

Is US World Commitment Too Big?

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WASHINGTON (AP) — In the last 20 years most of the non-Communist world has been brought under the shelter of American power. Protection has been given in the form of guns, foreign aid, and defense promises.

Now, important voices are questioning whether this country has over-committed itself; whether the United States has spread itself too thin; whether the United States will have to fight one war after another because of its foreign commitments.

Top administration figures say no, but they have failed to quiet the concern.

The fact is that the U.S. policy of containing communism —

and the related policy of trying to build peace and order in the world — offers an open-end promise of help to any country coming under military attack, whether direct as in South Korea in 1950 or indirect as in Viet Nam.

The promise begins with formal defense treaty pledges to 42 allied nations. But it ranges far beyond allies to cover semi-allied countries such as Spain and reaches to non-aligned and sometimes highly critical countries such as India. In the non-Communist world only a few lands in the interior of Asia may be said to lie entirely beyond the reach of the American promise.

In fulfillment of this policy of containment and peacekeeping since the end of World War II, the United States has fought in Korea and Viet Nam. The Korean War is estimated to have cost \$18 billion over a three-year period and the Vietnamese war is now costing \$1 billion a month.

The United States has spent on its own arms and armed forces, including their deployment in combat over 20 years, a total of \$850 billion. These forces are today deployed in 15 countries outside the United States apart from Viet Nam.

The United States has also invested \$120 billion in foreign economic and military assistance, much of which was asked by successive U.S. presidents with the argument that it was vital to help block the spread of Communist power in the world. In the United Nations the United States has invested \$2.5 billion over the 21 years of its existence, including about \$218 million for peacekeeping or policing operations in the Middle East, in the Congo and in Cyprus.

Such enormous expenditures, even by the world's richest and most powerful nation, have recently raised some questions in Congress about whether the United States was spreading itself too thin.

Concern over this possibility seems to have been one reason why the proposal by Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield in May — for a drastic cutback of

U.S. forces in Germany from the present six divisions to one division — received backing of 44 senators.

But this is not the main question which has troubled senatorial critics of the war in Viet Nam and President Johnson's use of power generally in the world. They are more worried about where the course of combat in Southeast Asia is leading and whether the commitments of the United States to contain communism and combat aggression in the world may lead to new and more dangerous wars.

J. W. Fulbright, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has argued that these commitments grow out of foreign aid assistance to weak and underdeveloped countries quite as directly as they grow out of any treaty obligation, either explicit or implied.

"An attitude (toward helping a foreign country) becomes a policy that involves us with the governments of some 83 developing countries," Fulbright told Secretary of State Dean Rusk during a foreign aid hearing April 18.

"I am trying to get at whether aid programs aren't an important element in getting us involved in Viet Nam and other countries."

"I haven't said," Rusk replied, "that we will send out troops if things go bad in a developing country. We have aid programs without any security commitment and not everybody we help is an ally."

Democratic leaders in the Senate for roughly a year have been displaying the greatest discontent with basic U.S. foreign policy that Washington has seen since the fundamental policy lines were laid out at the end of World War II. One reason for this seems to be a conjunction of three actions by President Johnson in a period of six months beginning in late 1964.

In the first action Johnson had U.S. Air Force planes carry Belgian paratroopers on a rescue mission into the Congo, to pull out American and other nationals, chiefly missionaries. The paratroopers fought rebel forces at Stanleyville and were accused of using a humanitarian operation as a cover to help the Leopoldville government

crush a pro-Communist revolution.

In February 1965, Johnson radically escalated the war in Viet Nam by beginning the bombing of North Viet Nam and shortly afterward sending in the vanguard of U.S. combat forces — now totaling more than 260,000 there.

Then within two months came No. 3 — he sent American forces into the Dominican Republic with the argument that the Communists there had captured a revolt against the ruling military junta.

The mere coincidence of these events created a sense of alarm among the Johnson administration critics, notably members of the President's own party, in the Senate.

The critics have been developing their crusade slowly ever since with demands ranging from a reassessment of U.S. commitments abroad to a redirection of a policy toward Communist China and a reorganization of the Atlantic Alliance and its purposes.

Nevertheless, there is no feeling within the Johnson administration on the part of State and Defense Department officials or White House authorities that the President faces irresistible pressures to shake up U.S. foreign policy on such a broad scale. Slowly, over a period of time, this policy may have to be changed, but when, where and how will be hard questions to answer.

Rusk and Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, carrying the main battle for the administration, have tried to meet the main brunt of the criticism, as handled by Fulbright, with assurances that the United States is conscious of its own physical and moral limitations.

"The United States," McNamara said, "has no mandate from on high to police the world, and no inclination to do so."

At the same time, in a speech at Montreal May 18 before the American Society of Newspaper Editors, McNamara also argued that the United States is forced by its own security interests to concern itself with trouble wherever it arises.

"Whether Communists are involved or not," he said, "violence anywhere in a taut world transmits sharp signals through the complex ganglia of international relations; and the security of the United States is related to the security and stability of nations half a globe away."