

Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

The bankruptcy of the 'China card'

The explosive developments in China provide the U.S. with an opportunity to reverse its own disastrous policies.

One of the nation's best-known scholars on the subject of U.S.-Asian relations, Dr. A. James Gregor of the University of California at Berkeley, came here May 22 to call on President Bush to take a more emphatic stand in support of the students in Beijing.

"What we need is a clear statement of U.S. policy and values, a statement of our immortal values, an American vision that is shared by the vast majority of the people on this globe," Dr. Gregor told a conference sponsored by the Ethics and Public Policy Center.

He criticized the "China card" policy, inaugurated by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in the early 1970s, saying it led to the appeasement of a so-called ally "who is not essential for our defense." The United States, through its trade policy toward the newly industrialized countries of Asia, is hurting the strategic position of the free world against the growing Soviet threat in the Pacific, he added.

"We have no reason to appease the P.R.C.," he said, ridiculing the fantasy fostered among U.S. businessmen that there are "two billion armpits over there awaiting U.S. aerosol cans."

Instead, President Bush should say something to the effect that "students and others who are prepared to die for their freedom represent the greatest tradition that led to the founding of our own country."

Dr. Gregor warned against the Soviet threat in Asia, noting that the concentration of Soviet military force in Siberia is directed not against the P.R.C., which is pathetically incapable of repelling any Soviet attack or

representing a military threat to the Soviets. Instead, Soviet military capability is targeted against Japan and the U.S., with its concentration located only 40 miles from Japanese territory across the Sea of Okhotsk. There the Soviets have two crack divisions of troops, deployed to operate facilities that can launch 2,000 tactical aircraft and 140 nuclear-armed submarines.

A more imminent threat, however, is the ability of the Soviets to choke off oil to Japan, 90% of which is imported into that country via the Indian Ocean.

From their basing on the coast of Siberia, the Soviets can impose "sea denial" for up to 1,500 miles in any direction in the Pacific, he said.

In light of this reality, he said, U.S. policy toward Asia has been disastrous. For one, the "China card" served to help tilt India toward the Soviets, since this policy necessarily included U.S. support for Pakistan, a foe of the Indians.

Moreover, continuing U.S. trade policy, threatening sanctions against Japan and other Western allies in the region, combined with the prospect of a diminished U.S. military presence in Asia, has undermined the reliability of U.S. allies there.

For example, the U.S. role in the ouster of President Ferdinand Marcos from the Philippines has resulted in the very serious prospect that the U.S. will lose access to Clark Field and Subic Bay when the leases on those facilities expire in 1991.

Dr. Gregor noted that Marcos was replaced by a regime which has be-

come "every bit as corrupt as the Marcos regime," but which lacks the ability to sustain its relationship, including its military agreements, with the U.S. Even though President Corazon Aquino says she is inclined toward a renewal of the base agreement with the U.S., 16 out of 24 members of the Philippine Senate now oppose it.

This, combined with U.S. defense budget cuts that have placed 16 frigates in mothballs, seriously threatens U.S. interests and those of its allies in the region. In addition, he pointed out, public opinion is turning against the U.S. with dramatic speed in places like the Republic of Korea and the Republic of China on Taiwan.

This is primarily because of ill-conceived U.S. trade pressures, he noted, such as forcing Taiwan to import 500 tons of U.S. chicken parts or cigarettes without warning labels. "The price we are going to pay in the long run for such short-sightedness will far outweigh any conceivable advantages of this policy," he said.

Dr. Gregor said the U.S. should look upon the recent developments on mainland China as a "window of opportunity" to redress the ill-fated trend of U.S. policies in Asia. "It could provide us with some valuable breathing space" which the U.S. "should exploit to the maximum" with "a principled program of response."

As for those who would argue that the current P.R.C. leadership is already in the process of implementing reforms, Dr. Gregor said, "The demonstrations are, themselves, *prima facie* evidence that the so-called reforms of the current regime are not sufficient. There has been no orderly change. The Beijing government has not been willing to make orderly and timely reforms and concessions. This is why the patriotic sentiments of the students spread so rapidly throughout the population there."