

Congressional Closeup by William Jones

Readiness, caution urged toward North Korea

"The world must be firm but calm in handling the row over North Korea's alleged nuclear arms program," Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.), chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said on Jan. 11 in a press conference in Seoul, South Korea. Nunn and Sen. Richard Lugar (R-Ind.), who were on a fact-finding tour, said the West must pursue dialogue while being prepared for any contingency, including sanctions and war.

Nunn said that Washington and Seoul must preserve peace and stability on the Korean peninsula and prevent North Korea from becoming a nuclear state. "Those two goals have to both be pursued. I don't think we can choose between the goals and I don't believe we can afford to sacrifice one goal for the other," he said. The United States and South Korea must work together closely, and with Japan, Russia, and China, to resolve the issue, Nunn added. "This challenge that we face together I think has to be met with determination and firmness and also a sense of calmness. . . . We must make certain that we meet all the contingencies that might befall us: those of the economic, military or security. . . . We ought to say that we are prepared for all contingencies, but we are prepared if necessary to proceed to the United Nations."

Nunn said Pyongyang had three options: to continue its current level of military spending and have its economy collapse, start a war that would lead to its destruction, or join the international community. "It is our fervent hope that they will choose the third, and hopefully in the short run," he said. Nunn called on North Korea to take a step toward diplomatic recognition by the United States by opening all its nuclear sites to inspection.

Regarding economic sanctions against North Korea, Lugar said, "We should be thorough and patient and persistent and know that time is on our side, given that we can cover all contingencies and apply pressure without being provocative." On Jan. 14, after returning to the United States, Lugar said that he "saw no direct threat from North Korea at the moment." Pointing to North Korean leader Kim Il-Sung's expressed desire to visit Beijing, which has been asked by the United States to mediate with North Korea on the nuclear conflict, Lugar said, "The diplomatic routes are being pursued vigorously."

Partial victory claimed against video violence

Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) and Sen. Herbert Kohl (D-Wisc.) said on Jan. 10 that the video company Seaga of America has agreed to withdraw its controversial "NightTrap" video game, which features scantily clad young women being attacked by hooded men who use drills to drain their blood. Kohl said the company had agreed to re-edit the game and not release it until an industry rating system was in place. "When it comes to our kids, we're not going to tolerate this trash," Kohl said.

"This is a major victory for everyone who was offended by NightTrap's depictions of horrible violence against women," Lieberman added. "The headlong rush toward using sex and violence to promote video games may finally be slowing down."

The senators held hearings in December to urge that video games containing violence and sex be taken off the market or carry ratings so parents could decide if they were suitable for their children. They also cited "Mortal

Kombat," which features martial arts characters who tear off the heads of their victims, as an objectionable video game.

The video game industry has agreed to develop a rating system. Lieberman and Kohl said they expect results by their next hearing on March 4 or they will try to pass legislation to require ratings.

China MFN jeopardized by human rights, warns Smith

At a press conference on Jan. 11, Rep. Chris Smith (R-N.J.) warned that many in Congress will oppose renewal of Most Favored Nation preferential trade status for China because of its human rights record. "If Most Favored Nation status came up for a vote in Congress today," he said, "it would be rejected."

Smith had just returned from a six-day trip to China where he met Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister Liu Huaqiu and other officials. Smith said he had "expressed outrage" at the new Chinese eugenics law in a meeting with Lee Honggui, director of the General Office of the State Family Planning Commission, pointing out that it "was reminiscent of the Nazis with its emphasis on weeding out the handicapped and those who are less than perfect."

Although Smith said he felt that there had been improvement in the area of economic gains since his last visit, "the political controls that are on people in some cases have actually gotten worse, particularly in the religious freedom area."

Smith was to have been accompanied by Rep. Frank Wolf (R-Va.), but Chinese authorities did not issue Wolf a visa until it was too late for him to go. Other congressional delegations

concerned with improving business relations have been given red carpet treatment by Chinese officials.

Lugar calls for more 'shock therapy' in Russia

Sen. Richard Lugar (R-Ind.) urged that there be no let-up in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) "shock therapy" policy in Russia, in a press conference on Jan. 14 after he returned from a trip to Moscow and the Pacific region. Lugar complained that the Russian Central Bank had been issuing "sizeable credits" to major enterprises, which were "not producing anything that people need." As a result, said Lugar, Russia was facing "hyperinflation."

While admitting that the economic situation in Russia is "worse than the Great Depression," Lugar said he did not believe shock therapy was the reason. "I don't believe the IMF should let up on its conditionalities," he said. "The predicament of the IMF is that money is being distributed to factories that are not making a profit." While admitting that if unemployment increases "there may be a revolt," he recommended that the Russian government set up unemployment insurance instead of trying to keep "unprofitable" factories in operation. "The Russian people are being hurt not by the reforms, but by this inflation," said Lugar. This must change, he insisted. "Substantial reform is not only required, but is essential," he said.

Lugar explained that "further government-to-government assistance" would be a "dubious venture," and that continued funding would have to be filtered through the international financial institutions (IFIs). But "the IFI funding has not been disbursed to

Russia because of the rampant inflation," he said. Therefore, only with a program that was acceptable to the IMF, the most important of these IFIs, would the money be distributed, he indicated.

Johnston calls for ending Vietnam embargo

Sen. J. Bennett Johnston (D-La.), chairman of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, speaking in Hanoi on Jan. 10, called on the United States to lift the 20-year trade embargo imposed on Vietnam. "It's time to close the book on the past," said Johnston. "It is time to renew and reconcile our relationship with Vietnam and move on to a new chapter."

Johnston was leading a seven-man committee delegation on a three-day visit, where they examined conditions and acquainted themselves with the spirit of cooperation of the Vietnamese government. Four other members of the delegation, Mark Hatfield (R-Ore.), Alan Simpson (R-Wyo.), Harlan Mathews (D-Tenn.), and Robert Bennett (R-Utah), also called for ending the embargo and restoring diplomatic relations with Vietnam. A sixth member of the delegation, Don Nickles (R-Okla.), said he was leaning strongly toward recognition, while the seventh member, Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Penn.), said he needed more time to think about it.

In related developments, Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.), a member of the Senate Foreign Relations committee who was also visiting Vietnam, said on Jan. 15 that U.S. specialists were getting the best cooperation possible from the Vietnamese authorities on prisoners of war and those missing in action (POW/MIAs). Alleged "stonewalling" on the part of the Viet-

namese authorities on MIA investigations are being used to prevent the lifting of the embargo. Kerry indicated that the spirit of cooperation by the Vietnamese should evoke an "appropriate response" by the American people.

Black Caucus forces hearings on crime bill

The House Democratic leadership, under pressure from the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), has agreed to hold hearings on the sweeping anti-crime legislation passed last fall by the Senate and supported by the Clinton administration. That bill proposed increasing prison space, increasing criminal penalties (including mandatory minimum sentencing), expanding use of the death penalty, and allowing juveniles as young as 13 to be charged as adults for crimes involving the use of handguns.

The legislation has been heavily criticized by the Caucus and by black activist groups who held a three-day conference in Washington on the crime issue at the beginning of January. Representatives of the National Black Caucus of Local Elected Officials and other organizations will join with Rev. Jesse Jackson to meet with President Clinton to discuss the measures.

Criticism of the effectiveness, and the humaneness, of the death penalty has been rising. On Jan. 13 Amnesty International called on the White House and governors to impose a moratorium on executions while a presidential commission studies the death penalty. In a report issued by the group, it was shown that the death penalty is used disproportionately in cases involving poor and minority defendants.