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US Policy in Asia: The Myth and the Reality

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U.S. POLICY IN ASIA - THE MYTH AND THE REALITY

One of the most misleading and dangerous myths concerning American foreign policy is that the United States is withdrawing from Asia, and is no longer concerned with Asian affairs. In recent months I have heard several variations of this myth, none of which is based on the realities of life in Asia today.

First is the myth that America failed to keep a commitment to South Vietnam, so that America's commitments to the rest of Asia cannot be trusted. Nothing could be further from the truth. The United States expended hundreds of billions of dollars, sacrificed 57,000 dead, and suffered over 300,000 wounded in Vietnam - all without even a valid security commitment supported by Congress and the American people. Moreover, the outcome of the war in Vietnam was never in American hands. As President Kennedy said of the Vietnamese in 1963, "In the final analysis it is their war. They are the ones who have to win or lose it." On the other hand, the United States
maintains today valid bilateral security assignments with five nations of Asia, as well as the ANZUS Pact with Australia and New Zealand. Unlike Vietnam these security arrangements have been approved by Congress and the American people, and it is my observation that they are well appreciated in Asia as well. They are supported by 132,000 American servicemen in the Western Pacific and their reinforcing air, naval, marine and ground forces in the United States and elsewhere.

A second variation of myth of America's withdrawal from Asia is the charge that our ground force reduction in South Korea terminates our commitment to that country. Again, the facts present a different picture. Based on South Korea's growth and strength - twice the population and three times the GNP of North Korea - President Carter decided to proceed with a careful reduction of U.S. forces in Korea over a four to five year period. As part of the reduction plan, the Administration plans to strengthen South Korea's defense capabilities. Both the President and Secretary of State
Vance have forcefully and frequently reaffirmed the American security commitment to South Korea and our determination to maintain it.

A third misconception is the exaggerated concern over the issue of normalizing relations with China. United States policy under three consecutive Presidents recognizes there is but one China and that Taiwan is part of China. Secretary Vance has made clear American concern for the well-being of the Taiwanese people. At the same time, you cannot ignore 1/4 of the world's population. When seen from this light, the process of normalizing relations with China is anything but a withdrawal from Asia. To the contrary it is a major step in keeping tune with the reality of Asia today.

Finally there is the issue of the Mutual Security Treaty with Japan. Those who say the United States should disavow the Treaty in favor of Japan's assuming a major military role in Asia have forgotten who it was that insisted on the Treaty in the first place. Moreover, a heavily armed Japan would be a most unsettling influence on all of Asia, and threaten peace and stability in a region only too familiar with the ravages of war.
American interest in Asia is by no means limited to issues of national security. Last year our two-way trade exceeded $52 billion, greater than our total trade with the European Economic Community. And it is growing every year. Over 750,000 Japanese visited the United States in 1976, benefiting the American tourist industry and deepening the understanding between our two peoples. Indeed, trade and tourism have expanded so much that the Pacific Ocean is now more of a highway than a barrier, and the East Asian Pacific basin has truly become where East meets West.

In the span of my experience in Asia I have witnessed America retrench from world responsibility in the aftermath of World War I, only to overextend itself later in a profligate war in Vietnam. Neither course was suited to the reality of life in Asia in the past, and neither is suitable today. Instead the United States is pursuing a moderate course – of maintaining genuine American interests in Asia and supporting those interests with commensurate economic, political and military strength. In my estimation the United States position in Asia is more favorable than at any time since World War II.
The future of Asia and the United States are inextricably tied together in common purpose and common problems. We would have a great deal to lose in withdrawing from Asia, and in recognition of the realities of Asia today have decided to stay. In so doing we have gained a great deal more - for ourselves and for future generations of Asians and Americans.