

Decision At Quemoy



By F. C. Sta. Maria

THE TENSE situation over the Quemoy islands continued to occupy the headlines during the month, even as feverish steps were taken on the diplomatic front to prevent an open war. There was generally a relaxing of tensions. This was brought about by several factors, foremost among which was the abrupt shift of United States policy from one of rigidity to conciliation.

This latest development was not entirely welcome to Nationalist China. In fact, Chiang Kai-shek has been greatly disturbed by it and has publicly stated that the new American position has the makings of a modern Munich. It is not clear until now what U.S. State Secretary John Foster Dulles meant exactly when he announced Washington's latest stand. But in Chiang's mind the vagueness is disconcerting enough. Conscious of the dwindling popularity of the Nationalist cause, the aging general is afraid that Uncle Sam would hand over the Quemoy

to Red China and thus shatter all hopes for a Chiang comeback on the mainland.

Actually Chiang Kai-shek's fears are well founded. The United States will pull out of the Quemoy quagmire, given a favorable atmosphere. That means in plain terms the Americans are only looking for a graceful excuse to quit the beleaguered off-shore islands without making the whole business look like a Yankee surrender.

Both Dulles and President Eisenhower have said so in diplomatic language. It does not need a suspicious Nationalist mind to make this deduction. Of course, a Quemoy withdrawal would involve a much more complicated decision than this. It would probably insist, for instance, that the evacuation be peaceful and that Red China guarantee not to use the islands as a staging area for future military action

against Formosa. In any event, the loss of the Quemoy to the Chinese communists seems to be only a matter of time.

TO BE SURE, there are two distinct schools of thought on the Quemoy crisis. The first is friendly to Taipei and tends to magnify the importance of the off-shore islands. This group views the indispensability of Quemoy to Nationalist China for three reasons: (1) Quemoy bottles up the Amoy and Foochow harbors, preventing their use and that of the adjoining sealane by the Reds; (2) Quemoy is a base of intelligence and guerrilla operations against the Chinese mainland; and (3) Quemoy is a symbol of the Nationalist regime and its determination to recover the mainland. It is believed by proponents of this view that the Quemoy is worth saving at any cost.

On the other hand a second school of thought, which is gaining ground, believes that the significance of the Quemoy has been exaggerated. Geographically, the islands are a part of the China mainland, Big Quemoy being less than six miles off the coast. The water separating the Quemoy from Formosa, on the other hand, is 115 miles at its narrowest point. It is difficult, if not impossible, from this viewpoint, to defend the islands from a

determined communist invasion. To many, the Quemoy is nothing but a symbol of Chiang Kai-shek's improbable dream of returning to the China mainland. And to hold on to those isles even at the risk of igniting a worldwide conflagration is sheer foolishness.

This group of observers do not see the value of Quemoy to the defense of Formosa and would rather regroup the 60,000 or so Nationalist troops on Formosa itself where their effort would count in the event of a real invasion.

The latter thinking has recently been strengthened by developments in the United States and elsewhere. Great Britain, for one, has supported it. It is widely admitted that American sentiment now favors any form of settlement that will avoid war. Such sentiment is reflected in the editorial pages of U.S. papers and, as already mentioned, in the recent statements of Washington. American parents are in no mood for another Korea. The feeling seems to be that if Uncle Sam had to send out his boys to another war, it should be one for bigger stakes.

Taipei, of course, would never look at it this way. But that is understandable.

There should be no confusion in the minds of those who fear that withdrawal from Quemoy would mean the abandon-

ment of Nationalist China by the United States. Quemoy is not Formosa. America has commitments to defend Formosa and the decision to yield the disputed islands should in no way reflect America's lack of determination to stand by her promise.

7 HE HASTILY convened talks in Warsaw to discuss the critical situation here so far failed to yield good results. U.S. Ambassador Jacob D. Beam and his counterpart from Peiping, Ambassador Wang Ping-Nan, have been working hard and quietly to resolve unreconcilable positions. Interestingly enough, either side labels the other as aggressor: the U.S. by keeping troops in Taiwan and Quemoy violates Chinese territory; Red China by its seizure of the Koumintang government and by its repeated avowals to liberate Formosa is an actual aggressor.

The communist view, which incidentally is supported by India, is that the invasion and liberation of Formosa would be just a continuation of the civil war in China which saw the fall of the Chiang government in 1949. According to this opinion, the Formosa crisis is a purely internal affair. Neither the United States nor the United Nations has in this sense the right to meddle. President Eisenhower took exception to

this view when he explained in a recent press conference that any situation in the world which would likely cause a global war is the business of everybody.

Eisenhower's statement assumes timely significance in the light of proposals to elevate the Formosa question to the United Nations. It is hoped however that the Warsaw talks, supported by sweet reasonableness on both sides, could resolve the problem at that level. The easing of diplomatic tensions in the last few days gives hope that United Nations intervention may not be necessary.

Thus far the role of Soviet Russia in this conflict has not been mentioned. It is definitely an important position and one that has tended to make sharper the cleavage. Again, in this respect there is a divergence of views. One group sees Communist China as a potential rival of Soviet Russia, with the latter eager to provoke a large-scale war between the United States and Red China in order to weaken both in a protracted fight. This view further anticipates the desertion of Mao Tse-tung by Soviet Russia in the event of a war with America.

The other group regards Khrushchev and Mao as solid partners out to liquidate the Western "imperialists." Their

friendship may not be true or steadfast, but it is forged out of a common danger, and it will last until that threat to their existence is eliminated. In case of war, according to this view, Russia would not only help Red China with war materials but would plunge in to a total—most probably, nuclear—war with the United States.

In the heated exchange of notes accompanying the artillery barrage on Quemoy, Moscow had in fact threatened to unleash hydrogen bombs on U.S. bases in Asia (including the Philippines), should America provoke a Formosa war. The vagueness of issues involved is again stressed by the Soviet warning; the real aggressor or provocation is not defined. But in as far as the threat caused jitters in the Philippines and other parts of Asia, it was remarkably effective.

A CLOSELY related subject to the Quemoy crisis is Red China's repeated failure to win admission to the United Nations. The claim of some observers that Mao Tse-tung is using Quemoy as a jumping board to that international body

hardly sounds logical. Mao is not that stupid; he is realistic enough to know that tact and patience would get him inside the U.N. gates sooner than a shooting war. For if the last voting of the General Assembly (44 against, 28 in favor) is any indication, it should not be many years before the precious nod will be awarded to Red China. The opposition to the Peiping regime's entry was much greater in previous years.

As matters now stand, the Quemoy area is still the center of critical activity, with the fight largely confined to artillery firing and limited air action. With U.S. help supply to the besieged islands is being continued amidst a tight Red blockade. It is unlikely that the communists would launch an invasion at present although there is a strong probability that they will keep up the withering artillery barrage indefinitely—or until the Nationalists quit.

Chiang's troops will not quit on their own volition, needless to say. It is Washington that would tell them to do it, if at all. And it looks like Washington has little choice.

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