

Military Chiefs Show Sanity at Hearings

by Carl Osgood

While utopian madness reigns in some quarters of the Pentagon, some strategic sanity can still be found in the regional commands, at least those represented before the Senate Armed Services Committee on March 5. Adm. Dennis Blair, Commander of U.S. Pacific Command; Gen. Thomas Schwartz, Commander of U.S. forces in Korea; and Maj. Gen. Gary Speer, acting Commander of U.S. Southern Command, appeared before that committee to deliver their commands' annual posture statements.

Committee chairman Carl Levin (D-Mich.), in his opening statement, raised the key issues in each of those regions. With regard to the Philippines, he said, "I am concerned that our operations . . . could unintentionally expand beyond training the Philippine Army to fighting the Abu Sayyaf terrorist group." On the Korean Peninsula, Levin raised the possibility that "the lack of negotiations between the United States and North Korea, and between North and South Korea, is turning back the clock on some of the diplomatic advances that have been made over the last several years." And concerning Colombia, Levin raised the implications for U.S. policy, of Colombian President Andrés Pastrana's decision to evict the FARC narco-terrorists from their "demilitarized zone."

Limited Deployments

Admiral Blair told the committee that the U.S. operations in the Philippines are limited "to ensure they meet the objectives that we seek." The Philippines government only wants assistance, not replacements in this fight, Blair told the committee, and said that he has instructed his commanders that "we will advise our Philippine counterparts. We will not be doing the fighting for them." Blair said the current U.S. deployment to Basilan Island is limited to six months, although longer-term projects are not precluded. Finally he told the committee that his command has made a clear distinction between the Abu Sayyaf, and the MNLF and MILF groups. "We know who they are and how they work," he said, "and we can keep it separate." A related point that Blair made is that the U.S. advisers will be operating at the battalion level of the Philippine Army force deployed in the south (a battalion is about 600 soldiers), and that the advisers would be advising only in the battalion headquarters.

In his statement, General Speer said, "The Colombian military has done a good job in protecting civilians as they move to reoccupy the population centers" in the DMZ. How-

ever, "the Colombian military and the Colombian police lack the resources to fully re-establish a safe and secure environment throughout the country." Speer did report, however, that the training and equipping of a counter-narcotics brigade under Plan Colombia was completed last year, and has been very successful in terms of operational results.

Sen. Pat Roberts (R-Kan.) asked Speer for his assessment of neighboring Venezuela. Speer said that "there is certainly cause for concern on the company" President Hugo Chávez has been keeping. He added, "What we have seen in Venezuela is, the FARC moves with ease across the border into Venezuela, as it does in northern Ecuador to some extent, and Panama. We have seen weapons shipments arriving to the FARC and the [narco-terrorist] ELN that originated in Venezuela." He said there wasn't any evidence of an official government tie-in with those shipments, "but there are certainly some implications that it could be there."

General Schwartz said that "North Korea remains, without a doubt, the major threat to stability and security in Northeast Asia." But he added, "We need a road map, if we're not at peace, to a peaceful solution," to include "confidence-building" measures. Pointing to the obvious—that the dialogue with the North is not going well now—Schwartz said, "We'll wait patiently, but we're ready to engage."

Schwartz said that the agreed framework, under which the United States is facilitating the construction of two light-water reactors in North Korea in return for the North Koreans freezing their own nuclear program, "is viable," is the "road map to the future," and is "in the best security interest of the United States, and [of] vital interest to that area, absolutely." He noted that the agreement stopped the North's nuclear development, and "it gave us a monitoring capability that we want to have." General Schwartz called it a "stepping stone" to the missile test moratorium. "So, in all," he concluded, "I think the agreed framework has served us well."

The tenures of both Blair and Schwartz are due to end this year, and Speer is only in an acting capacity. General Speer took over for Marine Gen. Peter Pace, when Pace was selected to become vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld has indicated that he is withholding any announcement of replacements for these commanders until he is ready to submit a new unified command plan to President Bush. That plan is expected to include the formation of a new Northern Command for homeland defense; some realignment of the existing command structure; and the nominations for all of the new regional commanders, except for Central Command, where Gen. Tommy Franks has been commander only since October 2000. The way Pentagon Spokeswoman Victoria Clarke put it on March 12, was that Rumsfeld wants "the right kind of people" in those, and related, positions. It is possible that the "right kind of people" would have outlooks like those of former Undersecretary Richard Perle, current Deputy Secretary Paul Wolfowitz, and other crazed utopians.