

New Message, Old Doctrines

President Nixon's second State of the World Message is essentially a restatement and updating of last year's document. It does not appear at first reading to contain any new thoughts or proposals. Indeed, what is most striking is the manner in which the emerging Nixon Doctrine increasingly resembles old United States policies of the past two decades.

This is particularly noticeable in the lengthy passages in which the President attempts to defend his policies in Southeast Asia. While the mode of American intervention has been changed in order to assuage domestic criticism, the President seems to be pursuing the policy of containment in Asia first laid down by John Foster Dulles. He reiterates his determination to honor American commitments throughout the area—commitments which predate the changed conditions to which he says elsewhere American policy must respond—and he appears ominously to be extending those commitments to Cambodia and Laos.

Although the President continues to call for increasing self-sufficiency on the part of America's Asian allies, individually and in concert, he indicates that the transfer of defense responsibilities to local forces will be a long and slow process. It is obvious that the Nixon Doctrine is running into serious trouble in the face of Asian realities.

In Europe, too, Mr. Nixon reiterates old policy in such expressions as "today's new strategic equation," which turns out to be simply a restatement of the McNamara policy of graduated deterrence and response. He does wisely allow for Chancellor Willy Brandt's Ostpolitik and for initiatives by others when he says: "Today, our Western European allies are properly anxious to make their own contribution to East-West negotiations. They will increasingly assert their own judgment and interest in doing so."

While holding out hope for new understandings with the Soviet Union, the President generally adopts a tough line vis-a-vis the Kremlin. His expressed determination to persist with American ABM and offensive missile development lessens the likelihood of a fresh American initiative to break the disarmament deadlock when the SALT talks resume in Vienna next month.

There were echoes in the President's message of recent hints of a changing policy toward Peking. He said the United States would continue to oppose Communist China's efforts to unseat Nationalist China at the United Nations—which, of course, is not the same as opposing admission for Peking. But United States actions in Indochina are likely to speak louder than any Presidential words of conciliation.

On the positive side, the President's firm statement on liberalizing trade offers hope that the Administration will provide stronger leadership this year in the trade battle in Congress. There are also welcome signs of a more hospitable attitude toward trade with the Communist world.

Mr. Nixon takes justifiable pride in his Administration's vigorous efforts to promote a cease-fire and negotiations in the Middle East, which he correctly labeled as the most dangerous current international crisis area. His careful restatement of the American position should give further impetus to progress in the delicate negotiations now taking place at the United Nations.

In the closing remarks of his radio address, summarizing the message, Mr. Nixon said: "But history has taught us that the old diplomacy of imposing peace by the fiat of great powers simply does not work." Unfortunately the Presidential Message—especially that portion dealing with Southeast Asia—strongly suggests that President Nixon has not abandoned the old diplomacy.