

AMERICA'S MILITARY BURDEN IN THE THIRD WORLD

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Most Americans agree that our protracted involvement in the defense of South Vietnam has become a watershed in our security commitment to the Third World, but there is less agreement on what the central "lesson of Vietnam" is. For a few persons, "no more Vietnams" means the virtual renunciation of our non-nuclear military commitments, but for most of us, including the President, the ambiguities and frustrations of Vietnam mean that we should be even more selective about our active military participation in the future than in the past.

The evolving Nixon doctrine, enunciated first at Guam and elaborated in the State of the World message, calls for selective involvement in the defense of friendly states in the Third World and non-involvement in the internal affairs of any state, friendly or otherwise. (I discussed the President's views on the internal affairs of other states in the February, 1970, *worldview*.) The Nixon formulation is new, but an underlying principle of selective military commitment and involvement has instructed our foreign policy decisions since 1945. After all, the United States became seriously involved in only two of some fifty local conflicts since Hiroshima. What Mr. Nixon has done is to codify and further clarify the principles of selectivity implicit in the behavior of his predecessors. Like them, he has repeatedly declared that he will honor our commitments to protect our allies who are seriously threatened by external aggression, direct or indirect.

In spelling out the conditions for active U.S. military support of an endangered state, Mr. Nixon properly gives the highest priority to America's national interest: The crisis in question must present a threat to the vital interests of the United States. This is really a restatement of the problem, because in diplomatic parlance a *vital* interest is one we are prepared to fight for. There have been certain clear and present dangers around which the American people have quickly united. One such challenge was Pearl Harbor and another was the Cuban missile crisis.

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Most Third World crises have been less vivid and hence more debatable. Vietnam is a case in point. As the burden of our involvement became heavier in blood and treasure, many supporters of U.S. policy began to question whether the defense of South Vietnam was vital to our interests. Certainly a Hanoi victory over Saigon was no immediate threat to the United States, but was it a serious threat to the stability and independence of the states of Southeast Asia? And would a Communist-dominated Southeast Asia significantly alter the power balance in that part of the world to the detriment of the global balance of forces which, since 1945, has prevented both nuclear war and capitulation to the more extravagant designs of Moscow and Peking?

Without explicitly answering these questions about Vietnam, Mr. Nixon suggests several more specific criteria for active U.S. military involvement in Third World brushfires, criteria which help determine the importance of a particular conflict to the United States and to world peace. The criteria can be stated in the form of three negative propositions. The United States should not become a military combatant in any conflict: (1) that is largely internal and does not threaten the political or territorial integrity of neighboring states; (2) that is confined to a less-than-vital region and does not threaten the balance of forces in that region; and (3) that does not involve significant combat troops of a major adversary power. In sum, to quote from the State of the World message: "a direct combat role for U.S. general purpose forces arises primarily when insurgency has shaded into external aggression or when there is an overt conventional attack. In such cases, we shall weight our interests and our commitments, and we shall consider the efforts of our allies, in determining our response."

The invocation of the Nixon doctrine, it should be noted, would not rule out non-combatant military assistance to Vietnam, nor automatically preclude a combatant role if Hanoi's aggression is regarded a serious challenge to the security of a region judged vital to the U.S. position in the world. These crucial judgments are still being hotly debated.

The three criteria, however, provide helpful guidance in assessing many less complex challenges. Sev-

eral examples will illustrate the point. Though the conditions may not have been explicitly stated, Washington did not become involved, even as an arms supplier, in the recent Nigerian tribal-civil war, in spite of the provision of Soviet war planes for Lagos and indirect French support for Biafra. By the same standards, the United States should not have become involved militarily (albeit by proxy through a United Nations expeditionary force) in the Congo crisis of 1960-1963 which was also essentially a civil war that threatened no neighboring state.

The Israel-Arab confrontation presents perhaps the most agonizing test of the Nixon doctrine. In an attempt to maintain a balance in the area, U.S. arms have been selectively provided to both sides. The Soviet Union has armed Egypt. In spite of Israel's territorial conquest in the Six-Day War, which cannot be condoned, the basic power balance of the region has been maintained and the conflict has not yet threatened global equilibrium. And no major power has become a combatant in the Mid-East conflict. As long as these conditions prevail, the Nixon doctrine would preclude active American military involvement in behalf of either side. The situation would radically alter if Israel employed a nuclear weapon against Egypt, if the Soviet Union became a belligerent, or if some other turn of events threatened the U.S. position in the Mediterranean and thus weakened the southern flank of NATO.

The Nixon doctrine is also being tested by our present involvement in Laos, which in an ancillary way is replete with most of the ambiguities that have dogged our path in Vietnam. It would appear that the President will continue to provide logistical support and air cover for Laotian troops in their effort to hold back the Hanoi invaders, not only to defend Laos but also to protect South Vietnam during the transfer of combat responsibility from U.S. to Vietnamese units.

A rigorous reading of the Nixon doctrine and a backward glance at recent history suggest that the Third World in the near future will present few crises that require direct U.S. combat involvement. In sharp contrast, the need for American non-combat security assistance is likely to persist for a long time. Since 1945 Washington has provided non-combat military assistance to more than eighty-five governments. In fiscal year 1967, for example, some eighteen thousand men from sixty Third World countries requested and received some form of U.S. military training. Approximately the same number received some military hardware from the United States and many of them received public safety assistance to enhance the capability of their police services. These programs are continuing on a slightly reduced scale. Washington

also has military alliances with no fewer than forty governments. This widespread and voluntary security reliance of many small states upon one great state is unique in history.

Why have so many governments turned to Washington rather than to Moscow for protection? The obvious answer is that they trust us and our purposes more than those of the Soviet Union. And with good cause. Moscow has hardly demonstrated a consistent interest in the peace and integrity of the states of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. On the contrary, it has engaged in active and widespread subversion in these areas. As Mr. Nixon noted in his State of the World message: "We cannot entrust our future entirely to the self-restraint of countries [read USSR] that have not hesitated to use their power against their allies [read Hungary and Czechoslovakia]."

In certain isolated instances the Soviet Union has joined with us in calming troubled waters, but usually only when strategic considerations were involved and when prompted by an implicit threat from Washington. On the strategic level Moscow has entered into a limited partnership with Washington to curb the spread of nuclear weapons and to maintain mutual deterrence. The 1970 SALT talks will be a test of the Soviet interest in arms control.

Because we are the preponderant Western power and the only truly global power, and because both the Soviet Union and Red China appear to have a short-term stake in selective turbulence in the Third World, we cannot expect the heavy burden of peace-keeping to shift to other shoulders in the near future. Nor can we expect a great deal of help from Britain and France, who have largely withdrawn from their responsibilities in Asia and Africa. Mr. Nixon speaks about partnership, but it takes two to tango. We seek partners in the heavy task of keeping the peace, but a realistic appraisal suggests that in many future crises, large and small, we will bear the major burden. This burden we cannot escape with honor because we have a political and moral responsibility commensurate with our capacity to act.

The role of the peacekeeper is always hard and rarely appreciated, especially when the peacekeeper is powerful and wealthy. It requires a courage born of responsibility and self-confidence chastened by humility. The perils and obligations of power were perfectly understood by Edmund Burke 175 years ago when he commented on the situation of imperial Britain: "I must fairly say, I dread our own power and our own ambition; I dread our being too much dreaded . . . we may say that we shall not abuse this astonishing and hitherto unheard-of power. But every other nation will think we shall abuse it."