

A VIEW OF THE WORLD

Abraham Martin Murray

BUYING PEACE. Critics of Jimmy Carter grumble that he "bought peace" in the Middle East. Although they will not go so far as to deny the promised appropriations to Egypt and Israel, they suggest there is something dirty about using money, rather than a nice clean war, to achieve diplomatic ends. The administration points out that war would cost a lot more than the four or five billion involved in the Israel-Egypt settlement, plus war tends to get people killed.

President Sadat is said to hope for \$15 billion in aid over the next five years or so. There is some anxiety in Cairo and Washington that other assistance, notably from the Saudis, may be reduced or cut off. But it would seem there is no crisis at hand. There is time for things to sort themselves out in the post-treaty Middle East, since Egypt still has billions of aid dollars "backed up in the pipeline." In addition to the U.S., Japan, West Germany, and several OPEC countries have been pressing money upon Egypt that it simply is not able to use. The economic and social disarray in Egypt is such that banking promises is about all Sadat can do for the moment. The U.S. should not hesitate to deposit more promises in the Cairo account. Their more or less orderly expenditure over the years will help ensure continued cooperation from the country that is most key to a stable realignment of forces in that dangerous part of the world.

"THE SOVIET CENTURY." It seems a long time ago that Henry Luce of *Time-Life* declared ours "The American Century." Now the Committee on the Present Danger, an organization opposing SALT II and other "appeasements," declares that ours is turning out to be the Soviet century. That is patent nonsense that tends to undercut whatever useful purpose the Committee might serve. America has its very real problems, but an impartial comparison with those of the Soviet Union makes America's much publicized crises seem almost enviable. Economically, politically, and culturally, the U.S. is far in the lead. On relative military strengths a debate is possible.

The American lead does not necessarily result from a divine mandate that the U.S. be #1, but, for whatever reason, its being #1 is the inescapable fact. All but its paid propagandists acknowledge that the domestic economy of the USSR is a disaster area. From food to hairpins, an impenetrable jungle of government bureaucracy is imposed be-

tween production and consumer needs. More than sixty years after the revolution the great majority of Soviet citizens aspires to a standard of living well below America's officially defined poverty line. As for global economic influence, how many national economies that are above the devastation line are tied into the Soviet economy, and how many into the U.S.? Which partners of the Soviet Union are economically comparable to Western Europe, Japan, Taiwan, or Brazil? To ask is to know the answer.

Whether political strength follows economics or the other way around is a moot question. But the political comparison is equally favorable to the U.S. The Soviet Union is in essence a Russian empire uneasily astride numerous ethnic and national groupings of subject peoples. In the very near future Russians will be a distinct minority within the empire. Its "alliances" with Eastern Europe are, to put it mildly, insecure. To be sure, the U.S. has occasional quarrels with Canada and structural tensions with Mexico, but, in comparison with that of the Soviet Union, its territorial integrity seems impregnable. It can be argued that Russia can manage to hold things together, as with Czechoslovakia in 1968. But such extravagant expenditures of money, energy, and international reputation hardly make that style of pacification a firm foundation for domestic peace and prosperity or world influence. Or it is said that, despite its weaknesses, the USSR is in the ideological vanguard of global change. Tell that to the Chinese. In fact, we advise against telling it to anybody but the Cubans.

The cultural is closely linked to the political. Culture may seem a "softer" measure, touching, as it does, upon morality, ideals, visions of the future. But—from popular music, to Levis, to skyscrapers, to human rights, to the growing use of the English language—it is obvious that the USSR is not in the running. What nation in the world (again, omit pitifully dependent Cuba) looks to the Soviet Union as the model of the future for which it strives? Where does popular opinion, where it is free to express itself, not aspire to be like America? That may be good or bad. Certainly there is much in the U.S. that should not be emulated, but we are speaking here of global influence, of whether it is the American or the Soviet century.

Iran, which may or may not be the portent of a larger Islamic rejection of Western values, might be cited as a counterinstance. That is problematic. It has been argued plausibly that the shah was over-

thrown because of his brutal tyranny and his failure to deliver, for the vast majority of the people, the advantages of Westernization he had promised. They got the corruption without the values. In any case, even if there is an Islamic religious reaction against Western values, that is hardly a vote for Soviet (Western?) culture.

Then we come to the military factor. In terms of who has the strategic advantage in the event of nuclear slaughter, the debate will no doubt continue to rage. One thing is clear: The agreements prior to SALT II have done nothing to restrain the arms race. As Henry Kissinger recently said, "With or without arms agreements, we could not have done more [in developing and deploying new weapons] than we have done." The military factor, however, includes most importantly the effective deployment of military strength, short of nuclear confrontation. One surveys the globe with an eye to where the U.S. and USSR have military force effectively in place, and to the placement of military force that is friendly to their respective national interests. There is NATO in Western Europe. Of course there is the untested Warsaw Pact, largely composed of Russian allies most tenuously allied. The West is firmly entrenched, and the USSR effectively excluded, from the Middle East. In Africa, Russia has some eccentric friends in Mozambique, Angola, Ethiopia, and among guerrilla bands, but there are no strong and stable nations aligned with the USSR, while there are quite a number siding with the U.S. and West Europe. Aside from Cuba (again), the USSR has nothing in Latin America, while, for all the irritations that come with it, the U.S. has inestimable influence. In Asia there is Japan, of course, and China with a quarter of the world's population. The latter may or may not want a military alliance with the U.S., but it is undoubtedly hostile to the Soviet Union. Of course they have Vietnam, and may now wish they didn't.

Economically, politically, culturally, and militarily, the American *imperium* is incomparably more impressive than that of the Soviet Union. One friend who is a close observer of Russian behavior agrees with this assessment, but draws from it a rather gloomy conclusion. "That's just the point," he says. "The men sitting in the Kremlin see history passing them by on every front. They have only one thing that is really first class, and that is their strategic armory. The more they see themselves losing in every other area, the more frustrated they will become and the more they will be tempted to assert their equality in the only way that they are equal."

Russia's historic feelings of inferiority in relation to the West should not be exacerbated to the danger point. We should not flaunt the strengths and advances of the American-led West. American chauvinism can be as dangerous as the resentments that accompany Russian inferiority. There is

a difference, however, between chauvinism and acting with the confidence that is appropriate to the world's greatest power. Those who call for a show of greater American confidence undermine that confidence by alarmist pronouncements about America's becoming a second-rate nation. Finally, this is neither the American century nor the Soviet century. It is, and will likely continue to be for some time, a period in which, among all the nations of the earth, the United States of America has the greatest influence and therefore the greatest responsibility in moving toward a more stable world order. And that, contrary to the Committee on the Present Danger, means we should stop fretting about becoming #2, which is, after all, just another way of flaunting the fact that we are #1.

NO GOOD CHOICES. In a March 12 editorial the *New York Times* pondered the unhappy choices in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. "Backing Mr. Smith's scheme [that is, the interim government that includes the black leaders with the greatest demonstrated popular support] would be a serious mistake." That would, says the *Times*, make black Africa unhappy with us and would gain us an unsavory ally in Salisbury. "Backing the guerrillas is inconceivable as long as they refuse to assure a fair division of power and to protect white minority rights." Fair enough. "Yet," the editorial continues, "standing aside could permit the Soviet Union and its Cuban allies to gain the benefits of yet another successful African insurgency." So what should we do? "The United States can only wait for a new opportunity to bring [the violence] fairly to an end." Let's see now, that's choice number three, right?

The *Times* would do better to heed the conclusion of its own John F. Burns, who writes (February 25) from the scene: "Mr. Smith is not alone in fearing that the British-American plan, disbanding Salisbury's army and replacing it with a guerrilla-based force, would set the stage for a civil war between the [guerrilla] factions far bloodier than anything Rhodesia has yet seen. It is small wonder that there are people of good will who ask whether penalizing the Salisbury administration with sanctions while doing little to persuade the guerrillas to abandon the war is a responsible prescription for Governments that want stability and moderation for the people of this troubled land."

By the time this sees print, there may have been elections signifying what the people of Rhodesia, black and white, want for their future. That, it is hoped, might make it more difficult to dismiss the choice of the lesser evil as a racist "scheme."

Abraham Martin Murray is the collective name of those who contribute to "A View of the World." The opinions expressed sometimes coincide with those of the editors.