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Of Posturing and Power:
American Leadership and the
Western Alliance

by

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OF POSTURING AND POWER:
AMERICAN LEADERSHIP AND THE WESTERN ALLIANCE

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Paper presented to the Fourteenth Annual Meeting of the Committee on
Atlantic Studies, Wingspread, Racine, Wisconsin, September 22-25, 1983.

OF POSTURING AND POWER:
AMERICAN LEADERSHIP AND THE WESTERN ALLIANCE

I.

The environmental conditions that pertained when NATO was established in 1949 bear little resemblance to the conditions of the 1980's. NATO was a hegemonic alliance having a markedly asymmetrical distribution of power among the members in economic and political as well as military terms. No state in or out of the alliance approached a position of equality with the US. And none would challenge American hegemony for at least two decades.

An alliance has been defined as "an exclusive set of states acting in concert at a given time for the purpose of enhancing the military security of its members vis-à-vis a specified or specifiable external enemy" (Fedder, 1973). The conditions for mutually enhancing the military security of the members and the composition of the members of NATO have changed markedly since 1949, and those changes have been reflected in the politics of the alliance as well as in relation to the designated enemy. In 1949, Britain and France were barely emerging from the devastation of the war, Germany was defeated, dismembered, and occupied and only the US had economic resources sufficient to provide a base for rapid recovery. (Fedder, 1980, pp. 6-7.)

In the early postwar period, on the whole, American leadership was enlightened, occasionally inspired and remarkably lucky. Above all, it was reasonably well-informed. Truman, Marshall, Acheson, Kennan, Bohlen, Harriman and others were men of limited experience and skill as are all persons but they exhibited a pragmatic willingness to learn from their mistakes and shared sufficient repose to endure the mistakes of others. While often articulated in ideological terms, their responses to political events were not ideologically driven. Of course, this is not meant to deny the existence of any elements of ideologically driven perceptions, preconceptions and the like. American

leaders tended to be anti-Communist and anti-socialist, suspicious of any political leaders who seemed to be too tolerant of left-wing movements in Europe.

Considering themselves informed by the experiences of the thirties, even such enlightened leaders as those listed above were deeply suspicious of those whom they felt to be insufficiently sensitive to the moral bankruptcy of the left. After all, they felt, the left in Europe played cynical games with the communists, deceiving themselves and helping to deliver their countries into the hands of the fascists. Had the Europeans but understood, they would have elevated principle over politics and the world would have been better off for it. The real thrust of the complaint exhibited a perversely inverted logic among the American observers who all-too-frequently lacked adequate appreciation for the intricacies of politics and power. Bohlen's comment upon Secretary of State Cordell Hull is quite apt: "I do not think he can be called a great Secretary of State because he had only a limited understanding of political currents in the world. He did not understand, and indeed, true to American tradition, rejected the concept of power in world affairs."

(Bohlen, 1973.)

Rejecting power as a legitimate intellectual construct is a traditional if inconsistent American leadership pattern. Style is substance and the American style has normally eschewed the wielding of power as appropriate to persons of lesser morality. Both the United Nations Charter and the North Atlantic Treaty were justified to the United States Senate and the American public as the antitheses of power politics which, of course, they are not. Similarly, Secretary of War Stimson rejected using mail covers (inspecting foreign mail) on the eve of World War II with his dictum that "Gentlemen do not read other people's mail." And Ambassador Warren Austin saw little

justification for Arab-Jewish hostility in Palestine, asserting that to settle their differences, "All they have to do is act like Christians." As if Christians have not waged war upon Christians virtually since the advent of Christianity.

Senator H. Alexander Smith's (R., N.J.) statement but one day after the Truman Doctrine speech (3/13/47) is of interest: "The United States has to face the issue of accepting responsibility of leadership in world affairs or of letting the world drift into civil war and chaos. . . . We must help the world help itself back to security and God. . . but it must be one world under the United Nations and not two spheres of influence. There must not be any balancing of power." (Yergin, 1978, pp. 396-7.)

The differing approaches to foreign policy evident in the speeches and behavior of Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt symbolized a contrast that was profoundly significant. "Many American leaders condemned Churchill as needlessly obsessed with power politics, too rigidly anti-Soviet, too colonialist in his attitude to what is now called the Third World, and too little interested in building the fundamentally new international order towards which American idealism has always tended. The British undoubtedly saw the Americans as naive, moralistic, and evading responsibility for helping secure the global equilibrium. The dispute was resolved according to American preferences -- in my view, to the detriment of postwar security." (Kissinger, 1982, pp. 571-2.)

The recurring American disdain for the role of power is curious, pervasive, relatively consistently stated and almost always costly to American policy conceptions and implementation. When American political leaders deny the power content of their policies, they confound foreign observers and distress analysts because the denials are always false even while they inform

American policy. Such denials cannot simply be written off as posturing since, as shall be indicated below, posturing can yield very dysfunctional results. Yet the denial of the appropriateness and relevance of power by American leaders typifies the American experience. Kissinger's observations are quite apt:

In American discussions of foreign policy . . . the phrase "balance of power" was hardly ever written or spoken without a pejorative adjective in front of it -- the "outmoded" balance of power, the "discredited" balance of power. When Woodrow Wilson took America into the First World War, it was in the expectation that . . . the postwar settlement would be governed by a "new and more wholesome diplomacy" transcending the wheeling and dealing, secrecy and undemocratic practices that . . . produced the Great War. Franklin Roosevelt, on his return from the Crimean Conference in 1945 told the Congress of his hope that the postwar era would 'spell the end of the system of unilateral action, the exclusive alliances, the spheres of influence, the balances of power, and all the other expedients that have been tried for centuries -- and have always failed.' (Kissinger, 1982, p. 573.)

Churchill evidenced great discomfort at the apparent unwillingness of the Americans to wield their monopolistic might to arrange a settlement in Europe to his liking. In a speech delivered in Llandudno in 1948, Churchill bemoaned the failure to take advantage of the Anglo-American atomic monopoly to shape the course events were taking in Europe. Russian obstructionism in the meetings of the Council of Foreign Ministers took place without the application of adequate response by the Americans. Churchill asserted:

The question is asked: What will happen when they get the atomic bomb themselves and have accumulated a large store? You can judge for yourselves what would happen then by what is happening now. If these things are done in the green wood, what will be done in the dry? * * * No one in his senses can believe that we have a limitless period of time before us. We ought to bring matters to a head and make a final settlement. * * * The Western Nations will be far more likely to reach a lasting settlement, without bloodshed, if they formulate their just demands while they have the atomic power and before the Russian Communists have got it too. (Churchill, 1948.)

Churchill's importunings did not resonate in the halls of the powerful -- indeed, they fell on largely deaf ears. British Foreign Minister Ernest Bevin

had written to Secretary of State George C. Marshall urging the formation of a "sort of spiritual federation" of Western democracies after being disillusioned about Soviet foreign policy following the abortive London Conference of Foreign Ministers. Bevin's idea was picked up and run with by John Hickerson, Director of the Office of European Affairs in the State Department, who suggested creating a military alliance "if it were clearly linked up with the UN." (Petersen, 1982, p. 96.)

George Kennan, then chairman of the Policy Planning Council in the State department, argued against entering into a military pact, saying that: "A military union should not be the starting point. It should flow from the political, economic and spiritual union -- not vice versa" Petersen concludes from his research into the recently opened correspondence, that:

* * * First, the scope of the American alliance decision should not be exaggerated. Through its political, economic and military involvement in Europe and its increasingly antagonistic relationship with the Soviet Union, the United States was already deeply committed to the defense of Western Europe. * * * Secondly, it is difficult to uphold the view that the United States was pulled, dragged or lured into the Atlantic Pact by (over-) nervous Europeans. * * * The North Atlantic Treaty was rather the creation of an initial coalition based on perceived common interests between an important and eventually dominant group in the State Department and the British government. . . . (Petersen, 1982, p. 110.)

The American aversion to wielding power overtly and self-confidently is accompanied frequently by a reluctance to plan ahead. When Secretary Marshall delivered his commencement address to the assembled graduates of Harvard University in June, 1947, no "plan" yet existed to promote European recovery.

. . . Indeed, a week after the Harvard speech, Marshall solicited advice from US ambassadors in western Europe as "to what extent a European program is politically and technically feasible." Marshall requested the 'frank views' of the ambassadors in issues so basic as to reveal the still tentative nature of Washington's thinking about European recovery. As late as 30 June, Marshall informed the British Ambassador that his Harvard remarks represented something between a "hint" and a "suggestion" rather than a plan. Indeed, six weeks

after the Harvard speech George Kennan reflected in a briefing paper for Secretary Marshall that "we have no plan." (Cromwell, 1982, p. 235.)

Anticipating problems that would continue to bedevil American policy pronouncements years later, Kennan argued that the Marshall Initiative must be divorced from US-Soviet ideological confrontation in order to secure European cooperation. He reasoned that the avoidance of an ideological war was "a vital fact of present European politics." "The moment we place our demands in the framework of a Russian-American conflict we paralyze the will of practically every country on the European continent." (Quoted by Cromwell, 1982, p. 237). Except for the Inaugural period of the Marshall Plan, Americans tended to view all European relations through the prism of Soviet-American ideological conflict. And even that exception does not survive close examination. The Russians could have aborted the Marshall Plan had they participated in the Conference on European Economic Cooperation which formulated the plan. The record demonstrates conclusively that Congress would not have funded a program of economic assistance to the USSR in 1947.

II.

The fundamental premise for the American policy that was to be developed over the next decade was based upon assumptions of a reality that conformed little with the reality itself. US policy officials assessed the USSR as being much more powerful than was the case and attributed a degree of monolithic control by Stalin over the East European states that was grossly exaggerated. Kissinger's retrospective comment is quite on the mark:

Our current dilemmas are the result of the decision of all our post-war leaders to base security on technology -- to compensate for an assumed Soviet superiority in manpower and conventional weapons by reliance on our nuclear arsenal. * * * But from the perspective of a generation, it is possible to argue that the West was too ready to attribute a military edge to an adversary only recently devastated by war and 20 million casualties; that the NATO nations

underestimated the significance of their own industrial potential and forgot -- conveniently -- that in fact NATO's manpower is greater than that of the East. (Kissinger, 1982, p. 195.)

As Kissinger suggests, there was little realism to be found in the posturing or rhetoric of American policy makers regarding the assessment of Soviet strength at the end of World War II. Of the victorious powers none were more exhausted and diminished in relative power than the Russians and none less exhausted than the Americans. While the British were far weaker than the Russians in absolute terms, they emerged from the war far stronger relatively speaking than the USSR, especially when one acknowledges the continuing alliance with the US. France does not figure in a realistic calculus as a victorious power since her role among the victors was graciously extended by the US and the UK despite the Vichy past. Stalin's rejection of French participation in a post-war role rested upon an assessment of French weakness and inappropriateness evidenced by the stunning rapidity of the French collapse before the German invasion and the alliance of Vichy France with Germany and Japan. (We must recall the need for an Anglo-American invasion of and campaign against French North Africa and Japanese use of bases and staging points in French Indochina.) Beyond the contempt with which Stalin dismissed the French, Stalin did not understand the US-UK decision to grant a role to France in the occupation of Germany. Responding to their insistence, he acquiesced in the assignments of a portion of the Anglo-American two-thirds of occupied Germany to French occupation. Elevating France to such an "unearned" position seemed both confusing and inexplicable to Stalin.

Stalin's consolidation of power and control over the East European states was effected more tentatively and cautiously than was needed given Western policy or perceptions. Coalition governments were imposed in each of the states liberated and occupied by the Red Army in 1944-45 even though there was

no hint of active challenge, beyond protest, by the United States. "When Soviet troops moved into the countries of Eastern Europe in 1944, the Soviet government began to maneuver local Communists into positions of power, ostensibly in the name of creating 'friendly' and 'democratic' regimes." (Daniels, 1960, p. 136.) In his letter of December 27, 1944 to President Roosevelt, Stalin advised of the likelihood that a Communist dominated Provisional Polish Government would be installed in Poland rather than the Polish Government in exile in London:

I have to say frankly that if the Polish Committee of National Liberation will transform itself into a Provisional Polish Government then * * * the Soviet Government will not have any serious ground for postponement of the question of recognition. It is necessary to bear in mind that in strengthening of a pro-Allied and democratic Poland the Soviet Union is interested more than any other power not only because the Soviet Union is bearing the main brunt of the battle for the liberation of Poland but also because Poland is a border state with the Soviet Union and the problem of Poland is inseparable from the problem of security of the Soviet Union. To this we have to add that the successes of the Red Army in Poland in the fight against the Germans are to a degree dependent on the presence of a peaceful and trustworthy rear in Poland, and the Polish National Committee fully takes into account this circumstance while the emigre government and its underground agents by their terroristic actions are creating a threat of civil war in the rear of the Red Army and counteract the success of the latter (In Daniels, 1960, p. 137.)

From 1945-1947, Communist parties were placed in positions of principal power in regimes which also included conservative, agrarian capitalist parties. This despite the presence of the Red Army and the absence of any opposing military force. Communist party theoreticians wrote embarrassed, convoluted justifications for the "new" type of state created. "They are not capitalist states in the ordinary sense of the word. Neither, however, are they Socialist states. * * * * They may, with the maintenance of the present state apparatus, gradually pass over to Socialism" (Eugene Varga. "Democracy of a New Type," in Daniels, 1960, p. 152.) But why, it must be asked, should the transition be so gradual? Certainly, not because of lack of

commitment by Stalin to the goal of shaping the states in the region in his image. The argument advanced to Roosevelt regarding Poland could be applied equally well to Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Albania. Particularly, the states liberated by the Red Army from Nazi occupation were susceptible to immediate subjugation by monolithic Communist party control under the protection of the Soviet military.

The most credible explanations for Stalin's caution and hesitation are ambivalence on the part of the Russians and the risk of provoking an American intervention determined to prevent Soviet designs. In all likelihood, the simplest and most appealing explanation is some combination of ambivalence and anxiety about American intentions. The unification of the East European regimes (replacing the coalition governments with all Communist party member governments) and subsequent purging of deviationists (like Gomulka in Poland) and the "purifying" Stalinization of the diverse regimes was accomplished during 1947-1949; a process that was not completed until four years after the end of the war.

Four to five years in the sweep of time may be but a blip in historical terms; yet it provided Stalin with ample opportunity to consolidate his control, identify and remove competing elites and crush deviationists throughout those areas under Red Army occupation. It cannot be assumed that Stalin lacked the skill and determination required for such imposition of control.

Now some four decades after the end of the Second World War, given what was known at the time and what is becoming available as archives are opened, we must acknowledge the realities of the period if we are not simply to repeat mistakes and misperceptions of the past. We can no longer permit the type of statement as the following to pass without comment:

At the outset of the cold war, Soviet moves in Iran (Azerbaijan), Poland, Berlin, Greece and Czechoslovakia refuted hopeful expectations of a new international order based on U.S. collaboration with the U.S.S.R. and Great Britain; in 1947 Britain's abandonment of its strategic role in Greece began the still expanding process, unforeseen at the time, of America's global role of containment. (Osgood, 1981, p. 466.)

None of the discrete moves mentioned by Osgood supports his extrapolations. In 1946, the Soviet Union removed troops stationed in Azerbaijan pursuant to agreement with the US and the UK to prevent the pro-Nazi Shah from providing material support to the Axis powers and to protect Allied supply lines to the Soviet Union. American and British military personnel were stationed elsewhere in Iran for the same purpose. The removal of Soviet forces from Iran in 1946, however reluctantly, is evidence of Stalin's caution not of his aggressive expansionism. US demands for the removal of the troops were productive, demonstrating Stalin's respect for superior American power. It is doubtful that Stalin was impressed by the moral superiority of the US position.

As we noted above, the situation in Poland does not accord with Osgood's statement. With the Red Army occupying Poland at the end of the war, only invasion by American forces, war with the USSR, could have provided the opportunity for installing the Polish government in exile in London. Short of that, the best the West could have achieved was affecting the composition of the Communist dominated government in Warsaw. The possible opportunity to shape internal events in Poland and in East Europe generally was missed. We fell victim to our own self-fulfilling prophecy by writing off the East European regimes as having already been crushed by monolithic Communism. We failed to recognize that Communism was not monolithic and we assumed erroneously that the coalition governments were shams designed to mislead the West. Efforts could have been made to put "national" communists into office

rather than hard-core Stalinists. The way might have been cleared to bring Gomulka and others like him to power in 1946. They did assume power in 1956, marking the beginning of a wave of liberalization of the eastern regimes.

Berlin also does not provide evidence for Osgood's thesis. Ample evidence can be produced demonstrating the frustrations attendant upon Allied-Soviet contentions concerning the occupation of Germany and Berlin. Indeed, French occupation policy often was in conflict with British and American policies. Coordinating occupation policies for diverse states is a complex and difficult process even when overriding goals are clear and favored by the parties. Coordinating occupation policies with a government as suspicious, combative and contentious as Stalin's regime was all the more difficult. Bevin and Marshall despaired of expectations that Allied cooperation was possible following the collapse of the London Foreign Ministers' Conference in 1947.

Stalin's opposition to the Communist insurrection in Greece was as pronounced as and certainly more productive than American opposition. And in Czechoslovakia the Czech Communist Party apparently was almost as surprised by the success of the Coup de Prague (1948) as everyone else except for the Americans who had largely written off the Czech government as communist-controlled.

III.

Managing alliance policy until the mid-sixties was relatively uncomplicated: US strategic policy was alliance strategic policy. The asymmetry of the Atlantic Alliance masked frequently serious problems of alliance maintenance. Serious challenges to US leadership were neither possible nor welcomed by allied leaders save for the posturing of General de Gaulle whose efforts were primarily directed towards his German and British counterparts.

Events have caught up the American position within the alliance to the extent that US policy no longer determines alliance policy and does not always inform allied leaders whose interests are neither identical nor subordinate to American interests. The changes that have occurred are systemic and profound. Posturing about the imminence of the Soviet threat and appeals for unity cannot substitute for reversals of disintegrative, competitive and conflictual interests or tendencies which arise from changed circumstances and roles.

There are three classes of issues that encompass the range of discrete changes that have occurred in the European and international systems: (1) military-security; (2) energy; and (3) economic. These issues have been worked over to the point of triteness; however, reviewing pronouncements by public officials and scholars does not reassure one's sense of ease that debate and discussion illuminates and informs -- it may facilitate more pandering than enlightenment. Public officials tend to pander to an insipid public and scholars tend to pander to public officials. "Missile gaps" and "windows of vulnerability" are triumphs of insipidity conceptually distracting scholars from more interesting questions likely to inform debate. Kennedy's missile gap focussed attention upon a symbolic American weakness and provided a "rationale" for a greater bellicosity of exposition, a rapid remilitarization of US foreign policy and an adventurism unmatched since Theodore Roosevelt. It yielded counter-insurgency warfare and nation-building as new aims of foreign policy resulting in large part from the writings of social scientists cum social engineers who yearned to sit in the councils of the mighty manipulating men and events in distant places. It yielded the introduction of US combat personnel into Vietnam in Spring, 1961, inaugurating a series of events culminating in Spring, 1975, with the departure of the last helicopter from the roof of the US embassy in Saigon.

Kennedy's missile gap distracted public attention from the principal thrust of his policy: the development of an assertive, aggressive interventionist policy which would guarantee the primacy of American power for some indeterminate future. His policy concentrated upon non-substantive goals in that it sought to enhance US prestige, influence and suasion -- nonconcrete, indefinable products that are neither consumable nor palpable. As goals they are proximate to Schumpeter's conceptualization of imperialism as "objectless expansionism." (Schumpeter, 1951)

Kennedy inaugurated a program that resulted in exponential increases in US defense expenditures for conventional and nuclear capabilities. Initially the cost of increased defense expenditures was borne by the rapid expansion of the US economy in the early sixties. Escalation of the war in the mid-sixties accompanied the introduction of Great Society programs requiring financing that could not be achieved through economic expansion alone. Only taxation or inflation remained with the latter appearing more attractive since its impact was deferred and shared disproportionately by America's trading partners -- we exported much of the short term cost of waging war in Vietnam to West Europe and Japan. But the war became protracted and short term deferral achieved a long term impact.

With the US preoccupied in Vietnam, the way was clear for the Soviet Union to improve its military position in diverse ways. Soviet missiles and air power were improved significantly, as were Soviet naval and airlift capabilities. The USSR achieved a position of essential parity with the US in weaponry and, more importantly, demonstrated interest and capability to intervene rapidly and effectively in distant places around the globe. The USSR became a global power while the US was losing a war in Vietnam, grinding its teeth in Angola, reverberating around the Horn of Africa, impaling itself on

Watergate and flinging economic challenges at Germany and Japan. While the achievement of parity was inevitable given the size, interests and capabilities of the USSR the timing appeared to be related to a decline in US fortunes. Coincidence merged with political distress, war-weariness and developing economic malaise to create the illusion of a declining America becoming overwhelmed by a burgeoning Russian power and presence and an allied competition that was perceived as inconsiderate and ungrateful.

Differing European and American interests continued and even accelerated a divergence whose origins are traceable to the founding of the alliance. Apparent convergence of interests was most often achieved by imposing an overlay of agreement upon European allies whose tractability stemmed from the coercion imposed by a hegemonic super-ally on the one hand facing a hegemonic super-foe in the East.

Agonizing reappraisal and the European Defense Community, Suez, Skybolt and the Multi-Lateral Nuclear Force "solution" were but early indicators of developing divergence. There is nothing startling about the fact of divergence of interest. Convergence is worth noting and commonality is at best fleeting. Yet most commentators and the developing myth of 30 plus years of fatuous generalizations by public officials and scholars project a commonality of interests that is rarely achievable even by regions in a unitary state.

The continuing problem of the Atlantic Alliance has been the development of compatible policies absent common interest. For decades such compatibility was relatively easily achieved because of the enormous disparity of American military and economic power and the relative weakness of the Soviet Union. The Hungarian rebellion, disarray in the German Democratic Republic and Poland and the walling in of East Berlin were scarcely menacing to Western Europe.

In the eighties commonality is less likely to develop because of

competing stresses in the economic, military and political spheres. Economically, the US position is no longer clearly paramount. To cite one indicator, GNP per capita, the US led in 1960 and 1970 with \$2805 and \$4789, respectively, but fell to 10th place in 1980 with \$11,364 per capita. The relative decline of the US was more than offset by accelerated appreciation of West German, Swiss, French and Swedish fortunes, for example. Economically, West Europe prospered as America declined and the economic stakes for Western Europeans became more cherishable and required defending from what was perceived to be intemperate or misguided US economic policy. While the Soviet Union posed a latent military threat to West Europe, US economic policies had immediate consequences that did not reinforce allied cooperation.

The watershed for postwar US economic policy is provided by the series of events running from late 1971 to 1973 when the US devalued, demonetized and floated the dollar. The Nixon Administration yielded to a frustration that had been building for some years and had not resulted from policies largely of their making. The US dollar had been significantly over-valued and the Germans and Japanese particularly were perceived to be prospering at American expense. The American economic hegemony had been turned on its head yielding a US administration first pleading for, then cajoling and ultimately demanding corrective action that has not yet taken place. The Bretton Woods economic system was scrapped in large part and no replacement is yet in sight. Economic policy among the allies is marked by resurgent economic nationalism, neo-mercantilism and protectionism.

The enveloping disarray in international economic relations is accompanied by discordant energy policies whose pressures are currently abated by a temporary oil-glut. The present excess of energy supply over demand results in part from the global recession and from American conservation

efforts encouraged by high energy costs. But energy costs did not simply rise seeking some natural level - they increased in large part in response to US policy. The rapid decline in the dollar's value from 1971 to 1973 was a factor since oil is priced in dollars. In October, 1973, OPEC increased oil prices in part to "punish" the West for supporting Israel but also in order to recover value lost by the declining dollar. Further, the US urged Iran to press for significantly greater increases in order to provide Iran with more foreign exchange to purchase weapons and to promote conservation in the US. At its December, 1973, meeting OPEC added approximately \$7.00 to its price per barrel bringing the posted price to \$12.65. Kissinger was reported to have despaired at Congress' ability to adopt an energy policy raising prices adequate to promote conservation.

The nexus of economic and energy policies had enormous consequences for the West and provided no particular advantage for the US. The political sophistication manifested by the Nixon-Kissinger administration was not matched in the economic arena and contributed to allied determination to pursue economic and energy policies independent of the US. Confidence in American leadership was wanting; latent suspicions of American insensitivity and inadequacy were aroused, only to be compounded by dismay at Watergate which was neither understood nor appreciated in Europe. Compounding European distress concerning US leadership were the confusing alarms and signals emanating from Washington regarding Angola, Somalia, the War Powers Act, the Mayaguez incident and other indicators of American disarray. The US appeared to be a mighty giant whose muscles responded independently of nerve centers in a palsied brain.

The confusion attributed to Washington stems largely from an American tendency to treat symbol as reality and reality symbolically. Abjuring the use

of the word "detente" in his reelection campaign, President Ford signaled a change of policy that was not forthcoming. But he undermined the political concept because of his unwillingness to discuss the issue. He catered to the least informed, poorest educated elements in the electorate betraying a cavalier disregard for the substantive issue. The ignorant were not to be informed, merely pandered to in what proved to be an unavailing quest for reelection. Dismissing detente has enormous consequences particularly for the Federal Republic of Germany for whom detente is not symbolic but a political necessity. ". . . detente is indispensable for the European because any type of military conflagration would physically eliminate Europe. * * * Detente as a means of reducing military tension in Central Europe is therefore vital for the Federal Republic of Germany." (Czempiel, 1982, p. 18.)

Postulating detente as a symbol of policy permits the symbol to be treated as hostage to US-Soviet competition and conflict. In this usage, confrontation is posited as the vehicle for competing and conflictual relations likely to yield advantages for the US or the USSR in a zero-sum contest. Thus President Carter offered the Russians a choice between detente and confrontation in June, 1978.

Internally and externally, the United States could afford to debate whether the policies of detente should continue or whether a new policy of confrontation should be contemplated. In his Annapolis speech on 7 June 1978, President Carter could combine both possibilities and offer the Soviet Union a choice. But even such a debate and such a choice was already damaging to the kind of detente which had now become a constituent of German security. (Windsor, 1981, p. 10.)

As Windsor and Czempiel attest, detente for the Germans particularly and West Europeans generally is a necessary condition permitting the keeping of competition and conflict between the superpowers to manageable levels. "Confrontation" conjures up images of Europe becoming a theater of operations for possible limited war testing the resolve of the superpowers. Kissinger's

Brussels (1979) warning of the tenuous nature of the US nuclear umbrella, Carter's waffling on enhanced radiation weapons, B1 bombers, Pershing II and cruise missiles and his polar reactions to diverse Soviet policies heightened anxieties among Europeans more than did Soviet adventures in Africa, the Middle East and Afghanistan. The American euphoria attendant upon the signing of the SALT II treaty contrasts boldly to the despair and dismay generated by the Afghanistan invasion -- to Carter the greatest threat to peace since World War II. And he proclaimed detente dead, boycotted the Moscow Olympics, embargoed grain sales to the USSR and his National Security Adviser posed for pictures at the Khyber Pass. Symbolic posturing substituted for consequential policy leading to charges of incoherence and confusion.

IV.

Carter's inability to place Afghanistan in some realistic perspective was symptomatic of a condition that had been developing in the US for some time. In discussing American public opinion on foreign policy, Gabriel Almond said:

The reaction of the general population to foreign policy issues has been described as one of mood. This is to say that foreign policy attitudes among most Americans lack intellectual structure and factual content. Such superficial psychic states are bound to be unstable since they are not anchored in a set of explicit values and means calculations or traditional compulsions. (Almond, 1960, p. 69.)

Almond addressed the difficulty posed for US leaders in securing support for foreign policies from a volatile, fickle public. He did not anticipate the problems posed by leaders seeking to get to the front ranks of the crowd. Incessant sampling of public opinion to determine how prospective choices will "play in Peoria" bear little if any relationship to the constraints of power and responsibility, traditional or conventional methods of addressing issues and events or to the problem of contextual conformance.

That the lack of intellectual structure and factual content noted by

Almond applies to recent American leadership, not merely the public, is evidenced by the following excerpt from President Carter's interview by ABC-TV's Frank Reynolds about Brezhnev's reply to Carter's protest note on the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan:

Q. Have you changed your perception of the Russians in the time that you've been here? You started out, it seemed to a great many people, believing that if you expressed your good will and demonstrated it that they would reciprocate.

A. My opinion of the Russians has changed most drastically in the last week than even the previous two and a half years before that. It's only now dawning on the world the magnitude of the action that the Soviets undertook in invading Afghanistan. This is a circumstance that I think is now causing even former close friends and allies of the Soviet Union to re-examine their opinion of what the Soviets might have in mind. (New York Times, Jan. 1, 1980, p. 4.)

Chancellor Schmidt had chronic difficulty dealing with the Carter administration's seeming indifference to time-honored modes of interaction. As Henry Brandon reported, commenting upon Carter's neutron bomb cancellation decision following Schmidt's public commitment of support: "What has profoundly upset Schmidt is what is perceived here (Bonn) as a basic and misguided change in US foreign policy toward the western allies; namely Carter's reluctance to assume responsibility for the stationing of medium-range nuclear ballistic missiles in Europe." (Brandon, 1979, p. A7.) Carter's response to Schmidt's Alistair Buchan lecture (October, 1977) was to say that if the Europeans want such a special deterrent, they should assume full responsibility for it. This amounted to cavalier disregard for the set of events and negotiations which led to the German renunciation of a nuclear role as a condition of German remilitarization. American leadership was called into question and found wanting as being essentially irrelevant to the sweep of events.

Little reassurance has been provided to the Europeans since the Reagan Administration's Inauguration in January, 1981. The level of intellectual structure and factual content can scarcely have been said to have been elevated by such references as to Ho Chi Minh's refusal to agree to elections in Vietnam or to the discovery that Russian leaders may dissemble. Far more significant are statements as to the likelihood of a nuclear war in Europe in which the US might not participate, windows of vulnerability and declaration of a clear edge to the Russians in nuclear weapons. Careful analysis casts serious doubts upon such notions of superiority suggesting that they maybe rooted in ideological rather than analytical concepts. While it is yet early to evaluate the Reagan foreign policy, preliminary observations yield suspicions that the policy may be ideologically driven, that the rhetoric is congruent with the policy. When this occurs, symbols take precedence over reality raising questions of the relevance of American leadership for the Western Alliance.

The emergence of the concept "globalism" raises questions that may affect profoundly the American role in Europe. Globalism, the generational successor linkage, posits a global conflict with the USSR as the overriding reality of world politics. Questions of theater nuclear forces, Polish inviolability, Salvadoran revolution and Afghanistan suppression merge with situations in Angola, Namibia, the West Bank, and so forth to the end that they overwhelm analysis with a blurring of vision. Globalism deprives the opportunity of isolating conflicts to contain their impact and permit the development of proximate solutions. Globalism requires the generalization of conflicts that are better dealt with specifically if at all.

Superimposing superpower competition into the civil war in El Salvador denies legitimacy to local factions and disputes, justifies external

mischief-making and frustrates attempts to contain, control and ultimately resolve the conflict. And it jeopardizes key allies such as Germany whose security can only be achieved by detente which requires that conflicts be managed, controlled, isolated and, hopefully quarantined.

American predilections to view regional conflicts in global terms projects US-USSR confrontation in unlikely and inappropriate places and confuses allies with non-allies and even with states juxtaposed against allied states, such as the Warsaw Pact's Poland. And it focusses attention upon symbolic problems while practical problems cry out for attention and solution. Economic relations among the principal trading partners which are mainly the Western allies must be regulated by a normative system such as Bretton Woods. Problems of energy availability, access and price must be addressed seriously, not left subject to mindless demands that Europeans refuse to import Soviet gas. And the exponential increase of nuclear weapons stationed in and trained upon Europe must be addressed.

The disdain for power expressed in the elections of Reagan and Carter, among others, yields exaggerated pretense of higher, loftier ideals triumphing over crass politics. It confuses an electorate bombarded by such frequent and false images that it cannot distinguish ignorance from wisdom and tends to value them equally. And it results in a foreign policy-making process wherein the Foreign Service often becomes irrelevant if not hostile to the wishes of the President and his ministers. Kissinger's neutering of Secretary Rogers and sandbagging of the American SALT I negotiating team subverted the very policy process he headed. What can we call a process whereby such a skillful practitioner subverts himself in order to curry favor with his boss regardless of the effect upon policies and people?

Perhaps it is the ultimate achievement of an advertising culture that yields a populace unable to distinguish between ideological claptrap and instrumental policy. Or are America's embattled, bloodied Marines really noncombatant bystanders in Lebanon?

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