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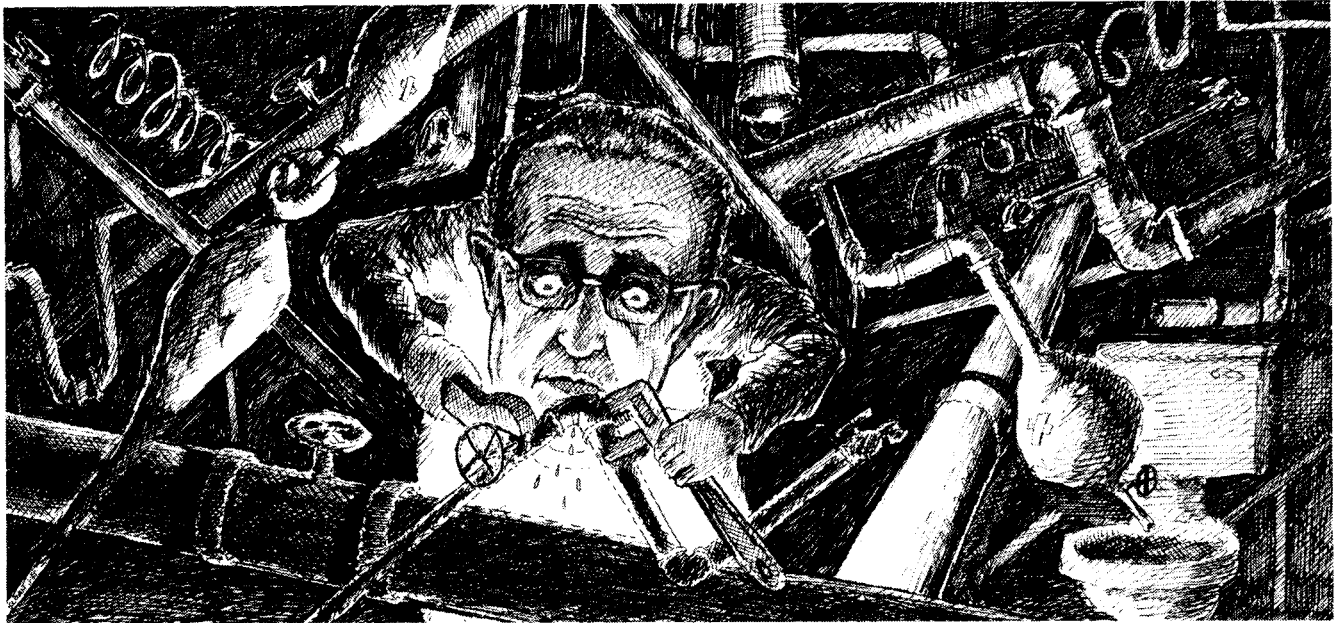
Henry Kissinger and the calculated failure of U.S. policy in Asia

by Uwe Henke v. Parpart

In September of 1984 a new private organization to promote "Pacific cooperation" was launched at a White House reception attended by President Reagan, Vice-President Bush, and Secretary of State Shultz: the U.S. National Committee for Pacific Economic Cooperation. On the face of it, this seems a useful effort in a worthy cause, and if one reads a recent San Francisco address (Feb. 21, 1985) by Secretary Shultz to that same committee, the impression is that there could not be a more propitious time to give firm institutional expression to U.S. commitment to expansion of economic relations among the Pacific rim nations. According to Shultz, aside from the "Philippine problem" and certain forms of correctable Japanese misbehavior, all is well economically and otherwise in the Asia-Pacific region.

Two years ago there might have been some justification for such an argument. Today, as the survey articles below compiled from reports by *EIR* correspondents in Bangkok, New Delhi, New York, and Washington amply demonstrate, wishful talk of political stability, military security, and economic vitality in the Pacific basin is dangerous folly. Moreover, the deterioration on virtually all fronts documented by our correspondents, is in large measure due to Mr. Shultz's own State Department's policies, which in several cases, most notably Korea and the Philippines, are running counter to President Reagan's explicit policy directions. The newly formed Pacific Cooperation Committee will not contribute to a reversal of the past years' trends and policies. Credibility as a "U.S. National Committee" required a certain degree of ideological diversity and catch-all characters in the constitution of the group. Still, its leadership and most prominent members not only represent the same kind of thinking as that of the State Department bureaucracy; they are its principal designers and strongest proponents. The cumulative effect of their policies, contrary to stated purposes, is that we find the United States on the retreat and faced with imminent further devolution of its strategic position everywhere in the Asia and Pacific region.

There are two easily identifiable root causes for this situation, one of global, the other of more immediate regional significance.



First, globally, continued subordination of U.S. foreign economic policy to World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and associated banking-interest dictates prevents formulation and execution of a coherent economic development policy representing the mutual interest of the United States and its developing and developed sector partners. Exclusive emphasis on debt collection and production for short-term export gains at the expense of urgently needed infrastructure and in-depth agricultural and industrial development has produced a human catastrophe in Africa, economic disaster and political instability in Latin America, and is now predictably beginning to affect Asia in similar fashion. It is also dangerously distorting the export and industrial production structures of Japan, Western Europe, and the United States.

Second, in the absence of a coherently formulated policy to counter it, the consequences of the 1969 Kissinger/Nixon "Guam Doctrine"—withdrawal of U.S. military forces from Asia and assignment of security responsibility to surrogate states—are continuing to be played out, mainly in the form of *ad hoc* modifications of the Kissinger/Brzezinski "China Card" illusion, and even more threateningly undermine vital U.S. security interests and strategic positions in Southeast and Northeast Asia and the South Pacific.

The failure of economic policy

The grave threat to U.S. national security resulting from U.S. abrogation of the conduct of its foreign economic policy to supranational banking institutions has been documented in the pages of this magazine on numerous occasions. Time and again the United States has come to the verge of or crossed

the line to military intervention or hurried redeployment in ill-founded efforts to stave off the worst political and security consequences of Zurich-, London-, and Wall Street-made financial and economic policies that can in no way be construed to represent any conceivable U.S. national interest. The ongoing devolution of the situation in the Philippines and the direct threat to essential U.S. military installations there is an obvious case in point. Still, IMF pressure on this long-standing U.S. ally is permitted to continue unabated and the State Department blames all on the "corrupt Marcos regime."

Similarly, the political stability and security of Thailand, a friend and later ally of the United States since the time of King Rama IV and Abraham Lincoln, is presently threatened more severely by the consequences of last year's 20% devaluation of the national currency, the baht—a measure highly recommended and applauded (but, of course[!], not imposed) by the World Bank and the State Department—than by the widely publicized danger of Vietnamese invasion of its northeastern provinces. However, if the baht devaluation produces Philippine-type circumstances of domestic turmoil and greatly weakens Thailand internally, a full-scale military conflict with Vietnam will become more likely, and along with it the possibility of high-risk U.S. military involvement. Arguably this is a worst-case scenario. But it brings into necessary focus the danger inherent in the misdirection of present U.S. global economic policy. Even if the worst does not come to pass, two reliable U.S. allies have been undermined and exposed to greater threat instead of being assisted—in our mutual interest—in their drive for economic advancement.

Gross economic policy failures have the consequence just described. However, economics is neither an independent nor the dominant variable of the overall strategy. Rather it functions as a kind of litmus test revealing the essentials of strategic purpose and method.

What then is U.S. Asia-Pacific strategy; what kind of philosophy (if any) and method is it based on; and why, despite all the growing talk of a “new Pacific era,” is the United States in a position of retreat—partly withdrawing on its own accord, partly being pushed out—from this crucial strategic arena?

Kissinger’s ‘Guam Doctrine’

As indicated above, to find an answer to these questions, it is necessary to go back (at least for a first approximation) to the 1969-73 period and examine Henry Kissinger’s “Guam Doctrine” and “China Card” policies. But let the reader be assured that the reason for focusing on Kissinger’s policy design is not this writer’s regard for that former secretary of state’s (he rather likes to refer to himself as “minister”) intellectual and moral acumen. It is a sad and unfortunate necessity arising from the fact that the policies of this latter day self-styled “Fürst Metternich” have not been superceded by alternative Reagan administration policies and that he is able to refer to himself with impunity as “a friend of President Reagan’s and a friend and supporter of all his associates in the National Security area.” (Henry A. Kissinger, keynote speech to the 1983 Hong Kong Trade Fair Conference, Oct. 28, 1983, p.2). Thus the obvious message is conveyed: “I am not speaking in an official capacity, but I am in with the President and I can let you in on what U.S. policy really is.”

The so-called Guam Doctrine was first spelled out by President Nixon at a press briefing in Guam in July 1969. The essence of it, quoting from the *Congressional Record*, is this:

“The United States is going to encourage and has a right to expect that defense will be increasingly handled by, and the responsibility for it taken by, the Asian nations themselves. . . . [Military involvement and aid] will recede, [but economic aid] will be adequate to meet the challenge as it develops.” Implementation of the doctrine, overseen by Kissinger and his principal NSC aide Alexander Haig, took the form of propping up Lon Nol in Cambodia and of “Vietnamization” of the war in Vietnam—with the well-known results. But with U.S. military withdrawal from Southeast Asia, how was the regional “balance of power” to be maintained? Enter the “China Card.”

Union, the failed Chinese-inspired 1965 communist takeover attempt in Indonesia and the end of the turmoil of the “Cultural Revolution” (bringing with it the down-scaling of China’s Vietnam involvement) the P.R.C. began to look increasingly like the appropriate power with which to strike a deal, both as a global counterweight to the Soviet Union and for potential future regional policing functions.

First high-level musings of this kind apparently are due to Robert McNamara (cf. *Pentagon Papers*, New York 1971, p. 583). But it was Henry Kissinger, true to his 19th century role-models Metternich and Castlereagh, to whom the temptation of inaugurating a Pacific “balance of power”-game became too great to pass up, nevermind whether China was prepared or able to play on his terms: “The essence of statesmanship is to act on the basis of assessments you cannot prove true when you make them. When the scope of action is the greatest, the knowledge on which to base that action is at a minimum.” (1983 Hong Kong speech, p. 4).

Aside from his fascination with the opportunity of foisting upon a reluctant United States—“there has been and continues to be an enormous [American] reluctance to think in terms of power and in terms of geopolitics” (Hong Kong speech, p. 2)—his cherished Austro-British 19th-century foreign policy approach, Kissinger had a second reason for pursuing the China opening, a reason more directly implied by the Guam Doctrine of disguised retreat. Again emulating the aging, burnt-out Metternich, he is profoundly pessimistic and cynical about the future role of the United States in the world political arena. The United States since the end of World War II has lost much of its internal strength and vitality and irrevocably declined, both in absolute and relative terms, as a world power. Concomitantly, the “American System” of economic development and republicanism has lost its attraction as a model for development in most of the world. Under these dismal but allegedly real circumstances, all we can do is cut our losses and retreat to the status of a hemispheric power, leaving in our wake (as an optimal outcome) a complex protective “balance of power” arrangement which only a statesman of the quality of a Metternich, Palmerston or Bismarck, or, of course, a Henry Kissinger can administer. And nevermind the morality of such a course of action. In foreign policy moral commitments only interfere with the efficient execution of the “balance of power” game. Most deplorably there are still groups in America who “think that relations amongst peoples and amongst states are like relations amongst individuals and that there is some impartial jury that judges the moral merit of our actions. . . . Some people are arguing that we have lost our moral advantage in the world. If we had such an advantage that could be translated into operational policy, I confess it was well hidden from me. . . .” (Hong Kong speech, p. 2-3).

Such are the principles and methods of Mr. Kissinger’s foreign-policy approach and the premises on which the “China Card” policy as the keystone of U.S. Asia-Pacific strategy is based. With some minor qualifications, they are shared by most of the present State Department bureaucracy and emphatically endorsed by the majority of the State Department’s academic and “consultants” entourage, i.e., the leadership body of the new Pacific Cooperation Committee.

In the first 18 pages of Kissinger’s 1983 Hong Kong speech concerned with foreign policy and security matters, I

counted eight occurrences each of the term “balance” (of power) and “equilibrium.” In addition, there are “center of gravity,” “frictions,” “[military] machines,” etc.—and one might also recall other terms such as “linkage” and “destabilization” which Kissinger made famous. And if the reader should be inclined to think that Kissinger stands alone with his preference for Newtonian mechanics-vocabulary in policy analysis, I invite him to do a word count of a recent authoritative reader on *The Future of U.S.-China Relations* (John Bryan Starr, ed., New York and London, 1984), featuring an all-star cast of U.S. China and Asia experts.

I imagine Kissinger standing in front of a world map with various size scales drawn in—large scales, small scales, with all sorts of weird, complex mechanical linkages—carefully distributing weights on each, probabilistically assigned, anxiously watching whether equilibrium is attained. And if something goes out of whack? Well, pull a lever, drop a country, destabilize another—some things must be off-balance for everything to be in balance.

Trained as a physicist with some knowledge of the history of science, I am reminded of Maxwell’s nightmarish attempt to model the dynamics of the electromagnetic field with the oddest collection and assembly of mechanical devices and linkages. Only reduction of electromagnetic field action to a strictly mechanical system was to count as a satisfactory explanation.

And so it is with the worldview of Mr. Kissinger. Utterly unable to discover a soul in himself, he cynically derides “those who think foreign policy is a subdivision of psychiatry and others who believe that foreign policy is a subdivision of theology.” (Hong Kong speech, p. 2). I imagine the man standing in front of a world map with various size scales drawn in—large scales, intermediate-size scales, small scales, with all sorts of weird, complex mechanical linkages—carefully distributing weights on each, probabilistically assigned, anxiously watching whether equilibrium is attained. And if something goes out of whack? Well, pull a lever, drop a country, destabilize another—some things must be off-bal-

ance for everything to be in balance overall.

This evil little plumber in the employ of David Rockefeller and American Express and dedicated to their greater purpose has been in charge of American foreign policy, either *ex officio* or in an unofficial capacity for the last decade and a half. It should not come as a surprise that some things have gone frightfully wrong in that period. We shall now survey some specifics of the Asia-Pacific region.

The ‘China Card,’ Vietnam, and Cambodia

Let us assume for the time being that a principal purpose of the “China Card” policy was to enlist Chinese support in denying the Soviet Union added strategic access to Asian Pacific regions in the face of the U.S. military disengagement mandated by the Guam Doctrine. (Caveat: In light of Kissinger’s “New Yalta” propensities of negotiating with the Soviet Union “equitable” worldwide spheres of influence, this may be a chancy assumption.)

Then consider the following sequence of events leading to the present situation of massively increased Soviet military presence (including major naval and air base facilities) in the Pacific—with the Soviet Pacific Fleet having grown into the largest component of the Soviet Navy.

1) April 1975—Fall of Saigon—the predictable result of the Guam Doctrine-derived “Vietnamization” and Kissinger’s Nobel Peace Prize-winning 1972-73 Paris performance.

2) July 1977—Vietnam-Laos Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation (a Vietnam-Soviet initiative).

3) December 1977—China-Japan \$20 billion trade agreement (a Chinese initiative).

4) July 1978—Vietnam joins Comecon (a Soviet initiative).

5) August 1978—China-Japan peace treaty, including “anti-hegemony” clause (a Chinese initiative).

6) November 1978—Vietnam-U.S.S.R. Treaty of Friendship (with major military implications—a Soviet initiative).

7) December 1978—China-U.S. diplomatic relations (a Chinese initiative).

8) December 1978—Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia. Ouster of China-supported Pol Pot regime (a Vietnamese-Soviet initiative).

9) February 1979—Chinese attack on Vietnam, immediately after Deng’s return from the United States (a Chinese initiative).

10) Vietnam grants Soviet fleet access to Cam Ranh Bay (a Soviet response).

(Tabulation in part drawn from Bernard K. Gordon’s contribution to *The Future of U.S.-China Relations*, pp. 122-23.)

The record shows not a single significant U.S. initiative in the entire period. The only one playing any “card” was the P.R.C. playing the “U.S. card” vis-à-vis Vietnam and Japan (to the extent that Japan would not have agreed to diplomatic

and trade relations with China without U.S. assent). The Vietnam War was a defeat and a set-back for the United States. But its presently evident major strategic consequences were by no means the inevitable result of the 1973-75 Indochina events. It was the "China Card" illusion that compounded the 1975 failure, leading to the present circumstances. And to the extent that it remains the magical key-stone of U.S. policy in the area, it prevents any constructive U.S. initiative in *the U.S. national interest* in the region.

A sober evaluation of U.S. policy opportunities with regard to Indochina and Southeast Asia, unperplexed by fears of Chinese rebuff and blackmail (cf. ongoing high-level Chinese negotiations with the Soviets), would indicate the following: Since the summer of 1984 and a major Le Duan address to the Central Committee on domestic and foreign policy (followed by Le Duan's visit to India) there is evidence that the Vietnamese have settled several internal disputes and have embarked on a firm course of domestic economic reconstruction. There are indications as well that they realize that this will be possible only in an improved foreign policy environment, implying the need, in particular, of moving in the direction of a regionally and globally acceptable Cambodia settlement. In this context, Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach has stated recently that he would welcome a higher-profile U.S. role in the region. A certain recent flexibility on the MIA issue underlines the point. Of course, such talk can be dismissed as merely tactical and deceptive. But what prevents the United States from exploring this opportunity *in its own interest* of perhaps arresting (if not reversing) further Soviet gains in Southeast Asia? As in 1975, the answer is: the "China Card." The P.R.C., for its own reasons, is firmly committed to its alliance with the Khmer Rouge (Pol Pot) forces in Cambodia, and for fear of negative Chinese reactions on other fronts, the United States will not rock the boat. In the meantime, Thailand, not able to count firmly on a U.S. regional commitment, is drawn closer into the Chinese orbit, in turn causing grave difficulties in the ASEAN alliance.

The policy recommendation at this point should be an obvious one: In the U.S. national interest, let us explore whether the Vietnamese overtures have a solid core and let us ask at the same time whether the U.S.-Chinese relation is based on something more than mutual blackmail. There is nothing to lose but dangerous illusions. And at least to this writer, it is inconceivable that, both in the light of longer-term Asian history and almost 45 years of Vietnamese resistance to foreign (Japanese, French, U.S.) domination, Vietnam is now simply content with becoming a Soviet satrapy.

China, Japan, and the United States

Kissinger-type "balance of power" practioners are mesmerized by China's size and mystified by Japan's economic success and political purpose. Thus, they latch onto the former, unseen and uncomprehended, and try to bully the latter

into conforming to their mechanistic strategy-game. But if we resolutely abandoned that immoral and destructive (to all) Newtonian balance and levers policy approach, U.S. relations with neither of these two great Asian nations need be overly complicated or difficult. Since there is no room here for more detailed historical analysis, I will discuss the matter only in the form of some brief policy recommendations. China's problems are obvious: A large and growing, mainly poor peasant population, no infrastructure to speak of to facilitate rapid industrialization, and as a result of the "Great Cultural Revolution" insanity, only the thinnest layer of skilled manpower and of an educated, technical, scientific, and managerial elite. Japan's problems—and we will focus on these rather than joining the chorus of the "Japan as number one" crowd—are equally straightforward. After successful and, in terms of industrial structure, properly executed postwar reconstruction, Japan in the 1970s and '80s has been increasingly forced into the role of a consumer goods (automobiles, electronic gadgets) exporter to the *advanced-sector* nations and at the same time, become increasingly insecure regarding its raw materials and energy supplies. This is directly the outcome of post-1971 U.S.-supported IMF and World Bank policies toward the developing-sector nations, ever more restricting "Third World" capital goods demand, or rather import ability. Japan is forced into the advanced-sector consumer goods market, its industrial structure is increasingly distorted in that direction, and then we turn around and complain about it! And the Japanese know full well what is happening, resent it, but at least in fundamental terms, don't buck it.

But now consider China from the standpoint of its real needs, and not from the standpoint of the mutually destructive "China Card" idiocy.

China needs first and foremost infrastructure. Japan and the United States should collaborate to supply it on a large scale. China needs industry. Japan and the United States should supply the capital goods to build it. Such U.S.-Japan collaboration not only with regard to China, but encompassing Southeast Asia including Indochina, is the proper basis for U.S. Pacific policy. Failing this, China, under the weight of its population pressure and with the future consequences of the inverted population pyramid resulting from its insane and abhorrent present population policy, will once again internally collapse. Chinese history will replay itself, but this time with the gravest worldwide consequences.

Postscript: I suspect that the U.S. National Committee for Pacific Economic Cooperation has a different policy vision. Why not dispatch a retired Lee Kwan Yue economic adviser to Peking and turn all of China, or at least its coastal cities, into a great Singapore? Several hundred million Chinese could then one day compete with the Koreans, Thais, the Japanese, and whomever else for the U.S. textile and consumer electronics market. If the dollar continues to go up, we should have no trouble affording all of it.