

Power Without Force

The United States is emerging from the latest crisis in the Mideast as by far the greatest power in the world. But not because this country is an arrogant, imperialistic military colossus.

On the contrary, the source of American primacy is economic strength, organizing ability and inner balance. So it behooves us, especially now, to bury completely the foolish military impulses which made for Vietnam in favor of constructive multilateral approaches in keeping with our true national genius.

The most impressive mark of American ascendancy is the Israeli-Egyptian agreement to disengage forces around the Suez Canal. That accord was negotiated by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in the most visible way. The success was announced simultaneously in Cairo, Jerusalem and Washington.

The Russians, despite billions of economic and military aid to Cairo and a steady build-up of the Mediterranean fleet, counted for nothing. Neither did the French or the British who have been trying to get the inside track with Egypt and other Arab states by jumping on Israel.

American military power, of course, had something to do with the accord. The nuclear deterrent and the Sixth Fleet fill out the background of whatever secret understanding was given to Israel. But Dr. Kissinger's major asset in getting the Israelis to withdraw unilaterally from Suez was a promise from the Egyptians that they would open the canal and rebuild the bordering cities in ways wholly inconsistent with a resumption of hostilities.

But why were the Egyptians so ready to do that for Dr. Kissinger? Basically, because President Anwar Sadat wants to have friendly relations with the United States. He rightly mistrusts the Russians with their heavy political hand. He wants no part of European colonialism. But he, and most Egyptians, want the goods, credits, educational opportunities and life-styles associated with the United States. So he positively insisted that the disengagement accord be made in America.

Equally striking signs of American preeminence arise from the international oil crisis. That supposed super-

power, Japan, has been knocked for a loop. Britain, France and West Germany are already breathing very hard. Apart from prostrating themselves before the colonels and sheikhs, these countries seem even devoid of ideas for meeting the crisis.

By contrast, the United States is in relatively good shape. We are only marginally dependent upon the Persian Gulf for oil supplies. We have enough possibilities in coal, oil shale and nuclear power to make credible a threat to become self-sufficient in energy.

Moreover, we have not been bankrupted morally or intellectually by the action of the oil producers in curtailing supplies and raising prices through the roof. American officials have developed ideas, some of them broached by Secretary Kissinger for joint management of the oil problem by producing and consuming countries. Secretary of the Treasury George Shultz had the guts to stand up at the International Monetary Fund meeting in Rome last week and tell the Arabs they had raised prices to the point where international currency stability had become "unmanageable."

What all this means is not that the United States is sitting pretty and can afford to go it alone. On the contrary, given the holdings of major American companies abroad, recessions in Europe and Japan would do terrible damage to the economy of this country. Moreover, the quality of American life—particularly for those of us who value the things of the mind—would be sadly diminished by an American divorce from Europe.

Neither does it mean that the United States can let down its guard in defense. Given the way the Russians behave and the run-down in American military stocks over the past few years, there is a powerful case for a big increase in defense spending this year.

But the United States does not have to flex its muscles in a brutal way to count around the world. This country can get by without the terror tactics Presidents Johnson and Nixon felt obliged to apply in Vietnam.

The logic of American strength is

that it needs to be applied with discrimination and delicacy. It makes sense for the United States to look to economic measures, much more than to gunboat diplomacy. It is to our advantage to work through multilateral organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. For the United States is so preponderant that when it does throw its weight around, destructive nationalism is stimulated even in friendly countries.

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