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Today and Tomorrow . . . By Walter Lippmann

The Obligations of Power

IN A carefully prepared address at Princeton University the President said last week that "the issue for this generation . . . has to do with the obligations of power in the world for a society that strives despite its worst flaws always to be just, fair, and human."



Lippmann

This is indeed the issue for this generation of Americans. What are our obligations in the exercise of the great power which we possess? This is the question which is troubling our people deeply and is dividing them dangerously.

The oldest and the first American answer to the question is in the Declaration of Independence, that power may be used only with "a decent respect to the opinions of mankind." This is the original American commitment, not to use force without taking into account the opinions of others. This fundamental commitment against the unilateral use of force in human affairs has been, in the American view, the prime obligation of power.

This has been the American idea from the beginning, and in the course of time it has evolved into a fundamental belief that the use of power must be brought under the reign of law. In this century the conviction has expressed itself in American support of the principle of collective security, as represented by the League of Nations, and then by the United Nations and by the regional agreements for the maintenance of peace.

FROM THIS, the fundamental obligation of pow-

er that it should not be exercised unilaterally, President Johnson has departed conspicuously. Though his intentions have been honorable, though his purposes have no doubt been good, the fact of the matter is that he has used military force more than once—in Santo Domingo, in the Stanleyville intervention, and in Vietnam without asking advice or seeking the consent of our allies all over the globe. He did not go before the United Nations for a verdict as to whether there was an aggression in South Vietnam. He did not consult, as the Treaty stipulates, the other members of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, he did not seek the advice and approval of the Organization of American States before going into Santo Domingo. His conduct of foreign relations has been willful, personal, arbitrary, self opinionated, and the fact is that he has won no important support for the Vietnamese war and that all the great states of Asia and Europe are absent from Vietnam, are anxious and suspicious.

THE PRESIDENT and his apologists have persuaded themselves that the war in Vietnam is a continuation of, and is legally and morally and strategically the same as, the resistance to the Kaiser, the resistance to Hitler, the resistance to Stalin, the resistance in Korea. They are mistaken. The conduct of American foreign policy since President Johnson was inaugurated in 1965 marks a radical break with the past. President Truman did not intervene in Korea on his own decision; he intervened after he had received the approval and support of the United Nations. This was no mere legal and moral facade. The proof is that the war was fought

with the support of seventeen nations. In neither of the world wars of this century did the United States intervene alone or fight alone.

The President said at Princeton that "unlike nations in the past with vast power at their disposal, the United States has never sought to crush the autonomy of her neighbors." Someone should explain to the President that a remark like that, showing that vast power is combined with perfect self approval, grates badly on the nerves of many people at home and abroad.

It is "the taking of too much upon one's self as one's right which, as the Oxford English Dictionary says, is what "arrogance" is.

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