

Vietnam Policy: Superficially Ingenious

By Gabriel Kolko

TORONTO—Each major failure in the conduct of postwar American foreign policy has led to the search for a new, more successful strategy which, in turn, has produced additional frustrations in a world ever less susceptible to U.S. control. The Korean war and the irrelevance of "containment" evolved into Dulles' "new look" dependence on strategic weapons, which the Kennedy Administration then modified to include a "limited war" doctrine whose main outcome was the Vietnam debacle. Today the Nixon Administration has proclaimed the end of a bipolar diplomacy which it alleges is a new departure—one promising future peace and stability—in its larger foreign policy.

Given the protraction and technological intensification of the Indochina war, it is clear that Vietnam is both the cause and main objective of Mr. Nixon's efforts to utilize older contradictions between China and the U.S.S.R. to obtain their cooperation in what must always remain a chimerical effort to sustain pro-American regimes in Indochina. Apart from the fact Russia and China cannot trade what they do not control, and that one of the common hallmarks of successful revolutionary movements is their essentially autonomous nature, the more pervasive reality is that the Nixon Administration has shown no real willingness to abandon the main institutional expressions of the cold war, from NATO to bases, or their key ideological premises.

Precisely because Washington overtly retains its commitment to continuing interventions in Indochina and the Third World, it must be apparent to Russia and China that no qualitative change in this main source of violence between states in the world today is possible. Washington's ephemeral effort to succeed diplomatically where it failed militarily in Vietnam is further neutralized by the fact that no conceivable quid pro quo exists to reconcile the diametrically conflicting interests of the world's major powers the U.S. must satisfy in order to deprive the Indochinese revolution of the material support of all its allies.

Ironically, in the process of seeking to exploit the contradictions between the U.S.S.R. and China, the Nixon Administration has accelerated those within the formerly American-led world. As Under Secretary of State

John Irwin 2d admitted last June: "Among the most immediate challenges to allied unity and strength are the tensions caused by economic issues," and these have intensified as a result of the Peking and Moscow voyages. The "serious problems" with Western Europe and Japan to which Mr. Irwin alludes will invariably have their political consequences, adding to the already enormous diplomatic price that the imperatives of the futile effort to win the Indochina war have imposed on Washington.

These economic issues impinge on domestic employment and social conditions in the other industrialized nations, as well as the inevitable tensions and conflicts between them for what Mr. Irwin terms "access to increasingly vital energy and raw material resources." While technology precludes the translation of such disputes into deliberate wars between capitalist nations such as the world suffered in 1914 and 1939, it cannot prevent economic warfare and rival efforts to dominate less developed states as yet untouched by social revolution. Japan's emergence as the pre-eminent foreign power in assorted East Asian nations, from Indonesia to South Korea, is but one example of how future U.S. diplomacy may be defined by the deepening real antagonisms between states whose only common denominator is an anti-revolutionary heritage that is no longer a unifier when capitalist nations have conflicting interests.

The new Nixon diplomacy is but a set of improvisations and eclectic responses to immediate challenges, superficially ingenious but ultimately even less likely to prove successful than the policies of his predecessors in imposing the U.S.'s will on its wavering allies, Indochina, or China and Russia. Its vast global military establishment and its terrifying presence in Indochina remain a reality that only the ideologically bemused refuse to see.

Washington's self-serving effort to tidy up 25 years of failure in regard to Russia and China has no equivalent in the Third World nor even with the other capitalist nations. Beneath the Administration's current veneer of self-confidence remains the unavoidable reality that the United States' existing and new conflicts with an increasingly pluralistic world promise only more years of crises and violence.

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