

THE REAL COLD WAR

Much of Our Strategy is Based on an Illusion

Michael Harrington

It is a dangerous, current cliché to say America is in the midst of a deep crisis. For suddenly, with the success of Sputnik, our mood of righteous self-congratulation has given way to the mood of the crash program. And our new sense of urgency develops simply as a reaction to Russia's technological achievement. Thus it is that so many can argue that the crisis will be resolved if only the United States can close the gap in military research, if only the old nuclear supremacy can be restored.

It is in this approach that we can identify a crucial paradox—that the burst of new discussion and new plans deepens the obscurity which surrounds the central problem of American policy; that all this newness is an energetic, seemingly purposeful method for continuing old and outworn attitudes.

This is true mainly because our new crisis-consciousness conceals two of the most important aspects of American policy. First, our plight today is, in a profound sense, more political than technological. And second, this critical situation did not appear out of the blue, like a Russian moon in the sky; rather, it is part of a deep and continuing process, dating back to the very origins of the Cold War itself. In short, almost all of the discussion today evades the very core of the problem: for over a decade, American policy has been unable to frame a political response to the challenge of Communism.

Sputnik, of course, has a military meaning. But this can be seen as the crucial fact only if one assumes that the immediate, single-minded goal of Soviet Communism is the nuclear destruction of the West. But if one questions this assumption (as George Kennan questioned it in his recent Reith Lectures), if one sees the real challenge of Communism as political, then Sputnik takes on a new, and an even more terrifying, dimension. It becomes, not simply or even primarily, a weapon of war: it is transformed into an enormous instrument of Communist *persuasion*, of Communist political struggle. And if America was incapable of a political response to the grim image of Stalin's Russia, how will it react to Khrushchev's much more alluring lies?

Thus, in order to arrive at a serious discussion of what must now be done in order to "wage" peace, and, at the same time, adequately respond to the new Soviet challenge, we must review the basic political patterns of the Cold War. Only in this way

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can we avoid the spurious novelty, the seeming response, of the crash program; only in this way can we arrive at a realistic sense of urgency.

For over a decade, the main outlines of American policy have been clear enough. The style of Dean Acheson differed from the style of John Foster Dulles, but the strategy of the two Secretaries of State has been basically the same. The United States has seen the primary challenge of Communism as military. It has, therefore, responded by organizing a system of alliances: the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, the Bagdad Pact.

Today, these groupings resemble nothing more than a house of cards. The recent NATO conference, beset by the problems of French colonialism and European neutralism, was, in spite of brave reassurances, a failure. The Bagdad Pact is becoming more and more of a liability in the Middle East, a part of the general disintegration of American policy there; and the best that can be said of SEATO is that it has hardly progressed from the communique stage and is more or less irrelevant to Asia's problems.

Along the way there were, of course, various aborted attempts at infusing political and social content into American policy. Some of these, like the Marshall Plan and Point Four, were generous and creative in intention, but they inevitably became subordinate to America's dominant military strategy. To cite but one example: more aid today goes to Chiang's Formosa and Rhee's South Korea than to Nehru's India. As a result, the "independent" nations throughout the world, that immensely important "uncommitted third of mankind," have become increasingly suspicious of American intentions.

But the problem is not merely negative: the lack of a political and social response. For the military alliances, justified almost exclusively in tactical terms, implied a political and social policy. In a struggle in which America presented itself as the champion of "democracy," Franco, Rhee, Chiang, Bao Dai, Songgram and practically every other anti-democratic defender of the "status quo" was included in the camp of the "free world."

In Southeast Asia, for instance, the political content of American policy was for years determined by support it gave to French colonialism and to an absentee emperor of Indochina. More recently, the triumphant answer of American diplomacy to the surge of nationalism in the Middle East was the state visit to Washington of His Majesty, Saud of Arabia, that perfect symbol of feudal backwardness in alliance with oil imperialism.

This sketchy review is, of course, oversimplified. The Berlin Airlift, for example, was a genuine political response to Soviet challenge, and one that paid off handsomely for freedom everywhere. But in the main, the pattern of the last decade has been one of the increasing militarization of American foreign policy. Rhetorically, the United States has cam-

pained internationally as the defender of democracy; but in actuality, it has presented itself to millions as a colossus empty of a democratic political or social content, subordinating all to military ends.

The Communists, on the other hand, have waged a ceaseless and effective political struggle. They have defended totalitarianism in the name of humanism, they have crushed free elections in the name of "people's democracy." And yet, their huge lie has captured the minds of millions of European workers and Asian peasants. A year after the Soviet Union murdered a revolution in cold blood in the streets of Budapest and stood revealed to the whole world as a ruthless anti-democratic power, it is reaching a new high in its political prestige. Why?

Any answer to this question is, of course, complex. Yet, I think we can see the basic factors involved in an answer in the success of the Communist political war: we are dealing here with an anti-imperialist imperialism. The Communists, obviously, are opponents of "Western imperialism" only because this is the road to their own conquest of power. But in the course of the struggle, what the Indochinese or the Indonesian peasant sees is not the totalitarian reality of Khrushchev's Russia or Mao's China, but rather the remaining imperialisms and militarism of Western policy. They see that the French fought in Indochina with a professional army composed in part of veterans of the Nazi Africa Corps—and that Ho commanded an army of volunteers. In that one fact there is more than a century of sorry Western history.

But more than anti-imperialism is involved. To the underdeveloped countries, Russia's transition, within four decades, from a third-rate European power to a contender for world mastery has an enormous appeal. It may well be that the symbolism of Sputnik as a quick summation of this transformation will be of greater moment to our history than its usefulness as a weapon. India today is faced with a deep economic crisis. How long will its millions be content to follow a slow, unaided parliamentary road toward industrialization? How soon will they emulate Mao's China as a way out?

Anti-imperialism is but one base of the Russian political successes. In Western Europe, particularly in France and Italy, anti-capitalism has given the Communists control of huge workers' movements, and this will continue as long as there are no alternatives in sight. It is incredible to remember that the strength of the Communists was maintained throughout the period of the Marshall Plan, indeed on the basis of *opposition* to the Marshall Plan—incredible, until we remember that the condition of the worker in France and Italy, *his* relative share of the national income, did not increase during this time.

We could summarize this whole process in a paradox of momentous proportions. In our time, the imperialist totalitarianism of Communism has succeeded in winning the support of countless millions

of anti-imperialists and democrats; and to much of the world the camp of democracy has appeared more and more as mindless, conscienceless power which defends, in the name of "security," oil feudalism and discredited despots.

But this need not be so. It is not a condition determined by some relentless, a priori march of history. It could be otherwise if the United States could make an adequate political response to the challenge of Communism. In what follows, let me sketch the kinds of steps which, I think, might indicate to the world that the American response was changing.

First, and foremost, the United States must become, in the eyes of the world, a positive force for peace. And this cannot be done (President Eisenhower to the contrary) by topping off a NATO campaign for missile bases in Europe with an address to Congress on our fight for "total peace." There must be a reality behind the political appeal, and this requires a basic reorientation of American policy.

Nuclear tests are a case in point. The standard argument against a unilateral cessation of testing by the United States is that this would give an enormous advantage to the Russians in an area where our nation must maintain its superiority. But this argument, it seems to me, conceives of the whole matter schematically, as if it were a simple problem of military logistics. It leaves out the political possibilities inherent in a policy of unilateral cessation. Once America stopped its tests, could Russia continue its program? Particularly if the American move were made the object of an intensive and world-wide campaign? Such a dramatic change in policy, such a posture of actually seeking peace through action, would, I think, force the Russians to respond in kind.

The same considerations are at work in the question of the withdrawal of American troops from Europe. It must be remembered that the Russians have made an offer on the withdrawal question. (Indeed, if America had announced acceptance of the Russian proposition at the end of October 1956, and begun to withdraw some token American forces at once, a terrific blow in defense of the Hungarian Revolution might have been struck.) But here again, a narrow, a passive, a too-neat military logic has prevailed.

Now, however, in the recent controversy between George Kennan and Dean Acheson, this issue has at last become one of dispute and debate. It is revealing to look at the counterposed arguments. Mr. Kennan has made a significant break with previous American thinking (including his own) in his Reith Lectures. He has challenged the basic assumption of American policy, the notion that the imminent danger is one of Russian attack.

"I have the impression," he has said, "that our calculations in this respect [troop withdrawal, Germany] continue to rest on certain questionable assumptions and habits of thought: on an overrating of the likelihood of a Soviet effort to invade Western

Europe, on an exaggeration of the value of the satellite armies as possible instruments of Soviet offensive policy, on a failure to take into account the implications of the ballistics missile; and on a serious underestimation of the advantages to Western security to be derived from a Soviet military withdrawal from Central and Eastern Europe."

As far as it goes, the Kennan statement is excellent; it does raise the question of the basic assumptions of American policy in Europe for over a decade. For example, all of the considerations which Mr. Kennan advances in his discussion of troop withdrawal are also relevant to NATO; they cast shadows upon that sacrosanct monument to a decade of military thinking. But more, Mr. Kennan's position has the virtue of seeing the problem of Germany as political. To me, the most significant point in his statement is that there has been "an overrating of the likelihood of a Soviet effort to invade Western Europe . . ." Once this cherished axiom of American policy is discarded, then, and only then, is the way open for a creative answer to the Russian political threat.

At the same time, Dean Acheson's criticisms of Mr. Kennan cannot be dismissed out of hand. One of them, in particular, carries considerable weight. The former Secretary of State does not believe that the Russians can carry out a withdrawal on their side since such an action "would lead to the immediate overthrow of the Russian-controlled regimes of Eastern Europe and to social changes whose repercussions within the Soviet Union would imperil the regime itself, or would be thought to imperil it."

We must credit Mr. Acheson's realism on this point. But then, one wonders: if Russian withdrawal from Eastern Europe would have the effect which he describes, should not our policy be concentrated on forcing precisely this turn of events? And even in Mr. Kennan's terms, a gain would be made if the United States could force the Russians to back down from their previous offer. As it stands today, the Communists, as usual, appear as the camp which is really concerned with peace and makes the suggestion of withdrawal, while the Americans, again as usual, search for all kinds of reasons to reject the Russian offer. If George Kennan's proposals had the impact of destroying this myth—and nothing more—they might be worth acting upon.

But more is possible than simply shattering a myth. It is true that the Kennan proposal demands Russian acceptance and could be lost in a maze of negotiations. But an American policy of unilateral troop withdrawal, coupled with a demand that the Russians live up to their previous offer, would have a devastating political effect. Again, we must ask ourselves whether the Russians could afford to keep their troops in Eastern Europe in face of the fact of an American withdrawal from Western Europe. As in the case of nuclear tests, the weight of an American initiative might force the Russians' hand.

(For that matter, we still have not pierced the mystery of Mikoyan's role in Budapest in October

1956, and the Russian announcement that they were willing to permit Hungary to leave the Warsaw Pact. There conceivably could be a Communist tendency in Moscow which, for one reason or another, wants to liquidate the Communist operation in at least some of the Eastern European countries.)

Both of these changes in policy, the cessation of nuclear tests and the withdrawal of American troops from Europe, are unilateral in character. That is, they both involve a truly "bold" foreign policy which would seize the initiative from the Russians. What, then, of the issue of negotiations?

The first thing that must be said about negotiations is that here the American position in the recent past has meant a considerable defeat for this country. When so doughty a follower of the State Department policy as Konrad Adenauer breaks ranks and speaks at the NATO conference of the necessity of thinking about negotiations, then Mr. Dulles has convinced no one, not even his best political friend. Here again, it is obvious that America's attitude toward negotiations should be aggressive, that the initiative must not continue to be taken so monotonously by that great letter writer, Premier Bulganin.

Yet, strangely enough, there is a great logic in what Mr. Eisenhower and Mr. Dulles have been saying about the content of negotiations. In Europe, the notion of a summit conference has assumed an almost magical power over significant sections of the population. Weary of a decade of Cold War, faced with the knowledge that their function as NATO allies is to act as a "trip-wire" for World War III, many Europeans seize upon the least chance and convert it into a great hope.

In the sense that this is a measure of their longing for peace, it is a mood with which one must sympathize. But the question of content, of the real possibilities for a peaceful settlement through negotiations, is another thing. The mistake of Mr. Eisenhower and Mr. Dulles was not so much their critique of negotiations, but rather the way in which they placed the United States in opposition to the European and Asian mood which demanded negotiations, i.e., in opposition to a tremendous yearning for peace.

The conflicts of the Cold War are not arbitrary—the result of malevolent cliques in the two major camps. They are aspects of two competing ways of organizing the world. Negotiations could succeed if they were to result in a division of the world between the two powers—at the cost of giving up any active struggle for the one third of the world which lives under Communist tyranny. But they cannot, in the foreseeable future, secure a just peace.

But the fact that negotiations cannot create a basic new reality, that they can only formalize existing relationships and deal with peripheral issues, does not mean that the United States should oppose them. It has already been pointed out that the Eisenhower-Dulles public stance deeply offends—even outrages—

the aspirations of millions in Europe and Asia. More than that, the American attitude seems to be trapped in a suicidal fatalism: it leaves propaganda and political maneuvering as the exclusive concerns of the Communists.

An America which would go to a summit meeting with its present program would come back empty-handed, because that program contains no active, no creative, political element. An America which would go to a summit conference prepared, let us say, to challenge the Russians to withdraw troops from East Europe in response to an American withdrawal from the West, such an America would have the chance of scoring a significant political victory.

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These three points are, of course, only the immediate steps which a reorientation of American policy toward political realism might necessitate. Deeper, more basic changes would ultimately have to take place.

In Asia, for instance, where China stands as the symbol of totalitarianism, and India of democratic industrialization, the United States must be committed to a policy of *massive* aid to the latter nation. The gap between the American funds directed to Chiang and those granted to Nehru is literally incredible. It will have to be drastically closed if India's freedom is to be saved.

Indeed, until American policy finds some way of genuinely reaching the dynamic and democratic

forces in this world—the masses of the colonial revolution, the workers of Europe—it will move from failure to failure. For the path of the present policy, of the subordination of political and social concern to military strategy, is a path toward disaster and defeat.

And here the impact of Sputnik has been dangerous in a peculiar sense. We are in the midst of a mood of crash-programism, of demands for more and more missile research, and this creates the delusion that the fundamental problem for us is technological. But the fundamental problem is deeper and more complex than that. We face a revolutionary change of historic proportions. Millions who were not active participants on the stage of history yesterday have become protagonists today. In such a situation, only a revolutionary policy can serve freedom and save peace. But we—and by “we” I mean not only John Foster Dulles and the Republicans, but Dean Acheson and the Democrats as well—have talked vaguely of democracy and “the free world,” but at the same time served a policy based on the illusion that the primary and immediate threat of Communism was military. In the doing, Communism has won millions of volunteers to its banner.

Unless this is changed, unless the United States realizes that the major challenge from Communism is political, we may soon face a terrible reality: not the reality of nuclear bombs dropped from a Sputnik, but the reality of millions of men who would be free deluded into the service of slavery because the defenders of freedom obscured their cause.

OUR DOMESTIC DEFENSE

The Russian satellites have shaken us out of our complacency more effectively than anything in American history. This may be the consummation of a process that began with the stalemate in Korea, the first time that our armed forces were not victorious in war. Perhaps this accounts for a certain stubbornness, possibly an obtuseness, in dealing with Communist China, a sort of unwillingness to face unpleasant facts contrary to our conception of the proper order of things in our universe. The Sputniks leave us with no alternative but to accept the reality of grave and present danger . . .

A new stress on human values, on democratic values, is necessary for the struggle in the present danger. In the final showdown, the conflict between the East and West will not be resolved by missiles or bombers, but in the hearts of men.

Free men do have the advantage, even over the technical efficiency to which the oppressed may be driven by their oppressors. They do have the advantage of independent thought, of loyalty to their way of life, even when the government changes, and of vindication by history. We must continue to counter-

act the Communist idea by the democratic idea. And this means we must continue to emphasize and implement the free way of life.

It won't be easy. It will mean higher not lower taxes; it will mean more work for our children in the schools, not less. It will mean higher standards of productivity for industry and labor. It will mean the granting in fact as now in law of full equal rights to all the people of this land. It will mean the continued demonstration in spite of the increased technical efficiency that the welfare of the individual human being is central to our way of life.

This country was built on the conviction that life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness were the right of all. It encouraged human dignity, it fashioned a new nation and through the generations a united nation out of the many groups that came from other lands. There is something precious, distinctive, unique, at the heart of our democracy. It is worth sacrificing for, and, if necessary dying for. But it is also worth living for.

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