

Who's to Blame for Policy Blunders?

The Constitution of the United States makes the President the commander in chief of all armed forces. As President, he approves, if he does not dictate, the nation's foreign policy. Certainly he is responsible, as the head of the government, for both. But, because General Eisenhower declared the "incompetence of political leaders" made military action necessary in Korea and the Berlin airlift, President Truman accused him of "falsification of facts," "endangering the security of the nation," and "joining in a Republican wave of filth."

It seems to us that General Eisenhower and General Clay, who succeeded General Eisenhower as commander in Europe, have made factual and dignified answers to both accusations. Of his part in the Korean decision, General Eisenhower says: "Every citizen knows that a military estimate requested of the Joint Chiefs of Staff must sternly confine itself to one question: the strategic defensibility of a given area in event of a general war. Anyone who can not distinguish between a military assessment and a statesman's political decision needs a lot of education in the handling of the world's affairs."

In other words, the Joint Chiefs of Staff when called upon for a report said the United States at that time was not in position to defend the Korean-Formosan area in event of a general war; not that the area was of no strategic value to the United States, as Secretary Acheson later said. The joint chiefs made a strictly military estimate that had nothing to do with the political.

The President says that in 1945 he proposed to Stalin—to whom he later referred as "good old Joe"—that the United States have free access to Berlin at the same time American troops were

withdrawn from the Soviet zone of Germany, and that carrying out the negotiations was left to General Eisenhower.

General Eisenhower, the President says, came home (he doesn't say he was recalled to become chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) and left the job to General Clay, his successor. The clear implication here is twofold: A failure to discharge his duty on the part of General Eisenhower; leaving the negotiations to a less capable subordinate. General Clay is widely regarded as an unusually capable officer. It is reasonable, at least, to assume that if he was sufficiently capable to succeed General Eisenhower as commander in chief in Europe (the President either selected him or approved his selection) he was sufficiently capable to handle the negotiations with the Russians.

As to the failure of those negotiations, General Clay says the Russians wanted to limit United States access to one route; he contended the United States should have access by all routes. General Clay was right and undoubtedly at the time was supported in his position by the President and would have had the support of the American people.

It's the first time we can recall that a President of the United States, instead of staying in the White House and tending the nation's business, is on a whistle-stop tour in behalf of one candidate and trying to destroy the prestige of another—the latter a man only a short time ago he promised to aid for anything he wanted, including the presidency—and trying to pass the buck by blaming that man for the political mistakes for which he, as President and commander in chief, should take final responsibility.

"Good old Joe" must be enjoying it, even if the heads of other nations are viewing it with puzzlement, if not dismay. It's a deplorable spectacle.

