

AT FIRST glance, President Nixon's second State of the World message looks like a blare of self-praise. It recounts Mr. Nixon's every deed and has quotes enough to warrant the title "Thoughts of Chairman Richard."

But everywhere in the document there are submerged concessions to the administration's critics. The total effect is a somber acknowledgement that the policies described may not be working.

Take the definition of the Nixon Doctrine. The message says: "We recognize that the doctrine, like any philosophic attitude . . . is not a detailed design. In this case, ambiguity is increased since it is given full meaning through a process that involves other countries . . . for the doctrine's full elaboration requires their participation."

In sum, the doctrine is what others think it is. It is a kind of Rorschach test. Which is precisely what critics have been saying.

On Vietnam, the message indicates that the President will not accept the rapid pull-out advocated by many senators and Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird. Neither will he accept political compromise in Saigon as a price of promoting the talks in Paris. On the contrary, the purpose of Vietnamization has been to give the North Vietnamese an "incentive to turn to negotiations rather than protracted war."

But the message concedes that this policy "cannot, except over a long period, end the war altogether." It further acknowledges that as American troop strength dwindles, the chances of inducing negotiations diminishes. It says: "As our forces decline, the role we can play on many aspects of a settlement is also bound to decline."

In Europe, the message affects to "welcome" Chancellor Willy Brandt's Eastern Policy. But it also validates the charge that Washington has been suffusing the policy in a miasmic cloud of suspicion and mistrust.

Thus Brandt's Ostpolitik is made to sound like the German model of Prime Minister Edward Heath's intention to see that "British policies are determined by British interests." On top of that put-down, the Bonn regime is

warned that "a differentiated detente limited to the U.S.S.R. and certain Western allies but not others would . . . turn the desire for detente into an instrument of political warfare."

As to the Middle East, the message pushes once again the American peace initiative. The Arabs are to accept an agreement with Israel. Israel is to withdraw from territories occupied in the Six-Day War of 1967. The prewar Israeli frontiers, the message says with new precision, are to be modified only by "insubstantial changes."

But the report acknowledges that the initiative is not now being pursued jointly with the Soviet Union. It contains a detailed description of what happened to the effort undertaken last year to achieve peace in the Middle East without Soviet cooperation. That attempt to put over a made-in-America settlement yielded tension between this country and Israel, Arab cries of Israeli treachery and—the better to show that if peace did come it was thanks to Russian pressure—further Soviet military penetration.

IN THE matter of arms control, the President acknowledges that the Russians have advanced a proposal for limiting deployment of the main defensive weapon, the antiballistics missile. But the President dismisses an ABM-only accord as a "mere token agreement."

That means that he wants to build onto an ABM accord an agreement including offensive weapons. But the President complicates that task by arguing that the multiple warheads which might in future be added to the Russian SS-9 missile are somehow much worse than the multiple warheads that have already been added to American missiles. The message says:

"Deployed in sufficient numbers and armed with the multiple independently targetable warheads (MIRVs) of sufficient accuracy, this missile could threaten our land-based ICBM forces. Our MIRV systems, by contrast, do not have the combination of numbers, accuracy and warhead yield to pose a threat to the Soviet land-based system."

In the end, what emerges from the State of the World

message is a sad impression. The President and his closest advisers talk a lot about a generation of peace. They are not fooling, and they would have domestic support for any agreements they made.

But they are caught up in the toils of their own beliefs. They have a deep ideological hostility toward the Communists. They translate any Communist gains into American reverses and they see potential Communist gains in any move made by left-wing regimes from Germany to Chile.

As a result, they frame terms for negotiation that work to block agreement. It is a case of a regime unable to let go, a government incapable of taking chances for peace, a Prometheus self-bound.

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Self-Bound