

AMERICA IS SWINGING—INWARD

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Clearly our political and military role in world affairs needs re-assessing. Clearly a lot of people and a lot of members of Congress are unhappy with it—unhappy with the way the war in Vietnam is going, unhappy with our inability to do anything about the invasion of Czechoslovakia, unhappy about the sad state of NATO, unhappy about the explosive confrontation in the Middle East, unhappy about the division of priorities between our role in the world and our crying needs at home. A lot of people wonder whether we have our priorities straight in our minds, whether we are really dealing with first things first.

Mr. Nixon says that the answer for all this is new leadership, and so, for that matter, does Vice President Humphrey. We are going to get new leadership and the question is whether, with new leaders, we are going to get radically new policies. That is what I would like to talk about—the opportunities and the limitations on new foreign policies that await any new President seeking first to reassess and then to reorder the role of the United States in world affairs.

The era of Lyndon B. Johnson is over. Between now and January 20 there will of course be developments abroad which will engage President Johnson's attention. There may be major initiatives from the President himself—a last ditch effort to meet with the Russians in an attempt to at least begin negotiations on new arms control measures. I would not exclude a complete halt in the bombing in North Vietnam, in an effort to get really substantive negotiations going before election day. But these would be no more than logical extensions of what President Johnson has been trying to do for some months—indeed for several years. For good or bad, the Johnson record has been very largely written. The evidence of this is in one of the less publicized activities now under way in Washington: a concerted effort, government-wide, to pull together the record, to collect the papers and the documents and the cables, and to try to arrange the history of this administration in foreign affairs, before the historians get at it.

This is a particularly appropriate time to reassess our role in the world because we are, in a sense, in a state of suspended animation

and indeed really have been since the 31st of March, when the beginning of the end of the Johnson era was proclaimed by the President's withdrawal as a candidate to succeed himself. More than that we are, I strongly suspect, at one of those curious turning points in the evolution of our foreign affairs that are not recognized at the time and are not even necessarily recognizable as such except in a much longer perspective, with the benefit of hindsight. The two conventions could have made this turning point much more dramatic, of course, if they had nominated, let us say Nelson Rockefeller in Miami, or Eugene McCarthy or Senator Edward Kennedy or, if Fate had not intervened, Senator Robert Kennedy.

There is going to be change, nevertheless, and the reason may have less to do with the identity of the two leading candidates than it has to do with the state of the world and with what has already been done within a very brief period by President Johnson himself. It also has to do with such intangibles as the mood of the American people and the political tide which seems to be flowing toward more conservatism, toward less foreign entanglement, toward a more modest role, all around, for the federal government, toward states' rights and local options.

There is an inward turning, encouraged by the urgency of problems at home, by the revolt of the youth and the disadvantaged. There is a general feeling that like a ship battered by storm we ought to return to port and refit before setting forth to tackle the problems of the world on anything like the scale we have been attempting in the postwar period.

Many things are contributing to these changes in collective attitudes, and it is not necessary to identify all of them in order to make the central point that we are confronting a period of change. It is necessary, in fact, to examine only one element—the touchstone of our current foreign policy, the central issue, the chief determinant of where we are going, the war in Vietnam. The main reason it seems reasonable to predict major changes in our role in the world, regardless of who the next President is, can be found in the simple fact that we have already made a major strategic change in how we have been conducting the war in Vietnam. This change inevitably and inexorably will force upon the next President even more fundamental revision of our objectives and our policy in Vietnam and all over the world, in all the places where new Vietnams could occur.

Presidents have a natural tendency to conceal this sort of thing. They abhor the suggestion that they have changed anything because this implies error; it suggests that what they were doing was wrong.

But in a certain basic, irrevocable sense, President Johnson last March and April changed everything in Vietnam.

It came about, I would argue, in the conjunction of two events. One was the Tet offensive in Vietnam. The other was the first Presidential primary, in New Hampshire. The first proved both the limits of what we could hope to achieve by a restrained use of military force and the limits of what the enemy could achieve. It is idle to argue who won. Nobody won. That is the point. The enemy showed that they could create an enormous amount of havoc at an enormous price. We showed that we could withstand this but that we probably could not prevent it from happening again if the enemy is prepared to pay the price.

So the futility of trying to win in the old conventional way was demonstrated, and with it our vulnerability as well as that of the enemy. What was also demonstrated was the inevitability that a negotiated, compromise settlement is the only way out short of escalation and full mobilization for a war effort whose outcome would be still less certain. The effect of this, I feel certain, was profound in New Hampshire and contributed mightily to the success there of Senator McCarthy. This, in turn, set up the prospect of an outright McCarthy victory over President Johnson in Wisconsin. On March 31, 1968, Lyndon Johnson, who had only narrowly escaped defeat in New Hampshire, faced the almost certain prospect of defeat and further humiliation in Wisconsin.

The interaction of these two widely separate events—a great enemy rampage in Vietnam and the primaries at home—may not literally have persuaded President Johnson to withdraw. But these two events certainly shaped both the timing and the manner of his withdrawal for together they helped reinforce the view among his advisors that the President could not win in Vietnam, or with the American public, by pursuing his current course.

So the President changed his strategy. One result was the peace initiative, announced on March 31, along with the President's intention of withdrawing as a candidate to succeed himself, and featuring the partial bombing pause and the call for peace talks. It was apparently the President's considered view that the latter two initiatives could not succeed unless they were coupled with his own retirement as a contender for the Presidency. These were the outward changes. But much the most important change was never really acknowledged. In fact, it was denied—it was a non-happening. But it happened. The President decided not to grant General Westmoreland's request for an additional 206,000 soldiers for Vietnam. It is

difficult to overestimate the significance of this decision for what it said was that the whole concept of applying graduated military pressure until the enemy buckled had not worked and could not be made to work. It was the difference in a poker game between raising and calling. It was a decision to play for something much more like a stalemate or a standoff than a military victory.

The critical point is that by putting this limit on what we can do in Vietnam, the government put a limit of sorts on what we can honestly hope to do any place. It restored to the forefront of our calculations what had been an element all along—the acceptance of the hard fact that we can do only so much for a small country which will only do so much for itself.

When President Johnson finally decided that the risk had to be taken, that the burden had to be shifted, that the United States could not continue expanding its effort, he finally and probably irreversibly confirmed the application to Vietnam of the concept of limited war—a concept which was preached by administration officials, off and on, and practiced, off and on, but never really acknowledged candidly because it had never been an easy concept to sell to an American public accustomed to winning cleanly and completely. Even in Korea, we restored the status quo ante; we pushed the enemy back behind the original line.

A case can be made that the much more recent events in Czechoslovakia established some sort of limit, too. But that limit was already there; however powerfully we might be drawn out of emotion to the side of the Czechs, the limits on what we could do for them were long ago fixed. These limits were fixed in Hungary, in Poland, and in the case of East Germany, where we might have used our influence or our arms—where we might have reverted to the old “roll-back” theory of the early 1950’s—and we did not. Neither did NATO, for the very simple reason that NATO was never set up to do that kind of thing.

Still, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia is another reminder of the limits of power in the age of the nuclear standoff where a balance of terror, however awesome, is pretty generally regarded as the safest, if that is the word, guarantor of peace. So, for perhaps a variety of reasons, some foreign and some closer to home, it seems fair to say that we are on the front edge of some kind of a new era, something markedly different whether it is called neo-isolationism or disengagement or whatever. It will be different in part for the fact that the next President will not be Lyndon B. Johnson, whose style and method and approach in the field of foreign policy is probably

very nearly unique. It will be different because there is a new mood in the country. Most of all, it will be different because Lyndon Johnson, as I have pointed out, has already taken the crucial step, in the crucial corner of the world, that was necessary to point the Vietnam struggle in a new direction—a direction which neither of the two major candidates seems likely to want, or to be able, to reverse.

It is relatively easy to say that the approach will be different. It gets a little harder to predict with any precision what this different approach will be.

The next President will not have the same sort of deep personal commitment to Vietnam that President Johnson had—the same personal and political prestige at stake. A President Nixon would have it a great deal less than a President Humphrey. Mr. Humphrey has stoutly defended the steady buildup of American combat forces which started with the landing of 3,500 marines in March of 1965. He has been out in front of the President in defense of our obligations in Southeast Asia and the relationship between these and our obligations around the world.

He is a loyal, not to say ebullient, deputy. But it is also perfectly clear that he would like to draw a very clear distinction between being a deputy and being his own man, as he made apparent in his acceptance speech at Chicago. Now he is already projecting the first withdrawal of American combat troops late this year or early in 1969. Without getting into an endless and infinitely complicated discussion over settlement terms, it is pretty obvious that Hubert Humphrey would be a reasonably and relatively generous negotiator in pursuit of a compromise that would end the war without clearly and blatantly leaving South Vietnam to the certain fate of a Communist take-over. He rests his hopes, as does President Johnson, on the theory that a progressive reduction of our effort will stimulate a progressive increase in the performance and the capacity of the South Vietnamese to carry a larger share of the load.

Mr. Nixon has been less explicit. But in one magnificently honed phrase he has said a lot, “We shall *end* the war in Vietnam and *win* the *peace* in the *Pacific*.” Note the word “end” rather than “win” and note also the reference to winning the peace in “the Pacific” rather than “Vietnam.” Walter Lippmann could live with that and so, with a little stretching could General LeMay. But Nixon’s meaning is not all that obscure. He has said privately that no President coming into office in early 1969 could hope to govern effectively unless he is somehow able to move Vietnam dramatically toward a settlement, if not actually settle the war, *within six months*. My own

guess is that Humphrey will feel somewhat the same compulsion.

Yet, it is idle to speculate about some new emerging American role in world affairs without taking somewhat into account the capacity of events to change everything—to upset everybody's timetable. It was, after all, *events*—a Communist insurgency in Greece, a Communist threat to all of Western Europe—that launched the whole postwar anti-Communist crusade and gave rise to the Truman Doctrine with its sweeping catch-all pledge on the part of the United States “to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.” With significant variations, this has been the bedrock of policy through Truman and Eisenhower and Kennedy and Johnson. Some have interpreted it more broadly than others. It has been applied in a variety of ways. But Lyndon Johnson still leans on the Truman Doctrine as a vital underpinning of policy in Vietnam.

In recent months, the Truman Doctrine and all that came after it, the pacts and the charters and the proclamations for Europe and Asia and the Middle East, have seemed increasingly out of date. Indeed, going back further than just the recent past, President Kennedy really began the talk of a different kind of obligation on the part of the United States—the more limited obligation to keep the world safe for *diversity*. *Non-Communism* began to replace *anti-Communism* as our goal. There was the test ban treaty and then the non-proliferation treaty now awaiting action in Congress. There were other signs of thaw in the Cold War—enough of them so that Hubert Humphrey felt free in July to talk about a “waning” of the Cold War, a prospect of “further accelerating mutual efforts toward disarmament.” “The Communist countries no longer pose a monolithic threat,” he said just two months ago. He also noted a new generation in the United States which rejects the “old premises of war and diplomacy and which wants to see more emphasis placed on human and personal values.”

These conditions, he said, demand “a shift from policies of confrontation and containment to policies of reconciliation and peaceful engagement.”

In Miami Beach a month later, Mr. Nixon observed in strikingly similar language that “the era of confrontation” is turning to “an era of negotiations with the Soviet Union.” He had not changed, he insisted, but the world had changed from the time that he made his 1960 acceptance speech in Chicago and demanded a “strategy of victory for the free world,” “an offensive for peace and freedom,” and “ideological striking force” to take “the initiative from the Communists.”

Then came the Soviet tanks together with those of their Warsaw Pact allies rolling into Czechoslovakia and you had to ask yourself what about this monolith? What about this new era of conciliation or negotiation or reconciliation? The answer is that certainly nothing is going to happen very quickly. Not Nixon, and not Humphrey, but the Russians—and the Chinese—will control the pace, or have a lot to say about it.

In the same way the North Vietnamese will have something to say about peace in Vietnam. If we have indeed abandoned once and for all the dream that one side can settle this, we must in all logic accept the fact that it will take some community of interest between the two sides, some mutual acceptance of the need to compromise.

So the role of the United States in world affairs is not something that can be fixed immutably in Washington. Still less can it be fixed in the White House. While Mr. Nixon has proposed a whole new approach to foreign aid and Mr. Humphrey has urged that it be increased, they both seem to agree, at least, that foreign aid is a useful thing—but there is not much sentiment of that sort in Congress, where the program has been all but dismembered this year.

In short, there are crosscurrents which will shape our role in international affairs. There is a conservatism about spending money for the vital necessities of uplifting underdeveloped parts of the world in the interests of trying to inoculate them from the kind of instability that causes Vietnams. At the same time there is, in Congress, and in the Pentagon, a cheerful readiness to spend any amount of money for anything new and shiny that promises us some gossamer strategic advantage over the Soviet Union, measured in megatonnage.

This is a curious state of mind, most effectively dealt with by former Secretary of Defense McNamara, who has tried harder than anybody to argue the case against an overwhelming nuclear superiority for either us or the Soviets. When both sides have the capacity to destroy each other, there is not a lot to be said for either one having the capacity to do it over again. There are outstanding commitments, to SEATO, to NATO, to Latin America. But there are also all sorts of ways of interpreting them, all sorts of tests which put more or less of an onus on the beneficiary of our help and support, and give us greater latitude for selectivity. My hunch is that the natural inclination of either Nixon or Humphrey will be to go down the road of careful, selective, gradual disengagement abroad, to wind up the war as rapidly and honorably as possible, and to submit reasonably to what will almost inevitably be a great upsurge of “never again” sentiment in the country.

So I foresee a shrinking role for the United States in foreign affairs—not a dramatic retrenchment, and certainly nothing like a revival of isolationism in the old form. But there will be a turning inward, a new caution about commitments abroad, new reservations about our obligation to set things right everywhere. This is almost unmistakably the mood of the country. It is reflected in the party platforms and the campaign statements of the candidates. And it goes without saying that it is a mood which could be altered or upset rather quickly by new threats posed by the Soviet Union or the Red Chinese or the men in Hanoi to our security.