

The Statecraft of Dean Acheson

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When Dean Acheson was appointed Under Secretary of State in September, 1945, I. F. Stone wrote in *The Nation*: "He has been pro-De Gaulle, anti-Franco, strongly opposed to the admission of Argentina to the U.N., and friendly to the Soviet Union . . . of all the men now in the Department, Acheson was by far the best choice for Under Secretary, and it is no small advantage to pick a man who already knows a good deal about the inner workings." Stone went on to note that one of Acheson's strongest assets was "in his relations with Congress. He deserves a generous share of the credit for the passage of the Bretton Woods legislation, and he played no inconsiderable part in the Senate's approval of the Charter." In order to placate Acheson's reactionary critics, Tom Connally reassured the Senate that he would "never have voted for Mr. Acheson's confirmation [as Under Secretary] unless it had been implicitly understood that he would not have a predominant voice in foreign policy."

Throughout his tenure in office, Acheson fought off charges of appeasement and softness toward communism. It is only in the light of latter-day revisionist scholarship that Acheson is found to have been the conscious or unconscious agent of imperialism and the architect of the cold war. While the later charges against Acheson are different from those of the forties and fifties, there is the same notion of a great conspiracy. Enormous, diabolic powers were

assigned to Acheson then, as now. Then Senator Wherry of Nebraska declared: "Acheson holds the destiny of the world in his hands." Another Senator swore that the recall of General MacArthur "was evidence of the complete domination of Dean Acheson over the foreign policy and military commitments of the United States. Mr. Acheson pulls the strings [to sell out America] and the dummies nod their heads." He is, declared yet another Senator, "the very heart of the octopus itself," which is strangling and deceiving the American people for the benefit of international communism. Today's critics are more sophisticated, and *they* know that he was really working in the cause of Wall Street and American imperialism.* What accounts for these stunning reversals of interpretation?

Acheson's major influence on foreign policy began at a time when a new and inexperienced President was rebounding from a period of hasty and ill-considered diplomatic improvisation following Roosevelt's death. There is general agreement that Roosevelt's diplomacy had plastered over the fundamental divergencies of Soviet and American interests.** Even had he lived, how much longer could Roosevelt's genial brilliance have reconciled what Americans considered the necessary preconditions of a satisfactory postwar world with Stalin's desire to recompense Russia's immense suffering? The postwar world forced hard choices. Americans were not pre-

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* This was not Acheson's first experience with what Richard Hofstadter calls anti-intellectualism and conspiracy theories in American life. When Roosevelt nominated him Under Secretary of the Treasury in 1933, he was attacked in the Senate for his alleged connections with the House of Morgan, only to be accused a decade later of being a minion of Moscow.

** Both James McGregor Burns in *Roosevelt: Soldier of Freedom* and Gabriel Kolko in *The Politics of War* agree on this.

pared for spheres of influence and a free hand for Russia in Eastern Europe and elsewhere. The Soviets were not prepared to put their trust in a three-power consortium and American promises of good will. The real issue, in terms of diplomatic history, is how well Acheson's diplomacy responded to the possibilities of the situation.

It was left to the inexperienced Truman to find a new basis for Soviet-American relations at a time when Americans were just learning how badly off the rest of the world really was. Says Gabriel Kolko: "This larger instability in European economics and politics required the United States to aid the resuscitation of cooperative conservative elements of Europe and to attempt to prevent a total collapse of the Old Order in Europe, and Asia that might open the door to Soviet predominance in a region or even the complete transformation of whole nations." Kolko recognizes that, given the circumstances, there was really no alternative to the confrontation of Soviet and American systems under conditions which were only partially controllable. We must then ask, given the contending forces, how well did Acheson blend the pursuit of American interests with the avoidance of nuclear war and another lapse into barbarism, and how well did he help ameliorate the tensions between the two superpowers?

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. recently wrote that many of Acheson's achievements stand like monuments to a past age. Perhaps so. Acheson's essential legacy, however, may lie in the intellectual temper and purpose he imparted to American diplomacy. Acheson freed Americans from the belief that they could act in international politics only in conformity to moral norms, and he helped dispel the notion that nothing justifies contaminating American ideals with power politics short of a great war. His legacy is discovered also in the conviction that it is within the power of men to control their destiny; that we may, by the application of intelligence, wisdom and imagination, avoid the worst possible outcomes. However much Acheson may have misunderstood Soviet intentions or overemphasized military power at the expense of negotiation, he did not believe that war was either necessary or inevitable. In fact, the conscious purpose of his statecraft was to avoid the likelihood that resort to atomic warfare would ever be necessary. Atomic war, he said, "is not an instrument of policy. It is the negation of plan and purpose beyond itself." In the face of a threatened escalation to all-out war with Communist China, Acheson vigorously encouraged Truman to resist the pleas of General MacArthur to bomb north of the Yalu River.

Nothing more clearly discloses the gulf between Acheson and the prevalent American responses of his time than a *Life* editorial of November 20, 1950. The principal charge was that Acheson, for all his

anti-Communist utterances, never went beyond the line that we must coexist; he accepted the premise that communism was here to stay. He saw the need to deter and contain the Russians and to make them respect our interests and those of our allies, but he was still willing to live with Moscow. "The most meaningful of Mr. Acheson's attitudes is of course his attitude toward the life and death problem of his time. How to rid the world of the threat and evil of Communism. He has never acknowledged that there is any inherent and fundamental conflict between Communism and freedom. Indeed, in his speech to the General Assembly (Sept. 20) he denied in measured words that there is such a conflict. . . ." His Asian policy was unacceptable to *Life* because he seemed to believe that "the Communists of Asia, and especially of China, are not inherently our enemies" and because "he discourages or minimizes any action in Asia which is likely to provoke them. . . ." His statements urging the Chinese to refrain from intervention in Korea were read in Asia as exhibitions of naked fear and encouragement to the Chinese Communists to come out shooting." Such was the gulf separating Acheson from the dominant popular attitude on American diplomacy and the "Communist menace."

Acheson did not come to his cold war positions on the basis of an *a priori* belief in the automatic hostility between communism and democracy. Rather, as a realist, he saw conflicts arising from the competition of great nation-states with differing perceptions of national interest. As Under Secretary he recommended—over the protests of Ambassador Arthur Bliss Lane—a multi-million dollar loan to Poland (1946) on the simple grounds that Western Europe needed Polish coal and that the sooner Polish mines could be made to produce the better. At the same time, Acheson, together with David Lilienthal and Robert Oppenheimer, devised a plan for international control of the uses of atomic energy, a plan which went at least part of the way toward recognizing the need to deal the Soviet Union into the nuclear club without exacerbating the Kremlin's morbid fear of foreign inspection.*

* A recent paper, "Symbolic Politics and the Origins of the Cold War," by Martin Wishnatsky of Harvard, contends that the failure to incorporate the O.S.S. into the State Department in 1946 meant a victory for the resurgent, hard-lining Foreign Service Officer Corps over the more liberal-minded, U.N.-oriented academics who comprised Roosevelt's wartime O.S.S. It should be noted that Acheson fought hard to incorporate the remnant of the O.S.S. and was defeated by those who did *not* want the Department contaminated by (1) liberals and (2) specialists in clandestine intelligence! By this test, Acheson could not have been both a cold warrior and in favor of the O.S.S. Indeed, he warned Truman against the rise of an intelligence agency outside of democratic control.

Acheson also had a high regard for the stability which the British Empire and monetary system had given to the nineteenth-century world, and he sensed that a similar set of supports would have to be developed if the trade, security and order which they had provided were not to disappear.

The same pragmatic sense that prompted Acheson to recommend approval of the loan to Poland and to pursue an atomic agreement with the Soviet Union also led him to consider the seriousness with which the Soviets seemed to be pressing their diplomatic offensive against Iran and Turkey. Here was no consolidation by the Soviets of acquired positions, as in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, but a substantial and quite new effort in a part of the world to which Western interests had traditionally been sensitive.

Acheson's view of the world was marked by images of power and order. Addressing himself in 1939 to the war which had broken out between Nazi Germany and the Western allies, Acheson warned Americans against hesitation and self-doubt and called upon America to refurbish its military power. He did not believe that America either could or should avoid the conflict. Like Roosevelt, Acheson feared that a Nazi victory would sweep away the democratic and moral foundations of Western civilization.

During the war, he opposed almost single-handedly the efforts of Roosevelt and the anti-British faction in the State Department and Treasury to dispossess England of its gold reserves and overseas holdings. He knew that a strong Britain would be indispensable to a stable postwar world. He ardently supported the Bretton Woods Agreements, not in order to fasten the yoke of American imperialism on the unsuspecting necks of others but to avoid a recurrence of the financial and monetary breakdown that produced the Great Depression. When it became apparent that in many parts of the world the only real choice was between Russian power and American power, he had no doubts about which power should be preferred.

Many cold war critics write as if there was some missed alternative to the direction Soviet-American relations took after the war. They are not content to criticize the nation's policy in its particulars but to fix upon every particular as evidence that the whole could have been quite different had this or that interest, or this or that statesman, not been determined to have it otherwise. They also find the general policy rooted in a specific cause which, if changed or eliminated, would have produced an entirely different result.

Only as the full extent of the war's devastation of Europe became visible did Acheson push for those policies now so prominently associated with his name—the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan and

NATO. There is no guarantee that had American policy been radically different, Soviet motives and objectives would have changed. Critics of Acheson ignore the fact that states have distrusted each other's motives and that good will guarantees nothing. It was hard to know, in 1946 and 1947, what Russia's motives and ultimate objectives were, so great was the miasma of misunderstanding and ingrained hostility. But what Acheson did know was that if we waited around too long to find out, we might have no other choice than to go to war to liberate the states of Western Europe and the Middle East, which then seemed vulnerable to anarchy or Communist domination. It is easy to forget that Europeans and others—socialists as well as capitalists, patriots as well as poltroons—wanted American economic and military backing in those days.

For that matter, how many ways are available for one state to shore up another? What forms of international intervention do not appear as a threat to still another nation which stands to lose from the endeavor? In pushing for the economic, political and military restoration of Europe, Acheson recognized that Moscow would feel threatened—although he did not anticipate this would take the form of the Berlin Blockade and the Korean War. That was a risk the Secretary was ready to run in order to redeem the situation.

He also assumed that the Soviets knew they could limit the extent of America's influence by a change in their own behavior (such as has occurred vis-à-vis Europe since the early sixties). Whenever the Soviets eased their threat or held out a negotiating bid, the unity of the Western powers fell apart. Acheson was hard put to sustain an all-out effort over the long run precisely because the French and British were waiting for the chance to reassert their own independence, and it was the men in the Kremlin who would provide the opportunity.

Acheson believed in power politics. He had no confidence in abstractions like world opinion or in institutions like the United Nations which lacked the means to follow through on decisions. Power is the ultimate reality in international politics because only power can guarantee people organized in nation-states what they cherish most: independence, security, and a measure of influence over their destiny. Acheson was not opposed to change in the international order, but in order to avoid war, change must be channeled so as not to precipitate paralyzing and destructive fears or passions. In the postwar period, it must be remembered, *revolutionary change was everywhere either threatened or underway*. Acheson was not urging that America preside over a Metternichian peace. The same unflinching realism which dictated that the U.S. not let things get out of control also led him, in 1947 and 1949, for example, to write off Nationalist China as a hopelessly reactionary regime.

At the same time, there was a strong strategic and calculating basis to Acheson's statecraft which limited his expectations about power. To begin with, Acheson recognized that in international affairs military and economic power were insufficient tools. Even sympathetic scholars overlook the principal point of his frequently criticized "perimeter" speech to the National Press Club in January, 1950: The basis of U.S. policy in Asia, he warned, does not assume that we would make national governments effective or supply them with the loyalty of their people. The most the U.S. could do was to supply a missing component with economic or military aid, but we could not provide governments with the will to work out their own salvation. Unlike contemporary nationalist movements, Acheson contended, the American Revolution was a political act and not a social revolution. Therefore, the U.S. should refrain from intervening in the internal affairs of emerging nations, both because of the obvious complications of intervention and because our own historical experience was foreign to this new type of social revolution.

Nor did Acheson believe that American national interest required us to defend all parts of the non-Communist world. He knew the limits of American power and of transforming that power into effective political action. Apart from the Western Hemisphere, Acheson regarded only two areas of the world as of primary importance to the U.S. One was Western Europe, including the so-called northern tier—Greece, Turkey, and Iran, against which Soviet pressure in the Middle East was principally directed—and the second was the offshore archipelagos of the Pacific—Japan, the Ryukyus, the Marianas, and the Philippines. Not only were these areas strategically important but they were the only places where U.S. assistance could be minted into real political power. In these areas, the U.S. could capture the spirit of nationalism and the desire for a better life which Acheson acknowledged to be the most powerful forces operating in the world of the mid-twentieth century.

Europe was the pivot of the world balance of power. Lose there and the United States would be faced with the grave alternative of 1940-41: either to make a last desperate effort to salvage Britain or withdraw into continental isolation with all that such withdrawal might entail for the future of American democracy. Then, too, the successful liquidation of Western Europe's colonial empires also depended upon the restoration of confidence, security and economic recovery at home. Like Stalin, Acheson regarded the fate of West Germany as the key to the future of Europe. The war had left no margins for safety in Europe. While Soviet control of Eastern Europe could not be finally secure without the neutralization of West Germany, Western Europe could not long remain independent without an independent West Germany. The alternatives were real-

ly that simple, the stakes were correspondingly high, and no statecraft worthy of the name could ignore these realities. The starkness of the alternatives so depressed Kennan (see Chapter 18 of his *Memoirs*) that he preferred to opt for the risks of disengagement and neutralization; Acheson chose the course of integrating West Germany into the Western camp.*

The outcome of the contest between Russia and America, then, was closely related to events in Germany. But if the resources of Western Europe were to be built up and permanently added to the Atlantic Alliance, Germany and France needed guarantees that the Anglo powers would not desert them at the first breakthrough of Soviet power. It is easy to criticize Acheson for militarizing NATO, especially if one forgets that the European foreign offices were clamoring loudest for full-scale American military commitment to Europe.

After the death of Jan Masaryk, the fall of Czechoslovakia and the extinction of the Czech Socialist Party, even the left wing of the British Labor Party favored NATO. As for the French, whose morale was constantly undermined by neutralist and Communist doubts that the United States would come to their assistance, they did not want another liberation, as Premier Queuille made clear at the time the North Atlantic Treaty was being negotiated. Either America must plan to defend Europe *in Europe*, as far east of the Rhine as possible, or renounce its pretensions to do so. Indeed, a common strategy and a unified defense force were urged by Europeans long before that decision could be wrested from the U.S. Congress under the impact of the Korean War.

In dealing with European problems, Acheson believed the U.S. could not lead from behind. He ended the American tradition of unilateralism by insisting that the U.S. share equally in the defense of Europe, taking the same risks as the European states. The security of Europe and the security of the United

* Only three years earlier, Kennan had recommended the very course which Acheson was to take. In an undated draft written in the summer of 1945, Kennan contemptuously disparaged the idea of a Germany run jointly with Russia. "The idea of both the Russians and ourselves withdrawing politely at a given date and a healthy, peaceful, stable, and friendly Germany arising out of the resulting vacuum is a chimera. We have no choice but to lead *our section* of Germany—to a form of independence so prosperous, so secure, so superior, that the East cannot threaten it" (*Memoirs*; emphasis added). It is curious that so little attention has been paid to this document and to the adamancy with which Kennan advocated at this time the rehabilitation of Germany within the Western European and North Atlantic community. The temper of despair with which he viewed Russian power expanding unchecked explains the containment philosophy. Why, then, did Kennan feel that Acheson was so wrong in doing just what he had recommended in 1945?

States, he insisted, were inseparable. Whenever Congress asked whether the Europeans were doing their share, Acheson insisted that that kind of penny-ante approach would not produce the desired results; if the U.S. made its contribution, he said, American diplomacy could insist that Europe live up to its commitments. Acheson was unyielding, whether in response to a Connolly and Vandenberg request to cut the heart out of the American commitment to the North Atlantic Treaty or to a proposal to cut additional aid to the hard-pressed European economies. He knew that before any progress could be made in German recovery and rearmament, or in French morale; or in overcoming British distrust of continental integration, the U.S. had to pave the way. Only then could European governments persuade their people to go along. America had to be both the prime supplier and the prime consumer of security.

Acheson did not regard war with the USSR as inevitable or even likely because he felt that the men in the Kremlin were highly realistic, which meant that neither did they want war. In dealing with Stalin, facts alone were meaningful; if the facts reflected a certain relationship of forces, there would be no need to bargain for a negotiated settlement. Adam Ulam, author of *Expansion and Coexistence*, writes that Soviet diplomacy was laboring under Stalin's increasing sense of his own infallibility,

a confidence that he could gauge exactly the threat from abroad and counter it without incurring the risk of all-out war. . . . To the last, Stalin . . . remained confident that he could raise the level of hostility to and provocation of the West without plunging into war. In his *Economic Problems of Socialism in the U.S.S.R.* written in 1952 he argued that conflicts within the imperialist bloc remained greater than those between the bloc as a whole and the U.S.S.R.

As for evidence that Stalin was genuinely interested in negotiating the issues outstanding between East and West, Ulam notes that no sooner was the danger of German rearmament past than Soviet tactics became dilatory: "propaganda rather than a settlement became the Soviet objective."

It can be argued that "negotiation from strength" implied a certain rigidity and refusal to consider possible changes in the Soviet position. George Kennan's observation of July 12, 1950, aptly describes the mood of the Acheson policy after Korea:

Plainly, the government has moved into an area where there is a reluctance to recognize the finer distinctions of the psychology of our adversaries, for the reason that movement in this sphere of speculation is all too undependable, too relative, and too subtle to be comfortable or to be tolerable to people who feel themselves confronted with the grim responsibility of recommending decisions which may mean peace or war.

But Acheson felt that the Soviet Union and the West were still a long way from having anything to negotiate about. Their respective security needs (Russia in Eastern Europe, the U.S. in Western Europe) were fundamentally incompatible. Stability was not to be expected from negotiations but from forces which precluded the Soviet Union's continued exploitation of European divisions and weaknesses.

Implicit in Acheson's drive to build up NATO was the embryonic notion of graduated deterrence. As the Soviets acquired nuclear capability and the Europeans clamored for effective defense of the peninsula as far east as possible, Acheson argued that only a sizeable military force could be a credible deterrent and genuine alternative to reliance upon nuclear weapons. To be sure, in all this, Acheson may have tried to do too much, and in the process became obsessed with military power.

Henry Kissinger, Stanley Hoffman and others have commented on the danger that a lawyer may bring to affairs of state the viewpoint and skills more appropriate to an adversary relationship than to diplomacy. They have a point. In Acheson's handling of domestic and Congressional opinion, for example, one often sees more of the brilliant lawyer presenting a brief for his client (the President) than of the public official urging the need for mutual exploration of a problem. (Of course Acheson himself would argue that in matters of foreign policy there is little room for domestic give and take, although—unlike his successors—he was never loath to tell the American people about the hard facts and the sacrifices expected of them.) Against the Kissinger-Hoffman thesis stands the success with which Acheson secured approval for everything but the European Defense Community.

Others have charged that Acheson distrusted public opinion, and he was wary of mass opinion when it could be summoned to support such things as McCarthyism. But, like every other Secretary of State, like every President, he wrestled with reconciling diplomacy to the right of the people to know and influence policy. He did not believe the press was inherently mischievous and irresponsible, although he knew it could be, and often was, used in mischievous and irresponsible fashion.

Acheson was convinced that only the President and the executive branch were able to produce coherent leadership in foreign policy. Yet he spent an inordinate amount of time securing the support of Congressional committees and other public organizations. Since he was under incessant attack, he had nowhere to hide. The irony is that, had Acheson listened to "the people," foreign policy would have been far more anti-Communist and xenophobic than it was. The massive public and Congressional support for the decision to intervene in Korea, for example, dissuaded Acheson from seeking a formal ratification by

Congress, thereby exposing the Administration to the later charge that it was Truman's war.

Acheson was an American statesman who could get Congress to agree to what he wanted. But our European allies were also impressed by the Secretary's innovations and his negotiating skill. The Temporary Council Committee set up to coordinate the national budgets and allocations of resources of NATO members probably constituted the most advanced form of regional integration ever achieved (and this without the bureaucratic apparatus of the Common Market). Still, as Hoffman has noted, American statesmen have a tendency to over-institutionalize diplomatic arrangements and thereby create unnecessary rigidities; this perhaps explains Acheson's failure to recognize that the European Defense Community was, in the end, an obstacle to German rearmament. But it is a measure of Acheson's skill and his ascendancy with European statesmen that even the Soviet negotiating bid of March, 1952, failed to budge the British, French and Germans from their essential commitment to the integration of West Germany into the Western community. Revisionist historians will have a field day when they discover the deftness with which Acheson was able to avert a break in Western unity.

The Secretary made his share of mistakes and could not always hold out against domestic political pressures. He felt it impolitic to recognize Communist China in the winter of 1949-50 without Senatorial approval—something he knew he could hardly expect to obtain. The decision to place the Seventh Fleet in the Formosa Straits was influenced by Acheson's realization that, to much of the public, it would seem incongruous to be fighting a war to save South Korea and yet fail to preserve a valuable anti-Communist bastion. Admittedly, it would have been better had Acheson not deserted his position that the United States should do nothing to incur the hostility which the Chinese have long felt toward foreign encroachment on traditionally Chinese territory. He failed to appreciate that the Chinese were not simply puppets of Moscow, and this can be viewed as the greatest error of his career; it had unwitting and disastrous consequences which his own sense of proportion later led him to regret.

Most grievous of all was Acheson's underestimating the significance of China's warning about what would happen if American forces crossed the 38th parallel. This is one of several classic examples of an American statesman's inability to accord the same degree of prudence to the Oriental's defense of his interests as he accords to that of a Germany or of the USSR.

Nevertheless, Acheson's response to the Chinese intervention illustrates the healthy sense of the political and psychological limits of power which gave his statecraft its moral dimension. Having allowed the U.S. to become engaged militarily with China in

Korea, Acheson did his best to disengage from a struggle in which he knew the U.S. did not have the strategic, political or psychological advantage and which would only alienate the U.S. from its allies and deepen existing frustrations at home. Besides, who needed it? A war with Communist China was a risk out of all proportion to the value of a unified Korea.

Except for the French war in Indochina, Acheson was pretty consistent in pressuring the British, Dutch and French to accommodate the various nationalist movements in their colonies. He preferred to exert pressure directly on foreign ministers and ambassadors, and in this way did not embarrass America's closest allies by hectoring them publicly in the United Nations. After listening to Eden complaining about Mossadegh and the Iranian rug merchants, Acheson admonished Eden that he was behaving like a Persian rug merchant in not settling with the Iranians over Abadan.

Acheson was not a reactionary, impervious to the winds of change. Nor did he have anything but contempt for the use of American ideals and political power to benefit American business interests. He knew about such misuses, he knew that interested segments of American business were among the beneficiaries of American cold war policies—and he opposed them. He wanted to raise the bargaining and purchasing power of the underdeveloped nations. The United States could not defend against the threat of Soviet ideological and military penetration and at the same time preserve the economic privileges of the West. He supported economic policies that were at that time considered enlightened. He refused to go along with Eden's demand that the U.S. withhold aid from Mossadegh until he came to terms with the Anglo-Iranian oil company, insisting that this would drive him into Communist arms. When the Egyptian government indicated opposition to a Middle East Defense Organization, Acheson dropped it. Greece and Turkey did achieve a modicum of economic well-being and democracy while Acheson was Secretary of State.

There are those who say that Truman and Acheson forsook Roosevelt's projects for big-power collaboration and embarked on a new policy of confrontation. Others argue that the seeds of Soviet-American conflict were always present because peaceful political cooperation with Russia was incompatible with the economic needs of American capitalism. The trouble with both viewpoints is that they confuse the desirable with the possible, wishing away the reality—that international politics had been in an unstable and highly charged state for the fifty years preceding Truman and Acheson and that the world had just gone through two of the most barbaric wars in history. Only a highly selective memory can ignore the significance of this upheaval and assume that, were it not for certain operational necessities of

American capitalism—international sources of raw materials, market outlets, investment opportunities—the world would enter a new era devoid of international strife.

Yet another school sees the U.S.-Soviet conflict as simply an extension of the struggle between socialist ideals—exemplified by the Soviet Union—and capitalist reaction—by Britain, France and the United States. The trouble with such arguments is that, however well researched, they all ride a hobbyhorse. The post-World War II world offered more than enough potential for any number of cold wars. The possible choices of 1945 lay along a continuum. At one pole was the possibility of wringing our hands and yielding to the chaos, with some form of third world war as an ultimate eventuality. At the other end of the continuum was the opportunity to re-establish order while permitting people to sort out their preferences at the same time. This is a more accurate description of postwar choices than that proposed by the revisionists. Therefore the only question is: With what degree of reason, sobriety, and prudence did Acheson approach his options?

True, Acheson held a Europe-centered view of world affairs and he did not spill over with emotional concern for the Third World (except in doing what he could to foster decolonization). On the other hand, he expected no gratitude from the newly emancipated states, and felt little if any moral outrage when they did not automatically side with the United States. Just as he could not abide a scoundrel like the Greek Premier Tsaldaris, so he did not revel in an evening spent at his Georgetown home in the company of Nehru.

If there was no sentimentality, neither was there room for pompous moralism.

Acheson's statecraft is related to later cold war developments in the same way that the success of Bismarck's statecraft contributed to over-reliance and cheap confidence in the use of power by statesmen of lesser stature and without the lucidity and political courage to resist the megalomania that accompanies power. Acheson always accepted the chastising contact with Congress and did not engage in anti-Communist demagogery.

Like Bismarck, Acheson emphasized power and order for the strictly mechanical purpose of maintaining a manageable balance of power. He did not see power as an instrument to prevent change or to destroy all ideas incompatible with America's vision of herself. The purpose of a strong central balance was to insure that changes at the periphery and in the domestic life of other states would not, in any vital sense, really matter.

Acheson's statecraft differed from that of Bismarck in one important respect. Contrary to the charges of arrogance and callousness in his preoccupation with power, Acheson had none of Bismarck's crude cynicism. If it is true that he was not an idealist, it is also true that he was not insensitive to the need to observe moral restraint. His was, in Max Weber's phrase, an ethic of consequences rather than an ethic of absolutes. Acheson considered the great issues of war and peace too tragic and desperate to permit indulgence in bluff and brinkmanship. His statecraft must be judged in the context of changing American definitions of its role in the world and, perhaps for the worse, the changing caliber of its statesmen.