

"CONCEPTS OF FOREIGN POLICY"

Ann Arbor, Mich.

Dear Sir: In "Concepts of Foreign Policy," (*worldview*, Feb. 1965), Professor Quincy Wright convincingly outlines an approach to international relations that encourages states with different social and political systems to coexist peacefully and to cooperate. Affirming the traditional international law principle that each nation is sovereign, he proposes as a means of relaxing world tensions a policy of "live and let live." If, as Mr. Dean Acheson asserts, current United States foreign policy seeks to preserve and to foster "an environment in which free societies may flourish and underdeveloped nations who want to work on their own development may find the means to do so," it is clear that Professor Wright counsels a less activist approach.

The continuing cold war conflict (combined with the frightening development of nuclear weapons) makes it imperative that world tensions be relaxed whenever possible. And a policy of respecting the autonomy of different socio-political systems does seem to contribute to world peace. But one wonders whether such a policy, strictly adhered to, is sufficient when a foreign government's conduct involves the abridgement of fundamental human rights. If the United States is to be faithful to its concept of personal dignity, it must—despite world tensions—deny that any nation has the right to infringe upon human rights and it should not be passive when confronted with situations like those in Nazi Germany or South Africa. Under traditional principles of international law, however, the treatment a government accords its own nationals is an internal or "domestic" matter, beyond the reach of international law.

It is true that a realization has developed in recent times that human rights are not solely a matter of national concern. The United Nations Charter explicitly recognizes that maintaining international peace and protecting human rights are interdependent goals and it imposes upon its members a clear legal obligation to promote increased protection of human rights. In Articles 55 and 56, members of the United Nations pledge themselves to promote a "universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without discrimination as to race, sex, language, or religion." But, as Professor Wright himself mentions, the United Nations Charter is based upon the sovereign equality of its members, so there are no effective means by which these obligations can be enforced.

Until these obligations can be enforced, or until all United Nations members voluntarily comply with

them, it seems that free nations like our own have both a political and moral responsibility to encourage "an environment in which free societies may flourish ..." by affirmatively promoting the protection of human rights. To define the nature and the degree of affirmative action is indeed a difficult and delicate task, as the current impasse over United States policy in Vietnam proves, but to remain passive on the theory that each nation has the right to its own socio-political system is surely not a better alternative.

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"VIETNAM: THE TREACHEROUS DEMANDS"

New York, N. Y.

Dear Sir: Your editorial of March on the problem of making judgments about foreign policy in the context of the situation in Vietnam leaves out the most serious difficulties. If the issues could be adequately judged by technical experts, such experts would find some way of communicating their judgments to the makers of opinion; but, the points at which opinions diverge belong to a level of deeper issues on which no one is an expert in a decisive way. Those who are believed to be experts profoundly differ.

I am not at all impressed by the clergyman in Washington who said that he didn't know "a clergyman in the country whose views on Vietnam are worth a hoot." This may happen to be true of clergymen but the logic of that part of your editorial would suggest that the same criticism applies to editorial writers and senators and many others who express themselves on the subject.

The real difficulty is that the points at which opinions diverge are neither technical nor moral. They have to do with presuppositions about the present historical situation which guide both the technicians and the moralists when they come to make judgments about policy. There are students who know a great deal about the issues involved but they differ as much as George Kennan and Robert Strausz-Hupé. Here are some of the questions on this level: What are the dynamics within Communist nations after they have reached a certain stage of maturity, how important is the imposition of communism upon other nations among their priorities? What is the role of the military power in relation to the threat of communism? How relevant is it to draw analogies from the experience of Hitlerism in Europe (Munich) to the way in which we should deal with communism in Asia? What are the limits of American pow-

er in Asia, especially in relation to a unified, modernized and dynamic China as a great nation whether Communist or not? What are the effects of particular American actions on the attitudes of people in various Asian countries and how important are these attitudes for the shaping of the future? How far is it true that the American government is imprisoned by an American ideology that cripples it in its response to the changes in the real world? What are the risks of escalation if we extend our bombing in North Vietnam?

These are not moral questions. They are questions concerning the interpretation of the realities in the contemporary world with which we are dealing. There are moral questions which are important. For example, there is, in addition to the question as to what are the risks of escalation, the question of whether we ought to take those risks. I suspect that our policy makers are more controlled in their judgments by the broad conceptions about the situation which they bring to the problem than they are by technical considerations, and that generally they listen to the experts who agree with those conceptions. I often hear that there is a dearth of experts on China who are close to the government.

There is a special danger that one kind of expertise will do duty for another. Those who know a great deal about the military aspects of the problem think nothing of dogmatizing about communism in China and the political problems of Asia generally. This is true of Secretary McNamara, of Hanson Baldwin, one of the most extreme examples is General Powers, formerly head of S.A.C. I am sure that these men carry much greater weight than the clergymen who are so easily dismissed but I doubt if their expertise is at all relevant to the considerations which should determine the choice of over-all policies. We hear much from experts on bombing and guerrilla warfare but we hear very little from experts on the people of North Vietnam, on the Buddhists of South Vietnam and on what makes the Viet Cong tick. It is experts of the latter type who should have a great deal to say about the nuances of policy.

It is my suspicion that we may have missed real opportunities because we have substituted clichés about communism for knowledge of these people. The President must choose his experts. He is not an expert on Asia and he is guided by the broad conceptions that he brings to the problems. When he speaks about Asia he seems to be guided by old stereotypes about communism and the relation of communism to military power that are filtered through very simple moral ideas. One hopes that he soon develops the intuitive wisdom about Asia that he clearly shows in relation to American problems.

George Kennan at the recent *Pacem in Terris* Conference called for a revision of our "assumptions

concerning Soviet intentions." He said that "they impute to the Soviet leaders a total inhumanity not plausible even in nature, and out of accord with those human ideals which we must recognize as lying together with other elements less admirable in the eyes of some of us, at the origins of all European Marxism." He then offers "a plea for something resembling a new act of faith in the ultimate humanity and sobriety of the people on the other side"; and says "I would like to address this plea to our Communist contemporaries as well as to ourselves." I believe that this is wiser counsel than we have had from most of our national leaders in recent years but many will regard it as dangerous wishful thinking. Among the people quoted by Pamphilus in the March *worldview*, Walter Lippmann and William V. Shannon would be on opposite sides of this question.

What kind of expertness can decide who is right? And yet a decision about this is more important than a decision about most of the matters that yield to technical judgments. I also suggest that this is not a moral question but a factual one and that moralists are likely to move either way.

Assuming that Kennan's statement about the Soviet Union is basically true, what policies would be best calculated to make such words applicable to China in 1970, or 1975? That is the most important question that underlies your editorial. Who is able to give an answer? One hopes that it is being asked persistently in Washington.

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Response:

Dr. Bennett's cogent letter parallels rather than opposes the intention of the editorial. We share, for example, his opinion of the views of the Washington clergyman; some knowledge about Vietnam is a prerequisite to sound judgment, but not the expertise he called for. Dr. Bennett's series of questions is precisely pertinent here.

An unresolved issue is the relation between moral sentiment and those "broad conceptions about the situation" which control the judgments of the policy-makers. In the April 18 issue of the *New York Times* James Reston wrote a remarkable column in which he argued U.S. foreign policy since the war had been guided by "an instinct from the past, and that instinct comes, whether we accept it or deny it, from the religious tradition of the past." This suggests that moral considerations enter policy formulations at a profound level.

Dr. Bennett's letter is, clearly, a contribution to that "better public discussion" for which the editorial called and an oasis of clarity in the present stage of that discussion.

Ed.

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