

Sticking To Dead Policies

Even Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's critics on Capitol Hill have reacted favorably to the lecture he read some of our "allies" who have been threatening to terminate or sharply curtail their commitments to the United States.

The Kissinger message was: Don't think you are "doing us a favor by remaining in an alliance with us." He was making the point that "any ally whose perception of its national interest changes will find us prepared to adapt or end our treaty relationship."

We assume, he said in refreshingly blunt language, "that our friends regard their ties to us as serving their own national purposes, not as privileges to be granted and withdrawn as means of pressure. Where this is not the mutual perception, then already it is time for change."

Dr. Kissinger could hardly have put it better. There is only one thing wrong with it. The Secretary failed to add that the United States, in turn, reserves the right to alter or end its commitments when they no longer serve American interests.

There is nothing accidental about this omission, for both President Ford and Secretary Kissinger, along with other administration spokesmen, have recently been talking as if U.S. commitments were forever, and once made have to be honored in perpetuity. No other power pursues such a policy, nor did the United States until Vietnam—and now Korea—came along.

It has suited our recent Presidents to invent or magnify so-called commitments in order to keep U.S. troops in foreign lands. They invoked the Southeast Asia Treaty (SEATO), the

Tonkin Gulf Resolution and the alleged personal commitments of previous presidents to justify staying in Vietnam, although none of these alleged commitments obliged the United States to intervene militarily.

Now the Ford administration is insisting it has to keep U.S. troops in South Korea because of an obsolete 22-year-old mutual defense treaty—as if it couldn't be terminated or amended to save the United States from becoming involved in another Asian civil war.

The brutal repressions of the anti-democratic, military government of South Korea have reached such proportions that Dr. Kissinger recently felt compelled to deplore them. But just the same, he added, "our support and assistance will be available where it has been promised."

In this respect, Kissinger could take a tip from former President Eisenhower. When the president of South Vietnam pressured Ike for support, the latter promised only economic help, and even that only on the condition of democratic reforms.

As Kissinger has so clearly pointed out, there is nothing sacred about commitments. Congress did not hesitate to repeal the Tonkin Gulf Resolution after it was used to legalize our military intervention in Vietnam. Later, it repealed the Formosa Resolution, which gave the President a blank check to go to war if China attacked the island presently known as Taiwan.

The Congress now should start taking a long hard, fresh look at our so-called mutual defense treaties with

both Taiwan and South Korea, which were drafted when conditions in the Far East were radically different than they are today. It is preposterous to call these pacts "mutual." How either of these insignificant countries could defend the United States defies the imagination.

The administration no longer emphasizes that South Korea is of vital interest in itself. Instead it has fallen back on the old domino theory, the new pitch being that Japan would be threatened if South Korea was conquered by North Korea. Just how is not explained.

North Korea has no navy, no amphibious capacity whatever, no strategic air force and no nuclear weaponry. Japan, on the other hand, is protected by the U.S. Seventh Fleet; along with our huge strategic Air Force and our arsenal of strategic and tactical nuclear weapons.

Lord Salisbury once remarked that one of the commonest forms of error in politics is sticking to the carcass of dead policies. France did not hesitate to drop out of NATO when it saw fit; Britain has terminated many old relationships; even Portugal has abandoned its old imperial ties. That's the way of the world. Change is inevitable.

The United States, however, still has an incredible number (43) of commitments around the world. The Pentagon especially hates to give up any of them. Not long ago it was discovered we still had a Military Assistance Group in Costa Rica, even though that poor little country doesn't even have an army.