

# Nixon's America After Vietnam

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Shortly after Oliver Franks was appointed British Ambassador to the United States by the Attlee government, he was treated to a short lecture by Winston Churchill on the United Kingdom's proper role in the world. After drawing three separate circles labeled Europe, the Commonwealth and the United States, Churchill drew a fourth circle labeled Britain, which partially overlapped each of the others. He went on to emphasize that the central task of British foreign policy was to carry on its relations with each area in a manner that contributed to a harmonious whole. This conceptual framework had considerable validity for that time, although the particular policies adopted ultimately proved too ambitious for a nation of Britain's size, her declining sense of imperial mission and lack of economic dynamism.

Without succumbing to misleading analogies about America having inherited Britain's role, one can say that the United States is now engaged in three separate sets of relationships with three quite different types of countries: (1) a basically competitive relationship with the Soviet Union and China designed to keep their power in check by utilizing both their mutual hostility and American military power, and to keep competition under control by cooperating with them on particular measures, especially those necessary to reduce the dangers of war; (2) a basically cooperative relationship with other advanced industrial nations—chiefly Western Europe, Japan and Canada—in order to deal jointly with the consequences of increasing interdependence while at the same time allowing the U.S. to hold its own in the inevitable economic competition with them; and (3) a relationship with the poor nations designed both to help them develop economically and to mit-

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igate local and regional violence (to the extent possible in a revolutionary age) and thus reduce the dangers of outside involvement or undue dependence on powers hostile to the United States.

No one of these relationships, however, exists in isolation. Containing Soviet and Chinese power involves American relations with other non-Communist industrial nations; aiding the less developed countries is a task for the industrial nations as a whole; and there is continued if much less frantic maneuvering for influence in Africa and Asia by non-Communist and Communist powers.

Richard Nixon's reelection by an overwhelming majority, although aided by a booming economy and an inept opponent, was due in no small measure to the American public's belief that he had performed credibly, even impressively, in conducting the nation's foreign policy. Key foreign governments shared this preference for Nixon over McGovern. Explaining this, Michel Tatu pointed out in *The Guardian* on November 21, 1972, that

... predictability is a much appreciated quality in this thermonuclear age, and ... the realpolitikers have it to a much higher degree than others.

People know more or less where they stand with Nixon the realist, the man who acts according to his interests, for those interests are measurable and logical (their legitimacy is another matter). But to deal with an idealist, an unimpeachably righteous personality, you have to be ready for anything: for the grand magnanimous gesture which, however, upsets stability, and for the daring move (lofty idealists are not far removed from crusaders); for the absence of reaction in the face of provocation, and for over-reaction in the wake of severe disappointment.

Underlying the favorable appraisals of Nixon was a widespread sense not of pride or approbation but of simple relief. There was relief from the ill-founded

but widespread fear of a few years earlier that American society was on the verge of collapse. There was also relief that the Nixon Administration attempted to adjust to new conditions in the world in a measured rather than a precipitous manner—in short, that it struck a tolerable balance between continuity and change. Nothing illustrates this feeling better than the response to the Administration's Vietnam policy: Relief that it was ending was accompanied by satisfaction that it terminated, not in victory—for only a few delude themselves about that—but in a negotiated cease-fire rather than a unilateral American withdrawal.

A similar combination of boldness and caution characterized other ventures: the working out of a less antagonistic relationship with Moscow while maintaining troop levels in Western Europe, the opening to China without cutting Taiwan adrift, continued alliance with Western Europe and Japan without trying to impose an American design on them and the reduction but not the elimination of American involvement in, and commitments to, the Third World. The Administration's response to pressures to hold down defense expenditures followed the same pattern: a decline in relative terms—from 10 to 6.7 per cent of gross national product—and by about one-third, in real terms as well (when allowance is made for inflation and pay increases), without precipitous reductions of either nuclear or conventional forces aside from those formerly allocated to Vietnam.

These attempts to move in an orderly fashion from an overextended cold war posture to a more selective involvement in a looser and more complex constellation of power can be criticized in terms of the timing and speed of the shifts, the manner in which various moves have been made, and—more fundamentally—the Administration's sense of priorities. But such criticisms are likely to be wide of the mark unless they rest upon an awareness of the fundamental difference between past American involvement in world affairs and that which obtains today. In this century the United States has been deeply involved in world politics only when it perceived a critical threat to its security. In those conditions the central task was quite clear—to defeat or contain the enemy—and this gave an intellectual as well as political coherence to American policy. Now the tasks facing the country are far more complex; if Vietnam represented the end of American innocence, the coming years will represent an era of unprecedented complexity. Explanations of American foreign policy—or criticisms of it—that do not reflect an awareness of this condition will be wide of the mark.

In this connection, much of the criticism leveled at the Administration's balance-of-power approach may represent reading more into the President's occasional reference to five power-centers balancing each other or to Kissinger's background than is war-

ranted. Kissinger commented on this to members of Congress in July, 1972:

This Administration's policy is occasionally characterized as being based on the principles of the classical balance of power. To the extent that that term implies a belief that security requires a measure of equilibrium, it has a certain validity. . . . But to the extent that balance of power means constant jockeying for marginal advantages over an opponent, it no longer applies. The reason is that the determination of national power has changed fundamentally in the nuclear age. Throughout history, the primary concern of most national leaders has been to accumulate geopolitical and military power. It would have seemed inconceivable, even a generation ago, that such power once gained could not be translated directly into advantage over one's opponent. But now both we and the Soviet Union have begun to find that each increment of power does not necessarily represent an increment of usable political strength.

There is widespread agreement, even among those critical of the extent to which the Administration thinks in terms of balance-of-power considerations, that it has handled relations with the Soviet Union and China successfully. Its ability to break out of the twenty-year period of rigid hostility in Sino-American relations, to negotiate the SALT agreements, to move toward normal economic relations with both countries—in short, to improve relations with two such mutually hostile powers while simultaneously inducing them to use whatever influence they had in Hanoi to help conclude a Vietnam cease-fire agreement—is a performance of historic proportions.

The President's impressive achievements in dealing with the Soviet Union and China will be easier to sustain with the end of U.S. involvement in Vietnam—assuming that an American disengagement, if not a secure peace, finally materializes. Yet the Administration's links to Moscow and Peking ultimately rest upon a factor beyond its control, namely, the continuation of intense but controlled Sino-Soviet hostility. A marked improvement in relations between the two powers—perhaps as a result of Mao's passing from the scene—or open war between them would overturn the tenuous set of balances that have been established. Failing a dramatic shift in Sino-Soviet relations, there is less danger of the Soviet-American relationship collapsing than there is in Sino-American ties unraveling. Soviet leaders have demonstrated their concern that change not overwhelm continuity, and Americans and Russians have had more experience dealing with each other. The recognition by Soviet and American leaders that the two countries have business to conduct was initially hesitant and uncertain because of profound distrust and ideolog-



ical antipathies, but the relationship has gradually become institutionalized.

Sino-American relations remain much more fragile, despite the resurgence of traditional U.S. fascination with China. Peking's willingness to sup with the Americans was due partly to its desire for help in developing its economy, but this was subsidiary to fear of the Soviet Union and, to a much lesser extent, Japan. But if time passes without new military tensions along the Sino-Soviet border, China's fears may gradually subside and the link to Washington appear less necessary. Moreover, Chinese foreign policy has periodically oscillated between moderation and radicalism. Institutionalizing Sino-American relations before such a shift in Chinese policy occurs may require recognizing the People's Republic as the legitimate government of China and ending formal U.S. ties with Taiwan, which is more painful and less glamorous than visits to Peking. The new arrangements worked out by Kissinger during his February visit to China ease but do not eliminate this problem.

This points up a second factor, namely, that the Administration's achievements to date have dealt with items rather simpler and easier than those on the agenda now. The quantitative controls on nuclear arms agreed to at SALT I need to be supplemented by far more elusive qualitative controls in SALT II. Limitations on Soviet and American conventional arms (which account for over 80 per cent of their respective defense budgets) will be complicated by the paucity of information about Soviet forces and expenditures, the different structures and missions of the two countries' military forces, and by the need to bring Eastern and Western European forces into

the comparisons and their governments into negotiations. Finally, at some point China needs to become involved in at least the nuclear arms control negotiations. This would increase the complexities enormously even if Moscow and Peking were less bitter antagonists.

If the Administration's policy toward its Communist rivals has reflected careful thought and skillful maneuvering, its relations with the major non-Communist industrial nations has oscillated between neglect and crisis management. Whatever one's opinion of benign neglect in domestic affairs, it is appropriate at times in international life. Western Europe has benefited from the Nixon Administration's disinclination to set forth an American design for the structure of the European Community, as well as from its willingness to go along with Brandt's *Ostpolitik* as long as an acceptable arrangement on Berlin was worked out. But neglect, like intervention, must be selective to be successful. This requires a clear sense of direction and priorities, and in this respect the Administration's record has been no better than fair.

To a degree, the failure to deal adequately with those countries with whom America's destiny is most closely connected reflects the attention and energy that had to be expended on Vietnam and on establishing a new relationship with the Soviet Union and China. Nixon and Kissinger, in their preoccupation with these matters, lost touch to some extent with what was going on in Western Europe and Japan. Moreover, this occurred not only at a time when the postwar economic revival of Europe and Japan posed new challenges to America's economic position in

the world but also when the impact of science, technology and economic interdependence required major adjustments in the locus of decision-making between nation-states and international institutions.

To take only the most obvious example, because it has been in the headlines most recently. The international monetary system created at Bretton Woods in 1944 broke down in 1971 because it was based upon an assumption of American economic supremacy that no longer corresponded to reality; U.S. economic weakness and German and Japanese strength undermined its basic premises. But the postwar international economic system had by this time succeeded beyond the dreams of its creators. The opportunities for growth it provided led to a growing integration of the industrial economies and the development of huge multinational companies to further this integration. According to the U.S. Tariff Commission's recent study, private institutions involved in international finance (mostly, but not entirely, American) controlled \$268 billion in *short-term* liquid assets by the end of 1971, which was *more than twice the total reserves of all the central banks and international monetary institutions in the world*. Given this disparity of resources and the lack of any means of regulating short-term capital flows, governments had no choice but to accommodate to market pressures when these pointed up the continuing weakness of the dollar and strength of the German mark and Japanese yen.

It is not necessary to attribute either greed or malevolence to those in charge of managing the funds of their corporations to conclude that a major international effort is required to work out agreed-upon methods of regulating such capital movements lest they create chronic instability—but without smothering the monetary system in a maze of rigid controls. Otherwise the Administration's quick and flexible response to the recent crisis will provide no more than a temporary respite. Similarly, the "rule of law" in international trade matters, which not only made possible the great trade upsurge of recent decades but also helped keep trade disputes from creating explosive political conflicts, has become badly battered. Thus a major restructuring of the international economic system is imperative.

The problem of such a restructuring is complicated by the question of leadership. Western Europe still cannot speak with a single voice and will be unable to do so for many years. Japan has advanced so rapidly that its people still find it hard to believe their country is secure in its newfound prosperity. More important, Japan has no tradition of constructive leadership in the area of international cooperation, and only a few of its political leaders or intellectuals are interested in such matters.

At the same time, the very weakness of the United States's economic position makes it difficult for any U.S. administration to take the lead and put forth

far-sighted, broad-gauged proposals. The Nixon Administration is convinced that the United States must take a much tougher stance on economic issues involving other industrial nations to prevent America's position in the world economy from continuing to deteriorate. But it needs to know the difference between hard bargaining and bludgeoning: Even a journal as friendly to the Administration as *The Economist* has commented that "Mr. Nixon's government has sometimes managed to be simultaneously brutal and sanctimonious in matters of trade." The great danger is that a firmer policy (which is overdue in some respects) will not be accompanied by a determined United States effort to work with other countries to establish international economic institutions that enable all to prosper. Without a larger vision it will be hard to prevent economic conflict from raging beyond control. The centrality of this matter becomes clear if we ask just one simple question: Could the Western world deal successfully with Moscow and Peking from a position of any strength if there were a breakdown of the international economy?

The Administration has been relatively successful in its efforts to dampen the strategic arms race through negotiations with Moscow without arousing undue fears by its West European allies that their interests were being sacrificed in the process. However, future negotiations with the Soviets will be concerned not only with strategic arms but also with the array of conventional forces in Europe—East as well as West. The complexities involved would be formidable in the best of circumstances, but the working out of a coordinated Western position on such matters at a time the Administration is taking a hard line on economic relations with Western Europe will be doubly difficult. The Administration's argument that the Western response to Soviet overtures on one issue should depend on Soviet actions in other areas—the "linkage" approach—may come back to haunt it in its dealings with its allies.

These difficulties—and they extend to many other issues—can only be overcome if the Administration can broaden its basic approach to international relations. This does not mean an abandonment of the search for a balance of power but a recognition that such an approach represents only one element of America's need. Miriam Camps has set forth the broader tasks of U.S. foreign policy:

The foreign policy of the present Administration appears to rest on a concept of international relationships and on a vision of an international system that gives too much importance to the maintenance and manipulation of the balance of power and too little to the management of interdependence and to the need to try—quite deliberately—to limit the role of conventional, com-

petitive, "zero-sum" diplomacy and to try to expand the role of "community-building." By community-building I mean the process of managing problems collectively, substituting rules, conventions, procedures, for the clash of national interests, in short recognising that there often is a *common* good that is different from the product of the interplay of the pursuit of particularist, national or sectional interests—and organising relationships accordingly ("Sources of Strain in Transatlantic Relations," *International Affairs*, October, 1972).

The magnitude of the task ahead is such that talk about 1973 being the "year of Europe" is more striking for its superficiality than as an indicator of good intentions. (And what of Japan, with a trade surplus of nearly \$9 billion in 1972 and an economic system that operates along different lines than those in other industrial nations? Will rising American anger and distrust of Japan over its failure to reduce its trade surplus with the U.S.—over \$4 billion in 1972—lead these two nations, which have never in history had good relations when both were strong, into bruising economic struggles?) The extent of the deterioration in official thinking was aptly illustrated by Flora Lewis's observation that today Washington regards U.S. economic relations with Western Europe and Japan as an "international poker game" (which has losers as well as winners), whereas a decade ago the Washington attitude was "a rising tide lifts all boats."

Nor is the lack of vision the only cause for concern. The Administration's penchant for secrecy and close White House control of operation as well as policy formation may have been necessary ingredients in a restructuring of policy toward Moscow and Peking, but this approach is inadequate in dealing with Europe and Japan in view of the need for extensive professional expertise in formulating and negotiating on the wide variety of matters involved in relations between industrial nations today. Moreover, legislation is often needed to permit meaningful negotiations or to turn agreements into law. The Administration's relations with Congress are not such as to induce confidence on this score.

**T**he Nixon Administration's record is the poorest in the Third World. It has amply demonstrated its indifference to the problems of less developed lands, which lack military power or—except for a few resource-rich countries—economic strength. But this disinterest is merely a surface manifestation of deeper difficulties. There is great confusion among Americans about the importance—or lack of it—of these countries to the United States and the West generally. In the late 1950's and early 1960's it was widely believed that the cold war would be won or lost in the Afro-Asian world. Having cast aside this fallacy, there is a strong tendency to adopt a diametrically opposed view, namely, that nothing that happens in these areas has any effect

on American security. This tendency is reinforced by the growing perception that military power has declining utility in areas of intense nationalism.

Nor is there any greater clarity regarding appropriate North-South economic relationships. Some economists argue that the lines of economic dependence run overwhelmingly one way and that the poorer countries can do little to ease their dependence or improve their rate of progress except on the terms set by the industrial world. Others argue that the dependence is a two-way affair, with the need of industrial nations for raw materials and energy (especially petroleum) providing significant bargaining power for less-developed countries if they work together.

Wherever one stands in this debate, one or two points are clear. First, unless there is a broad agreement among the industrial nations to act in concert in giving the developing nations *as a whole* some form of special access for their exports to the markets of the rich nations, the series of semiexclusive North-South relationships—such as that between European Economic Community and Africa—will continue to expand. This will not only work to the ultimate economic disadvantage of poor nations but will smack of neocolonialism to such an extent as to provide the perfect recipe for later conflict. The President has urged the industrial nations to adopt a generalized preference scheme applying to the exports of all developing countries, but he has given it a low priority in his dealings with other wealthy countries and has not made any serious attempt to push the necessary legislation through Congress.



Second, the economic resources in Latin America, Africa and Asia are spread very unevenly in relation to population. Kuwait has more oil than India, and Chile has more copper than Pakistan or Bangladesh. Thus some nations are likely to need external assistance if they are to have much hope of developing to the point of being able to provide a decent living for their people. But if the Third World is unimportant to American security, and if foreign aid seldom yields clear political returns, on what basis shall such help be extended? Some Western countries have resolved that humanitarian considerations are the only tenable ones over the long term and have been steadily increasing their effort.

In the United States, however, the trend has been in the opposite direction—especially under Nixon. In part this has been a reaction to excessive claims for foreign aid in the past, but discouragement over the performance and prospects of the poorer countries has also played a role. Moreover, many young people and intellectuals who in the past would have supported such programs now see foreign aid as an instrument by which the United States manipulates other nations. Aid is also viewed as strengthening entrenched local élites who refuse to permit the radical changes required for social justice and economic progress. Such changes are seldom without some validity in an imperfect world, but if aid were terminated on these grounds it would be a clear-cut example of the best being the enemy of the good. No resolution of this problem is likely until a measure of intellectual consensus develops and overshadows the present clashing viewpoints. But it will also require political leadership concerned with the welfare of those millions most in need abroad as well as at home—and able to articulate a course that steers between neglect of the poor and powerless and the arrogant belief that the fate of mankind rests squarely on American shoulders.

The one aspect of the Administration's policy toward the Third World that is to be welcomed is its lack of enthusiasm for involvement in the security affairs of these countries. (Its corollary willingness to accept conditions as it finds them arouses ambivalent feelings among many Americans: Some are appalled at its close relations with rightist dictatorships but approve of its greater tolerance of revolutionary upheavals, while others would have the government adopt the reverse approach.) Yet a low profile is a matter of posture rather than of policy,

and the Administration has not developed more than a general sense of how the "stable structure of peace" the President extols should be constructed. Failure to think through the implications of a more selective involvement will lead to frantic decisions by high-level officials ill-informed about local conditions when a crisis occurs, if the mishandling of the Bangladesh upheaval is any indication. Nor has this Administration demonstrated any greater skill or foresight than its predecessors in dealing with the continuing Arab-Israeli impasse, in spite of the opportunities offered by the Egyptian expulsion of the Soviets.

It would be demanding the impossible to argue that the Administration should have worked out clear and carefully interrelated policies in each of the three major areas of U.S. foreign policy in only four years, tempting as such an argument is when one listens to the claims of "dramatic departures . . . new structures of global relationships . . . a generation of peace" in the 1972 Foreign Policy Report. (The rhetoric may be less moralistic, but it is no less extravagant than in the past.) Much has been accomplished, and possible disasters have been avoided. Nonetheless, much remains to be done, and the Administration's basic philosophic approach to foreign affairs is not only inadequate for progress in neglected areas but a positive handicap to creating the types of relationship that are appropriate for friends as distinct from foes.

What is needed when dealing with Western Europe, Canada, Japan on the one hand and with the developing countries on the other is twofold: a higher priority for long-term considerations as distinct from a pursuit of the advantages of the moment and a recognition that it is possible to have a sense of moral purpose without becoming self-righteously moralistic. To lead a nation along any road except the one pointed toward the realization of its immediate self-interest requires political talents of the highest order—a sense of history, a breadth of vision, a largeness of spirit and a willingness to brave passions in order to advance deeply held convictions. Richard Nixon has occasionally demonstrated one or the other of these qualities, but not in any consistent fashion—which suggests that the next four years are unlikely to see the Administration overcoming the weaknesses it has demonstrated to date.