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“The United States Is Not an Asian Power”

In any design for durable peace it is time to drop the approach which led us into the misadventure in Indochina and into two decades of alienation as regards the people of China. It is time to discard the assumption that this nation's power is such as to be able to control the flow of events on the Asian mainland. Vietnam should have made it clear that our ability even to exercise a rational influence on the affairs of that continent is limited. Underscoring the point are the wasted years and the squandered resources in dealing with China on the basis of the long-distance hostility of a Cold War.

The United States is not an Asian power but a major Pacific nation. . . . The outer limits of our unilateral and bilateral defense in the Pacific are, in my judgment, the Aleutians, Japan, and the Philippines. Beyond that the enhancement of the nation's security is properly sought in developing multilateral relationships of peace and in strengthening bilateral relationships with Asian governments, preferably those strongly rooted in their own people. In short, the projections of the military defense of the western approaches to the United States should be confined to the Pacific Ocean. We should not presume to extend them onto the Asian mainland.

Nor, in the name of defense, should we pursue a course which leads us militarily into a third ocean, the Indian Ocean, and its adjacent lands. The first step in that direction, I regret to say, has been taken by the backdoor acquisition of Diego Garcia through questionable leasing practices. The development of that base is probably the opening gun in a campaign to build an Indian Ocean fleet. What for?

What interests of the people of this nation are involved that they should be called on to pay for a third-ocean navy? In truth, we have neither the manpower nor the resources to engage in an arms buildup in the Indian Ocean without massive increases in federal expenditures. If the Diego Garcia boondoggle materializes, what we will have gained, in my judgment, is not greater security for this nation but a further weakening of our capacity to meet the real needs of the American people. We will have the nucleus of another massive burden of taxes and inflation.

One hopeful sign in this situation is that the Senate on its own responsibility and the House, in conference with the Senate, directed that appropriations for fiscal 1976, except for a \$250,000 safeguard — on the airfield at Diego Garcia — be held off until April 1st. During that period, the President has been asked to try to negotiate a settlement with the Soviet Union which could preclude both powers from establishing bases in the Indian Ocean. That is not much, because if we are determined to waste our substance, I expect that the Russians are not going to help us to save it. At least, however, the measure does permit a brief period to stop, look, and listen before we proceed further along this course.

On the other side of the globe, we have in excess of five hundred thousand military personnel and dependents in Western Europe, thirty years after the end of the Second World War. That is probably the most costly single expenditure for a nonproductive purpose in the federal budget. This anachronistic deployment is a relic of World War II and the early years of the Cold War. Whatever relevance it

may have once had to the nation's security has all but disappeared. . . .

As of last July, including this European deployment, we had a total of 1,060,000 people, in one form or another [military personnel, civilian employees, servicemen's dependents], stationed abroad, paid for by United States taxpayers, for what are termed “defense purposes.”

If, as the executive branch contends, the role of world policeman for this nation has been rejected, then where is the pattern in this vast military commitment abroad? There is no pattern. What this nation has abroad, supports abroad, and promotes abroad, is a composite put together out of carryovers of World War II, the Korean war, and the Southeast Asian misadventure. Add to this motley collection a host of random undertakings over a period of several decades often for purposes long since forgotten. Add to it, finally, military aid to dozens of countries and vigorous arms merchandising by the Defense Department in the manner of some latter-day Sir Basil Zaharoff.

Who is trying to sort out this immense, disparate, and costly conglomerate? Where is the effort being made to separate the wasteful from the necessary? Where are the up-to-date integrated strategic concepts into which to fit specific defense activities abroad? The answers to these questions have yet to be supplied. They must be forthcoming. They are, in my judgment, an absolute requisite both for the restoration of the U.S. economy and for an effective contribution to peace on earth in the years ahead.

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Senior United States Senator
from Montana