

## Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

### Scowcroft: Bush not ready to lead NATO

Gen. Brent Scowcroft, who was the National Security Adviser under President Ford and is now the head of Vice President George Bush's National Security Task Force, was remarkably candid in comments made exclusively to this writer Oct. 19, that Bush is ill-prepared to lead the NATO alliance through rough tests it will face during the transition between the Nov. 8 election and inauguration day.

As honorary chairman of Bush's task force, no one would know better than Scowcroft about the vice president's preparedness to take the reins of leadership in NATO, and Scowcroft did not mince words about his grave concerns for what is going to happen once the election is over and, probably, Bush becomes the President-elect.

"I fear that sometime right after the election, Gorbachov is going to make a bold initiative in the area of conventional arms control, offering to remove two soldiers for every one in the West," General Scowcroft said. "This will be made to look very good to the average European citizen, who will assert great pressure on his government to accept the offer."

But, Scowcroft warned, the offer will only be a public relations ploy, aimed at manipulating popular opinion, especially in Europe.

"In reality," Scowcroft said, "the asymmetry that exists among conventional forces between NATO and the Warsaw Pact is much greater than two-to-one. It is more like four or even six-to-one. But that will not be well under-

stood in the West, and therefore I fear that a conventional arms reduction offer by Gorbachov will have a lot of appeal, even though its effect will be to give the Soviets an even greater edge."

### Alliance called 'fractured, vulnerable'

General Scowcroft, who is also a vice president of Kissinger Associates, Inc., was one of a panel of speakers at an Atlantic Council forum held in the House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing room, and spoke with me at length after the forum broke up. I challenged him to respond to the remarks made by Robert Gates, deputy director of the CIA (see article, page 64) when he predicted that the Soviets will make arms control proposals aimed at "severely testing alliance cohesion."

At first, Scowcroft complained about the Gates speech, saying that it was "overly pessimistic" and failed to measure the "inadequate" pace of Soviet economic reforms against any objective criteria. But then Scowcroft suddenly began agreeing with Gates's assessment on the issue of arms control. He made his prediction about what Gorbachov would do after the election in the United States, adding, "The problem is that NATO does not have its act together" to counter Gorbachov's ploy.

"Nobody in NATO has taken the lead to do this," he grumbled. "Look at the last NATO summit [last March in Brussels]. All they did was sit around and congratulate each other for the INF treaty." As a result, he said, NATO is now fractured, passive, and vulnerable to a phoney Soviet arms reduction "offer."

"Who is responsible for this condition?" I asked.

"Bureaucracy," General Scow-

croft said, with a sneering, obvious contempt for what the word represented. But it was also an evasion. So I asked again: "Who would have to provide the leadership to get NATO out of this condition?"

"It would have to come from the United States," he said. I could not permit him to be so vague, and insisted, "Who, in particular, in the United States has not been doing his job? Would it be National Security Adviser Gen. Colin Powell?"

"I think it would have to be the President-elect," Scowcroft said. "He would have to be prepared to get NATO together right after the election and assert leadership."

But, General Scowcroft went on, "It is not going to happen. Now, [Bush] is thinking about nothing but the election. . . . I don't know that anything is going to get done after the election, either. I doubt if anything will happen before the inauguration in January."

That means NATO is in trouble, and not only in the event that Gov. Michael Dukakis gets elected.

### 'Impossible to know Soviet intentions'

During the Atlantic Council forum, all the principal speakers said that the West should "keep its powder dry," but that they were hopeful of the changes the Soviets claim they are making.

Jim Shinn of the NATO Information Office, for example, said, "It is impossible to know the Soviets' ultimate intentions." Scowcroft himself said that "it remains to be seen if Soviet promises are sincere, or merely tactical."

Afterwards, when I asked General Scowcroft if there was any solid evidence that the Soviets were "sincere," he couldn't provide any.