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Foreign Policy Association D.C. - Foreign Policy in the Coming Campaign

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FOREIGN POLICY IN THE COMING CAMPAIGN

Foreign policy will be the predominant issue in the coming election. Its pre-eminence should be more complete than during any election since the Korean conflict. The campaign could well develop into a probing discussion of many basic national attitudes--some which have gone unchallenged for years. From the discussion, if it is responsibly pursued, may come lasting benefits to the nation.

Each campaign issue, as it unfolds, will inevitably arrive at the doorstep of foreign policy. In the light of the urban problem, for example, the diversion of the public initiative which is imposed by our overseas commitments
will make foreign policy an ingredient of any discussion of this chief domestic issue. Any consideration of economic issues sooner or later must involve the state of our balance of payments. That, in turn, will bring on a consideration of the costs of our worldwide military and other commitments—not only in Viet Nam but in Europe and elsewhere around the world.

If the level of discussion rises above personalities, I think this election year may be remembered for its great contribution to changing attitudes on foreign policy. At the least, there should be a greater understanding both at home and abroad of our nation's role in world politics.

In many ways, 1968 will be a watershed year for American elections. It is the first Presidential election in which those who were babies at the end of World War II will be eligible to vote. The attitudes of these young adults may well reflect a perspective of the contemporary world which is much sharper than that of those of us who have borne witness to the
victories and defeats of the past and, in that sense, are its sometime prisoner.

With a fresh generation of Presidential voters, a questioning election is likely. The questions asked will strike at premises many of us have accepted and built upon for years. The new generation was born too late to be influenced by post World War II furies, fixations, and fears. Its members frankly question policies which were designed two decades ago for two decades ago and largely for jousting with what was then assumed to be the indivisible monolith of Communism. For this new generation, the divergent experiences of Yugoslavia and Albania, not to speak of China, are highly relevant challenges to the basic assumption. The new generation of voters may well insist upon more than patent-medicine policies in response. This generation may insist, too, that government's direct responsibilities in the face of the unrest and rebelliousness at home is at least as great as its indirect responsibilities
in dealing with violence elsewhere in the world and they will not be put off by scornful references to isolationism--neo- or any other kind.

The questions that this new generation of voters asks may at times be naive, but such a characteristic often accompanies a fresh appraisal of basic concepts. To them it may appear incongruous that we find ourselves all too often striving abroad against the tide of change and tugging on behalf of the status quo.

The recent announcement of the United Kingdom of the abandonment of long held overseas bases east of Suez shall make this question very pertinent. While an older generation might say, let's fill the "vacuum," left by the withdrawal of the British, young Americans may see the departure as a chance to test regional and international responsibility in lieu of a 19th century unilateralism.

I think that voters of all ages may be interested in listening to the questions of young people and that they will
insist upon thoughtful answers to the questions. Indeed, the education may do us all some good. At the least, this new and enlightened generation shall contribute greatly to the style of the coming political campaign, not because it has become a significant voting bloc, but because its clear eyes and clear voice can do much to direct the nature and the depth of the discussion.

Complementing this new focus is the influence that television will have on the probing of foreign policy by the younger voters in the coming campaign. Television is recognized to have contributed, perhaps decisively, to the outcome of the tight 1960 Presidential election. In a very different way, it may play an equally significant role in 1968.

Without venturing into Mr. Harris' profession, I suspect that a substantial portion of this country now receives much of its information on national and international affairs primarily from television. Americans who in the past would be
content to read no further than a headline and leave the conduct of international affairs to Washington have gained from television a new interest and understanding of world happenings.

The growth of the middle class, as Mr. Harris has so ably documented, has changed the emphasis from the old economic issues of the thirties. Even as the deep interest of the electorate in foreign relations will be manifest in the elections of 1968, television will give to the issues which arise (and notably the issues of war) a new dimension. Never before, for example, have so many millions of Americans been exposed, day after day, to a life and death struggle waged 10,000 miles away--but observed each evening at home in living color. Never before have American parents borne witness to the battles in which their own sons may be involved.

And as the nation's concern has centered ever more deeply on Viet Nam, the issues of that struggle have become more closely entwined with fundamental domestic issues.
Inextricably woven within the structure of the war, for example, is the issue of what has been called the crisis in the cities--a problem as grave and complex as the war--and as costly, if one were to put the full price tag on the disintegration of the urban environment and what it may portend. With only a fraction of what it is costing to fight the war, much could be done to alleviate inadequate housing, to improve health and welfare programs, to provide better education and jobs--to reduce poverty and discrimination and tensions.

The past seven years will be recorded as years of great domestic achievement for the people of America. In the fields of medical care, education, health, human rights, housing and economic growth, the legislative base for improvements has been strengthened more than in any comparable period in our history. But there is so much to do. And the strain of domestic needs versus overseas commitment shall reveal itself in the form of a more searching examination of any outworn or dubious premises of foreign policy and their costs.
The discussions of foreign affairs in the coming election are to be welcomed. They should strengthen greatly the national awareness of the significance of this dimension of our national life and may well contribute to the development of more adequate policies for this nation in world affairs.