

What the "Pacific Doctrine" Overlooks

O. Edmund Clubb

The fall of South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia to the forces of communism in the spring of 1975 heralded a distinct shift in the balance of power in the West Pacific. The United States had lost its footholds in the Indochinese Peninsula, was being forced to evacuate military bases in Thailand, and faced a demand for the negotiation of new arrangements to govern the use of naval and air bases in the Philippines. There was a rise in Asian nationalisms, and a corresponding growth of local trends toward neutralism with respect to American "security" projects.

The domino effect of those developments had been less pronounced than some of the American "worst-case" analysts had speculated a quarter-century before; the setback was nevertheless of a magnitude that seemed to call for a massive revision of our grand strategy for Asia. In fact, certain basic American strategic concepts were projected unchanged into the future. The United States still clung to the conviction that it must strive for "stability" and maintain its "credibility"; and it apparently saw no way to remain "credible" other than to stand by existing alliances, even if the military factor had lost much of its earlier significance. Now, however, there was to be an increased emphasis on air and naval power with the use of island bases; and the strategic emphasis would be shifted from Southeast Asia to Northeast Asia.

So the United States solemnly reaffirmed its "commitments" not only to the Philippines, but also to Taiwan, South Korea, and most important, to Japan. But this recommitment to past positions was made in the face of massive changes in the strategic complex of Northeast Asia. For one thing, in 1972 the United States had undertaken détente with both the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the USSR, thus diluting the rationale that it had invoked for two-and-a-half decades in justifi-

cation of its strategy of confrontation and containment of Communist powers. For another thing, world concerns were slowly, but with glacial inevitability, shifting from the military field (where the United States had invested most of its political capital) into the economic arena.

There was limited recognition of the changes time had wrought. Speaking at Honolulu on December 7, 1975, the anniversary of Pearl Harbor, President Ford outlined what he termed "a new Pacific Doctrine" of "peace with all—and hostility toward none." In the President's words: "The center of political power in the United States has shifted westward. Our Pacific interests and concerns have increased....The security concerns of great world powers intersect in Asia. The United States, the Soviet Union, China, and Japan are all Pacific powers....Equilibrium in the Pacific is absolutely essential to the United States and to the other countries in the Pacific."

As spelled out by President Ford, the Doctrine contains six fundamental elements: (1) "American strength is basic to any stable balance of power in the Pacific"; (2) "The partnership with Japan is a pillar of our strategy"; (3) There should be "the normalization of relations, and "strengthening of our new ties," with the PRC; (4) The United States has a "continuing stake in the stability and security of Southeast Asia"; (5) "Peace in Asia requires a structure of economic cooperation reflecting the aspirations of all the peoples in the region."

In the framework of that strategy *American* power is patently viewed as the prime factor: it is to dominate the Pacific Basin. Next in political importance is Japan, chief pillar of the American strategy. The PRC is accorded an important role—in promise—but is clearly not elevated to the old dominant role of the Middle Kingdom. That other Asian power, the Soviet Union, was indeed identified as one of the four

O. EDMUND CLUBB, for twenty years with the U.S. Foreign Service in Asia, is a frequent contributor to *Worldview*.

great world powers whose "security concerns" intersect in Asia; but President Ford's treatment of the Soviet role extended no further.

The "new" strategy, manifestly a close relative of the Nixon Doctrine of 1969, was formally presented in its more benign, public relations aspect. It is necessary to look to related comments for the fuller interpretation. The element of military confrontation is now soft-pedaled—but this only means the contest has taken on new forms. Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger, speaking at a gathering of U.S. ambassadors in London in December, said that "We must balance off Soviet power around the world through a combination of political, military, and economic means." He continued: "In the Far East, the PRC must be a part of our political calculations." This was an extension of the concept of playing the two major Communist powers off against each other that had been introduced in the Nixon Administration.

On its face the Doctrine's point number six appears to be an expression of Kissinger's advertised concept of international cooperation under conditions of economic interdependence. Yet in his address of June 21, 1975, to the annual ministers meeting of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Kissinger called for cooperation among the "industrialized democracies" (capitalist countries) for both economic and political ends in their dealings with Communist countries and Third World nations. In the Pacific that tactic would have Japan aligned with the United States in dealings with both the PRC and the USSR, and also in exchanges with Southeast Asia.

What are the prospects for the effective operation of the Pacific Doctrine strategy in post-Vietnam Asia?

The United States now finds itself in a vulnerable position in Southeast Asia. Thailand illustrates the point. Thailand followed up on its demand that the United States evacuate Thai bases, and, except for some 250 military-aid advisors, the evacuation of United States military forces was actually completed on July 20. In Indochina the United States no longer has clients to support militarily. It retains tenuous diplomatic relations with Laos, but has no contact with Cambodia. With regard to reunited Vietnam—where the USSR has committed itself to providing \$2.6 billion in aid in the 1976-80 period and the rest of the East European bloc and the PRC to \$2 billion each—the United States refuses to abide by its commitment in the January, 1973, Paris Agreement to help repair the damage it had inflicted upon the Vietnamese economy. The United States has thus far failed to make use of "economic means" in postwar Vietnam, and so lets slip the opportunity to win some influence in that power sector.

The United States retains footholds in Southeast Asia. It has political and economic ties with Indonesia, and that relationship is safe so long as the Suharto regime holds power. Talks began with the Philippines in June regarding the future American use of the bases at Clark Field and Subic Bay. But there is little doubt that, with

some changes in deference to Filipino sovereignty, Manila will permit continued American use of the bases—at least for the time being.

The American relationships with Indonesia and the Philippines are nevertheless characteristic of the position of the United States elsewhere in the Third World: It gets on best with right-wing authoritarian regimes. Popular revolutions in such countries almost invariably threaten the American connection. American policies devoted to the service of military "security" and special economic interests offer no firm guarantee of long-term "stability and security" in Southeast Asia.

In the Northeast Asian sector, as indicated by Kissinger, the PRC figures prominently in the American calculations. The Chinese leadership wants to interpret the Pacific Doctrine as favoring the establishment of a united front of the PRC, Japan, and the United States against the Soviet Union—with the employment of tactics of *Chinese* design and in pursuit of *Chinese* objectives. The overall strategy of that Maoist version of the Anti-Comintern Pact of the 1930's would naturally eschew détente: China nominally adheres to the principle of peaceful coexistence, and even maintains minimal state-to-state relations with the USSR; however, it views détente between the USSR and the United States undesirable in the extreme.

Washington shows itself aware of Peking's aim of utilizing the Sino-American relationship to further China's own global objectives. In his press conference of January 14, 1976, Secretary Kissinger remarked: "We should have no illusions on what that relationship [with China] is based. There is no question that the interest the People's Republic of China has in a relationship with the United States depends on its assessment of the relevance of the United States to problems of concern to the People's Republic of China." Japan and the USSR, in short, are seen in Washington as prominent features in Peking's political landscape.

It is self-evident that Peking also gives considerable weight, in its strategic calculations, to American relations with Taiwan and South Korea. So long as the U.S. maintains some 42,000 troops in South Korea supporting the Park Chung Hee regime, it cannot remove the Korean Peninsula from the U.S.-PRC power equation. And while America maintains its military alliance with Taiwan, America rests on the Nationalist side in the unended Chinese civil war. If the USSR is Peking's "principal enemy of the moment," the United States still qualifies as Enemy Number Two.

Peking stands prepared to compromise with secondary enemies—tactically and temporarily—for what it considers an adequate return. But as recent developments in Angola demonstrate, there are definite limits to the profit China can anticipate from taking wrong sides with the United States simply because of opposition to the Soviet Union. The Chinese are concerned, not with gratuitously befriending the chief world "imperialist," but with political or economic gain for themselves.

Trade between the United States and China does not

“The element of military confrontation is not soft-pedaled, but this only means the contest has taken on new forms.”

compensate for political infertility. Virtually nonexistent before 1971 by reason of the American embargo, trade rose to nearly \$1 billion in 1974, only to slump back to \$462 million in 1975 (when China's two-way trade totaled \$14 billion). China is short on purchasing power: Its foreign trade deficit climbed to \$1.3 billion in 1974, then dropped back to about \$500 million in 1975. It had a deficit of approximately \$145.5 million in its 1975 trade with the United States, and it cannot readily overcome the disadvantage. Its chief exports to the States are light industrial products and handicrafts, which run up against the current American urge toward economic protectionism. Add the circumstance that China does not enjoy most-favored-nation (MFN) treatment under the American tariff laws, and the future of Chinese export trade to the United States does not look promising. It is not to be expected that China will spend here much more than it earns.

The Sino-American relationship is finally to be viewed against the background of the factional struggle at the top that has now resumed in China. The power structure so carefully erected by Premier Chou En-lai in the last years of his life has been thrown into disarray by the purge in April of Deputy Premier Ten Hsiao-p'ing. Chairman Mao Tse-tung has loosed violent “contradictions” and again destabilized the domestic situation; a major succession struggle has begun as the Chairman's life and powers are ebbing away. Peking's foreign affairs strategy, which has followed a zigzag line from its beginnings, may before long diverge sharply from the current course and take on a new direction dictated by China's estimate of where its greater profit lies. Mobility is the very essence of China's tactics, whether traditional or Maoist, in its foreign relations.

The American position with respect to Japan is clear: Its prime concern is to keep Japan in its political camp. The second American aim is to get the island empire to do more “burden-sharing” in strategic “defense” terms by shouldering more responsibility for regional security, particularly with regard to those two politically embarrassing American allies, Taiwan and South Korea. But the Asian situation has changed fundamentally since the existing Japanese-American ties were first designed and knit. Today, when confrontation between the United States and a diverse

and divided “Communist bloc” has become blurred, Japan perceives fewer reasons to undertake tasks related to the advancement of American military projects in the West Pacific. Given the critical world economic situation, Japan is more and more concerned with economic matters.

The United States talks a great deal about “cooperation” in international economic relations. And at the Rambouillet summit conference in November, 1975, of the chiefs of the United States, Japan, West Germany, France, Italy, and Britain, the U.S. and its capitalist trading partners reiterated their standing pledge to avoid economic protectionism. That negative pledge was not legally binding. In fact, in the five years that have elapsed since the “Nixon shocks” of 1971 there have been various manifestations of American economic nationalism directed against Japanese commerce. No doubt Tokyo remembers.

The conferees at Rambouillet also agreed to “look to an orderly and fruitful increase in our economic relations with socialist countries as an important element in progress in détente and in world economic growth.” The future potential of Soviet export trade is suggested in a CIA report made public in April, 1975, estimating that the USSR's exports to “the West” would total \$9.3 billion in 1975, \$17.7 billion in 1980, and \$24.7 billion in 1985. Trade with the United States remains of prime importance to Japan; but Japanese industry needs raw materials that the USSR is in a position to supply. At a time when certain Japanese products encounter protectionist barriers in the United States and Sino-Japanese trade has gone into a decline, Japan feels a need for new markets for its products—such as those offered by the socialist bloc in general and the USSR in particular.

It is significant in this connection that in the postwar period the economies of Siberia and the Soviet Far East have been developing at a rate 1.5 times that of the USSR as a whole. The tenth Soviet Five-Year Plan (1976-80) provides for continued heavy emphasis on development of the economy of the Asian sector of the country. The region is rich in natural resources—natural gas, coal, timber, iron ore, and (in the western portion) petroleum. The Soviets are constructing a new railway, the three thousand-kilometer Baikal-Amur Magistral (BAM) to connect the Trans-Siberian Railway with the Sea of Okhotsk by a route running north of Lake Baikal. It is planned that there will be developed, in the region served

by the railway, a whole network of exploitative and industrial enterprises. Completion of BAM is planned for 1982. The economic importance of the Soviet Far East *in relation to the Western Pacific* will then have been substantially increased.

This Soviet eastward thrust offers potential for developing mutually profitable economic relations between the USSR and Japan. For a decade now Soviet-Japanese trade has been systematically patterned in accordance with five-year commercial agreements. There have also evolved a number of cooperative projects for the exploitation of natural resources in the Soviet Far East, involving Soviet timber, prospecting for petroleum on Sakhalin's ocean shelf, and mining coking coal in Yakutia (with Japan to be supplied with such coal over a period of twenty years). Japan is also assisting with construction of the new port of Vostochny on Wrangel Bay.

It is thus not surprising that in the first four years of the second five-year commercial agreement (1971-75) Soviet-Japanese trade grew at the average rate of 26.6 per cent per year. The United States in 1973, with its huge sales of grain to the USSR, occupied second place (behind West Germany) in the capitalist bloc's trade with the Soviet Union; in 1974, however, it slipped to seventh place in that trade, and Japan is now ranked second with a two-way turnover of \$2.514 billion. In 1975 the U.S., again favored by heavy Soviet grain purchases, climbed back—but only to fourth place. The rate of growth of Soviet-Japanese trade was slowed that year because of a decrease in Japanese imports, but there was still an overall gain. All signs indicate that that trade is destined to increase even more in the future. Despite the parallel Chinese and American efforts to keep the USSR and Japan at arm's length from each other, economic forces are operating to bring the two closer together.

In sum, as the United States embarks upon the Pacific Doctrine, it faces substantial obstacles. It maintains a military position still in Southeast Asia, but finds that economic forces there now outweigh the military factor. In Northeast Asia the United States would enlist Japan to further its military and political interests, but at the same time it begrudges Japanese access to the American marketplace. Japan, in a reorientation of its economic strategy, turns to new fields of endeavor—even fields from which the U.S. stands aloof. With respect to the PRC, the United States finds a certain compatibility in Peking's anti-Soviet strategy, but not in its tactics and ultimate objectives. Since the PRC is a nation governed by fundamentally different political and social concepts, the mutually incompatible elements outweigh the compatible ones.

It is with respect to the Soviet Union that the Pacific is most deficient, however. The USSR is not only developing its Pacific fleet (which commands the fascinated attention of American strategists), but it has undertaken major expansion of the economy of the country's Asian sector, with all its rich natural potential. The political as well as the economic weight of Soviet Asia is increasing proportionately. Although the Doctrine nominally envisages an "economic cooperation" beneficial to *all* peoples in the Pacific region, American strategy in operation is not geared to the massive shift eastward toward the Pacific of the Soviet center of economic gravity. That evolving politico-economic phenomenon has every potential of becoming a dominant factor in the pentagonal relationship among the capitalist powers Japan and the U.S., the socialist powers China and the USSR, and the developing nations of Southeast Asia—Communist and non-Communist alike—in the quarter-century ahead.