JEROME A. COHEN, *Professor of Law and member of the Executive Committee of the East Asian Research Center at Harvard University, husband of Joan Lebold '54, was asked to speak on problems of today to alumnae returning for reunion. Sage Hall on May 31 was crowded with listeners who had come back for comradeship but want always to take home from Smith College something more. Mr. Cohen, speaking rapidly for over an hour, gave them much more. This is only part of his exposition.*

UNITED STATES, CHINA AND VIETNAM

I WOULD first of all assert what to many is apparent but what some powerful critics of the Administration refuse to concede—that there is an American interest in Asia. I do not subscribe to the thesis that Asia is too far away and too unimportant, and that we have too little in common with Asians to justify our active concern with and participation in events in that part of the world. Wholly apart from other considerations, the facts of international life necessarily have made the world's greatest power an Asian power, and the consequences of American withdrawal from Asia would be unfortunate for many of the peoples in that part of the world and for ourselves.

A more difficult question, of course, is how to define the American interest in Asia and the means that are appropriate to promoting it. A variety of definitions are familiar. I will mention only three that have been prominent: protection of the maritime periphery against domination by the Eurasian land mass; containment of Communism; and implementation of democratic self-determination.

To define the American interest in Asia as the protection of the island chain that girdles the mainland has several attractions. It is a clear line that can be understood by all concerned. Moreover, it limits our objective in a way that allows for maximum effective application of our military resources. As the situation in the Taiwan straits has demonstrated, only modest amounts of sea power and air power are required to defend Asia's islands. There is no danger of bogging down vast American armies in a type of war for which they are ill-suited.

Yet, as Korea illustrated, in practice this island theory, which was essentially our strategy in early 1950, will often break down. There are good reasons for this, unhappily. The island theory abandons all countries on the mainland to their fate, whatever the nature of the threat to which they are exposed, however great the coherence and will of a given people to exist and however stable its government. Adherence to this theory has proved intolerable for the United States in a variety of situations.

We enter troubled waters, however, when we depart from the island theory and attempt to construct a broader definition of our interest that will not overtax our national resources. This, of course, is the lesson of Vietnam.

"Containment of Communism," which is often said to be the principle underlying our Vietnamese intervention, dangerously obscures the basis of an enlightened policy. Surely one of the points that must be driven home to the American people is that there no longer is such a thing as an "international Communist monolith." Nor, contrary to Secretary Rusk's frequent assertions, is there in a significant sense an "Asian Communist conspiracy whose capital is Peking, China." We are all too aware of how inadequate it is for Communists to lump the U.S., Britain, France, West Germany and Japan under the single rubric of a "bourgeois imperialist conspiracy whose capital is Washington, D. C." Such categories conceal more than they reveal about the diversity of circumstances and national interests of the countries involved. More refined analysis is equally necessary on our part when we view the relations of Communist states with each other and with non-Communist states. Communist China, North Korea and North Vietnam are as different from each other as they are from Soviet Russia, and their interests are often incompatible.

This fact has important implications. If, as many do, we define our principal objective as the containment of *Chinese* Communism, we may well consider the possibility that a strong nationalist, albeit Communist, regime in Vietnam, a country with a millennial tradition of hostility toward China, may prove to be an effective factor in containing China once we cease a policy that inevitably increases North Vietnam's reliance upon China.

YET I am far from satisfied with a policy that defines our interest as containment of Chinese Communism. At the outset, one should note that such a view diverts our attention from the fact that the North Vietnamese may be expected to do more to "contain China" than we would care to have them do; namely, to attempt to gain control not only of South Vietnam but also of Laos, Cambodia and Thailand. Even if the North Vietnamese were the declared enemies of China, we could not look with favor upon their domination of their neighbors.

Secondly, "containment of China" is much too negative a slogan and a strategy, even if it is to be "containment without isolation," which is only a step in the right direction. It will be highly offensive to the sensitivities of any leadership group likely to emerge from the current struggle in China, for it evokes an image of an aggressive China that will seek to expand its borders unless forcibly deterred. This will exacerbate Chinese resentment about being branded an "aggressor" by the UN in 1951 for having entered the Korean War as UN forces advanced toward the Chinese border in disregard of repeated Chinese warnings to stop. Detached observers familiar with Chinese history and the contemporary scene are increasingly of the opinion that the

"containment" emphasis grossly exaggerates the record of Chinese "aggression." I will cite only a few examples. A number of studies, including even a Rand Corporation monograph, have concluded that China's Korean intervention was a defensive response. Harold Hinton of the Institute of Defense Analyses summarizes his detailed examination of the 1962 outbreak of hostilities on the Sino-Indian border by stating: "In this way India precipitated war with a stronger enemy... who had evidently made considerable efforts from the autumn of 1959 to the spring of 1962 to avoid hostilities, but who had watched the steady advance of Indian troops in the western sector with growing concern." And my own research makes clear China's strong legal basis for refusing to renounce the use of force in the Taiwan strait, a position with which Chiang Kai-shek agrees. (That, after all, is what civil war is all about.)

A policy that focuses on containment obscures the real threat that confronts Asian states. Despite the fact that Secretary Rusk repeatedly speaks as though there were a danger of Chinese aggression in the sense of unprovoked, massive border crossing by armed units, there is no substantial likelihood of such an attack anywhere in Asia. (Escalation may, of course, stimulate a defensive response in Vietnam.) The real threat is that in various countries the failure of local non-Communist leaders to meet the pressing political, economic and social needs of the day may permit local Communists, with modest amounts of advice, training, propaganda, supplies and arms from Peking, Hanoi or Moscow, to come to power on a platform of national regeneration. This is how Mao Tse-tung came to control China. This is how Ho Chi-minh came to power in North Vietnam, and this is how the Communists almost gained power in Indonesia.

We should therefore place our major emphasis not upon the development of military power to contain aggression by China that is unlikely to occur but upon the development of effective national leadership in the non-Communist countries of Asia. This is why I sympathize with the Administration on those occasions when it states that our goal in Vietnam is to permit democratic self-determination, for this symbolizes, although in a left-handed and dangerous way, recognition of the need to do what we can to facilitate the development of healthy conditions and dynamic leadership in that country. At least this third major way of defining the American interest in Asia focuses not upon China, a country in which we can exercise little influence, but upon those countries where we can do somewhat more to affect events. But that is about all that can be said for this formulation.

The Cohens on a Cape Cod sand dune when father was able to get away from China watching and the complexities of the law.

It is a dangerous formulation in part because of its emphasis upon democratic self-government, evoking, as we have seen in South Vietnam, all the trappings of a Western political system, however ill-suited they may be to the local situation. The fact is that, as events in Saigon should remind us, virtually nowhere in Asia will conditions permit the genuine transplantation of Western political democracy in our lifetimes. To claim that this is our goal is to condemn ourselves to failure and to expose ourselves to charges of hypocrisy and perfidy. Given Asia's authoritarian tradition, the most that we can aspire to is the fostering of effective leaders who will earn the confidence of their people as genuine exponents of national regeneration. The tragedy of Vietnam, as it was the tragedy of China, is that local Communists captured the mantle of nationalism through the incompetence, corruption and disarray of other leaders. Fortunately, the situation is not yet so extreme in most other Asian countries.

An even graver defect of this third formulation is that it implies no limitation upon the kinds of measures the United States ought to take to achieve its interest in self-determination. We have made many mistakes in Vietnam, but the crucial one occurred when we moved from providing economic aid and military training, advice and supplies to involving our own men in combat. Contrary to the assertions of the Administration, Vietnam is unlike Korea in significant ways; not the least of these derives from the fact that in Vietnam "aggression from the North" occurred principally after the intervention of American combat forces, which were introduced not to rebuff a border crossing by large formations of units but to assume the much more difficult task of rescuing the Saigon regime from losing out in the local struggle for power with the Hanoi-supported but primarily indigenous NLF.

If we learn anything from Vietnam, it should be that on the Asian mainland our military power is relatively ineffective in coping with internal revolution and subversion, and that any direct application of American military power in these circumstances is likely to involve us in a commitment that is wholly disproportionate to our genuine interest in the area. As former Ambassador Reischauer and many others have pointed out, any government that cannot handle internal threats to its existence despite American economic, technical and military support probably cannot be rescued for long by the intervention of any reasonable amount of American fighting forces and cannot be expected to survive the withdrawal of such forces. If they do not support such a government in its internal struggle, its people demonstrate more vividly than they could in any Western-style election that the government is not regarded as an authentic vehicle for national aspirations.

WHAT I have said rests upon the premise that not all existing regimes in Asia can be saved and, indeed, deserve to be saved. This is a premise that the Administration refuses to recognize when it announces, without qualification, that we are in Vietnam to preserve the right of self-determination. In Vietnam we have attached ourselves to a series of governments that have failed to earn the mandate of nationalism and are unlikely ever to do so. We ought to recognize that fact, however tardily and however unpleasant its implications. If we do, we can console ourselves by also recognizing that Vietnam is intrinsically of little importance and that, even after our inevitable phased withdrawal from Vietnam, conditions in other Asian countries will be considerably more favorable to us than those in Vietnam.

I do not believe in the "domino theory." What will determine the outcome in each country is that country's own circumstances and not whether or not a Communist guerrilla movement has been successful elsewhere. Nor do I believe in the Mao-Lin Piao thesis. Because historical factors in Vietnam make it the one obvious place where the Mao-Lin thesis can apply, we should not be beguiled by Peking's propaganda into believing that the thesis will prove applicable in other places where those historical factors are absent. In passing, I should note that, although it is frequently mentioned that a phased withdrawal from Vietnam might have unfavorable repercussions upon neighboring regimes, it is less frequently mentioned that the steady escalation and the massive expansion of American military presence required by our present policy are actually having adverse effects not merely in Vietnam but also upon neighboring regimes. One wonders, for example, whether today Thailand's rulers feel more secure against insurrection than they did three years ago.

To sum up, I would define our interest in Asia as the creation of strong, non-Communist, independent, popular and progressive governments, wherever possible. To this end I would advocate providing governments that give promise of meeting these criteria with American economic, technical and military aid, wherever such aid is welcome. However, except in the rare case of unprovoked invasion from without, we must not contemplate commitment of American combat units. Revolution and internal subversion must be met primarily by local people. I assume that from our island bases we will maintain a nuclear umbrella over Asia and military forces adequate to deter overt aggression.

Before closing I should say another word about China. Literally anything may yet happen in that vast, unhappy nation. Along with most other China specialists I think that the probable result of the current crisis is that a less blatantly ideological group will gradually assume control, almost certainly after Mao passes from the scene if not before. We should do what little we can to encourage the progress of moderate, technocratic leadership. Reduction of our involvement in Vietnam is an indispensable prerequisite, Beyond that, we should make very clear our willingness to engage in nonstrategic trade, to permit Chinese Communist representation in the UN, to facilitate exchanges of correspondents, cultural groups, tourists, and so forth, and to discuss possible approaches to the Taiwan problem and the thorny question of diplomatic recognition. The status of Taiwan, of course, is the greatest obstacle to improvement of our relations with China. Yet even Stalin died, and so too will Mao and Chiang, thereby opening up possibilities for maneuver that do not now exist. We must not assume that the attitude of the present Chinese leaders will be any more eternal than that of their predecessors or that of other countries' leaders. Before very long, China may well perceive Soviet and Japanese power as more immediate and more threatening than American.

There is an outside chance, however, that events in China may take a more unexpected and ominous turn and that the Cultural Revolution will lead to progressive disintegration of the national government. We ought now to be thinking very seriously about the problems that will arise if a number of regional governments replace China's national regime, or if there is even graver disintegration that leads to chaos, mass starvation and mass slaughter. How should the United States be prepared to meet such a radical change in Asia's power constellation? How might the Soviet Union, Japan, Nationalist China and other states respond? With what dangers to our interests and world peace? Any effort to think about the problems that disintegration of Chinese Communist power would produce inevitably leads one to ask whether the ultimate objective of our containment policy—the collapse of the Communist regime—is a sound one. Upon reconsideration, especially in the light of our experience trying to put the South Vietnamese government on its feet in a nation with roughly one-fiftieth the population of China, we may come to the conclusion that the Chinese Communists have actually been doing us a favor by feeding and maintaining control over 700,000,000 people who might otherwise be substantially adding to instability in Asia.

A Land Called Crete . . Idomeneo, Rè di Creta

The Departments of History and of Music announce that Volume XLV of the Smith College Studies in History: *A Land Called Crete: A Symposium in Memory of Harriet Boyd Hawes* ($5.75 a copy) and a recording of the concert performance of Mozart's *Idomeneo, Rè di Creta* ($5.00 per set) are now available. Either or both may be requested from the Order Department of the William Allan Neilson Library and checks should be made payable to Smith College.