



Comments on Panel 45

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Jeffrey Kimball

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Comments on Panel 45: Diverse Doctrines: New Perspectives on the Nixon Doctrine From Asia to Latin America

Chair: **Jeffrey Kimball**, Miami University

“From Operation Cooperation to Operation Condor: U.S. Narcotics Control and Poppy Eradication in Mexico, 1969-1976”

Daniel Weimer, Wheeling Jesuit University

“Be Careful What You Wish For: The Nixon Administration, "Vietnamization," and the Opening of the People's Republic of China, 1969-1972”

Chris Tudda, U.S. Department of State

“Embracing the New Order at a Distance: The Nixon Administration and Indonesia, 1969-1974”

Brad Simpson, UMBC

Commentator: **Jeffrey Kimball**

Welcome to Panel 45, Session VII. "Diverse Doctrines: New Perspectives on the Nixon Doctrine from Asia to Latin America"

My name is **Jeffrey Kimball**, and I will be chairing and commenting.

I'm sorry to announce that **Antonio Renzi** of the University of Florence had to withdraw because of an unexpected schedule conflict concerning his dissertation defense.

I've asked the panelists to confine their opening, formal remarks to fifteen minutes in order to allow time for audience questions and additional discussion among the panelists of their topics. The order of formal presentations is as follows: **Chris Tudda, Daniel Weimer, Brad Simpson**. I will introduce each when it is his turn to speak. Following their formal presentations, I will offer brief comments. Then we will open the discussion to questions and remarks from you, the audience.

My comments:

Thank you panelists for your very fine, informative, interesting, and important papers, from which I have learned much. I have no serious criticisms and will confine my remarks at this point to an observation about the Nixon Doctrine in general followed by a suggestion to the panelists.

Each panelist, each author links his Nixon-era topic to the Nixon Doctrine: Vietnamization and the opening to China, narcotics control vis-à-vis Mexico, and military

aid to Indonesia . That is, all put their topics in the context of Nixon Doctrine policy. My own research has led me in books and articles to argue, however, that the customary understandings of the Nixon Doctrine are erroneous in substantial part. That is, the Nixon doctrine did not constitute a foreign policy doctrine in the sense of having been a grand strategy or a master set of principles and guidelines controlling policy decisions. I'm open to contrary arguments, of course, but whether the Nixon Doctrine was truly a doctrine or not, Nixon did not practice its principles consistently or even intend to do so when he first announced them. The so-called doctrine, moreover, did not represent a major shift in U.S. foreign policy: previous administrations had applied or attempted to apply the Nixon Doctrine's core principles in selected areas of the world. In Indochina, Vietnamization was not the main component of Nixon's strategy, and he secretly valued other, more militant approaches. Vietnamization was not even a Nixon administration invention. It diffusely originated with the antiwar movement, congressional doves, and agency staffers during the period of President Lyndon B. Johnson's direction of the war, and it was a topic candidates and parties discussed during the 1968 election campaign. In addition, Nixon did not begin to implement Vietnamization in earnest until many months into his presidency, and he did so only after other components of his strategy failed to produce victory and as members of his own administration and the public demanded that he withdraw American troops more rapidly. At the very moment Nixon announced the "doctrine," the measures for which it stood were secondary to others he had in mind for dealing with the Vietnam War, Asia, and the world.

As for the so-called doctrine in other areas of Asia or the world, Winston Lord, Kissinger's aide on this question, reported in January 1970 that the nascent and so-called Nixon Doctrine was neither a "grand strategy" nor a "master plan." The "proposed policy" was "not all that different from the rhetoric of past policy," although it did have "operational value" insofar as it was "putting flesh" on actions already being taken but which had not been "consciously constructed" as part of a "consistent pattern." He also pointed out that if the Nixon Doctrine were to become a governing doctrine, there were several unresolved issues to settle on a case-by-case, country-by-country basis. Kissinger's comment on the cover page of Lord's memo was: "Winston, I've read belatedly--1st class. How do you suggest we get policy resolutions of unresolved issues?"

When Nixon announced this so-called doctrine in Guam in July 1969 he was doing it for political purposes at home and in Asia. But he didn't really intend it to be a doctrine. The press interpreted it as such, then Nixon saw a political advantage in embracing it. Later, it seems to have appealed to historians and other intellectuals because, as William Bundy observed, it gave Nixon's policies a colorful and systematic image and a coherence, but it was a coherence undeserved, I believe.

So, I suggest that the panelists reevaluate the so-called Nixon Doctrine in relation to their topics, because it may lead them to discover that the policies they discussed in their papers had other goals, other motives, other purposes driving them . Indeed, the policies they discussed may simply have been part of a continuum in U.S. foreign affairs predating

and postdating the Nixon administration, and if this is the case, which I think it is, that would be an important discovery, affirmation, or advancement of historical knowledge.

So, at some point in the discussion, I hope the panelists will respond to this observation.

I have other questions to ask of the panelists but will postpone these until after we take questions from the audience.

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