

Moscow's age of Aquarius

The Cold War is over. That was the essence of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's dramatic speech yesterday at the United Nations.

Quite a change from the last visit of a Soviet leader, the bumptious Nikita Khrushchev, who banged his shoe and warned the West, "We will bury you!"

That was during the iciest days of the Cold War. Yesterday, a mellow Gorbachev spoke about the Soviet Union becoming a "partner" with the rest of the world community. He called for international relations to be "de-ideologized," no small matter for a nation that until recently supposedly based its foreign policy on class struggle.

The USSR, said Gorbachev, favored economic integration with the world economy — this from a nation whose money cannot be converted into any international currency. We must strive, he added, for a "non-violent world," with free trade in ideas. The environment must be protected as a high priority. Force would no longer be used as a means of foreign policy.

Exit the glowering Russian bear; the age of Aquarius has finally reached Moscow.

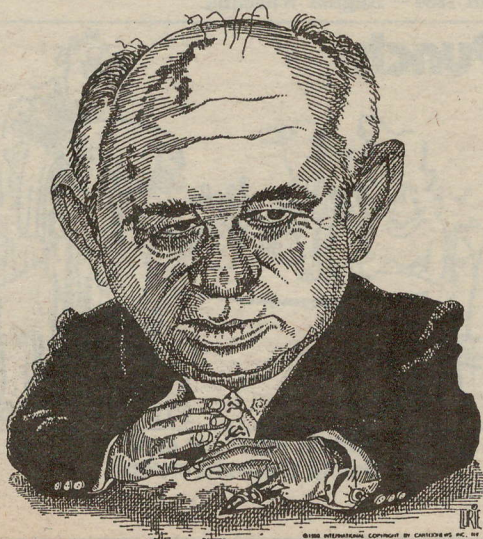
Yesterday, the anniversary of Pearl Harbor, Gorbachev came forth with a number of surprises, most of them pleasant.

- The USSR would make a unilateral cut of 500,000 men out of its total armed forces of 5.6 million — the world's largest.

- Six armored divisions based in East Germany, Hungary and Czechoslovakia would be withdrawn and disbanded. Such units are the best in the Red Army and equipped with the most modern T-80 and T-64B tanks.

Gorbachev went on to say that 5,000 tanks and 50,000 men in total would be pulled out of East Europe. This means that additional tank cuts will probably be made in Soviet motor rifle divisions, since six armored divisions account for only around 1,980 tanks. Such reductions will amount to 20% of Soviet tank strength in East Europe and 10% of troop strength.

- Another 450,000 men and 5,000 tanks will be cut



MIKHAIL GORBACHEV

**ERIC
MARGOLIS**



from Soviet western military districts west of the Urals. Also to be scrapped are 8,500 guns, an important loss for an army that calls artillery, "the king of battle," and 800 combat aircraft.

- Four Soviet divisions stationed in Mongolia, a Soviet protectorate since the early 1920s, are to be pulled back into Siberia. This is an extremely important gesture to China which has long fretted over the Soviet presence in Mongolia — a dangerous salient that gave the the Red Army the ability to make an armored dash to Beijing. A major boost for next year's Sino-Soviet summit.

- Equally significant, Gorbachev spoke of "restructuring" Soviet forces to give them a defensive alignment. Soviet military doctrine is based on high-aggression, armored blitzkrieg. Making the ground forces assume a defensive posture means a 180-degree change in tactics, strategy and equipment. Gorbachev calls this "reasonable defence sufficiency."

- Two key elements in this plan will be elimination from East Europe of bridging units and assault landing units. The former are essential to move the Red Army across the many water obstacles that lie in the path of an advance into Western Europe. The latter are tasked with seizing Denmark and tearing open the exits from the Baltic in time of war. How many of these key units will be eliminated remains uncertain — the size and speed of the cuts will be the best indication of Gorbachev's sincerity.

- After all the above cuts, the Soviets will still have a hefty advantage over NATO in tanks, guns, armored vehicles and combat aircraft. Further deep cuts will be needed to make the USSR truly non-threatening. Still, if the cuts announced by Gorbachev are made in combat-ready forces, they will considerably lessen the threat to NATO of a quick, crushing defeat in a surprise attack.

- Gorbachev proposed a Jan. 1 in-place ceasefire in Afghanistan, supervised by UN troops. He offered to cut aid to the communist regime in Kabul if the U.S. would stop arming the Afghan resistance.

The Soviets are hurting badly in Afghanistan. They rightly fear that the Kabul regime won't be able to hold out after the Soviets withdraw their last troops by Feb. 15 — if they continue the withdrawal. It may already have been halted.

Gorbachev's military cuts are good news; his proposals for Afghanistan are not. He is in effect proposing a de facto partition of Afghanistan into Soviet and resistance-controlled zones, with the communists holding Kabul and the mineral-rich north. The West should reject this one-sided offer.

It should listen closely, however, to Gorbachev's key message: The USSR will henceforth conduct its big-power policy by economic and political means. Shoe-banging is out, at least for now.