Galbraith criticizes ‘mindless diplomacy’ in foreign policy

by RICHARD BEST

John Kenneth Galbraith, former American Ambassador to India and now chairman of Americans for Democratic Action, declared here Monday that "like attempts at regulation of narcotics or smog control in Houston, American foreign policy does not have a natural reputation for success."

Specifically criticizing U.S. support for the general's junta fighting on our side" in Vietnam, the close adviser of Senator Robert F. Kennedy urged that negotiations might take place as soon as possible.

Professor Galbraith, the fifth speaker in the Rice University President's Lecture Series, 1966-67, was introduced by President Kenneth S. Pitzer to an overflowing Hamman Hall audience April 10.

Calling attention to Galbraith's several important books on economics and their shared period of service at the University of California, Mr. Pitzer did not mention the former ambassador's recent election to the chairmanship of the liberal ADA organization.

"A Modern Foreign Policy" was the title of the lecture which aimed at demonstrating the evolution of official American understanding of international affairs since the end of World War II.

Mindless Diplomats

In dry, emotionless tones Mr. Galbraith, who is now teaching at Harvard, criticized the present foreign policy establishment comprised of the Department of State, the Pentagon, the CIA, the Ford Foundation, Joseph Alsop, etc. as sharing an almost inevitable bureaucratic resistance to change. He noted the classical problem of the "mindless diplomat" to whom all popular movements are equated with communism, and pointed to Ellis O. Briggs, former ambassador to Spain, as a typical example.

The liberal Democrat spoke of there having been three generations of American foreign policy since the forties. In the war-time period there was the grand alliance with Britain and Russia and hope for a post-war continuity of nations.

New Reality

The second generation, which confronted the cold war in Europe, had the task of rehabilitating Europe and protecting the rest of the world against the threat of monolithic communism. They were impressed by the late Senator Joseph McCarthy with the dangers of being soft on Communism.

At this stage Galbraith claims much of American foreign policy thought has remained. Though the rhetoric, and particularly that of Secretary of State Dean Rusk, remains the same, the reality, according to the Harvard economist, has been radically altered. Prosperity has not been good for hardline communism.

"When a communist country needs to produce a mass car, it necessarily gives a sense of its ideological force."

Third Generation

There has been a decline in the influence of fear of Russia in Europe and thus a decline in American authority. "Our leadership depends on our being needed," he said.

Now, however, a "third generation" exists which accepts the opportunities of co-existence with various communist states which have themselves evolved.

This third generation position has most noticeably affected U.S. policy in Europe. The treatment of the continent as a unity, Galbraith said, will hopefully lead to the end of the special position of the West German government in American policy. Talk of German reunification, he finds, is "essentially liturgical," and U.S. attitudes less geared to the needs of Bonn will lead to improved relations with France.

Bridge Building

Perhaps in an attempt to soften his bitter criticism of the Johnson administration's policy in Vietnam, Galbraith praised the President for his shrewd handling of the Multilateral Force controversy, for his cautious treatment of General DeGaulle, and for broad attempts at bridge building with eastern Europe.

Generally Mr. Galbraith looks for improved relations with the Soviet Union as long as Vietnam doesn't heat up. NATO will, in his opinion, be recognized as a framework for western cooperation rather than an integrated military unit. He hopes to see some accommodation with Russia over troop strength in Europe because, he noted somewhat cryptically, "both the United States and the Soviet Union have need of troops elsewhere."

Co-existence

Turning to Asia, the one-time envoy to India sees a less realistic approach and even more second generation rhetoric, though he did not claim that all Asian communists are interested in peaceful co-existence. When China finally settles down, the U.S. should, in Galbraith's view, welcome her into the UN and concede self-determination to Taiwan.

But even here there have been significant moves toward accepting a third generation policy. President Johnson has not been given enough credit, he suggested, for his recognition that communism is not the crucial element in many disputes in Asia.

Vietnam still remains the most agonizing remnant of the cold-war position. Probably because of a recent New York address on the subject, Galbraith did not discuss the problem with great care. He noted what he called the "abiding popularity of the Vietcong," and strongly criticized the "military junta," his term for the Government of the Republic of South Vietnam. Avoiding mention of recent moves to implement constitutional government, Galbraith found the South Vietnamese leadership still identified with French colonialism.

He predicted a settlement not very different from that in Laos, which has now returned to "the obscurity it so manifestly deserves."

Mr. Galbraith claims that the Viet Cong will never be driven out of control in the area south of Saigon and this would in fact not be worth the effort if it could be done.