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THE FUTURE ROLE OF THE UNITED STATES  
IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

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THE FUTURE ROLE OF THE UNITED STATES  
IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

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I have been concerned with this problem for a number of years, during which I have had occasion to modify my views as time and reflection revealed the difficulties inherent in various conceivable policies.

In the past, I was of the opinion that the United States should accept the burden of maintaining the Asian power balance alone, but that American intervention should be limited to situations which without such intervention would seriously threaten that balance of power by permitting a single nation or a coalition of nations to dominate the Indo-Pacific region.

My guiding consideration at the time was that Asia had only in recent decades entered its age of nationalism

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<sup>\*</sup>This is the text of the opening statement made before the Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives, chaired by Congressman Clement J. Zablocki of Wisconsin, on April 4, 1968, as part of current hearings on the future role of the United States in Asia and the Pacific.

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and that it was fated to experience for some time to come the numerous clashes of interest typical of the nationalist phase of historical evolution. The obvious parallel was the history of Europe in the two centuries preceding World War II, and I envisaged for the United States in Asia a role similar to that played in the past by Great Britain in European affairs.

To be able to play this role, the United States would want to avoid security arrangements and alliances that would impose legal, or at least moral and political, obligations on this country to support one side against another in conflicts caused by territorial disputes and the various other rivalries typical of the age of nationalism.

Unless we want to accept the forbidding and thankless task of acting as arbiters of Asian history -- and I am firmly convinced that we should not presume to play that role -- we must avoid commitments that might force us to take sides in disputes such as the past or present ones between India and Pakistan, Indonesia and Malaysia, Cambodia and Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines, Cambodia and Vietnam, and Japan and Korea.

Until Asian nationalism reaches the maturity that Western Europe seems to have attained after a long period of intense and destructive enmities, conflicts like those enumerated above will recur, and the history of recent years provides compelling arguments for the wisdom of a policy that avoids our unilateral involvement in such situations.

As I have devoted a great deal of my time in the last fifteen years to the study of Indonesian affairs, an example concerning that country comes to mind. If, following an

understandable impulse to be champions of justice, we had sided with Malaysia in the years 1963 to 1966, when that country was being victimized by the "confrontation" policy of President Sukarno and his Foreign Minister, Subandrio, this might have left a residue of bad feelings toward the United States even in Indonesia circles hostile to that policy. But we wisely avoided getting involved, the conflict was resolved by the Indonesians and Malaysians themselves in the summer of 1966, and last month the distinguished Malaysian Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, was the state guest of the new Indonesia President, General Suharto. The lesson of this and other, similar experiences can only be that American intervention in Asian conflicts should be considered only in situations where the major Asian balance of power is in danger of being upset by a nation or coalition with hegemonial ambitions.

If one accepts this conclusion as a basic policy guideline, one can derive from it concrete politico-military implications for our security arrangements in Asia, both as regards U.S. alliances and agreements with other nations and concerning the deployment of our forces in the Indo-Pacific area. In developing my thoughts on these matters I have been guided, since 1965, by the firm belief that, regardless of our efforts at persuasion, Great Britain will withdraw from "east of Suez" at the earliest possible date, and that no other Western European nation will be willing to share with us the burdens of keeping the power balance in Asia.

In any approach to this position it is, of course, imperative to consider the likely future role of the Soviet Union, which some commentators, hopeful because of the

Sino-Soviet conflict, have fancied as a future partner of the United States in keeping the peace of Asia. My own view has been that it is dangerous to extrapolate in this manner from the Soviet Union's patent desire to avoid a suicidal nuclear conflict with the United States. Despite the common interest of the two nuclear superpowers to avoid mutual annihilation, the Soviet Union is not likely, in the foreseeable future, to help us secure our national interests in Asia or elsewhere.

It has been my belief since 1959-1960 that the leaders of the Soviet Union at that time made the fundamental decision that their country's ambitions as a world power required extending its presence beyond the Eastern European sphere of influence created by Stalin. New aid agreements with the U.A.R., Iraq, Cuba, India, Indonesia, and other countries in that period marked the emergence of the Soviet Union as a global competitor of the United States.

In my view, the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962 was only an episode in the history of the Soviet challenge, followed by temporary retrenchment to avoid the danger of a nuclear conflict. In this last year, the emergence of the Soviet Union as a Mediterranean naval power, her role in the Arab-Israeli conflict, her quiet penetration of India, which will probably result in strategic benefits in the Indian Ocean area, and her assistance to the regime in Hanoi give us the measure of the Soviet Union's global ambitions.

It would be a grave error of judgment to assume that Soviet interests in Southeast Asia will be convergent rather than competitive with American interests. As a great power, with ample resources, the Soviet Union will

be able for a long time to come to pursue her own national interests and ambitions in competition with both China and the United States. The day when she may have to side with one against the other in defense of her own national interests is probably still far in the future.

Were it not for the experience of Vietnam, one could argue that we should therefore be prepared to stand alone as a Pacific power capable of using strategic forces and general purpose forces to prevent any one nation or coalition of nations from establishing its hegemony in Asia. Unfortunately, this task is bound to be much more difficult than that faced by Great Britain in Europe in past centuries. Although Napoleon or Hitler tried to use ideology as part of their armory, their hopes for conquest relied primarily on the successful prosecution of conventional war.

In the coming decades, in Asia, similar military ventures are not very probable. Neither Communist China nor anybody else is likely to send conventional invading armies into the arc of Asia, from Afghanistan to Korea. Against such an overt act of international aggression, if anyone were to commit it, air interdiction would be possible, and international public opinion would sanction the use of drastic military measures.

I have also never believed that Communist China or anybody else would use nuclear blackmail to establish a sphere of influence in Asia. For such blackmail to be more than an idle threat, China would have to demonstrate her willingness to use her modest nuclear capability. Once she became a nuclear aggressor in Asia, the United States, in self-defense, would have to destroy China's nuclear potential before it could threaten the existence of the

American people. Therefore, as China acquires nuclear experience, she may become as cautious as other nuclear powers have been in the use of those suicidal weapons.

The conclusion of this brief analysis is that, however unlikely nuclear or conventional aggression in Asia may be, the United States must have, as a deterrent, the capability to commit her strategic forces and her general purpose forces against a potential large-scale aggressor in Asia. We will have to learn to distinguish such major acts of aggression from limited conflicts, reflecting the unsettled conditions of Asia's age of nationalism, to prevent the United States from getting involved in local Asian affairs.

Unfortunately, this precept offers no remedy against the most serious threat that the free nations of Asia are likely to face in the period ahead, namely, the indirect forms of establishing control over another country by creating politically and economically dependent governments. With the end of the age of Western dominance, the Third World has entered upon a long period of instability and uncertainty. In broad terms the situation is analogous to that which prevailed in the Western world after the fall of the Roman Empire, when it took centuries before a proper balance between freedom and security was again established.

Like European feudalism, the military regimes that have gained control of so many newly independent countries are manifestations of the respective societies' quest for stability and safety. It is to be hoped that the accelerating pace of contemporary history will shorten these transitional stages toward constitutional and representative government from centuries to decades. But the new nations are vulnerable indeed to subversion and various forms of

pressure against which there is no easy and obvious defense. Not only the disappearance of the imperial-colonial order but the inherent social tensions of the process of modernization make the new nations easy targets for predatory external intervention in their affairs.

Any power that attempts to establish its hegemony in Asia is likely to use politico-military and economic-cultural methods in pursuit of that goal rather than conventional or nuclear aggression. I do not share the view of those who argue that Chinese Communist statements are idle threats hiding a cautious foreign policy. The setback of the Cuban missile crisis did not prompt the Soviet Union to abandon permanently her global ambitions. Similarly, Communist China is not likely to abandon her policy of achieving Asian hegemony because of the setback her interests have suffered in Indonesia, or because we are making the conquest of South Vietnam costly to the Communist rulers in Hanoi.

The social tensions present in the countries of Southeast Asia today make it possible to create in those nations political movements bent on the violent overthrow of the existing regimes through revolutionary war. Communist China will be increasingly tempted to aid and abet such subversive movements which at best, from her point of view, may result in the establishment of pro-Chinese regimes and at least will keep the countries on her periphery in turmoil for a long time to come, thus preventing the emergence of a strong and stable coalition of nations capable of balancing the power of China.

If the lesson that the American people draw from the war in Vietnam is that we should not again get involved in

counterinsurgency operations in Asia, it can be argued that the Chinese Communists will have achieved one of their major objectives toward the establishment of their hegemony in Asia, namely the neutralization of American power at the lower end of the spectrum of flexible response. If, for domestic political reasons, American power will not be available in the future to help friendly governments against armed insurgents supported from abroad, then alternative arrangements must be planned now to avoid a vacuum in Southeast Asia in the 1970's.

In the recent past, my thinking on these matters has evolved from my earlier belief that American power alone can keep the balance in Asia to the realization that, because of our experience in Vietnam, alternative solutions must be found. At first I thought that a purely Southeast Asian alliance or security arrangements for mutual help against insurgencies would be the answer. But I have come to the conclusion that at this stage of Asian nationalism such a plan would be premature, as too many mutual suspicions and prejudices are still hampering the peoples and governments of Southeast Asia.

In the coming period of Southeast Asian history, therefore, after the termination of the war in Vietnam and the British withdrawal from Singapore, the best hope would seem to lie in pragmatic, ad hoc security arrangements between the countries of Southeast Asia and of the Southwest Pacific including Australia and New Zealand.

Such arrangements will be useful to the countries concerned only if they lead to concrete, operational cooperation among those nations against insurgencies and subversion. The United States could contribute to them by a new and

imaginative pattern of military assistance. If the equipment furnished to the countries of Southeast Asia in the future were to make their logistics, communications, and weapons compatible and complementary, effective cooperation among those countries would be greatly facilitated.

When the war in Vietnam is honorably brought to an end and it becomes possible for the United States to gradually withdraw its forces, I hope that serious consideration will be given to the possibility of transferring some of the military equipment now in the area to the countries of Southeast Asia which are prepared to defend themselves jointly or severally against insurgency and subversion.

The United States need not participate in the plans that the countries of the area will make for their own defense; its function will be to make available its industrial resources to these agrarian societies, which cannot themselves produce the equipment they will need to deal with the threats that will face them.

In conclusion, I would like to repeat how I see the future role of the United States in the security of Asia: we should provide the nuclear umbrella, the deterrent against massive conventional attacks, and the equipment to be used by the countries of Southeast Asia themselves in any conflicts that may involve them at the lower end of the spectrum of violence.