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WITWATERSRAND : BETWEEN PAST AND FUTURE

A POSTSCRIPT TO THE AGE OF VASCO DA GAMA: SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL SCENE

An address delivered by Professor Max Beloff, Gladstone Professor of Government and Public Administration and Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford, in the Dorothy Susskind Auditorium of the University of the Witwatersrand, on Monday, August 29th, 1966.

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The lecture is one of a series to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the founding of the city of Johannesburg and the 70th anniversary of the founding of the predecessor of the University of the Witwatersrand, the South African School of Mines, at Kimberley.

I should like to begin this lecture by thanking the University of the Witwatersrand not so much for the invitation to deliver it - since that imposes on me a responsibility about which I feel very diffident, but for its hospitality to me over the past few weeks, and for the opportunity thus provided to learn something about the city and country which it is the University's purpose to serve. No impartial observer from overseas can fail to be impressed by the way in which this University has struggled to maintain the universal values of the academy in a not wholly friendly or even wholly understanding environment. One must I think be particularly impressed by the burden which these circumstances place upon the students here who have to add to the normal claims made by study at an advanced level the additional and voluntary task of upholding through example and precept those elementary rules of human equality, the observation of which is essential to the good name of any academic institution in the modern world. I think myself that it is a pity from many points of view that the responsibilities and even risks inherent in this position should fall so heavily upon the young, but find it not difficult to understand why it cannot be otherwise. I can only add that so long as Universities in other countries can be assured that this devotion to academic freedom in its broadest sense is fully shared and upheld by the teaching and governing bodies of the University there is no reason why any obstacles should exist to the movement of scholars between this University and faculties abroad, including those of the Universities of the United Kingdom, whatever political arguments may be adduced to the contrary.

But my contribution to this series is not concerned with this important topic of the role and responsibility of Universities. Your celebrations concern both City and University and my starting-point must be the city and its founding. The consequences of the founding of Johannesburg and of the contemporaneous development of the great industry upon which it has thrived are writ large upon the history of South Africa and have because of the chain of political events they set in motion powerfully affected the history of Britain itself. To South Africans the events of the quarter-century that followed the founding of your city remain all absorbing - perhaps too all absorbing in view of the very different problems that now confront them. But those same years also set for Britain the pattern of the debate over matters of Empire and Commonwealth that is still not altogether closed. And yet even this theme is likely to seem parochial to later historians. For the coming together of British and continental European entrepeneurs and adventurers on the territory of a pastoral Republic itself of European origin but in latitudes very far from Europe and within quite another ethnic and cultural sphere is only one incident in a much wider process by which over some centuries the affairs of Europe - its greeds, ambitions and ideals, spilled over into a wider world. And it is this reflection about the origins of Johannesburg that I take as the starting point of an attempt to suggest that its past and future is indissoluble from that of the wider world in which its fate is ineluctably cast. Neither the Witwatersrand nor South Africa can contract out of history.

In his book, "Asia and Western Dominance" published in 1953, the Indian scholar and diplomat, the late K.M. Panikkar put forward the view that "the four hundred and fifty years which began with the arrival of Vasco da Gama in Calicut (in 1498) and ended with the withdrawal of British forces from India and of European navies from China in 1949, constitute a clearly marked epoch of history". (1) The fundamental aspects of what he calls the da Gama epoch may in his view be briefly stated: "the dominance of of maritime power over the land masses of Asia; the imposition of a commercial economy over communities whose economic life in the past had been based not on international trade, but mainly on agricultural production and internal trade; and thirdly the domination of the peoples of Europe who held

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1. K.M. Panikkar, Asia and Western Dominance. (London 1953).p.11

the mastery of the seas, over the affairs of Asia". (2)

As Panikkar himself points out the same domination of the maritime powers of the Atlantic brought about the European conquest and colonization of the New World - though, one must add, with different results. Finally, since Vasco da Gama's predecessor as the leading Portuguese navigator, Bartholomew Diaz had reached the Cape of Good Hope in 1487 and since Africa also was to experience European penetration from its coasts into the interior one could conclude that the Vasco da Gama epoch might be regarded as an epoch in world history rather than Asian history alone. During that period most of the rest of the globe was not only drawn into an economic and political system of which Europe was the core, but was opened up to the penetration of European religion, European science and technology, and European theories and practice in social relations and in the realm of public affairs.

We do not know enough about human societies to explain all the reasons for this extraordinary outburst of inventive ingenuity and capacity for discovering new institutional forms that lay behind the expanionist achievements of the maritime countries of Europe and later of the North Americans in the centuries that followed the Portuguese discoveries. Nor would I wish to minimise the negative aspects of the record; the destruction of other societies, the damage to other civilizations, the reckless dissipation of human and natural resources that accompanied the process of conquest and colonisation. From the point of view of the student of international relations - if that rather ambiguous term be permitted - one thing does stand out very clearly, and that is that the events that make up the history of the Age of Vasco da Gama and the structure of power that existed during it was, as Panikkar pointed out, based on the pre-eminence of maritime over land-communications. It was control of the sea that permitted the Europeans and latterly the North Americans to exercise economic and political control over distant lands, and it was the competition between the different maritime empires - and in particular between their navies - that determined the political and with it the commercial contours of most of the world.

For this reason those elements in the make-up of a country that were most conducive to maritime enterprise outweighed in importance many other factors - size of population, extent and fertility of soil and so forth. Upon the basis of this experience and in particular in the light of the outcome of the Anglo-French conflicts of the eighteenth century, theories of sea-power such as those of Admiral Hahan and his school came to dominate much of the West's strategic and political thought in the closing decades of the last century and at the beginning of the present one.

But already the conditions that made for the unquestioned pre-eminence of the maritime Powers were on the way to disappearing. The railway and the internal combustion engine were redressing the balance of communications in favour of overland routes as against the longer passage by sea. The growing complexity and weight of armaments, land as well as sea, were making the size of a country's industrial base the central factor in its ability to exert power externally. Some of the implications of these changes were glimpsed by the English geographer Halford Mackinder and his book Democratic Ideals and Reality, published in 1919, became the inspiration of first the German, and then the American school of geopoliticians.

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2. K.M. Panikkar, Asia and Western Dominance. (London 1953).p.12

But Mackinder was writing too soon for a real appreciation of the changes made by air-power and the way in which it would affect relations between land and sea-powers. The ability of navies to use aircraft launched from ships may have prevented for some time a full realisation of the change that had been made. And similarly with nuclear weapons, the age of land-based immobile launching sites is giving away already to that of the missile-firing submarine. But the submarine as a launcher of atomic weapons is not exercising naval power in the old sense. Indeed atomic weapons have altered the whole basis of international relations in an even more fundamental way than any of the changes we have touched upon.

One must be careful even here not to overestimate a single factor of this kind. It is of course true that a nuclear war between major powers would destroy so much of the planet's life and reduce the rest to so low a standard that human history might either end for good, or at least have to begin all over again; to say nothing of genetic mutations. But the possibility of man-made catastrophe does not as we know dominate every one's mind all of the time. We have to assess the changes brought about by the existence of nuclear weapons after first enumerating some of the others that would, even without them, have altered for good our picture of the world.

We have for instance to estimate the effect of the changes in the basic elements of human demography since we now possess for the first time in human history both the scientific means for raising the human life-expectancy to something near its biological maximum and those which make it possible more easily than in the past to restrict the number of births. But while the effects of the first set of discoveries have spread and are spreading with quite extraordinary rapidity, the diffusion of the second has come up against many obstacles: economic, social, religious, ideoligical. In almost all countries fewer babies die and adults live longer: in only some countries are fewer babies born. The result is therefore not only a population explosion which makes anxieties about so-called food surpluses quite absurd, but a population explosion which is very unevenly felt around the globe. Our understandable worries over the future of India and Latin America, our fears about China as a possibly expansionist power both spring from this source.

Other changes too were in progress well before the explosion of the first atomic bomb. Indeed the victories that Japan achieved before this dire event befell her may in retrospect seem even more important. For it was they that heralded the end of the age of Vasco da Gama in the sense in which we may equate it with an age of European domination. They showed that it was not necessary to be a European nation or one of European or even partially European stock to be able to make full use of western technology. If the ability to manipulate not merely technology in the strict sense but also the complex administrative and economic organisation that is needed to make modern technology effective was not something which demanded a white skin and a Christian past, then many cherished assumptions would have to be revised.

Nevertheless we must again not jump too easily to a connection between cause and effect. The relinquishment of sovereignty by the major European powers over their dependencies in other continents that has taken place with such breath-taking rapidity over the last twenty-five years had not been due to a reversal in the balance of military and industrial power. Japan still remains the only non-European country to have adapted western techniques with marked success. Indeed in many respects so far from a levelling-up in the balance of the Continents we have seen the reverse. As technology has advanced, as economic enterprise has demanded a larger and larger scale of operations for full efficiency, so has the divergence of

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the standards of living between the advanced and the so-called under-developed or developing countries continued to grow. And disparities in standards of living are matched by equal disparities in political and military power.

The retreat of Europe by which one means not simply the abandonment of political control but the large scale repatriation of settler-populations of European descent, which may well be followed by a similar re-gathering of other diasporas - Indian and Chinese - that came into being in the shadow of European expansionism - is not a retreat which can be explained as a response to uncontrollable external pressures. It must be explained in psychological terms - in terms of a massive loss of self-confidence.

It is not difficult to see why this loss of self-confidence should have occurred at the time it did. In their entering upon, and still more in their conduct of the two world wars, the European peoples forfeited in their own as well as in the world's estimation any claims to moral superiority that they might otherwise have put forward. The fact that one European nation embarked upon a policy of naked racialism culminating in mass-exterminations was bound to rebound to the discredit of all them. If the European countries still had the same confidence in the superiority of their culture as had the British rulers of India in the age of Macaulay, it is hard to believe that their retreat would have been so precipitate - a greater love of ease, an unwillingness to make material sacrifices would not alone be sufficient to explain it.

One piece of evidence might be the fact that the Americans have not shown the same reluctance as Europeans to pursue their own policies - although the powerful traditions of isolationism and anti-imperialism have prevented them from accepting direct political responsibilities outside their borders. If one needs further proof that it is a psycholigical rather than a material evolution that is in question, one has only to look at the one European country which has been unaffected by this change of mood. For the Russians their innate conviction of the superiority of their own form of industrial society over Asian ways is fortified by their ideology. For this reason they have managed in Soviet Central Asia to retain under their rule considerable number of non-European peoples and to embark upon a steady process of assimilation.

Soviet Central Asia is the last European Empire of any importance; and it is perhaps because of the fact that there is not the slightest indication of any compromise as to its future that its existence passes unchallenged by the powerful anti-colonial bloc at the United Nations.

Another important change in the contemporary world brought about first by the European expansion, and subsequently accelerated in the course of the European retreat, has been the destruction of traditional social forms and their replacement, where they are replaced at all, by the cement of nationalism alone. Once authority passes from traditional rulers to the educated classes - what some people call the intelligentsia - nationalism becomes the only sanction that these governments possess. It may not always be called nationalism. But what passes under the name of socialism or democracy even in so many new States is in fact, little more than nationalism. And if the boundaries of a new State either fall short of, or go beyond, those of the national group with which it is identified, one has at once a prime cause of further instability.

What is true of the transmutation of democracy and socialism is of course true of other ideas and institutions of European origin. Although

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Europeans before 1914 may not have thought that their political mastery in the rest of the world would last for ever, they did expect permanently to implant their own ideas and fundamental institutions. And for a time they seemed to be justified. The former British possessions all began independence with constitutions on the Westminster model, just as the states of Latin America having no Spanish model available began by trying to follow the example of Washington. But in most cases the emergence of very different patterns of government and behaviour, and of a very different attitude to the law and to politics was very rapid indeed.

It could be argued once again, that this is largely a domestic matter, that from the international point of view it is the actual number of independent States produced by the retreat from Empire that is more important than their internal structures. And this might indeed be the case were it not for yet another fact of great importance, and that is the urge towards the creation of new international institutions and the very different picture that these present as a result of the Second World war and the accompanying shifts in the locus of power. The League of Nations and the Hague Court of the inter-war years like the International Labour Organization and the lesser international bodies of the period were all ultimately expressions of the old idea of the concert of Europe. They implicitly accepted the view that Europe lay at the centre of world affairs and that the principal European governments shared a common interest in the prevention of conflict and in the existence of a stable international order. The United States, it is true, stood aloof for the most part; but at least its general sympathy could be assumed.

Action outside Europe for a body so constituted and inspired was virtually impossible as the course of the Sino-Japanese conflict amply illustrated. Closer at hand, it was almost as difficult to deal with with a European Great Power that repudiated both the authority and the ideology of the Concert. It was therefore right that the makers of the United Nations should try to build the new organization on the basis of what they believed was a realistic assessment of where power would now lie. In its original form the Charter represented an institutionalization of the wartime Grand Alliance itself.

Its failure to achieve its purposes has derived in part from a mistaken assessment of the original opportunities. The strength of the Soviet ideology was too strong to permit any combination of it with even the most tentative steps towards supra-nationalism, as was proved by the Soviet Union's attitude towards the efforts of Mr. Hammarskjoeld, and Mr. Khruschev's statement that there are neutral countries but no neutral men. The United Nations was therefore bound to become a focus of Great Power rivalry and no attempts to circumvent the Charter by enhancing the authority of the General Assembly, or of the Secretary-General could get round this fact. The only result of attempting to do so was the financial impasse, still unresolved. The same ideological incompatibility led to the exclusion of the actual government of China in favour of a regime in exile with no prospect of restoration. So the United Nations ceased to have the advantages of universalism without acquiring those of homogeneity.

Today most member countries accept neither the idea of the gradual diminution of national sovereignty, nor the alternative Soviet ideal of a single world communist society. In so far as they are not moved merely by passion or resentment against real or fancied wrongs, they are understandably members of it mainly for the sake of what advantages they can secure for themselves in respect of assistance from the Great Powers. An inability arising from circumstance to respect the slow processes of constitutionalism in their internal affairs is paralleled by a high degree of

impatience where international matters are concerned.

One could therefore say that the contemporary world is one in which there is a great discrepancy between the largely material motivation which figures in the forefront of discussions on political questions and actual political behaviour especially though not exclusively on the international plane. Statesmen talk as though their chief object was to raise the standard of living of the peoples for whom they are responsible; and all the talk is of development and planning. Yet much of what they do is clearly the result of feelings or desires that have little if anything to do with direct economic issues. Examples are so numerous that it would be tedious to list them.

It cannot for instance be denied that one result of technological progress is to increase the size of the rational unit for action. With the growing importance of the industrial base as the infra-structure of military power there has been a tendency for the number of "Great Powers" to decrease until at present only two States fully deserve that appellation. In the pre-1914 world there were seven or eight with such claims. The falling off of their number was true even before the coming of nuclear weapons. Even if, as I have suggested, brute numbers of population are also relevant the argument for bigness is not invalidated. And what is true in power-politics is equally true in the economic field.

Therefore one has seen alongside the breaking-up of Empires the attempt to create new large political units of which the European Communities represent the most successful example, if still only an embryonic one. But outside Western Europe even this measure of success has nowhere been attained; and the West European example was so favoured by external stimuli that one cannot be certain of its durability in a very different context to that of the late 1940's or mid-1950's. Indeed one major partner in the effort repudiates the ideology if not the institution.

Nor would it be sufficient - though it would be encouraging - if this movement were successful within the limited scope of western continental Europe. It would still leave unaffected and perhaps even affected for the worse other areas of the world where prospects for even growth and much more doubtful. Nor does it seem that economic rationality necessarily succeeds even when it has an ideological underpinning. The obvious recalcitrance that the countries of Eastern Europe are showing towards the central planning of their affairs as a unit is not without relevance.

Usually nowadays one refers to the element of irrationality simply as "nationalism" once more. But this is of course an oversimplification. It is obvious that there is a sense in which some communities of action are more favourable situated than others to produce both the results of collective action and individual satisfactions. In the relatively recent past such collectivities have usually been those we know as nations, and these have on the whole shown greater stayingpower than empires or other multiple forms of community. But there are obvious instances when the power of an idea has sufficed to transcend what would otherwise seem to be national barriers. Elsewhere we have seen new nations come into being often as a result of previous constraint and forcible embrace of imperial rule.

One's impression of the present age is that it is not only one of imperial retreat but also one in which the undoubted constructive aspects of nationalism have their darker side in the mutual intolerance of national groups and the consequent weaknesses of all plural societies. It looks as though the prelude to political construction must be a recognition of the valid claims to the autonomous though not necessarily separate development of the national groups out of which one hopes little by little to build a more rational order on a regional or ultimately a world basis. But we must recognise that

this process of disentanglement even when inescapable carries with it the possibilities of impoverishment, cultural as well as material.

Furthermore, this process nowhere proceeds in a vacuum. For the other principal feature of the present age is the instantaneity of communication and the identification that the people of one grouping can so easily come to feel with the fortunes and misfortunes of another. The most massive efforts at self-isolation such as the Soviet Union has practised for almost half a century and China for nearly two decades are clearly destined to prove ineffective though they have certainly proved more effective than some people in the West at one time believed possible.

We are too close to the events of our own times to recognise the content of the ideas which will in the long run prove dominant. The defination of what is tolerable to the world community would be something upon which it would not be possible to find agreement as things are. But one could hazard a guess that there are some actions and some beliefs that will oneday be regarded in the same way as modern Europeans look back upon the activities of the Spanish Inquisition or the witch-burnings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Freedom of belief - including freedom of unbelief - has slowly made its way in the world though it has a long way to go. In similar fashion, the belief that the various branches of the human race can be classified as biologically superior or inferior will come to be recognised as mere superstition. This is not to say that all human groupings have so far showed equal potential in all respects. But it certainly means that no individual's potential can be regarded as limited by his physical characteristics. And following from this comes the inescapable conclusion that no social order which treats individuals unequally upon this basis has any long term hope of survival. Such situations have been created in the wake of the movements of peoples set on foot during the age of Vasco da Gama - and in almost every continent. Nor was this the first example in human history of the results of conquest. Certainly one cannot foresee in each separate case how a situation so created may come to an end; that it can come to an end anywhere without penalties falling on the innocent seems all too unlikely. But of two things we can be certain; first that the international community weak though it is has a sufficient interest in the liquidation of such situations for no government devoted to disorientation to be able for ever to retain unhampered jurisdiction; and second that no permanent stability in a country's, a continent's, or a world's affairs, can be taken for granted until such moves towards equality have been made. Only rationality can drive out irrationalism; never a counter-irrationalism.

The existence of situations which affront the embryonic collective consciousness of the civilized world is only one of the reasons for the high degree of irrationality that marks our era, and we know too little of what drives human societies along the paths they follow to have any certainties in a field such as this: certainly the mere student of politics has little to offer by way of explanation.

We cannot yet explain to ourselves with any degree of conviction the appalling events of which Europe has been the scene in our own lifetimes, and much research is still needed despite the human urge to forget. How much less can Europeans be certain of what moves men of other races, in other climes, with different social and religious and family environments! These are some of the reasons which impel one to insist that the atom bomb was not simply an addition to man's armoury that might have come into being at any time with the same consequences. It is rather the ultimate product of industrial society at a particular point in its development, and its effects upon international relations are only to be understood in the light of the kind of world which has had to cope with it and which has so far failed to do so.

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It is important to say this because the strategic literature which has grown up around the problem of atomic weapons in the last few years, particularly in the United States, tends in part to minimize the importance of the actual political environment in favour of a language of abstractions or symbols. This kind of writing suggests that atomic warfare is a kind of chess, but one in which the loss of a pawn may signify the wiping-out of a city and the loss of a piece the annihilation of millions of human beings and the turning of vast areas into sterile wastes. Nothing could be further from reality than the "games-theory" of strategy. Nuclear strategy if it is not to end in mutual annihilation depends far more on an understanding of individual and collective human behaviour that it does on the knowledge of fissile materials or missile propellants. Any study of the Cuba crisis - our only case-history so far - must prove this to be so.

Equally dangerous as I have suggested is the assumption that may come naturally to historians of the military art that the nuclear weapon only is another development in the long story of weapon-improvement, bearing the same relation to conventional explosives as did the cross-bow to the long-bow. For this assumes that as in previous cases a new weapon will produce a new form of defence against it, so that the initial advantage to the offence is wiped out. Science has made too many leaps in our time for a non-scientist to be categorical about anything; and it may be that in the fullness of time - if humanity survives that long - science will discover measures of defence against both the bomb as such and all possible means of delivery. Indeed as a theoretical exercise we know this to be possible. But the two things would both be necessary; and what is more the defence would have to be absolute for defence to be meaningful. That is itself a new factor since previous forms of defence have been successful if even a modest percentage of achievement could be guaranteed. And this was true even of the bombing plane in the last war. For atomic weapons this does not hold good. Even if one missile with a hydrogen warhead gets through out of a hundred that are launched, the attacker's objective will have been accomplished. Meanwhile attempts to crack such defences are likely to impose ever new burdens on the people concerned.

But even supposing this absolute defence to be a theoretical possibility this is of no immediate relevance; from our point of view the possessor of atomic weapons and of adequate means of delivery is today in a position of not merely relative advantage over an enemy, but of absolute advantage; and all depends upon his will to make use of it.

We are then in a different and new dimension of war and of diplomacy; and this had many consequences, as we have been discovering; though not all of them are clear to peoples, or even to soldiers and statesmen whose opinions and mental attitudes have been formed in a different world. I can only indicate the principal consequences. Some are more obvious than others.

First of all, there is clearly no answer at present to the threat of nuclear weapons other than the deterrence implicit in another country's possession of similar striking power. And deterrence to be meaningful can probably only be exercised by a Power of similar size to the one to be deterred. The situation between the United States and the Soviet Union is one of mutual deterrence; but it is very doubtful whether a small and crowded West European country can deter one of the giant Powers.

In the second place, this has consequences for Alliance policy. In previous periods it was possible to add together the contributions of allies and establish a numerical equivalent between two sets of opposing armies or navies. In relation to deterrence the contribution of non-nuclear

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members of an Alliance is limited to the facilities which they may be able to offer the nuclear forces of their partners. And with the emergence of the submarine as the normal vehicle for strategic missiles this is not as important as it used to be as the French now argue in their withdrawal from integration. The inequalities in an Alliance are thus qualitative, and not quantative, and this has unavoidable implications for policy-making.

But it also has the effect of minimizing the differences between allies and neutrals. In other words, what protects a non-nuclear Power against the pressure of atomic blackmail is the existence of other nuclear Powers which are prepared to extend their protection to it even without any reciprocity, because they would regard its falling into the control of the opposing camp as being inimical to their own interest. Any discussion of the defence of India in the light of China's progress towards becoming a nuclear Power gives clear evidence of this fact.

The difference between being allied and being "non-aligned" lies in not the difference in the degree of protection but in the degree of consultation to which Allies alone may aspire. But here too the evidence is that the nuclear Powers will not feel bound to consult their Allies in the event of a direct threat to their national interests. The Cuba crisis was a direct confrontation between two Powers only.

It is very hard for statesmen to avoid talking in obsolete language, and to express resentment at the consequences of this new situation; but words do not alter things. The various devices discussed within the Atlantic Alliance for sharing a small number of nuclear weapons in this or that fashion do not alter the essentials of the picture.

Furthermore from the point of view of preserving peace which depends in part about precise calculations as to the interests and intentions of other Powers, the fewer countries with nuclear weapons the better. The greater the number of them, the higher will be the chances of a fatal miscalculation. And this is equally true of any moves towards disarmament and arms control; and one could add in parenthesis here, that the need for measures of disarmament for economic and social as well as for political reasons is still a first priority in the search for a more rational world.

We may arrive at the conclusion that the dominant role of nuclear weapons in strategic thinking tends to diminish the value of mere Alliances, but to enhance the benefits of forming larger political communities in which decisions can be taken on behalf of the whole be accepted political processes. On the other hand, the fact that larger political communities would solve certain problems by no means implies that this makes the communities themselves any easier to bring into being.

Enlightened self-interest may visualize the ultimate objectives; but our capacities for thinking out the intermediate steps and the will to take them may still be lacking. Nor is there any lack of powerful arguments against the creation of large multinational States. The speed of positive action of which a medium-sized nation-State is capable cannot easily be duplicated. Even a relatively homogeneous democracy like the United States is, except under the immediate stress of war, extremely difficult to govern successfully; and its political processes are ordinarily subject to very great delays. Perhaps this is more true of matters of domestic welfare than in the international or defence sphere; but the two are indissolubly connected and since the ultimate strength of a Government depends upon the consensus of the citizens, to make this harder is to reduce the energies of Government.

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There are some further reflections on the role of atomic weapons and their impact upon the international scene which must now be made, and which relate to the existing political constellation rather than to some future goal. Anyone looking at the history of the period since 1945 must come up with two observations. In the first place, a number of incidents which could hardly have avoided leading to war between the major Powers in the pre-nuclear age have proved capable of solution, either by direct diplomacy or simply by the fact of their being ignored once the original burst of indignation has been ritually celebrated. One reason is clearly the existence of nuclear weapons themselves and the much greater risk inherent in recourse to war. But what this does mean is that political boundaries in cases where the Great Powers feel their interests to be involved are much harder to shift than ever before.

With the exception of the Trieste affair there has been no change in any European frontier since the immediately post-war period. It is not a very long stretch of time but I suspect there are few others as long in modern European history without territorial changes. In other words in a Continent where the regimes themselves can control their own internal security either by virtue of their own strength or with the aid of an Allied or occopying army there is a strong presumption in favour of the duration of the status quo; and even if such security collapses for a time (as during the Hungarian revolution of 1956) the chances are much against external intervention to upset the existing distribution of Power. It is hard to see how any changes at all can be brought about except with the agreement of the Great Powers based upon their acceptance of the fact that a new situation would suit them better than the existing one. In such circumstances the role of conventional military forces becomes a different one - their main purpose is to control minor incidents and to deter minor probes.

The other observation is the directly contrary one. While Europe is unusually peaceful, much of the rest of the world is subject to an unusual degree of violence. There has over the same period been hardly a day in which fighting somewhere has not been reported in the press; not a day in which some lives have not been lost to international or civil violence. One can see that this is in part due to what I began by describing: the replacement of former imperial regimes by new Governments less capable of keeping violence at home in check, and less willing to seek to compromise their claims abroad.

But this is not new; power vacuums following the erosion or collapse of imperial structures are not new in history. These are more dangerous today however because other developments in arms - at the opposite end of the scale from nuclear weapons and missiles - give an unusual advantage to the attacker provided he does not exceed the scale of guerilla warfare.

In the past what had ended situations of this kind was the arrival on the scene of new and stronger military and empire-building Powers from outside. But here the existence of nuclear weapons acts as an inhibition. One cannot keep order with an arsenal of nuclear weapons. At most one can try to use the threat of them to prevent assistance to the forces of disorder from coming in from outside. But no democracy certainly, and perhaps no State of any kind is going to take such risks where its vital interests are not clearly engaged. And so far, all such cases except that of Cuba since the end of the Korean War have been in countries fortunately remote from the main areas of concern to the two Great Powers in whose hands the ultimate decisions still lie.

Such violence has become so endemic that Europeans may perhaps respond too sluggishly to the threat to the general peace that it implies.

The dangers in respect of local violence seem to me to be increased rather than diminished by what from other points of view is often regarded in the West as a favourable turn of events: the unhealed split between China and Russia and within the world communist movement as a whole.

Not only may the Chinese themselves be willing to take risks from which the Russians might shrink but the competition for allegiance in the Communist movement might lead the Russians themselves into more active courses in order to prove their right to leadership. The strangle-hold of Marxist analysis and language is still such as perhaps to lead the Russians into errors of calculation both as to local conditions and as to what the United States and its allies are prepared to tolerate.

Once an atomic war broke out in the present stage of technology it is hard to see how it could be restricted or controlled. There is thus every reason for countries without direct interests in the more crucial regions to give what aid they can through the assignment of forces, or the payment of the expenses of such forces, wherever it is possible for the United Nations to engage in peace-keeping operations. It is disturbing to find how few of the "middle" and smaller powers fully accept their responsibilities for such action, and how many are prepared to let the United States and one or two other countries bear the main burden where peace-keeping is concerned.

But it would be idle to pretend for the reason I have already given either that all areas of actual or possible conflict are suitable for United Nations action, or that the United Nations cannot be inhibited from action by the hostility of some Powers to such an extension of United Nations responsibilities, One must not think of United Nations operations as more than palliatives - minimizing violence while people have time to study the situation, to reconcile themselves to facts, and perhaps even to change their minds.

It is clear that in the long run it will be necessary, if humanity is to survive for all Powers - Russia and China no less than the western countries - to accept the limitations upon national policies and even ideological motives that are inherent in the existence of weapons of mass-destruction in a divided and crowded world. To assume that our objectives should, or could, become identical is to demand utopia. The best we can hope for is some agreement, tacit before it becomes explicit, on what limitations upon action we must agree to accept. Short of a world government with a world monopoly of nuclear weapons (that seems out of the question except as the result of the very conflict that it is intended to avoid) there is no other way of preserving and fortifying the peace.

It may well be that most of the constructive efforts we can make for improving the conditions of life must be within the narrow framework of the nation-State, or at best within the communities formed by the combination of like-minded States. But unless our progress along these lines is matched by equal progress along the path of breaking down the barriers between the great human blocs - racial and ideological - it is idle to pretend that this by itself points out the road to safety. Indeed we should always examine proposals for action on the lesser scale to see whether they are likely to impede action on the greater. The fate of the world depends even more than in the pre-atomic age on inter-bloc rather than intra-bloc politics. And while statesmen may feel that too much insistence upon this fact alienates their peoples and limits their own possibilities of holding power or wielding it for the common good, it is the business of the academic student of politics constantly to remind them and the public of the disagreeable truths that so rarely figure in parliamentary debates or election speeches.

12. Our/.........

Our enemies are not the atoms not even atomic weapons; they are passion and ignorance. Passions may be partially outside our control but as academics our business is to detect and defeat ignorance.

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Collection Number: A1132

Collection Name: Patrick LEWIS Papers, 1949-1987

PUBLISHER:

Publisher: **Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa**
Location: **Johannesburg**
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