

Today and Tomorrow . . . By Walter Lippmann

General Wheeler's View *8/11/66*

THE CHAIRMAN of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Wheeler, said on Sunday that the American effort in Vietnam is an attempt to establish a balance of power that will preserve peace.

General Wheeler argued, I think rightly, that



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a mong powerful nations there is no more effective way of keeping the peace than a balance of power. While it is by no means all that is necessary to peace, to know that military power cannot be used effectively and at a tolerable cost is the mightiest of all checks upon military aggression. For there is nothing so corrupting to a powerful nation as the feeling that it is irresistible.

General Wheeler was, we must assume, talking about establishing a balance of power which would check and restrain the expansion of Red China. He must have meant that the object of our fighting in Vietnam is to establish a balance of power against the Chinese. Assuming that this is our objective, how sound and how effective is our strategic and diplomatic policy in Asia?

FROM THE beginning of our intervention I have believed that our policy was unsound and ineffective. This conviction comes not from personal expertness but from a long familiarity with the classic American strategic objection to fighting land wars on the Asian continent. President Johnson is, as a matter of fact, the first American President who has discarded the old strategic rule. General Eisenhower refused to violate it. General MacArthur warned us against violating

it. General Ridgeway refused to approve proposals to violate it. President Kennedy, though he intervened considerably more than did his predecessors, still adhered to the rule that the war was not to become an American war on the Asian mainland.

Those who have held to this rule have always realized that as a war on the mainland escalated, the Asian forces opposed to us be gotten rid of by firepower and bombing.

would prove to be inexhaustible. We ought not to be surprised that this is happening. For there are more Asians in Asia than there ever can be Americans, and this elemental fact cannot

To establish a balance against a great Asian country like China, the first consideration a great Asian country like China, the first consideration of high strategy is to find and establish a firm and secure basis of American power. It seems to me that the United States can never find a secure base on the mainland. The base must in the nature of things take account of the fact that the Chinese have no sea power and that we do have great sea power. From the point of view of security, Vietnam, which is open to the whole mass of Indochina and China itself, is a particularly badly located base for American power.

Moreover, a base for American power in Asia must be firm in the sense that it is not established in the midst of a people which is a political quagmire. Any other place on the mainland if used for land operations, will prove to be a quagmire.

in carrying out a policy of a balance of power, it has always been prime consideration to come to an understanding with the enemy of your enemy. When Great Britain administered the balance of power in Europe

it never lost sight of that consideration. Always it made allies of the other countries menaced by the aggressor government of the time. Britain never fought alone if she could help it. For us, in the case of China, the first necessity has been, and is to cooperate with the Soviet Union, which is China's great rival in the interior of the Asian mainland.

But instead of doing that, we have been soft-headed enough to appease our hawks, and thus to make it impossible for the Soviet Union to cooperate with us. No one who really knows what it means to conduct a policy of balance of power would act as we are acting.

IN VIEW OF Secretary Rusk's indefatigable love of historical analogies, in view of his belief that the war in Vietnam is in principle the same war as that which came when Hitler was on the rampage, I venture to add a footnote. The fun-

damental mistake which was made by Neville Chamberlain in 1938 was his failure to come to terms with the Soviet Union as an ally against Hitler. The appeasement which he practiced at Munich, that is to say the sacrifice of Czechoslovakia to Hitler, was the consequence of the fact that Chamberlain had no ally in Eastern Europe. The disgrace of the appeasement resulted from the fact that Chamberlain's prejudices and scruples prevented him from building an alliance to contain Hitler.

Since it is for the moment fashionable to talk in historical analogies, it would be useful to ponder how Chamberlain in 1938 and we in 1965 each failed to come to terms with the enemy of our enemy.