

# World Opinion Meaningless

by BRUCE COMPTON

The ridiculous concern with how the world community will react to any proposed action of this country that is shared by many in the State Department, the Congress, and by many private citizens is indeed puzzling. The opinions and sentiments of any large mass of people, let alone of the entire world, are a curious blend of self-interest, opinions foisted upon them by mass media, emotional sentiments, ideological taint and misinformation. By far the most crucial aspect is self interest.

The concept of self interest can be made crystal clear by the following example. Let us assume that there are only enough coconut trees on an island to support two men. Let us also assume that these two men have devised a way to insure constant sustenance to these trees so that they will not starve. These men also have a raft which they use occasionally to sail around the island in. One day, there appears in the distance a plane which then crashes into the ocean. The pilot can be faintly seen by the two men on the island to be thrashing about in the water. A decision must now be made. Should the two men on the island take their raft and rescue the pilot?

The discussion naturally centers on the coconut trees. It is quickly decided that the two men will stay where they are and the pilot drowns. The self interest in this case is obvious. Were the two men to rescue the pilot, they would no longer have sufficient food to sustain them.

It is in their self interest to sustain themselves and therefore they decide against rescuing the pilot and thereby decide not to starve. Whether these two men made a right or wrong decision is not at issue. They acted according to their self interest.

In a similar, though not identical manner, self interest is the primary factor in nearly every decision that a man makes. If he desires pleasure, then he will make decisions according as to whether or not their result will be a pleasurable one, or will make him feel good. If he values his mode of existence, then many of his decisions will be based upon whether or not they will preserve and protect that mode of existence.

We can readily see that diversity of self interests will lead to a diversity in ways and means of dealing with the situations of life. By the same token, similarities in self interests will lead to the formation of societies, clubs, and other associations whose aim is to safeguard and advance the self interests of their members.

To all these numerous and diverse interests has been added the concept of national interest with the rise in relatively modern times of the nation state.

We now reach the point I have to make. How can any given decision that anyone makes be expected to be well received by so many divergent factions whose likes and dislikes are primarily motivated by self interest? I shall use another example.

The Nixon administration has been building up a special task force of 24 warships in the Sea of Japan to protect American reconnaissance missions off the coast of North Korea. The Soviet Union has protested this action. The constellation of self interests in this matter is very clear. It is in the national interest of South Korea that the North Korean aim to take over South Korea be thwarted. In order to thwart this constant threat, it is necessary that reconnaissance be continually maintained in order to counter any active invasion efforts. It is in the North Korean national interest to have its territorial ambitions satisfied. It is in the American national interest to honor its treaty commitments and more importantly to prevent the loss of the strategic South Korean peninsula.

It is in the Chinese and Soviet National interests to promote the national interests of a fellow socialist state. The reactions of the rest of the world community can be predicted accordingly. Since North Vietnam desires continued Soviet aid, it can be expected to support the Soviet protest. Since South Vietnam desires continued American aid, it can be expected to support the actions of President Nixon in this case. Since Australia's national interest leaves no room for an extended Communist bloc in Asia, it too may be expected to support Nixon's action. In a similar manner, the positions of most nations of the world may be seen to act accordingly to their national self interest.

Because the sentiments of the world community are reflections of the self interest of each member, no decision made by any nation can be expected to

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win the approval of all, or in most cases, even a majority of other nations.

It is for this reason that foreign policy decisions should be made solely upon the basis of national self interest and the rest of the world be damned.