

In trying to assess the impact of Vietnam and Watergate, Henry Kissinger told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee: "These traumatic events have cast lengthening shadows on our traditional optimism and self-esteem. . . . Where we once ran the risk of thinking we were too good for the world, we might now swing to believing we are not good enough. Where once a soaring optimism tempted us to dare too much, a shrinking spirit could lead us to attempt too little."

These dangers cannot be ignored. But Dr. Kissinger's attempt to define them is misleading. The choice before the United States as a major world power is not simply between daring too much and attempting too little. It is rather between what is right and what is wrong, between honesty and deception, between adherence to principle and pursuit of Realpolitik.

When the United States joined her European allies in the liberation of Europe from Nazi domination, this country dared a great deal—as it did again with its Marshall Plan strategy of rebuilding a prostrate continent. It was not that the United States subsequently dared too little or too much. It was rather that the nation deserted its principles. There would have been no honor in the Bay of Pigs even had the venture succeeded. From the ill-considered foray into the Dominican Republic to the undercover C.I.A. skirmishes in Southeast Asia, the American posture contradicted American ideals. The military and moral disaster of Vietnam and Cambodia was the bloody end of a long wrong road.

It is not a question now whether the American people believe themselves too good or not good enough for the world. Successive Administrations have imposed on the world Big Power policies which the American people never were allowed to approve or disapprove. In that process, which culminated in the secret war against Cambodia and the carpet-bombing of Hanoi, Americans lost control over their destiny.

Until their Government's actions at home and abroad begin again to carry the imprint of the people's will, the question whether Americans believe themselves too good or not good enough for the world is irrelevant.