

Admiral Blair Rebuffs Neocons' Taiwan Policy

by William Jones

Admiral Dennis Blair, the former commander of the U.S. Pacific Command, said on Sept. 25 that the United States must make it clear to Taiwan that, if it were to declare independence—thus provoking a confrontation with China, which considers Taiwan an integral part of its homeland—the United States would not come to Taiwan's aid. Blair spoke at a forum sponsored by the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies in Washington.

The neoconservative faction of Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz and Defense Policy Board Chairman Richard Perle, including their supporters at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), is outspoken in support for a shift in U.S. policy to the benefit of Taiwan independence. Blair was asked whether his statement meant that he were not in favor of the U.S. policy of "ambiguity" with regard to Taiwan. He replied, "I am in favor of political ambiguity, but not military ambiguity."

"Strategic ambiguity" is the somewhat Byzantine formula characterizing the U.S. relationship to Taiwan. While the United States, in its traditional "one-China" policy, recognizes only mainland China as the representative of all China, the old pro-Kuomintang "China lobby," strengthened by "free-market" neoconservatives, succeeded in keeping intact—in the enabling legislation that established diplomatic relations between the People's Republic of China and the United States in 1979—a clause which said that "any effort to determine the future of Taiwan by other than peaceful means, including by boycotts or embargoes," would be considered "a threat to the peace and security of the Western Pacific and of grave concern to the United States." The Enabling Act was provocatively retitled the Taiwan Relations Act, and passed with a sizable enough majority to make it veto-proof.

With the inroads made by the neoconservatives during the last ten years, further legislation has been introduced that would commit the United States even more strongly to Taiwan, although many of these efforts failed of passage. In addition, many neoconservative think-tanks have encouraged political forces on Taiwan to push for independence. Taiwan President Chen Shui-bian has provoked an outcry more than once from Beijing authorities through his calls for independence. President Chen's wife, Chen Wu Sue-jan, when visiting the AEI at the end of September, said that she was looking forward to the day when Taiwan would again "join the community of nations."

Usefulness of Military Ties

Admiral Blair, the former Pacific commander, was also anxious that Washington re-establish full military-to-military relations with China. While the neoconservatives have been feeding their mouthpiece, *Washington Times* scribbler Bill Gertz, with horror stories about Chinese espionage, Blair contends that the United States has such a strict system of classification, that there would be little opportunity for visiting Chinese military officers to learn anything of strategic importance. On the other hand, what they do learn by visiting U.S. military bases and talking with their American counterparts helps to eliminate "ambiguity" in their understanding of the United States and its people.

The United States, he said, could learn a lot from these visits, in what he dubbed "Ask-Int." Simply asking people about what they do and what they think, can tell more about a nation and its people than all your signals intelligence and imaging devices would ever reveal, Blair said. He also noted that it was of the utmost importance to have some knowledge of military counterparts on the other side. During the most recent crisis with China, after a U.S. Navy EP3 reconnaissance plane had to perform an emergency landing subsequent to a mid-air collision with a Chinese fighter, the knowledge attained during the previous period of military-to-military exchanges allowed the Pacific Command to know exactly whom they had to contact on the Chinese side, in order to come to a resolution of the crisis. This prevented further confusion that might have resulted in even more serious consequences for the U.S.-Chinese relationship. "We knew who the people were on the Chinese side," Blair said. "And the Chinese knew who was who on the U.S. side."

Blair recommended conducting joint exercises between the two militaries, in such operations as the two might well be called upon to do together in the future: anti-drug operations, search and rescue missions, anti-piracy operations, and peace-keeping. "These would allow us to develop habits of cooperation," Blair said.

When asked by *EIR* where he thought China would be in the next 10 to 20 years, Blair said he didn't really know. While the "Get China" neocons have been crowing about how China will develop into an expansionist power, Blair pointed to the realities of their policy: "They have solved their border problems with their neighbors, they are not deploying in other parts of the world. They are cooperating in the multilateral fora. Our strategy should be to encourage China to be a responsible power in the world, and to be prepared to act, if it is not."

Areas of cooperation are many; most importantly, in North Korea. "This is a country whose population hasn't grown a bit in ten years. That tells you something of the dire state of affairs there," Blair said. He expressed great interest in the joining of the rail lines between North and South Korea. "In areas like this," he told his audience, "China should be encouraged to do more."