

EDITORIAL

Whiplashed or whipsawed?

Precisely who or what is responsible for determining the concerns of the United States of America in affairs of nations abroad is unclear. In some instances, the Department of State seems to hold the position of trust; in others, ad hoc commissions, appointed to report conclusions which are then passed on to Congress and the President, seem to function as advisors with greater influence than the Secretary of State. And then come times when the President assumes the prerogative to make unilateral decisions all on his own.

Whatever the chain of command and whatever powers influence decisions and who ultimately makes them, all of us who watch and listen can but conclude that responsibility shifts from one entity to another with remarkable ease, sometimes with lightning speed, and that in recent years military interests in our country have pre-empted those of the peace makers.

Lately we Americans have had called to our attention the desperate plight of citizens of El Salvador, of Lebanon, of the anti-communists in Nicaragua, of Grenada, again of El Salvador and again of Lebanon. And now we are asked...no, not asked, TOLD... it is our duty to prevent any disruption of shipping through the Straits of Hormuz, a waterway in contention between Iran and Iraq, two other warring countries of the Moslem world.

At the same time, of course, this country's involvement with the struggle in Lebanon has been summarily withdrawn. It appears that, having suffered defeat after attempting to conduct diplomacy with military might, America now accepts the necessity for Middle Eastern nations to work out their own solutions. In this, obviously, those countries are far better prepared to succeed than we could possibly be. But now El Salvador is once again dragged to the fore!

Troubling to those of us who observe all the seesawing of public attention back and forth between the Middle East and Central America is the evidence that nothing is really earth-shattering about any of the upheavals in which our nation cannot seem to resist becoming embroiled. Not one of those conflicts truly concerns us. Not one is worth the loss of a single American life. Not one is of such immediate concern to us that it cannot be shelved for a few months, cast into the shadows of oblivion while the spotlight shines brightly but briefly upon some other horrid scene.

And then, once that crisis climaxes, the beam of public attention shifts back again to the action previously highlighted. Lo and behold, nothing changed while we weren't looking. Oh, some human rights is always resurrected as justification for this country to continue meddling, to continue supplying military material, money, and advisors. The deplorable conditions under which civilians of those countries live actually continues to deteriorate but, for the most part, their survival is of secondary consideration to the military position.

Who or what is responsible for our national foreign policy is no longer clear. For some years citizens of this country have been incapable of describing our position on the international scene because the stance of our federal government is undeterminable. As Americans, we don't know what our aims are abroad. We don't know because our government apparently has no established purposes. One moment we are told a particular goal is vital to national security; a week or two later we are advised that objective is no longer of any real importance. Instead, our attention is directed to some other "hot spot" that warrants our immediate intervention.

For how long will Americans stand patiently still and endure being whipsawed from crisis to crisis?