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Draft Statement on U.S. Foreign Policy Alternatives

A Statement Prepared According to the Instructions of

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More than two years have passed since the signing of the Vietnam peace agreement in Paris and yet it appears that we must again face the agonizing dilemma of Vietnam. In the coming months we will have to answer some very difficult questions about our present and future commitment to South Vietnam. Since U.S. aid is vital in supplying both the economic underpinnings of political stability and the munitions for continuing the military struggle, should the United States reduce, maintain, or possibly increase its aid to Vietnam? Should the United States over the next few years dramatically reduce its aid to South Vietnam to near zero--a policy which quite possibly would result in the collapse of present South Vietnam? Since the local adversaries seem incapable of implementing the Paris peace agreements by themselves, does the United States have the responsibility to initiate another great power effort to reimplement or redefine the accords? Or should the United States reserve its limited negotiating assets for other pressing problems such as the Middle East or the SALT talks?

Any attempt to answer these questions must come to grips with the larger question of U.S. commitments. The answer will depend, of course, upon what we judge to be the goals that the United States should seek and the policies judged most likely to achieve those goals. It depends upon what we consider the responsibilities of the United States in the world and what we assess to be the limitations upon U.S. power.

What we must keep in mind, however, is that our commitments depend on our aims whether we define these to be to establish democracy worldwide, to contain communism, or to secure American economic interests. Our ultimate aims will thus determine whether we go to war if our external oil supplies are interfered with, whether we give economic or military aid to a country which violates universally accepted fundamental human rights of its citizens, or whether we intervene if a government not to our liking politically is about to establish itself in an allied state.

The questions concerning America's worldwide role have special pertinence today because of the vast changes occurring both abroad and at home. The military, political, economic, and some might even say the moral failure of Vietnam along with the high cost to us of that war in lives and dollars has forced this nation to reassess its entire post World War II overseas diplomatic and military policy. In addition to the war in Vietnam, our diminishing confidence in our ability to influence the course of events in all parts of the world, our growing concern with domestic problems, the revived strength and confidence of other countries, as well as global issues such as pollution and energy have made this country question the premises on which the foreign and national security policies of the United States have been founded for the past thirty years. It appears that some change

in our role is needed. The form of that change is, however, far from clear. It will probably require a long period of national debate to form some sort of consensus. For the present we can only put forward some possible alternatives.

First I would like to mention a few policies which would appear not only frivolous and unworkable, but also dangerous because they ignore the realities of present-day international politics. The first of these is pacifism which posits that war is immoral and that therefore the United States should refrain from engaging in it ever. It is based on the rather unrealistic premise that if one nation disarms all others will follow suit. Another somewhat parallel policy is that of isolationism which requires that the United States follow strict neutrality and remain aloof from the quarrels of the rest of the world. The historic connotations of this very word give a sense of irresponsibility leading to tragedy--America's rejection of the League of Nations, nonintervention in Ethiopia and in Hitler's Europe. This policy of national withdrawal appears highly unrealistic in this interdependent world. Equally unrealistic in the other extreme appears a policy which places America in an all-out struggle against the appearance of Communism anywhere in the world. This policy condemns all attempts to reach any sort of understanding with the Soviet Union and China.

A more realistic alternative, which is often termed, neo-isolationism, presents the general view that while the Soviet Union is willing to take advantage of all opportunities to extend its influence and power, and while it engages in political warfare, it is not going to risk a nuclear confrontation with the United States. The Russians are, according to this analysis, fully aware that a nuclear holocaust would mean the death of millions of its own population and the destruction of the modern economic structure they have struggled for decades to erect. The Soviet Union is thus seen as an essentially satisfied power with little real intent for world conquest. Moreover, it has China on her borders constituting an immediate, long-term threat to its security.

The general conclusion of this neo-isolationist view is that the United States is overextended, especially militarily and should, therefore, immediately reduce its overseas commitments. U.S. forces in Europe must be cut back, the number of U.S. bases in foreign countries should be dramatically reduced and military aid largely eliminated. Some proponents of this analysis would also cut back economic aid or channel most of its through multilateral organizations such as the United Nations and its agencies. The above steps would enable the United States to balance its commitments with its resources, end the enormous outflow of dollars, and apply some of

the savings to pressing domestic problems. The substantial reduction of U.S. forces overseas would leave fewer of them in exposed and vulnerable positions, the national economy would be under less strain, and the cohesive forces in American society would be strengthened and so the security of this country would actually be enhanced.

Another alternative opposing this analysis and reminiscent of the pre-Vietnam view of U.S. commitments regards as quite premature both the demand for troop reductions overseas and the contention that the "cold war is over". These analysts point out that the ultimate goal of Communism is the destruction of capitalism. They point to Khrushchev's statement that the Soviet Union favors all wars of national liberation, a statement which has not been repudiated by his successors. Moreover, not only have both the Soviet Union and China supported the Communists in Vietnam, but also they have supported and given every indication that they would support revolutionary activity against governments with which they maintain friendly, or at least correct, relations. The expansion of Soviet naval power into the Mediterranean is viewed not as the natural assertion of great power status, but as an expression of imperialist aspirations, of a desire for domination. The proponents of this traditional analysis say that the Communists do not really believe in coexistence. They may favor it to nuclear war, but they do not believe in real peace as it once was known. Finally these opponents of any massive reduction in U.S. commitments abroad say that any agreements which may be reached with the Communists such as those pertaining to Berlin, result from Western firmness, and illustrate

the success of the general containment policy.

Yet a third alternative accepting certain elements from both these previous alternatives has guided American foreign policy in recent years. This alternative known as the "Nixon Doctrine" posits that the United States will respect its commitments; however, it cannot, and will not "conceive all the plans, design all the programs, execute all the decisions, and undertake all the defense of the free nations of the world. We will help where it makes a real difference and is considered in our interest."[1/]

The basis of this doctrine is the national interest of the United States: "We are not involved in the world because we have commitments; we have commitments because we are involved. Our interests must shape our commitments, rather than the other way around."[2/] This concept of national interest gives much flexibility, for it can be applied differently in different situations. Thus American forces in Vietnam can be withdrawn, those in South Korea reduced, those in Europe maintained at existing levels while simultaneously eliciting greater material contributions from allies. The basic philosophy of this doctrine presents no hindrance to continued efforts at detente with the Soviet Union and China. Other nations are expected to play a larger role in their own defense and economic development commensurate with their present capabilities. Under this doctrine foreign aid would continue, but recipient nations are expected to mobilize themselves more effectively, and other developed countries are expected

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1/ U.S. President, U.S. Foreign Policy for the 1970's: A new strategy for peace. A report to the Congress by Richard Nixon, President of the United States, Washington, Feb. 18, 1974, p. 6

2/ Ibid., p. 7.

to contribute more. In essence, the defense and development of other countries is seen as their own responsibility first, a regional one second, and an American concern only thirdly--if the efforts of the first two are insufficient to meet the needs.

Alliances are indeed not created as eternal unions, but rather strictly as business deals. They are groups of nations which happen to have certain interests in common and find it convenient to pursue those common interests through common action. So the permanence or impermanence of an alliance depends on the permanence or impermanence of the interest involved. For example, the withdrawal of the bulk of our troops from Europe would not necessarily mean that we were abandoning Europe. Rather it might show that we believe that the landdefense of Europe nearly thirty years after the end of the Second World War is primarily the responsibility of the Europeans. Our special contribution lies in providing a nuclear deterrent, as Europe's last line of defense. If we examine the reasons why we provide that deterrent, we will see it is not out of charity, and not because we have signed a North Atlantic Treaty pact, and not because of the American forces in Europe. We provide the nuclear deterrent because we consider it vital to our interest to do so. If it were not considered vital, NATO could not force us to link our nuclear fate with that of Western Europe.

The preceeding discussion has presented variations on one theme--what should be the U.S. role in the world? And this cannot be answered simply, absolutely, and eternally. Questions such as: what should be our policy toward further aid to South Vietnam, how do we weigh the claims of the

Israelis versus the Palestinians; is it right ethically or even pragmatically to stay out of the Middle East; and are human rights any less important in the Soviet Union and China than in Greece or South Vietnam cannot be answered by a simple, all-encompassing theory of international politics. We must continually examine and re-examine our policies and make changes as times change, as perceptions of threats change, as leaders change as their rhetoric, for our commitments at any time are what we choose to make them.