This statement was one of the major elements in the package of firmness and conciliation that led from the Cuban missile crisis to the nuclear test-ban treaty.

The world has changed in many ways since '63, but the lessons of that era point the way to improving American-Soviet relations today. Provoked by Soviet advances from Angola to Afghanistan, Presidents Ford, Carter, and Reagan have moved toward building positions of military strength to deal with Soviet expansionism. Yet it is not strength alone that makes effective policy. Strength must be invoked with skill and care, as in the Cuban confrontation of 1962. This done, it is the job of creative diplomacy to reach an accord that offers benefits for both sides. Such was the case with the test-ban negotiations of 1963.

Kennedy stood firm on Cuba: Soviet nuclear arms must be withdrawn, never to be reintroduced. In return came the promise that Washington would never attempt to overthrow Castro by force. The firmness with which Kennedy was able to assert his position derived in part from America's small but adequate strategic nuclear force—an arsenal numbered in hundreds rather than the thousands of today. More important, though, was America's supremacy in conventional forces, at least in the Caribbean, and the solid support it received from NATO and the Organization of American States. These reeds have grown thin since 1963.

Soviet behavior in the Berlin crises of 1958-61 and its Cuban gambit of '62 posed a greater threat to world peace than any of its actions in recent years. It was a time of even more uncertainty about the balance of strategic arms; and in that pre-Kissinger era there was a far greater tendency to think about Russia and America in simplistic terms ("Better dead than Red"). Still, Kennedy did not gloat publicly over Khrushchev's retreat from Cuba. Instead, he worked to move from the brink of war to a strategy of peace.

His American University address called attention to steps already undertaken to improve communications between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, most notably the creation of a Hot Line; and it announced that a ranking diplomat, former Ambassador to the USSR Averell Harriman, much respected in Moscow, would be sent to negotiate a ban on nuclear tests.

Apart from these announcements, Kennedy's speech was important for a compassion that embraced all humanity, including the peoples of the Soviet Union. The president spoke movingly of their sufferings in World War II, implying that Soviet citizens have reason to value peace. This point and others made by Kennedy were appreciated by Khrushchev, who reciprocated with conciliatory statements and gestures (e.g., an end to the jamming of Western radio broadcasts) in the weeks and months following.

As the American University speech was being drafted, Kennedy and his advisors worked out a flexible negotiating posture for Harriman to take to Moscow. Washington was ready to negotiate either a comprehensive or partial ban on nuclear tests. When the Russians opted for the latter, Washington concurred. Half a loaf was better than none; first steps could become significant strides.

This, in fact, is what happened, for the test ban was quickly followed by other U.S.-Soviet agreements—on outer space, military budgets, and the production of fissionable materials. The idea of freezing offensive and defensive weapons came early in 1964 in the wake of the test-ban accord. The first major Soviet wheat purchases came in late '63, helping to reinforce the momentum toward normalization of U.S.-Soviet relations.

Neither Kennedy's untimely death nor Khrushchev's ouster in October, 1964, derailed the "spirit of Moscow" that commenced with Harriman's 1963 visit to the Kremlin. That came in a confrontation halfway around the world, where neither superpower had vital interests: Indochina. And here we find another, albeit negative, lesson: If Moscow and Washington should again manage to reverse the spiral of conflict and move toward a systematic reduction of tensions, both should take care that this process be sustained despite temptations to exploit fleeting opportunities in the Third World.

To balance firmness and conciliation: that is the supreme challenge in statesmanship. It is a pressing challenge, but there are useful precedents to guide us toward a strategy of peace.

Walter C. Clemens, Jr., Professor of Political Science at Boston University, edited Toward a Strategy of Peace, a collection of essays by U.S. and Soviet leaders and scholars on the themes of John Kennedy's 1963 address.

EXCURSUS 4

Robert J. Myers on THE MORAL HIGH GROUND

The Council on Religion and International Affairs (CRIA) has been asserting for years its strong belief that ethics is an inevitable and integral component of all U.S. policy decisions.

One obvious demonstration of this truth is in the economic realm, whether the decision involves our own domestic budget or the type of aid to send to country X. At the same time, in economics as elsewhere, the ethical component of decision-making remains implicit, rarely coming under scrutiny. As George J. Stigler, recipient of the 1982 Nobel Prize for Economic Science, has written in The Economist as Preacher, and Other Essays:

Economists seldom address ethical questions as they impinge on economic behavior. They (and I) find the subject complex and elusive in comparison with the relative precision and objectivity of economic analysis. Of course the ethical questions are inescapable: One must have goals in judging policies, and these goals will certainly have ethical content, however well concealed it may be.

There are those who agree immediately with this assertion, others who disagree. Members of this latter group come in two flavors: One smiles and says that ethics has nothing whatever to do with foreign policy. The other group, seemingly contradicting, raises its eyebrows at the very notion that United States foreign policy can be anything but ethical; CRIA's concern, these people say, is simply redundant. It seems to me that these groups have little difference between them. The one that appears to reject the notion of a relation between ethics and U.S. foreign policy has created its own ethic—the purity and transcendental quality of the American national interest—and why say more about it? The other group believes that America's moral purpose, its ethics, is readily and regularly projected onto the world scene as American foreign policy—and why confuse the issue?

I think these two views are incorrect. If they are true, they do not make moral sense. If U.S. foreign policy creates its own ethic or is moral by definition, then there is no room for judgment, choice, and responsibility, which are at the heart of any ethical system.

A recent example of the popular and mistaken notion of a separation between ethics and policy was offered by Wil-
lliam E. Colby, former CIA director, in the course of a statement supporting a nuclear freeze: "I figure the priests can take care of the moral aspects and I'll talk about the practical aspects." Those so-called practical aspects—the decision on manufacture and use of nuclear weapons—are what the moral issue is all about!

To place the clergy in a box marked "moral" and the policymakers in a box marked "practical" does a grave disservice to both groups and promotes the fiction that moral concerns are separate from decisions about nuclear power. The result is a debasing of the intellectual quality of the entire nuclear debate. Colby's distinction, doubtless well intended, offers no respite to our political leaders, who must indeed grapple with the moral dilemma posed by all nuclear decisions. Any decision, any choice, by definition selects one value over another, with consequences the whole nation has to bear.

One of the best statements describing the workings of ethics in foreign policy was offered by the late Professor Hans J. Morgenthau:

There is a misconception, usually associated with the general depreciation or moral condemnation of political power, that international politics is so thoroughly evil that it is no use looking for ethical limitations of the aspirations for power on the international scene. Yet, if we ask ourselves what statesmen and diplomats are capable of doing to further the power objectives of their respective nations and what they actually do, we realize that they do less than they probably could, and less than they actually did in other periods of history. They refuse to consider certain ends and to use certain means, either all together or under certain conditions, not because in the light of expediency they appear impractical or unwise, but because certain moral rules interpose an absolute barrier. Moral rules do not permit certain policies to be considered at all from the point of expediency. Such ethical inhibitions operate in our time on different levels with different effectiveness. Their restraining function is most obvious and most effective in affirming the sacredness of human life in times of peace.

Now one can, of course, dispute the effectiveness of moral restraints in the contemporary world. One might point to certain slip-ups, such as Vietnam, Cambodia, and Lebanon, to name just three. Still, such moral restraints are one litmus test in evaluating the character of a nation's leadership.

So whatever the actual state of ethics and foreign policy, nations regularly address their foreign policy objectives in words and with measures that seek to transcend their obvious national interests. All seek the moral high ground. This gives rise to the problem of how to distinguish morality from ideology—to distinguish what we believe from what we merely say we believe.

Following the bombardment of Vera Cruz in 1814, President Woodrow Wilson said that "the United States has gone to Mexico to serve mankind." Most of us remember the American army officer in Vietnam who said that he had to destroy a village in order to save it. Senator Albert Beveridge, one of the principal jingoists of the 1890s, was convinced that America's world-civilizing role was endlessly good and so powerful that one day Shanghai might be raised to the same level of progress as Kansas City.

While America is not alone in singling its own praises, where does this crusading spirit come from? Why does it come and go with such unpredictability?

There are two contradictory tendencies in American politics—one, after the philosophy of John Locke, proclaiming the virtue of maximum freedom of the individual from the state; the other, after the philosophy of Aristotle, insisting that the individual can reach his full potential only in the political community. The Federalist Papers demonstrate this dichotomy, and Worldview Associate Editor Wilson Carey McWilliams captured it well when he wrote that "Americans value individuality and love, without understanding the difference."

In times of real or assumed national peril, the call goes out: We have imperial reasons to project American power abroad; individual moral perceptions must be subordinated to the interests of the state. A debate over this issue is now in progress with regard to Latin America. There are echoes here of Woodrow Wilson and his postwar aim of "making the world safe for democracy."

These two competing visions of America and Americans—the liberal and the classic view of the citizen and the state—are important in understanding U.S. foreign policy, our anti-Communist stance, our promotion of human rights, our choice of allies, and so on.

And beyond these two principles that inform America's view of the world, Americans tend to view themselves as the very souls of pragmatism. Our relationship with China, for example, is expected to flower despite fundamental differences between our political, legal, and economic systems and cultural traditions. Is this, in fact, possible?

One thing can be said with confidence: If justice is in short supply in this world, there is no shortage of statements proclaiming that only by following the dictates of one particular national ethic will justice be assured. I have cited several egregious American examples. From a random take of one day's foreign broadcast transcripts, I will add a few examples from other countries:

On the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the death of a young Chinese soldier, his words were cited with approval: "I live to serve the people wholeheartedly and to fight for the cause of the liberation of humanity—the cause of communism." Said the Politburo member honoring his memory: "Some people say the moral values of Lei Feng are now out of fashion. This view is wrong."

An Afghan delegation in Bulgaria said: "The new peace initiatives of the USSR and the socialist countries are a real factor in improving the political climate in Europe and the world, for reducing international tension, and for preserving and protecting peace."

The North Koreans said on the same day: "We should not acquire peace by begging the imperialists for it. Peace should be obtained by struggle.... Because our proposal is just, we believe that the question of withdrawal of the U.S. troops will be resolved."

And the Heng Samrin government of Phnom Penh warmly praised the just position of the Soviet Union," concluding that "judicious opinion in the world cannot accept the absurd, immoral and hypocritical point of view of Beijing."

All these statements suggest that being right, acting justly, are the concerns of all who act in the international field. Each frames his claims in the language of higher purpose. A comparison of actions and words is the best guide to sorting out ethics from ideology.

We need to ask ourselves to what extent our own policies meet such a test. In America's concern for human rights and Third World economic development, and in our commitment to preserving and expanding freedom we are asserting what most of us see as the best of our own heritage. Other countries will disagree. So far no one has produced a transcendent standard all can agree upon.

Robert J. Myers is President of CRIA, publisher of Worldview.