's GNP will approach that of France in 2010, for example, and Brazil's will roughly match the United Kingdom's.

The redistribution of political influence and the proliferation of weapons technology will lessen the ability of the great powers to intervene in regional conflicts. This in turn increases the danger that local wars may spread or escalate.

Even today, numerous Third World countries are too well armed to dismiss lightly. Twenty-two developing nations own ballistic missiles. A dozen field more than 1,000 tanks each. Many have chemical weapons and advanced electronics. By the next century, forty nations might possess nuclear weapons.

Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean rim are ripe locations for trouble. The greatest danger of all may be the smoldering unrest in Eastern Europe. The entire continent could be drawn into a conflict that began with violent breakup of the Warsaw Pact.

Such considerations alone should put a damper on premature celebrations about the Benign New World. Our main national security concern, however, is still Soviet military power. No matter what the optimists think, that danger has not melted away.

The international goodwill that Mr. Gorbachev enjoys was purchased on credit. As US Army Chief of Staff Carl E. Vuono says, "most of his promised military checks are still in the mail." The United States unilaterally reduced its defense program by eleven percent in the past four years. Mr. Gorbachev's reductions have not yet begun.

Moreover, Mr. Gorbachev's promises touch only the margins of Soviet military strength. Adm. William J. Crowe, Jr., Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the House Armed Services Committee in April testimony. "Even after reducing 500,000 troops, the USSR will end up with an active military establishment of about 4,600,000 personnel and the world's largest inventory of military hardware," Admiral Crowe said.

Soviet military spending rose by its usual increment last year, and Soviet industry continues to run full tilt on military production (see Editorial, "*The Embattled Soviet Economy*," July 1989 issue). Gen. John Galvin, Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, recently described how new production could affect the net result of the Soviet offer to withdraw 10,000 tanks from Europe.

"They are now producing about 3,000 tanks a year—far better tanks, by the way, than anything they are talking about removing," General Galvin said. "They say, and I agree after having studied it, that it will take them about two years to pull back the 10,000 tanks in an orderly fashion. By then, they will have added at least 6,000 newer ones."

If Mr. Gorbachev succeeds in his reform program, that would not necessarily be good news for the Western world. All of his actions are consistent with building the Soviet Union into a more powerful adversary.

Mr. Gorbachev may give us more symbolism, which has worked well for him so far. It is conceivable that he will tear down the Berlin Wall. He might even give Lenin a decent burial. Such symbolism does not diminish his real power. What he will not do is willingly turn the Soviet Union into an inconsequential backwater.

But on what basis except military muscle can the Soviet Union be counted a great power? Trade? The Soviet economy is a basket case, and the poor quality of goods produced by Soviet factories has been a continuing disappointment to Mr. Gorbachev. Ideology? Even the Communists don't buy communism anymore. Population and geography? Perhaps, but Moscow's grip on the Soviet empire is not what it used to be. A huge military establishment is the Soviet Union's only real source of influence and power. Mr. Gorbachev will hold on to it if he can.

Almost everyone agrees that the global distribution of power is shifting. Change brings instability, which leads to all manner of dangerous circumstances. We had better think again before dumping those eleven divisions, three carrier battle groups, and twenty fighter wings. ■