

## First-Rate Power Test

MUCH OF the criticism that has come in of Mr. Nixon's Cambodian declaration is of the assertion that America must not become a second-rate power. The critics are saying one or another variation of the same thing.

The implicit challenge is to the assertion that America needs to be a first-rate power. That is a central question, strangely unexamined. We look about us and recognize that there are a great many second-rate powers which are somehow muddling through this century. They have their preoccupations—one thinks, for instance, of the English; but they have also their domestic felicities.

THEY ARE not called upon, anymore, to fight extensively in far off lands, or to bear the brunt of everybody's animadversions who feels that if he were President of the United States, the world would be so very much more congenial. It would be totally desirable if every power in the world were a second-rate power. But unfortunately, nature decrees that there shall always be at least one first-rate power.

It isn't mere bombast that Mr. Nixon is talking. What he said in his well-structured speech wasn't that it is fun to go and die for the good-old glory of a good-old first-rate power. He wasn't Prince Harry at Agincourt, bringing the fighting blood of his countrymen to an elated boil. He does expect, and is entitled to expect, that thoughtful Americans understand what it is that happens when a power climbs down from greatness in a world where other nations, of hostile disposition, will inherit the position of primacy.

It wouldn't greatly matter if we became a second-rate power yielding, let us

say, to Great Britain, which was a first-rate power during the 19th century, providing with her navy the shield needed for our brilliant gestation. But if we lose now it is the Soviet Union that we will lose to. And the Soviet Union desires to preside over a world which is quite horrible to contemplate.

What is happening in Indo-China is a contest of wills. Ours has been bent on establishing that a modest, non-aggressive alliance continues to be tenable in a remote part of the world. The enemy is bent not only on simple aggression, but on proving that the United States cannot dispatch a responsibility she willingly and intelligently entered into.

If the Communists establish that the United States cannot do that, then, as of that very moment, the United States abdicates as a first-rate power. The French did, after all. But the French were spared worse humiliation—by the presence of the United States. Let those who wish to abandon Mr. Nixon at this moment force themselves to say: what will make us convincing, tomorrow, when facing the mid-east, we tell the Soviet Union that we desire a balance of power there, the survival of Israel? What prestige will we bring to the Organization of American States when we discuss the virtues of stability in Latin America? The advisability of continuing America's responsibility for the Panama Canal?

WHAT, a very few years after our collapse in Asia, will our partners in Europe think when the Soviet Union presses its advantage, to say, the occupation of West Germany?

These are questions to which manifestly Richard Nixon has given very great thought, and if he prevails, history will owe him a great debt.