

United States probably gets more blame than it deserves for its late nineteenth- and twentieth-century Cuban policies, the policies are hardly relevant to the problem of Soviet offensive weapons in Cuba. It is worth repeating that the President's action was not directed against Cuba but against the Soviet Union. It was not occasioned by the nature of the Castro regime—much as some might have liked it to be—but by the Soviet's use of that regime to establish its bases in this hemisphere. We would have been justified in taking the same action had Russia established bases on the soil of a democracy in this hemisphere. Thought of differently, we would have been justified had the placing of missiles in Cuba been attempted by, say, Britain, a democratic country, if Britain had already asserted and shown its enmity to us as has the Soviet Union. The twinges of moral conscience with regard to Cuba can be

understood, but this cannot excuse what would seem to be the intellectual failure to make the factual distinctions.

Among all circumspect people, relief that Russia has been checked in Cuba is tempered by the recognition that we have neither turned the Soviet tide nor solved the "Cuban problem." To Santayana's reminder that those who fail to learn the lessons of history are compelled to relive it, we might add that the tolerable margin of error has been so reduced that opportunities for this experience may not often recur. If our recent confrontation has taught us a little better the legitimate role of power, without forgetting that it is a role and not the whole play, that it is a means and not an end, we might both expand those recurrent opportunities for experience and be better prepared intellectually and morally for the next encounter.

## **Other voices**

### **THE ACCUMULATION OF PERIL**

*In this article, reprinted in part from the December 1962 issue of Liberation, A. J. Muste comments on various reactions, official and non-official, to the Cuban crisis—and makes several recommendations. Mr. Muste is well known for his years of activity in furthering the cause of peace. He has written and lectured widely on the dangers of a nuclear age.*

Together we have lived through the experience of standing on the brink of nuclear war and of not being pushed or falling over into the abyss. What saved us? If, in a few days or weeks or months, in some other part of the world, a like crisis develops, can we be assured that we shall again be tough and smart—and lucky—enough to escape? Or are we indeed caught in a game of "Russian roulette," and if so, how can we pull out of that macabre game and devote ourselves to pursuits more in line with our professed traditions and ideals.

At the height of the Cuban crisis there were more people in this country to whom the possibility of a nuclear holocaust seemed a near-reality than ever before. If Khrushchev had this response in mind when he attempted to install missile bases on the island, he achieved his purpose. I do not sense, however, that Americans have concluded that having been so near the brink we must not get near it again.

The feeling is, rather, that if we could get near and not go over once, we can risk getting near two, three or even more times. This attitude is based largely on approval of President Kennedy's course, which is taken to prove that once you get tough with the Bolsheviks they will draw back.

Accordingly, there is not either in Administration circles or among the people generally or even, I think, among the intellectuals, for the moment any grave apprehension as to the future or any feeling that we need to explore fairly radical changes in national attitudes and policies. There is actual optimism on the part of some that a period of general relaxation is ahead during which progress will be made in negotiations about testing, disarmament, even Berlin perhaps. But even those who do not share such optimism think that things are under control, that a situation which in the President's phrase was about to become "unmanageable" is after all manageable, and that we can continue to "live with it"—as we have for a decade or more—as long as it is necessary, until a solution is somehow gradually worked out. The crucial question now for Americans generally and for those who belong to the peace organizations in particular is whether this evaluation is essentially correct. The programs we outline and the course we pursue will depend largely on whether we accept it. . . .

In attempting to outline the basic character of the situation with which we now have to deal, I do not want to dwell on what seem to me to be incidental aspects or details. The situation in relation to Cuba, as in relation to any point of contact between enemy régimes, may change almost from day to day. The alternation of heightened and somewhat relaxed tension is the standard pattern, and does not reveal the basic trend. Even if the arrangement contemplated in the Kennedy-Khrushchev exchange, which caused an audible sigh of relief around the world on October 28, 1962, works out as was expected for a time, we shall not have ground for believing that the road to peace has been opened or even that we can afford to reconcile ourselves to living with the cold war and the arms race, go about "business as usual" while governments maneuver—not quite on the brink.

Nor am I dwelling here on such developments as the ideological conflict between the Soviet and the Chinese Communist parties, the conflict for power which is almost certainly being waged in the Kremlin, the Sino-Indian War, which may foreshadow a major turning point in history, the unresolved situations in the Congo and in eastern and southern Africa generally, the possibility, about which there is some speculation, that the United States and the Soviet Union may be drawing together—they were after all allies in World War II—to "contain" Communist China. Shifts in relationships between nations and ideologies are under way and it will probably be some time before it is clear how far and in just what direction they are going. But for reasons which will be suggested as we move along, I do not think they fundamentally alter the problem of power struggle and arms race with which we have to deal.

One reason why people in government, and citizens generally, are able to have an essentially false, as I feel, confidence about the manageability of future crises is that they do not really sense and face up to the nature and extent of the crisis we have just survived. The President in late October took it upon himself in the name of the government and people of the United States to risk precipitating the world into a nuclear war in order to get Soviet missiles out of Cuba. I am not trying to minimize the complicity of Khrushchev in the situation. And I am sure the President felt compelled; he could see no other honorable and practical course. But none of this alters the fact that the President made it clear that he would "press the button." Had Khrushchev not backed down, this would have happened. In that event, we would probably not be here now. Many parts of the world, including the United States,

would be a shambles. If perchance survivors could claim "victory," that triumph, according to the President, would be turning to ashes in their mouths. Morally and politically, we have performed this act, though we were spared from executing it physically.

*That* is what we have to live with now—do live with. There has been no vast outcry against it. What if we had been made to back down in Turkey or elsewhere under a similar threat? What would we not have said about the moral depravity, the political irresponsibility, the diabolic madness of Khrushchev and the Soviet régime? What terror and anguish would have swept over the nation! What evidence is there of a feeling of revulsion on our part now? Even in the churches? Since there is virtually none, what reason have we to think that what we were so recently prepared to do, we shall not do again at another critical point? Has anyone noticed any disposition to get rid of the H-bombs or the biological weapons so that we shall not be again tempted to use them?

Consider the recent crisis from a different angle. We were prepared to invade Cuba. The United States government offered in a transaction with the Soviet hierarchy to give the Cuban government a guarantee against military invasion in return for a withdrawal of certain Soviet weapons from the island, as if Cuba's protection from invasion by us were a matter for bargaining with another big nation. Had we carried out the invasion to which we were committed, Cuba would have become our Hungary, a case of a big nation attacking a little one—a very little one in this case—and subduing it in the interest of its own "security." It is possible that the Castro régime might have been able to mount resistance and carry on guerilla warfare against such an invasion. It seems certain that in other Latin America countries the resentment aroused by this action would have sparked smoldering revolts against internal conditions and the external enemy to the north, which, since they would inevitably be largely Communist-led, we would feel bound to put down. In that event, Cuba and other Latin American countries would have become our Algeria and we would have been involved perhaps for years, like France, in a war that could not be won and that would become increasingly "dirty." Latin America would have been lost to the United States, as would most of Asia and Africa. It would be hard to imagine a more sweeping victory for Communism and the Communist bloc.

Once again, it will be a terrible mistake if we permit the fact that the worst did not happen to

obscure the horror and madness of what we had decided to embark on. And again, what evidence do we have of a deep revulsion on the part of people and government, which would give a basis for believing that this whole approach will be abandoned and a fundamentally different course blocked out?

To turn to another vital factor in the situation, the race in nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction has not been slowed down, much less abandoned. Talk about conferences on testing and disarmament is again being heard. We shall need much more evidence than is now at hand before we are warranted in expecting that any more significant results will be achieved than in the past or, for that matter, any results at all. President Kennedy brought forward again in exchanges with Khrushchev the concept of balance of weapons. Khrushchev's great mistake or crime was upsetting the balance, which allegedly had been rather scrupulously maintained by both sides, by trying to put missiles in our back yard. This was a curious thing to say after both powers had just completed another series of tests. The President himself in his March, 1962 address alleged that it was necessary—we were forced—to test not in order to maintain a balance but because, though we were clearly superior, we would fall behind if the Soviet government continued to test and we refrained!

Walter Lippmann pointed out at the time that there was no basis for discussion at all if security required superiority. The Soviets could not permit thorough inspection because that would prevent *them* from trying to achieve superiority. The United States had to demand what the Soviets would not accept because otherwise the Soviets might surreptitiously achieve superiority. The concept of balance is basically a chimera in this supertechnological era, when short of a radical change in political policy, the vast network of scientists and technicians on both sides is going to keep on relentlessly devising and producing new weapons.

Any time that balance or stability actually becomes the objective of governments, they will *immediately* stop producing new or more weapons. They will freeze the *status quo*, and that is the only way a *stable* situation can be had. A *race* is not run to result in a dead heat. As long as the *race* goes on, each inevitably seeks superiority. Under such conditions, a Russian invention could in a few months give it a far greater leverage than a few bases in Cuba. An American invention might conceivably make Russian bases even in Cuba no great threat. But whatever the appropriate label is for

such a situation, it is not balance or stability. We are living on the edge of the abyss all the time, though it is only occasionally that the sky is lit up so that we see it.

From a Christian, a moral, a human standpoint, it seems to me appalling to witness men in government who are no doubt in general high-minded, sensitive, and certainly informed, operating in this context. They carry out their moves, after vast reading, heavy thinking, many conferences, like moves on a chess-board. As players of this game, they are utterly oblivious to the fact that the figures on their board are, on the one hand, human beings, and, on the other, nuclear and biological weapons.

Not so many years ago, Christian thinkers were saying that any mass bombing of cities was forbidden by morality, the precepts of the Gospel and the traditions of the church. That there are no firm voices carrying authority to say NO now to further maneuvering with nuclear weapons on simple *moral* grounds is surely a fearsome indictment of our moral and religious leadership of all kinds. It is utterly terrifying to me that to so many Americans and others raised in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, it seems nonsense, just pointless, to raise this moral issue; terrifying that it seems "natural," as it were, to say that if an enemy threatens you, you threaten him; if he wipes out many millions of your people, you wipe out two or ten times as many of his. That it does not occur to multitudes to recoil from such blood-letting and see that *we have got to find another way* to deal with our problems and our fellow-human beings is surely a symptom of a profound malady, an indication, that we are drugged and blind.

Granted that we cannot present a clear and detailed picture of how a nation would proceed if it decided to remove itself from the madness and atrocity of the nuclear-arms race and disarm unilaterally, if need be. But have the many minds which are devoted to working out government policies and "practical" and "responsible" variations of them, which "you can reasonably expect the people to buy"—have they even an approximately clear and detailed picture of where we are being taken? Do they really have a manageable situation as compared with the "unmanageable" one which they think would result if unilateralism were taken seriously? How are we going to acquire an approximately adequate outline of what a nonviolent approach entails until at least a considerable body of trained minds tackle that job? And do human beings ordinarily stay in a burning house until they are sure they have another waiting for them?...