

Ordinary Americans are beginning
to challenge the insatiable twins,
Pentagon and Presidency

Foreign Policy At Home

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When I started working for SANE in February, 1960, there was no question in my mind that I was working on foreign policy issues. International confrontations—the Bay of Pigs, Berlin, the Congo, the Cuban missile crisis—engulfed us like ocean waves. The superpowers were testing H-bombs in the atmosphere. China was considered an international outlaw. The cold war was in full swing.

Almost all Americans then accepted the assumptions of the cold war: (1) that the world is divided between the forces of aggressive communism and the forces of freedom; (2) that it is the responsibility of the United States to help defend the forces of freedom around the world; (3) the best guarantor of national security is armed might; (4) the more armed might a nation possesses, the more secure it is. In the heady days following World War II, Washington policy-makers rolled these assumptions into a new worldview and dedicated American foreign policy to the “containment of communism.” In pursuit of this policy, they may not have altered the world balance of power in favor of the United States but they have certainly altered the power *inside* the United States—to the detriment of the American people.

Power continued to flow to the presidency, as it had throughout World War II. And power flowed to a newer institution, the military-industrial complex. These two interlocking institutions, the presidency and the complex, came to dominate American foreign policy. The Congress and the people increasingly felt themselves to be outsiders looking in.

We now know in our guts how clearly foreign policy is the extension of a nation's internal condi-

tion. We ask ourselves why we did not act sooner. After all, President Eisenhower warned of the “unwarranted influence” of the military-industrial complex in his Farewell Address in 1961. I suppose the simplest answer is that we were unprepared in the early 1960's. My associates and I were not ignorant of the defense-dependence of many industries, of labor unions, of think tanks and universities. However, despite the temporary aid and comfort of Ike's warning, we offered no available countermeasures. The peace movement was minuscule and unrepresentative, and its focus was on international negotiations. We were preoccupied at that moment with the anticipated progress toward a nuclear test-ban treaty under the incoming Kennedy Administration. We did not anticipate that, along with the test ban, we would get a huge missile buildup and the beginnings of American intervention in Vietnam.

The power of the presidency and of the military-industrial complex did not stop growing with Eisenhower's farewell warning. The policies and expenditures of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations continued to nourish these insatiable institutional twins. Finally, Vietnam made visible for all to see the full dangers of military-mindedness to American life. We learned this lesson gradually, but well.

By the end of the 1960's the United States had already built the world's most destructive war machine, and its military received half of each federal tax dollar (excluding the costs of past wars) and more than half of the funds spent nationally on research. Five million men and women served in the armed forces and as civilian employees of the Pentagon, and four million worked in defense industries. Millions more were economically dependent upon them. The Department of Defense deployed 339 lobbyists on Capitol Hill and more than 6,000 public relations men around the world. Between the end of World War II and 1969 a total of \$1 trillion was spent on the military. This huge expenditure cemented the working

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relationships among the leaders of the Pentagon, their industrial suppliers, military-oriented congressmen and presidential assistants, and the super-patriots of the veterans' and reservists' organizations. A trillion dollars buys massive political influence.

We now have a new kind of American corporation, the government-subsidized hybrid earning private profits from the tax coffers and unprepared to compete for commercial markets. In this connection we have in recent years learned much that we only suspected before. For example, the revelations about Lockheed supplied by such "whistle-blowers" as Ernest Fitzgerald show the complex to be part bureaucratic, part industrial—a network in which even the most astute observers fail to detect where government ends and the corporation begins. Defense industry feeds the state and the state feeds defense industry. Thus the military-industrial complex assumes a self-perpetuating momentum, resisting control from any quarter, public or private.

This momentum explains in part why it is so difficult to change policy, whether in Indochina or in regard to other far-flung military commitments. It also explains why the Nixon Administration's proposed budget for Fiscal Year 1973 still contains 42 cents out of each tax dollar (not including trust funds such as Social Security) for current military expenditures, plus another 18 per cent slated to pay the costs of past wars.

The President's war-making power provides a parallel impulse for continuation of the status quo. By unilaterally sending U.S. military forces to Korea, Lebanon, the Dominican Republic and Indochina, American Presidents have ignored Congress's constitutional right to declare war. American fighting men have also been sent secretly to Laos and Ethiopia. Because the powerful do not readily give up their power, by the spring of 1972 an unlikely Senate al-

liance of conservatives and liberals—including John Stennis, Jacob Javits, William Spong and Robert Taft, Jr.—was struggling to impose legal limits on the President's war-making powers.

And so, at the beginning of the seventies, I find myself working not so much on foreign policy as on the domestic institutions that are a major roadblock in the way of a humane foreign policy. Until these institutions are cut down to size, serious progress in foreign policy is unlikely. SALT negotiations and trips to China may come and go, but the basic policies can remain in force with only cosmetic alterations. Any realistic strategy for peace must deal with these domestic institutions.

In January, 1971, SANE formulated such a strategy. It is, first, a search for a new coalition of groups which understand that they are common victims of the Pentagon and must move together to tie its purse strings. These are the groups which work, usually quite independently of one another, for quality education, pollution control, health and drug care, better housing, mass transit, decent jobs and so forth. As long as the military dominates the federal budget we will lack the resources to cope with these problems. The situation cannot be reversed until these groups begin to work together. The SANE argument is nicely summed up in the Willie Sutton story. When the eminently successful bank robber was caught after a record number of heists, he was asked, "Willie, why did you rob the banks?" Willie replied: "That's where the money is." Which is but the restatement of ancient wisdom: "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt 6:21). When those who seek domestic goals, from better schools to cleaner water, understand that the Pentagon has the lion's share of federal resources, the situation can begin to change.

Most organizations in the field of human needs have been reluctant to tangle directly with the military lest they antagonize their own members or members of Congress, or both. Only one presidential candidate, George McGovern, has gone beyond the rhetoric of "reordering priorities" to make a campaign issue of precisely how he would cut over \$30 billion from the military and transfer it to civilian programs. Significantly, McGovern picked up blue-collar support on this issue in the primaries.

The precursor of this approach was suggested by Seymour Melman (now co-chairman of SANE) in 1964. Melman proposed the formation of a "coalition for peace" based on the need of many groups—blacks, labor, the jobless—to receive a larger share of society's resources. The appeal of new priorities failed to move the civil rights groups or unions, however, in the 1964-66 period. It took massive American intervention in Vietnam and agonizing divisions at home to move part of the black leadership and a handful of labor officials toward even a tenuous

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They are fiercely loyal . . .

But they are not blind

coalition with the peace movement. By 1972, rank-and-file unionists and blacks (and certainly the unemployed) are vastly more receptive to a new priorities approach than were their organizational leaders of a faraway eight years ago.

If the first part of SANE's strategy is building a new coalition, the second is replacing the outmoded assumptions of the cold war. These assumptions, now being examined for the first time by increasing numbers of Americans, provoke some lively questions to the decision-makers. For example, if, as Defense Secretary McNamara testified in 1968, between 200 and 400 megaton-size nuclear weapons could destroy 30 per cent of the Soviet population, why does the United States need 6,000 of these weapons in 1972? Does the greater threat to the average citizen come from the possibility of Soviet or Chinese attack or from assaults by other Americans? Why did the United States help Tito after 1948 while opposing Ho Chi Minh? Why does the U.S. have 48 public, and an unknown number of secret, military commitments to other countries? Why are American armed forces stationed in 3,000 bases throughout the world? Why, when our society is unravelling at home, should Congress adopt the \$85 billion in new military obligations requested by President Nixon? The burden of proof must at last be placed on the political and military leaders.

As the public pushes this dialogue further we must be ready with a new definition of national security. Such redefinition begins with the elementary notion that, unless there is a healthy and vibrant society to defend, no amount of money and energy can erect ramparts behind which to hide. National security means a search for supranational common interests and cooperation in dealing with world problems of hunger, environmental poisoning, drug traffic, depletion of resources and nuclear and conventional arms races. The big powers have allowed the United Nations to become as flabby as an unused muscle; it is past time to develop truly international approaches to peacekeeping.

Such a strategy for change readily utilizes public education, direct pressure and the electoral process. We must get over the sterile "movement" debates that set one means of change against the other. The same people who were once successfully conditioned to accept the unrealistic worldview of the cold war must now be emboldened to ask insistently "Why?"

and "Why not?" This is the chief task of public education.

Simultaneously, the public must be mobilized to pressure those who make the decisions about the use of our tax dollars—the President and members of Congress. Obviously, congressmen are easier to reach than the Presidents. We cannot afford to neglect all the traditional methods of pressuring Congress: organizing community groups for lobbying, monitoring voting records, inviting congressmen to debate their opponents, and letters to local newspapers criticizing the specific failings of officeholders.

Then, too, there are less conventional methods. One of the more imaginative direct-action efforts was made by only nine members of SANE, directing their barbs at Army surveillance of civilian organizations. Carbed like Sherlock Holmes and other super-sleuths, carrying telescopes, tape recorders and notebooks, the group "staked out" the home of Defense Secretary Melvin Laird for the benefit of the news media. Among other things they asked neighbors whether the Laird family read any suspect literature, thus using reverse psychological jiu jitsu against a top responsible official. What is good for the Secretary of Defense might well be good for congressmen, and the imaginative citizen will not lack an appropriate tactic.

When all else fails, it is more possible than many people seem to think to remove elected officials. *This means that some concerned citizens must be involved in party politics, not as an alternative to nonpartisan pressure tactics but in addition to them.* As long as political parties nominate the men and women who make the decisions about the federal budget, the draft and foreign intervention, the electoral process will remain a central field of struggle for change. Continuing involvement in a major party should replace furious campaigning once every four years for a presidential candidate. We have to be in a position *to nominate* candidates for Congress and the presidency. Otherwise the November choice is likely to be no choice at all.

We should not be embarrassed to remind ourselves that change is a long, continuing process. Many younger people in particular follow a pattern of being "into" this and "into" that in such rapid succession that they cannot possibly change anything. We ought not to allow ourselves to be intimidated into conforming to the style of youthful futility.

It is not enough to fight conditions in general. We must, rather, locate the decision-makers on specific issues and decide how to influence them. In the area of war and peace, the decision-makers are the President and members of Congress. They may be unduly influenced by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Lockheeds, but they are nonetheless a relatively small number of identifiable individuals who hold office through constitutional means. They cannot continue to hold power without the collaboration of at least some of the voters.

I used to believe that it was more difficult to influence decisions on war and peace than decisions on race. Now I know the reverse to be true. One reason is that there are fewer decision-makers in foreign policy. Consider, for example, the job of integrating a suburban neighborhood. Who are the decision-makers? The real estate firms. The banks. The local government. And every resident of the neighborhood. All of them have to be influenced. That one seemingly small example of local change could be as complicated as influencing, for example, a military aid bill before the Congress.

As we work for radical change we must be sensitive to the values of the American people. Ours is a middle-class country in attitudes, distribution of income and standard of living. The most clearly oppressed, whether judged by racial or economic yardsticks, are in a minority. This has a measurable impact on the evolution of foreign policy. During the height of the Vietnam war, in 1968, the Survey Re-

search Center of the University of Michigan found that 63 per cent of the respondents who believed the war was a mistake viewed antiwar protesters negatively. Of the group then favoring complete withdrawal from Vietnam, 53 per cent had a negative feeling toward the protesters. This negative view had a paralyzing effect on the expression of the antiwar sentiment that had in fact spread far beyond the universities and affluent suburbs. Too many Americans held back in expressing their views publicly because they feared giving the impression they had joined up with the flag-burners, pot-smokers and long-haired youth.

It is true that the news media, especially TV, distorted the reality of the peace movement. But it had a lot of help from alienated, self-indulgent and insensitive souls who were more eager to shock the construction worker and his wife than to mobilize an antiwar coalition. Millions of Americans are the children or grandchildren of immigrants who gained land, home, personal freedom and financial stability of a sort in the United States. They are fiercely loyal to the country. But they are not blind. Their sons fought and sometimes died in Vietnam while protesters went to college. The tax burden of the war fell unfairly on working-class pocketbooks.

Middle America seethes with discontent; Richard Nixon can appease some of it and George Wallace can tap much of it, but George McGovern has shown that the process is reversible. He has quietly listened to ordinary Americans. Perhaps that is the most important lesson for all of us to learn.