

Asia Defense Policy Fight Brews At White House

A heated dispute is being battled out inside the Carter Administration over United States defense policy in Asia. The major issue is the future of U.S. relations with the People's Republic of China, a question at the very heart of America's basic strategic defense posture.

The most immediate topic of controversy is the proposal most often associated with Henry Kissinger and the Brookings Institution for the United States to openly engage in a working military relationship with China as a strategic "counterweight" to the Soviet Union. Secondary but related issues in the debate are the U.S. defense relationship with Japan and the Administration's much-publicized plan to withdraw U.S. ground troops from South Korea.

A highly respected Asian scholar in the U.S. with extensive ties to the State Department has informed this news service of the outlines of the debate, which breaks down into three basic points of view.

The first group, led by National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, is arguing for a full-scale "united front" with China against the Soviet Union and favors withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Korea and arms sales to China, both designed to aid the "united front" policy. A close ally of this group is Senator Henry Jackson (D-Wash.) who returned from Peking two weeks ago openly advocating that the United States use China as a "lever" against the Soviet Union in the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks.

Immediately opposed to this is a second faction, which includes Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and, to a lesser extent, Defense Secretary Harold Brown, and operates under tremendous pressure from the powerful bureaucracies of the Pentagon and Department of State. This second group is vehemently opposed to a "united front" with China and, while not against the troop withdrawal from Korea, has argued for maintaining the traditional "equilibrium" power balance in North Asia involving the United States, the Soviet Union, China, and Japan.

A third group, represented by Sen. George McGovern (D-S.D.), advocates total American withdrawal from Asia. This policy is widely regarded as "unserious, and totally unviable" as one observer put it, with little chance of gaining the upper hand in the White House policy struggle. However, it has proved useful as a flanking ploy against the Vance grouping.

The present debate was sparked by the growing possibility that Congress will refuse to ratify Administration requests for some \$800 million in military aid for South Korea as compensation for the withdrawal of U.S. troops as a result of the Korean influence-buying scandal on Capitol Hill. The compensation program was the basis on which the many outspoken critics of with-

drawal accepted the plan, in hopes that the compensation would serve to maintain the delicate power balance surrounding the highly explosive Korean Peninsula. Once again, with Congressional go-ahead for the compensation program in question, the withdrawal plan has become a focal point for debate of the basic U.S. strategic posture in Asia.

Intelligence community sources known to oppose the withdrawal emphasize that the policy has strategic implications far beyond Korea. "The only possible rationale for a withdrawal from Korea at this time is an attempt to intensify the Sino-Soviet split," one such source said. He explained that a Korean peninsula under the sphere of influence of China—something that could result from U.S. withdrawal — "would lead to a confrontation between China and Russia," and put the whole region on a hair-trigger for world war.

The Strategy of Korean Withdrawal

A Sino-Soviet conflict, with the United States allied with China, was precisely what Henry Kissinger had in mind when he designed the original U.S. troop withdrawal from Asia — the so-called Nixon Doctrine — in 1969. His plan, the devious "Washington-Peking-Tokyo Axis," was to redeploy U.S. troops from Asia to Europe and consolidate a "second front" against the Soviet Union in cooperation with a China allied to NATO.

For Kissinger, the Korean peninsula remained a thorny problem. It is the one place in the world where there is a direct possibility that China and the U.S. could line up on different sides in the event of conflict. Both the Soviet Union and China border North Korea and are allied to that country, while the United States presently has 30,000 troops in South Korea under the provisions of a wide-ranging defense treaty. Moreover, China's ties to the North were deepened by the Korea war, when the two countries were allies against the United States. Clearly, if a full alliance with China was to be struck, some arrangement had to be reached regarding Korea, so that the U.S. and China could end up on the same side of the fence.

Although Kissinger's efforts toward this goal were suspended as a result of the communist victory in Vietnam, the Carter Administration, under the influence of Brzezinski, quickly picked up where Kissinger left off. Not accidentally, the chief adviser to Carter in developing the withdrawal policy was Barry Blechman, who, as a Brookings Institution "specialist," became known as the chief theorist of the pro-Peking "second front" strategy against the Soviet Union.

But the announcement early last year of the withdrawal plan, the "balance of forces" in the Ad-

ministration has changed, chiefly as a result of the widespread opposition from the Pentagon and the State Department, as well as from South Korea and Japan. Under primarily the influence of Vance, the Administration has gone to great lengths to emphasize that the withdrawal policy in no way signals a change in U.S. defense commitments in Asia, and in South Korea in particular. This has included the commissioning this week of U.S. troop participation in the largest military maneuvers on the peninsula since the Korean war. Moreover, the same theme has been repeated numerous times in the last two weeks by Administration officials as several Congressional committees have opened hearings on the withdrawal policy.

Defense Secretary Brown went so far as to indicate to the House International Relations Committee two weeks ago that U.S. troops might be redeployed to Korea in the event of war. In addition, the *Far Eastern Economic Review* reported last week that Mike Mansfield, U.S. Ambassador in Tokyo, and Leonard Woodcock, the U.S. envoy in Peking, have both added their usually liberal voices to those who oppose the Korean withdrawal.

Brzezinski has not given up the fight, however. With the Panama Canal issue almost out of the way, it is expected he will make a major push for placing renewed negotiations with the People's Republic of China high on the Administration's priority list. Leading Sinophiles in the Senate, such as Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) and Alan Cranston (D-Calif.), have long questioned the placing of such issues as the Panama Canal, or even the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks, ahead of the negotiations for normalization of relations with China.

The activities of the House Subcommittee on International Organizations, which opened public hearings last week as part of its 18-month "investigation" into all aspects of U.S.-Korean relations, are expected to be helpful to Brzezinski. Known as the "Fraser Committee" after its Chairman, Rep. Donald Fraser (D-Minn.), the committee has staged highly publicized "exposés" throughout the hearings on the "origins" of the Korean influence-buying scandal on Capitol Hill, with heavy emphasis on "proving" that Korean President Park Chung Hee directed the lobbying efforts. High officials of the Nixon and Ford Administrations, together with officials in the intelligence community are implicated as having shut their eyes to these efforts.

For Fraser, a member of the Trilateral Commission who is heavily influenced by the "McGovern faction," the ongoing hearings return his years-long campaign to destabilize the Park government to the front pages. The Park regime is viewed by the McGovern crowd and Brzezinski alike as a major obstacle to resolving the Korean controversy with a pro-Peking tilt, as both the PRC and its North Korean allies refuse to negotiate with the South as long as Park is at the helm. Moreover, the attacks by Fraser, who according to all accounts dominates the course of the committee's work, on the intelligence community are expected to help Brzezinski quiet the opposition to the "united front" with China within the Pentagon, the State Department, and the CIA.

The Japan Connection

Informed sources report that the severe criticisms of

the Carter troop withdrawal policy from Japan have, like U.S. domestic pressure to the same effect, served to force the Administration to moderate the policy. For Japan, the Korean withdrawal, as designed by Kissinger, has meant increased pressure to build up its defense in cooperation with China "to take up the slack." Thus far, Japanese Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda has steered away from this policy, opting instead to maintain Japan's traditional policy of "equidistance" between China and the Soviet Union.

In recent weeks Fukuda has been sending the United States unmistakable messages to the effect that if the United States withdraws from Korea and tries to force a realignment of forces in Asia along anti-Soviet lines, Japan may have to abandon its traditional defense relationship with the U.S.

The most dramatic of these messages was Fukuda's endorsement in a speech to the Diet (Parliament) last week of the idea that it would not be a violation of the Japanese constitution for Japan to possess "defensive" nuclear weapons. Fukuda clarified this statement by saying that such possession of nuclear weapons would violate the Nonproliferation Treaty, which Japan has signed, and that his government has no intention of acquiring nuclear arms, but the statement was shocking nonetheless because it is the first time a postwar Japanese Prime Minister has endorsed this view. For Washington, the message could not have been clearer, since Japan is known to have angrily threatened to amend the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty and acquire nuclear weapons several times during the Kissinger era.

Moreover, Fukuda's statement followed shortly his public embrace with one of his top political rivals within the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, Yasuhiro Nakasone, shortly after the latter gave a speech questioning U.S. defense commitments in Asia. Nakasone has long been known as a proponent of moderate Japanese rearmament combined with a Japanese defense policy more independent of the U.S. Fukuda, who echoed Nakasone's questions toward the U.S. in a speech two weeks ago, plans to question President Carter on U.S. Korean policy when he visits Washington in early May. It is believed that a speech by Defense Secretary Brown in California two weeks ago concerning U.S. defense policy in Asia was designed to allay Japanese fears that the U.S. is changing its policy towards the region. Brown stressed that the Administration plans to build up U.S. air and naval forces in the region while maintaining, except for the Korean withdrawal, all U.S. combat troop deployments.

Perhaps the irony in the Administration's Asia debate in the frequently voiced myth that China wants U.S. troops to stay in South Korea as a bulwark against the Soviet Union. Intelligence sources report that it is in fact the Soviets who want the troops to remain, so as to preserve the existing power balance. The Soviet Union, distrustful of their nominal North Korean ally Kim Il-sung, fear that removing the stabilizing force of U.S. troops in Korea could easily lead to an outbreak of hostilities on the explosive peninsula, and embroil the U.S. and USSR in a nuclear showdown that neither wants.

—Peter Ennis

We Must Give Asia Its Due

Defense Secretary Harold Brown to the Los Angeles World Affairs Council, Feb. 20, 1978

I have just returned from several days visiting the Pacific Fleet and reviewing our defense posture in the Pacific and East Asia with our senior military commanders there. Like them, I am concerned with what can only be termed a misconception about our policy — that is the belief, expressed sometimes at home and sometimes abroad, that the United States is withdrawing from Asia.

That perception is, quite simply, wrong....

Clearly our defense posture in Asia must be based on protecting these interests and those of our friends and allies and on helping preserve peace and stability. Our military forces in Asia make a vital contribution to these ends....

The President has decided that, except for the planned withdrawals from Korea, the United States will maintain this current level of combat forces in Asia....

There are major uncertainties in Asia which could threaten future peace in Asia and Europe. The equilibrium that has emerged in East Asia during this decade — in which the United States, the USSR, the People's Republic of China and Japan are the principal players — is not only beneficial to Asia but helps maintain the balance in Europe.

That equilibrium, however, is not necessarily permanent.... If we don't give Asia its due — if we don't maintain the necessary military forces, as well as enough economic and political strength in the region to hedge against these uncertainties — the favorable political balance we now find in Asia could deteriorate rapidly.

A Treaty Is A Treaty...

Associated Press report of U.S. Ambassador to Japan Mike Mansfield's press conference March 1:

U.S. Ambassador to Japan Mike Mansfield said Wednesday he assumes U.S. ground troops would become involved if a war broke out in Korea.

This view differs from long-stated U.S. policy, dating from the Nixon Doctrine of 1969, which stressed that American allies in Asia would be aided with arms and advice but be expected to fight for themselves.

Mansfield, speaking to reporters, said the purpose of joint America-South Korean maneuvers next week was to demonstrate American flexibility in responding with fighting men to a possible North Korean invasion of the Republic of Korea.

Asked to elaborate, Mansfield said the security treaty between the two countries stipulates the United States will go to South Korea's defense in case of attack.

"A treaty is a treaty," he said. "As long as it is in

force, we will uphold the commitments in that treaty." ...

Mansfield said it was no contradiction that he fully approved U.S. President Carter's decision to gradually withdraw 33,000 U.S. ground troops from South Korea.

Withdrawal Doesn't Mean U.S. Troops Won't Fight

The Hapdong News Agency reported the testimony of Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Morton Abramowitz and Gen. John Vessey, Commander of U.S. forces in Korea before the Senate Armed Services Committee Feb. 24:

The withdrawal of U.S. ground forces from South Korea will not prevent immediate and automatic involvement of U.S. forces in a new Korean war, a high ranking Pentagon official and a commander said Friday.

In their testimony, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Morton Abramowitz and Gen. John Vessey, commander of U.S. forces in Korea, disclosed that even following the pullout of U.S. combat troops from South Korea, the United States could not help being involved immediately in any new war on the Korean peninsula as long as U.S. air and naval forces, and units of logistics, communications and intelligence remain there.

Gen. Vessey indirectly expressed his opposition to the withdrawal by saying that the proposed withdrawal timetable is too tight and the pullout should be carried out slowly and it should not upset the military balance on the Korean peninsula.

Our Position Is Clear

Testimony delivered by Secretary of Defense Harold Brown before the House International Relations Committee Feb. 22:

Committee Chairman Rep. C. Zablocki: You said in your statement that neither the Soviets nor the Chinese should have any doubts that we would meet North Korean aggression with overwhelming force. What conversations have we had with the Soviets and the Chinese on this matter?

Brown: The Soviets, I know, are made aware of our commitments to the South Koreans directly. With the Chinese, it has been discussed peripherally. But in fact what counts is not what we say but how we behave. Our commitments are demonstrated by continuing joint exercises like the upcoming large-scale exercise early next month with the South Koreans, by our upgrading our own air equipment and our own forces in Korea, and by our improving the Korean armed forces. And perhaps, the most important of all is the arms transfer program and security assistance the administration asked for.

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