

The Dangers of Asian Escalation

By Marquis Childs

THE WITNESS had just concluded his testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, speaking with the deliberation of one who weighs his words with the greatest care. In the momentary silence that followed, Chairman J. William Fulbright said:

"I know of no one better qualified to comment on this than you are."

George F. Kennan had come out of his academic solitude at Princeton, where he is a professor at the Institute for Advanced Studies, to give his views on war and peace. Former chairman of the State Department's policy planning staff, Ambassador to the Soviet Union and later to Yugoslavia, author of definitive studies on Russia that have won every literary award, Kennan's qualifications could not be disputed.

IN HIS APPEARANCE before the committee and in two preceding speeches Kennan had uttered a grave warning. By escalating the war in Viet-Nam, Kennan was saying, the United States risks bringing Russia and China together again and facing the two nuclear giants almost alone. Asked by Sen. Stuart Symington (D-Mo.), a former Secretary of the Air Force, what would be the reaction to American bombing of China, Kennan replied:

"... It is my feeling that in these circumstances they would feel themselves compelled to give military aid to China, probably short of getting in a nuclear exchange with us themselves. But in the process, I think, Soviet-American relations would be very seriously damaged for a long time to come.

"The problem we have over the next few years with the Chinese Communist regime is a tremendously serious one, very, very bitter and difficult, much greater than the problem with the Russians. If we are going to face successfully the solution of this problem with the Chinese I think we need all the help we can get and I think we need precisely something like a decent relationship with the Soviet Union.

"In other words, if we are going to cope successfully with the Chinese Communists we must opt if we can — it does not lie with us — to have one Communist adversary rather than two. It does not help us to force the Russians to come down on the Chinese side in the conflict against us."

It was no secret that privately several

of the Senators around the conference table were sympathetic to this view. But in the curious atmosphere prevailing in Washington, with pressures constantly growing to back President Johnson's moves in Viet-Nam, little or no comment came from the Senatorial side of the table. Similarly, knowledgeable specialists in the executive branch also agree that the greatest danger in Viet-Nam may be uniting the two Communist powers. They, too, are silent, since high policy is to push the war in Viet-Nam to a point at which the North Vietnamese will end their help for the Communist guerrillas and presumably end the conflict.

IN A SENSE, therefore, Kennan is a unique figure. Others have questioned the Administration's policy and at one extreme have denounced it. But they have done so without his broad range of experience and background.

This is not the first time he has spoken out when it might have been more discreet to be silent. In a series of lectures in London in 1957 he suggested the need for nuclear disengagement in Central Europe along the lines of the plan proposed by Poland's foreign minister, Adam Rapacki. The hard-liners came down on him with a savage attack.

In his address at the *Pacem in Terris* conference in New York, called to consider ways to implement Pope John XXIII's encyclical on peace, Kennan stressed the need to give serious consideration to proposals "looking to a restriction of the place of nuclear weapons in Europe's defenses." This would be one way to ease tensions and help build a working relationship with the Soviet Union. Behind this view is the assumption basic to the Kennedy Administration's foreign policy in working out the nuclear test-ban treaty — that in a period of peace and prosperity the Communist powers will relax totalitarian controls and make peaceful coexistence a reality.

In his third utterance, a speech at Princeton University, Kennan dealt more directly with the Asian confrontation. He called for a reduction of American involvement in the Far East. The United States must come to terms in some way with the prevailing political forces on the Chinese mainland, he told his academic audience.

One consequence of the widening conflict in Viet-Nam is a hardening of attitudes here at home. Or, at any rate, those who do speak out for the most part express the view that this country must take any and all risks to subdue the Communist guerrillas in Viet-Nam.