Secretary Acheson and the Defense of Korea

Irresponsible critics have repeated the false charge that Dean Acheson in his National Press Club speech of January 12, 1950, excluded Korea from the list which the United States would defend against attack. This false charge has been based on a quotation torn out of context and misinterpreted by those who use the Big Lie tactics. A full reading of this section of the Secretary of State's remarks will show that Mr. Acheson differentiated between those areas for which the United States is directly responsible because of ownership (Alaska), occupation (Japan and the Ryukyus), plus the Philippine Islands, and those nations which are the general responsibility of the United Nations.

In his Press Club speech, Secretary Acheson warned that the United States, as a nation, would defend its possessions and occupied territories. Then he went on to say (and this part of the speech is never quoted by those who practice the Big Lie) that the entire "civilized world" under the Charter of the United Nations — definitely including the United States — would commit itself to defend those areas outside of the direct responsibility of the United States. These are Secretary Acheson's precise words: "Should such an attack occur — one hesitates to say where such an armed attack could come from — the initial reliance must be on the people attacked to resist it and then upon the commitment of the entire civilized world under the Charter of the United Nations which so far has not proved a weak reed to lean on by any people who are determined to protect their independence against outside aggression." (Italics supplied)

Secretary Acheson stated in concise terms what our action would be in the event of aggression. It IS EXACTLY WHAT THE UNITED STATES AND THE UNITED NATIONS DID WHEN THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA WAS ATTACKED ON JUNE 25, 1950! Secretary Acheson made it crystal clear and his prediction was accurate: the United Nations, supported by the United States, did move immediately to resist the aggression in Korea.

Those repeating this irresponsible charge should be asked: "Why haven't you quoted the full meaning of Secretary Acheson's speech? Do you know that the full quotation shows the facts to be exactly opposite to your charge? Do you know that the United Nations and the United States did precisely what Secretary Acheson predicted in his Press Club speech?"

Attached is the pertinent quotation from Secretary Acheson's Press Club speech of January 12, 1950.
What is the situation in regard to the military security of
the Pacific area and what is our policy in regard to it?

In the first place the defeat and the disarmament of Japan
has placed upon the United States the necessity of assuming the military
defense of Japan so long as that is required, both in the interest of
our security and in the interests of the security of the entire Pacific
area and in all honor in the interest of Japanese security. We have
American and there are Australian troops in Japan. I am not in a posi-
tion to speak for the Australians, but I can assure you that there is no
intention of any sort of abandoning or weakening the defenses of Japan
and that whatever arrangements are to be made either through permanent
settlement or otherwise, that defense must and shall be maintained.

This defensive perimeter runs along the Aleutians to Japan
and then goes to the Ryukyus. We hold important defense positions in
the Ryukyu Islands and these we will continue to hold. In the interest
of the population of the Ryukyu Islands, we will at an appropriate time
offer to hold these islands under trusteeship of the United Nations. But
they are essential parts of the defensive perimeter of the Pacific and
they must and will be held.

The defensive perimeter runs from the Ryukyus to the Philippine
Islands. Our relations, our defensive relations with the Philippines are
contained in agreements between us. These agreements are being loyally
Carried out and will be loyally carried out. Both peoples have learned
by bitter experience the vital connections between our mutual defense
requirements. We are in no doubt about that and it is hardly necessary
for me to say an attack on the Philippines could not and would not be tol-
erated by the United States. But I hasten to add that we do not view the
imminence of any such attack.

As far as the military security of other areas in the Pacific
is concerned, it must be clear that no person can guarantee these areas
against military attack. But it must also be clear that such a guarantee
is hardly sensible or necessary within the realm of practical relation-
ship. Should such an attack occur — one hesitates to say where such an
armed attack could come from — the initial reliance must be on the peo-
ples attacked to resist it and then upon the commitments of the entire
civilized world under the Charter of the United Nations which so far has
not proved a weak read to lean on by any people who are determined to
protect their independence against outside aggression.

--From: The text of the extemporaneous remarks
made by the Hon. Dean Acheson, Secretary of
State before the National Press Club, Washing-
ton, D. C., on January 28, 1950 (italics sup-
plied)