

STATE OF THE WORLD

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Readers are reminded that worldview welcomes correspondence. Letters may be specific comments on articles in recent issues of general discussion, but readers are requested to limit their letters to 500 words.

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The world has changed in the last year, and President Richard Nixon's second State of the World Message is intended to reflect it. In spite of some shifts in emphasis, however, it varies little from the President's Message of last year, examined elsewhere in these pages. Donald Brandon concludes his analysis of the 1970 Message thus:

"It is therefore necessary to reject the current radical, liberal, and conservative conventional wisdom regarding the non-utility of any and all covert or overt uses of the instruments of force in the Third World. This nation must continue to engage in prudent selective containment, though not necessarily with American combat forces. And this country must continue to engage in prudent, selective bilateral as well as multilateral foreign aid and trade policies. A too rapid and too rigid retrenchment by the United States would jeopardize both the efforts of the last thirty years, and the prospects for relative peace in the next generation."

Those who read or listened to the Message which the President delivered on February 25th will note that most of it is in conformity with this judgment. We have been accustomed to hear that while the world changes rapidly our perceptions follow slow behind. And many will find this adage confirmed by the President's Message.

Others can point out, however, that there are some shifts in the new statement and they are not negligible. There is an acknowledgement that the policy of "Vietnamization" will not end the war in Vietnam; it will at best prolong it, holding the Viet Cong at bay, while the U.S. contribution in men is reduced and its contribution in matériel remains high. But there is no diminishment of the idea of an eventual military victory. The President also gave more sympathetic attention to the demands a power as great as China can expect to make. The shift in emphasis was marked by his repeated use of the title China claims for itself, "The People's Republic of China." And in his comments—or lack of them—concerning Russia's role in Southeast Asia and in the Middle East there was a recognition of shifting interests, marked by degrees, but only degrees, of changing expectations.

There were other changes that could be noted. To select one that is worth further and prolonged discussion. A year ago, the President asked: "Should a President, in the event of a nuclear attack, be left with the single option of ordering the mass destruction of enemy civilians, in the face of the certainty that it would be followed by a mass slaughter of Americans?"

In his second Message, he himself answered by saying "we must insure that we have [such] forces and procedures." This seems totally acceptable—until we realize that we are discussing an actual nuclear exchange, a nuclear

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war. And the questions that have been canvassed so thoroughly in the total program of CRIA and the pages of *worldview* are returned to and thrown open to re-examination. One immediate reaction is not only possible but called for: the proposal is not totally acceptable, not without grave risks of its own.

J. F.

RIDING THE ESCALATOR

It is significant that the February invasion of Laos and five months' bombing of the Ho Chi Minh trail have earned little public criticism. Significant because it indicates that, by talking about an end to the war and acting under the cover of the slogan "Vietnamization," Washington can use its jaded strategies, search and destroy and unrestricted bombing, in a form tolerable to former critics. Such tolerance is mistimed, for, as Hans Morgenthau pointed out in the *New Republic* for February 20th, since President Nixon is still seeking victory—a strong anti-Communist government in Saigon—"he proposes not to end the war but to change its nature."

This is tragic to those who see the realities of the war as political and thus unaffected by Vietnamization: the weaknesses of the Saigon government; the long-standing and flexible strength of insurgent forces and their backers; the very nature of an insurgency. Such observers feel that, even with the war widened to engage rebel troops outside of South Vietnam, the most a military strategy can achieve is a prolongation of the war, the imposition of near suicidal costs on the "victor," or the creation of a new and more disastrous conflict.

That Vietnamization has not affected such arguments can be seen with the help of what is known about the "Laotianized" secret war in Laos. There the war is run from behind an elaborate front which is totally dependent on U.S. dollars and fire-power. There Asian soldiers absorb the casualties. There the war has become dependent on American air power which is "inexpensive," deadly, and noncontroversial. There too, despite such military assistance, the war has gone badly. And there the war has been kept as secret as possible, has been widely tolerated or ignored in the U.S.

But what does the American public perceive of the latest example of Vietnamization, the invasion of Laos? According to an article in the February 14th *New York Times*, three key factors

contributed to the lack of response to the attacks. The first was the "limited" U.S. role in the invasion; American soldiers had not officially entered Laos, they had only given air and backup support. Second, bold claims for the success of a precedent action, in Cambodia, rendered the new invasion more acceptable. Third, the news blackout, secrecy, and the use of news leaks all made the actual invasion a vague, inevitable occurrence rather than a shocking or angering one.

The *Times'* analysis may be right. But questions remain. Do Americans support a "low cost" invasion, or have they become morbid spectators of an event they seem unable to affect? Do they believe in a Cambodian precedent for success in Laos? By February 3rd, *Le Monde* had described the situation in Cambodia as having "seriously deteriorated in the past few weeks." Indeed, according to the *Times*, by February 2nd "the Viet Cong were returning to sanctuaries cleared by South Vietnamese and U.S. troops last summer."

Finally, news management had indeed seemed to reduce the outcry over Laos. But even so cynical an achievement was incomplete. Critics of Washington's tactics and policies could still find fuel for their arguments. Yet, by late February criticism of the attacks on Laos remained fitful and scattered. The will of Washington to continue to fight had carried the day.

K. Z.

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CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Habitual readers of mastheads will note the addition of three new contributing editors. *worldview* is happy to welcome them.

David Little, Assistant Professor of Christian Ethics in the Divinity School of Yale University, specializes in historical and social ethics. He is the author of a CRIA publication, *American Foreign Policy and Moral Rhetoric: The Example of Vietnam*.

William Pfaff has been a journalist, a correspondent in Europe, Africa, the Arab Middle East, India and Vietnam. Presently with the Hudson Institute, he is co-author, with Edmund Stillman, of *Power and Impotence*, *The New Politics*, and *The Politics of Hysteria*.

Rosemary Radford Ruether, Professor of Historical Theology, School of Religion at Howard University and a lay theologian, is the author of several books, including *The Church Against Itself*, and *The Radical Kingdom: The Western Experience of Messianic Hope*.