Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.

FOREIGN POLICY AND THE AMERICAN CHARACTER

Foreign policy is the face a nation wears to the world. The minimal motive is the same for all states—the protection of national integrity and interest. But the manner in which a state practices foreign policy is greatly affected by national peculiarities.

The United States is not exempt from these unimpeachable generalities. As Henry James, an early American specialist in international relations, once put it, "It's a complex fate, being an American." The American character is indeed filled with contradiction and paradox. So, in consequence, is American foreign policy. No paradox is more persistent than the historic tension in the American soul between an addiction to experiment and a susceptibility to ideology.

On the one hand, Americans are famous for being a practical people, preferring fact to theory, finding the meaning of propositions in results, regarding trial and error, not deductive logic, as the path to truth. "In no country in the civilized world," wrote Tocqueville, "is less attention paid to philosophy than in the United States." And, when Americans developed a distinctive philosophy, it was of course the pragmatism of William James. James perceived a pluralist universe where men can discover partial and limited truths—truths that work for them—but where no one can gain an absolute grip on ultimate truth. He stood against monism—the notion that the world can be understood from a single point of view. He stood against the assumption that all virtuous principles are in the end reconcilable; against faith in a single body of unified dogma; in short, against the delusions of ideology.

Yet at the same time that Americans live by experiment, they also show a recurrent vulnerability to spacious generalities. This is not altogether surprising. The American colonists, after all, were nurtured on one of the most profound and exacting ideologies ever devised—the theology of Calvin—and they passed on to their

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Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Albert Schweitzer Professor in the Humanities at the City University of New York, is working on a book about Franklin D. Roosevelt and the coming of the Second World War. This article is adapted from the Cyril Foster Lecture delivered at Oxford University in May 1983.

descendants a certain relish in system and abstraction. The ideas of the Americans, as Tocqueville found in the 1830s, "are all either extremely minute and clear or extremely general and vague." The Calvinist cast of mind saw America as the redeemer nation. It expressed itself in the eighteenth century in Jonathan Edwards' theology of Providence, in the nineteenth century in John Calhoun's theology of slavery, in the twentieth century in Woodrow Wilson's vision of world order and in John Foster Dulles' summons to a holy war against godless communism. The propensity to ideology explains too why the theory of American internal society as expounded by some Americans—the theory of America as the triumph of immaculate and sanctified private enterprise—differs so sharply from the reality of continual government intervention in economic life.

This tension between experiment and ideology offers one way of looking at the American experience in world affairs. The Founding Fathers were hard-headed and clear-sighted men. They believed that states responded to specific national interests—and were morally obliged to do so, if there were to be regularity and predictability in international affairs. "No nation," observed George Washington, "is to be trusted farther than it is bound by its interest." They understood, moreover, that the preservation of American independence depended on the maintenance of a balance of power in Europe. "It never could be our interest," wrote John Adams, "to unite with France in the destruction of England . . . . On the other hand, it could never be our duty to unite with Britain in too great a humiliation of France."

The Jeffersonians, though sentimentally inclined to favor France against Britain, were equally hard-headed when national interest intervened. "We shall so take our distance between the two rival nations," wrote Thomas Jefferson in 1802, "as, remaining disengaged till necessity compels us, we may haul finally to the enemy of that which shall make it necessary." And in 1814, with Britain waging war against America as well as France, indeed seven months before the British captured Washington and burned the White House, Jefferson watched Napoleon's European victories with concern. "It cannot be to our interest that all Europe should be reduced to a single monarchy," he wrote. "Were he again advanced to Moscow, I should again wish him such disaster as would prevent his reaching Petersburg. And were the consequences even to be the longer continuance of our war, I would rather meet them than see the whole force of Europe wielded by a single hand." In these arresting words Jefferson defined the national interest that explains

American intervention in two world wars as well as in the present cold war.

I do not imply that the Founding Fathers were devoid of any belief in a special mission for the United States. It was precisely to protect that mission that they wished to preserve the balance of power in Europe. They hoped that the American experiment would in time redeem the world. But they did not suppose that the young republic had attained, in Alexander Hamilton's words, "an exemption from the imperfections, weaknesses, and evils incident to society in every shape." Hamilton urged his countrymen instead "to adopt as a practical maxim for the direction of our political conduct that we, as well as the other inhabitants of the globe, are yet remote from the happy empire of perfect wisdom and perfect virtue." If America was to redeem the world, it would do so by perfecting its own institutions, not by moving into other countries and setting things straight; by example, not by intervention. "She goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy," said John Quincy Adams. If ever she did, "The fundamental maxims of her policy would insensibly change from liberty to force . . . . She might become the dictatress of the world. She would no longer be the ruler of her own spirit."

The realism of the revolutionary generation was founded in the harsh requirements of a struggle for precarious independence. It was founded too in rather pessimistic conceptions of human nature and history. History taught the Founding Fathers to see the American republic itself as a risky and doubtful experiment. And the idea of experiment, by directing attention to the relation between actions and consequences in specific contexts, implied a historical approach to public affairs. Yet—another paradox—the role of the Founding Fathers was to annul history for their descendants. "We have it in our power," cried Tom Paine, "to begin the world all over again"—a proposition quoted, by the way, by President Reagan in his recent address to the evangelicals at Orlando. Once the Founders had done their work, history could start again on a new foundation and in American terms.

So the process began of an American withdrawal from secular history—or rather of an American entry into what Dean Acheson once called "a cocoon of history." This process was sustained by the fact that the men and women who populated the new world were in revolt against their own histories. It was sustained, too, by the simultaneous withdrawal of the American state from the power embroilments of the old world. The realism of the revolutionary generation faded away in the century from Waterloo to Sarajevo

when the European balance of power was maintained without American intervention. As the historical consciousness thinned out, ideology flowed into the vacuum. The very idea of power politics became repellent. The exemption from the European scramble nourished the myth of American innocence and the doctrine of American righteousness.

When America rejoined the scramble in 1898, it did so with an exalted conviction of its destiny as a redeemer nation, and no longer by example alone. The realist tradition by no means vanished. So William James protested the messianic delusion: "Angelic impulses and predatory lusts divide our heart exactly as they divide the heart of other countries." But this was for a season a minority view. When the United States entered the First World War for traditional balance-of-power reasons, Woodrow Wilson could not bring himself to admit the national interest in preventing the whole force of Europe from being wielded by a single hand. Instead he made himself the prophet of a world beyond power politics where the bad old balance of power would give way to a radiant new community of power. And he insisted on the providential appointment of the United States as "the only idealistic nation in the world," endowed with "the infinite privilege of fulfilling her destiny and saving the world."

So two strains have competed for the control of American foreign policy: one empirical, the other dogmatic; one viewing the world in the perspective of history, the other in the perspective of ideology; one supposing that the United States is not entirely immune to the imperfections, weaknesses and evils incident to all societies, the other regarding the United States as indeed the happy empire of perfect wisdom and perfect virtue, commissioned to save all mankind.

This schematic account does not do justice to the obvious fact that any American President, in order to command assent for his policies, must appeal to both reality and ideology—and that, to do this effectively, Presidents must combine the two strains not only in their speeches but in their souls. Franklin Roosevelt, the disciple at once of Admiral Mahan and of President Wilson, was supreme in marrying national interest to idealistic hope, though in the crunch interest always came first. Most postwar Presidents—Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, even Nixon—shared a recognition, alert or grudging, of the priority of power politics over ideology.

The competition between realism and ideology was complicated, however, by two developments: by the fact that the United States in the twentieth century became a great power; and by the fact that

the balance of power in the twentieth century faced the gravest possible threats. There was in 1940 a very real monster to destroy and after 1945 another very real monster to contain. These threats demanded U. S. intervention abroad and brought the tradition of isolationism to a permanent end. But the growth of American power also confirmed the messianism of those who believed in America's divine appointment. And the fact that there were a couple of real monsters roaming the world encouraged a fearful tendency to look everywhere for new monsters to destroy.

II

The present Administration represents a mighty comeback of the messianic approach to foreign policy. "I have always believed," President Reagan said last November, "that this anointed land was set apart in an uncommon way, that a divine plan placed this great continent here between the oceans to be found by people from every corner of the earth who had a special love of faith and freedom." The Reagan Administration sees the world through the prism not of history but of ideology. The convictions that presently guide American foreign policy are twofold: that the United States is infinitely virtuous and that the Soviet Union is infinitely wicked.

The Soviet Union, Mr. Reagan has proclaimed, is an "evil empire," "the focus of evil in the modern world." Everything follows by deductive logic from this premise. The world struggle is "between right and wrong and good and evil." When there is evil loose in the world, "we are enjoined by scripture and the Lord Jesus to oppose it with all our might." Negotiation with evil is futile if not dangerous. The Soviet Union is forever deceitful and treacherous. The Soviet leaders erect lying and cheating into a philosophy and are personally responsible for the world's manifold ills. "Let us not delude ourselves," Mr. Reagan has said. "The Soviet Union underlies all the unrest that is going on. If they weren't engaged in this game of dominos, there wouldn't be any hot spots in the world." Not content with the orchestration of crisis in the Third World, the Soviet Union, once it acquires a certain margin of numerical superiority in warheads, can well be expected to launch a surprise nuclear attack on American targets. Safety lies only in the establishment of unequivocal military dominance by the United States, including a first-strike capability. If this means a nuclear arms race, that is Moscow's fault, not Washington's, because America's heart is pure. In any event nuclear weapons are usable and nuclear wars are winnable. We shall prevail.

6 FOREIGN AFFAIRS

The seizure of foreign policy by a boarding-party of ideologues invites a host of dangers. Most of all you tend to get things wrong. Where the empirical approach sees the present as emerging from the past and preparing for the future, ideology is counter-historical. Its besetting sin is to substitute models for reality. No doubt the construction of models—logically reticulated, general principles leading inexorably to particular outcomes—is an exercise that may help in the delineation of problems—but not when artificial constructs are mistaken for descriptions of the real world. This is what Alfred North Whitehead called "the fallacy of misplaced concreteness," and it explains why ideology infallibly gets statesmen into trouble, later if not sooner. The error of ideology is to prefer essence to existence, and the result, however gratifying logically and psychologically, undermines the reality principle itself.

Ideology withdraws problems from the turbulent stream of change and treats them in splendid abstraction from the whirl and contingency of life. So ideology portrays the Soviet Union as an unalterable monolith, immune to historical vicissitude and permutation, its behavior determined by immutable logic, the same yesterday, today and tomorrow; Sunday, Monday and always. We are forever in 1950, with a crazed Stalin reigning in the Kremlin and commanding an obedient network of communist parties and agents around the planet. In the light of ideology, the Soviet Union becomes a fanatic state carrying out with implacable zeal and cunning a master plan of world dominion.

Perhaps this is all so. But others may see rather a weary, dreary country filled with cynicism and corruption, beset by insuperable problems at home and abroad, lurching uncertainly from crisis to crisis. The Soviet leadership, three quarters of a century after the glorious Bolshevik revolution, cannot provide the people with elementary items of consumer goods. It cannot rely on the honesty of bureaucrats or the loyalty of scientists and writers. It confronts difficult ethnic challenges as the non-Russians in the Soviet Union, so miserably underrepresented in the organs of power, begin to outnumber the Russians. Every second child born this year in the Soviet Union will be a Muslim. Abroad, the Soviet Union faces hostile Chinese on its eastern frontier and restless satellites on the west, while to the south the great Red Army after three and a half years still cannot defeat ragged tribesmen fighting bravely in the hills of Afghanistan.

I don't want to overdo the picture of weakness. The Soviet Union remains a powerful state, with great and cruel capacity to repress

consumption and punish dissent and with an apparent ability to do at least one thing pretty well, which is to build nuclear missiles. But there is enough to the reality of Soviet troubles to lead even the ideologues in Washington to conceive Soviet Russia as a nation at once so robust that it threatens the world and so frail that a couple of small pushes will shove its ramshackle economy into collapse.

The Soviet Union of course is ideological too, even if its ideology has got a little shopworn and ritualistic over the long years. It too sees the enemy as unchanging and unchangeable, a permanently evil empire vitiated through eternity by the original sin of private property. Each regime, reading its adversary ideologically rather than historically, deduces act from imputed essence and attributes purpose, premeditation and plan where less besotted analysts would raise a hand for improvisation, accident, chance, ignorance, negligence and even sheer stupidity. We arrive at the predicament excellently described by Henry Kissinger: "The superpowers often behave like two heavily armed blind men feeling their way around a room, each believing himself in mortal peril from the other whom he assumes to have perfect vision . . . . Each tends to ascribe to the other a consistency, foresight, and coherence that its own experience belies. Of course, over time, even two blind men can do enormous damage to each other, not to speak of the room."

By construing every local mess as a test of global will, ideology raises stakes in situations that cannot be easily controlled and threatens to transmute limited into unlimited conflicts. Moreover, ideology, if pursued to the end, excludes the thought of accommodation or coexistence. Mr. Reagan has instructed us that we must oppose evil "with all our might." How now can we compromise with evil without losing our immortal soul? Ideology summons the true believer to a *jihad*, a crusade of extermination against the infidel.

The Russians are in no position to complain about such language. It has been more or less their own line since 1917. Reagan is simply paraphrasing Khrushchev: "We will bury you." Still the holy war has always represented a rather drastic approach to human affairs. It seems singularly unpromising in the epoch of nuclear weapons. And the irony is that, while Soviet ideology has grown tired, cynical and venal, the new American crusade is fresh and militant; and the Washington ideologues thereby present the Kremlin with an unearned and undeserved opportunity to appear reasonable and prudent. In particular, the American dash into ideology promotes a major Soviet objective, the turning away of Western Europe from

the alliance with the United States.

Having suggested the current domination of American foreign policy by ideology, let me add that this domination is far from complete. Mr. Reagan's world view is not necessarily shared even by all members of his own Administration. It is definitely not shared by the Republican leadership in Congress. In general, it has been more vigorously translated into rhetoric than into policy. The suspicion has even arisen that Mr. Reagan's more impassioned ideological flights are only, in Wendell Willkie's old phrase, "campaign oratory," pap for right-wing zealots to conceal the Administration's covert creep to the center in domestic affairs. And the prospect of a presidential election next year creates a compelling political need for the Administration to attend to public opinion—a concern that may be a force for restraint in Central America and that could conceivably drive the Administration into arms control negotiations well before November 1984. Still, Mr. Reagan is not a cynical man, and, whatever the tactical function of his speeches, they must also in some sense express sincere convictions.

The greater restraint on ideology comes from the nature of foreign policy itself. The realism of the Founding Fathers sprang from the ineluctable character of international relations. National interest in the end must set limits on messianic passions. This fact explains the Administration's tendency to march up the ideological hill and then march down again, as in the case of the pipeline embargo. For the United States does not have the power, even if it had the wisdom, to achieve great objectives in the world by itself. Because this is so, a responsible foreign policy requires the cooperation of allies, and allies therefore have it within their power to rein in American messianism.

The pipeline embargo is only one example of the modification of ideology by interest. Ideology favors a blank check for Menachem Begin in Israel, but interest argues for the comprehensive approach to a Middle Eastern settlement that Reagan set forth on September 1, 1982, in the most impressive speech of his presidency. Ideology calls for the support of Taiwan at the expense of mainland China. Interest argues against policies tending to unite Chinese and Soviet communism. Ideology calls for the support of South Africa against black Africa. Interest argues against a course that leaves black Africa no friends but the Soviet Union. Ideology calls for the excommunication of socialist regimes. Interest sees benefits in cheerful relations with France, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Greece and Sweden. Ideology calls for chastisement of the debtor nations in the Third World. Interest leads to an additional $8.4-billion contribution to the International Monetary Fund.

III

Yet there remain sectors of policy where ideology still holds sway. One, for the season at least, is Central America. No one can be too sure over the longer run because the Administration has marched up and down this particular hill more than once in the last two years. During the vicariate of General Haig, insurgency in Central America was deemed a major Soviet challenge demanding a mighty American response. Then, in the first tranquilizing days of Secretary Schultz, the impression was allowed to spread that perhaps the troubles had ample local origins and, despite allegations of extracontinental instigation, might be amenable to local remedies. Subsequently Secretary Shultz caught the ideological flu, and by mid-1983 we were back at the global test of will.

Unquestionably the United States is facing tough problems in Central America. Nor does it meet the problems to observe that they are, in some part, of American creation. Twenty years ago the Alliance for Progress set out to deal with poverty and oligarchy in Central America. But the Alliance changed its character after the death of President Kennedy, and American policy abandoned concern with social change. When revolution predictably erupted in Central America, ideology rejected the notion of local origins and decreed that the Russians were back at their old game of dominos.

Ideology, it should be noted, offers a field day for self-fulfilling prophecies. If you shape rhetoric and policy to what you regard as a predestined result, chances are that you will get the result you predestine. Having decided a priori that the Nicaraguan revolution was a Soviet-Cuban conspiracy, Washington gave the Sandinistas little alternative but to seek support from the Cubans and Russians. The French wanted to sell Nicaragua arms and send in a military mission. Washington, instead of welcoming a democratic presence that would have been reliably alert to Soviet deviltry, exploded in indignation. When the CIA does its best to overthrow the government in Managua, we express unseemly shock that this government dare take measures to defend itself. Maybe it would have happened anyway, but the ideological policy makes insurgent anti-Americanism inevitable.

The present Washington disposition is to raise the stakes and to militarize the remedy. We are trying to provide the government of El Salvador with sufficient military aid to defeat the insurgency and to provide the insurgency in Nicaragua with sufficient military aid to defeat the government. If we don't act to stop Marxism in Central America, the argument runs, dominos will topple, and the Soviet Union will establish a bridgehead in the center of the

Western Hemisphere. "Our credibility would collapse," Mr. Reagan has said, "our alliances would crumble, and the safety of our homeland would be in jeopardy." In April 1983 he denied any "thought of sending American combat troops to Central America." By June the thought had occurred, and he now cautioned, "Presidents never say never."

Other views are possible. The historian is bound to note that unilateral military action by the United States in Latin America is nearly always a mistake. Another by-product of ideology, along with the self-fulfilling prophecy, is the conviction that the anointed country, whether the United States these days or the Soviet Union in all days, understands the interests of other countries better than they understand their own interests. So in 1967 President Johnson sent Clark Clifford on an Asian tour, charging him to get the states of the South East Asia Treaty Organization to increase their contributions to the forces fighting communism in Vietnam. Clifford was astonished to discover that other Asian countries, though considerably more exposed to the danger, took it less tragically than the United States did and saw no need to increase their contributions. When he thereafter became Secretary of Defense, Clifford did his best to wind down American participation in the war.

If a Marxist Nicaragua (population 2.7 million) or El Salvador (population 4.5 million) is a threat to the Hemisphere, it is a more dire threat to Mexico, to Costa Rica, to Panama, to Venezuela, to Colombia than it is to the United States. These nations are closer to the scene and more knowledgeable about it; they are a good deal more vulnerable politically, economically and militarily than the United States; and they are governed by men just as determined as those in Washington to resist their own overthrow. When Latin American countries don't see the threat as apocalyptically as we do, only ideology can conclude with divine assurance that they are wrong and we are right. Are we really so certain that we understand *their* world better than they do?

In any event, ideology is a sure formula for hypocrisy, if not for disaster. Mr. Reagan says righteously that we will not "protect the Nicaraguan government from the anger of its own people." A fine sentiment—but why does it not apply equally to the government of El Salvador? Why do we condemn Nicaragua for postponing elections until 1985 while we condone Chile, which postpones elections till 1989? Would the Administration display the same solicitude for elections and rights in Nicaragua if the Somozas were

still running things?

Ideology insists on the inflation of local troubles into global crises. National interest would emphasize the indispensability of working with Latin Americans who know the territory far better than we do and without whose support we cannot succeed. Let Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia and Panama—the so-called Contadora Group—take the lead, and back them to the hilt. Only if all agree on the nature of the response will intervention do the United States more good than harm in the Hemisphere. If it is too late for a negotiated settlement and our Latin friends reject military intervention, then we may have to resign ourselves to turmoil in Central America for some time to come—turmoil beyond our power to correct and beyond our wisdom to cure.

IV

Another sector where ideology still controls policy in Washington is, alas, the most grave and menacing of all—the nuclear arms race. It is in this field that the substitution of models for reality has the most baneful effect. War games these days are played by general staffs with such intensity that they come to be taken not as speculations but as predictions. The higher metaphysics of deterrence, by concentrating on the most remote contingencies, such as a Soviet first strike against the United States or a surprise invasion of Western Europe, makes such improbable events suddenly the governing force in budgetary, weapons and deployment decisions. History shows the Soviet Union to be generally cautious about risking direct military encounters with the United States; but ideology abolishes history. Reality evaporates in the hallucinatory world where strategic theologians calculate how many warheads can be balanced on the head of a pin. Little seems to me more dangerous than the current fantasy of controlled and graduated nuclear war, with generals calibrating nuclear escalation like grand masters at the chessboard. Let us not be bamboozled by models. Once the nuclear threshold is breached, the game is over.

I do not dismiss the Soviet Union as a military threat. We have noted that one thing Russia apparently does well is to build nuclear missiles. But we must keep things in proportion. Ideology, here as elsewhere, encourages exaggeration. Moreover, the professional duty of generals is to guarantee the safety of their countries; and the professional instinct of generals is to demand enough to meet every conceivable contingency. As old Lord Salisbury once wrote, "If you believe the doctors, nothing is wholesome; if you believe

the theologians, nothing is innocent; if you believe the soldiers, nothing is safe." Like ideology, defense budgets need ever more menacing enemies.

In Washington Pentagon officials take masochistic pleasure at regular intervals in declaring that the Soviet Union is now stronger than the United States. These recurrent Pentagon panics, ably recalled by Robert H. Johnson in the Spring 1983 issue of this journal, range from the "missile gap," promulgated by the Gaither Report 25 years ago, to the "window of vulnerability," announced by Secretary of Defense Weinberger in 1981 and slammed shut by the Scowcroft Commission in 1983. One doubts that defense officials really believe their own lamentations; at least, I have never heard any of them offering to trade in the American for the Soviet defense establishment. When asked in Congress recently whether he would exchange places with his Soviet counterpart, the chairman of the American Joint Chiefs of Staff replied succinctly, "Not on your life." The ideologues achieve their dire effects by selective counting—by comparing theater nuclear weapons, for example, and omitting American superiority in the invulnerable sea-based deterrent. I would not take the lamentations too seriously, especially around budget time.

The irony is that the Pentagon and the Soviet Defense Ministry prosper symbiotically. There is no greater racket in the world today than generals claiming the other side is ahead in order to get bigger budgets for themselves. This tacit collusion, based on a common vested interest in crisis, remains a major obstacle in the search for peace. As President Kennedy remarked to Norman Cousins, the editor of the *Saturday Review*, in the spring of 1963, "Mr. Khrushchev and I occupy approximately the same political positions inside our governments. He would like to prevent a nuclear war but is under severe pressure from his hard-line crowd, which interprets every move in that direction as appeasement. I've got similar problems . . . . The hard-liners in the Soviet Union and the United States feed on one another."

The existence of Soviet military might obviously requires effective counterbalance. It requires nuclear deterrence capable of retaliation against a first strike, and this the West has. It also requires conventional force capable of discouraging Soviet aspirations in Europe, and this the West may presently lack. The need is to remove European defense from the delusion of rescue through limited nuclear war. The European democracies must understand that reliance on the bomb to save Europe no longer makes sense in the age of nuclear stand-off. However destructive conventional war

can be in modern times, it is infinitely less destructive than nuclear war would be. And the sure way to make the improbability of a Soviet attack across rebellious satellites on Western Europe even more improbable is to leave no doubt that the costs, even without nuclear response, would be intolerably high. This lies within the power of the European democracies to do.

V

But what of the bomb itself? For we live today in a situation without precedent—a situation that transcends all history and threatens the end of history. I must confess that I have come late to this apocalyptic view of the future. To set limits on the adventures of the human mind has always seemed—still seems—the ultimate heresy, the denial of humanity itself. But we always recognized that freedom involves risk, and the free mind in our time has led us to the edge of the Faustian abyss. "Man has mounted science, and is now run away with," Henry Adams wrote more than a century ago. "Some day science may have the existence of mankind in its power, and the human race commit suicide by blowing up the world."

I had always supposed that, with the nuclear genie out of the bottle, the prospect of the suicide of the human race would have a sobering effect on those who possessed the tragic power to initiate nuclear war. For most of the nuclear age this supposition has been roughly true. Statesmen have generally understood, as President Kennedy said in 1961, "Mankind must put an end to war or war will put an end to mankind." I saw how after the Cuban missile crisis a shaken Kennedy—and a shaken Khrushchev, too—moved swiftly toward a ban on nuclear testing and a systematic reduction of international acrimony.

I no longer have much confidence in the admonitory effect of the possession of nuclear weapons. The curse of ideology is that as it impoverishes our sense of reality, it impoverishes our imagination, too. It enfeebles our capacity to visualize the Doomsday horror. It inhibits us from confronting the awful possibility we can no longer deny: the extermination of sentient life on this planet.

Under the hypnosis of doctrine, ideologues in Washington today plainly see an unlimited nuclear arms race not as an appalling threat to the survival of humanity, but simply as a fine way to do the Russians in. Either they will try to keep up with us, which will wreck their economy, or they will fail to keep up, which will give us the decisive military advantage. To have an arms control agreement, they believe, would be to renounce our most potent weapon against the empire of evil.

I continue to find it hard to suppose that either superpower would deliberately embark on nuclear war *ab initio*. But it is not hard to foresee a nuclear overreaction to the frustration or embarrassment of defeat in conventional warfare. It is still easier, with 50,000 warheads piling up in the hands of the superpowers and heaven knows how many more scattered or hidden or incipient in other hands, to foresee nuclear war precipitated by terrorists, or by madness, or by accident, or by misreading the flashes on a radar screen.

The stake is too great to permit this horror to grow. For the stake is supreme: it is the fate of humanity itself. Let me say at once that the answer to the nightmare cannot conceivably be unilateral nuclear disarmament. The likely result of unilateral nuclear disarmament by the West would not be to prompt the Soviet leadership to do likewise but to place the democratic world at the mercy of Soviet communism. History offers abundant proof that mercy is not a salient characteristic of any communist regime.

Neither the arms race nor unilateral disarmament therefore holds out hope. What we must do rather is to revive the vanishing art of diplomacy. American officials these days like to strike Churchillian poses. They remind one of Mark Twain's response when his wife tried to cure him of swearing by loosing a string of oaths herself: "You got the words right, Livy, but you don't know the tune." Our road-company Churchills lack one of the things that made Churchill great: his power of historical discrimination.

"Those who are prone by temperament and character," Churchill wrote in *The Gathering Storm*, "to seek sharp and clear-cut solutions of difficult and obscure problems, who are ready to fight whenever some challenge comes from a foreign Power, have not always been right. On the other hand, those whose inclination is . . . to seek patiently and faithfully for peaceful compromise are not always wrong. On the contrary, in the majority of instances they may be right, not only morally but from a practical standpoint." So, in the spirit of Churchill, let us not prematurely abandon the quest for peaceful compromise.

The reciprocal and verifiable nuclear freeze on the production, testing and deployment of nuclear weapons and delivery vehicles is backed today, according to polls, by more than 80 percent of Americans. The freeze is the most promising beginning, or so it seems to me. More must come. A joint Soviet-NATO command post, where each side could monitor the other side's radar screens and to which all war rumors would go for resolution, would do much to reduce the chances of accidental nuclear war. Deep cuts in

nuclear stockpiles must follow, perhaps by each superpower delivering an equal number of nuclear weapons of its own choice for destruction by an international authority, a procedure that would minimize the theoretically destabilizing effect of reduction by fixed categories. Mankind has no choice but to find ways to crawl back from the edge of the Faustian abyss and to move toward the extinction of the nuclear race; better this, with all its difficulties, than the extinction of the human race.

VI

What the world needs to bring this about is above all deliverance from ideology. This is not to suggest for a moment any symmetry between the United States and the Soviet Union. In the United States, ideology is a lurking susceptibility, a periodic fling, fooling some of the people some of the time but profoundly alien to the Constitution and to the national spirit. Washington's current ideological commotion is the result, not of popular demand or mandate, but of the superficial fact that in 1980 the voters, unable to abide the thought of four more years of what they had, had Reagan as the only practical alternative.

In the Soviet Union ideology remains the heart of the matter. It is not a susceptibility but a compulsion, inscribed in sacred texts and enforced by all the brutal machinery of a still vicious police state. Yet even in the Soviet Union one senses an erosion of the old ideological intensity until a good deal of what remains is simply a vocabulary in which Soviet leaders are accustomed to speak. Let not a spurt of American ideologizing breathe new life into the decadent Soviet ideology, especially by legitimizing the Russian fear of an American crusade aimed at the destruction of Russian society.

In the end, ideology runs against the grain of American democracy. Popular elections, as the Founding Fathers saw long ago, supply the antidote to the fanaticism of abstract propositions. High-minded Americans have recently taken to calling for a single six-year presidential term on the ground that Presidents, not having to worry about reelection, would thereby be liberated to make decisions for the good of the republic. This assumes that the less a President takes public opinion into account, the better a President he will be—on reflection, a rather anti-democratic assumption. In the instant case, the best things Mr. Reagan has done—his belated concern about racial justice, about the environment and natural resources, about hunger, about women, about arms control—have all been under the pressure of the 1984 election. He might never have cared if he had had a single six-year term. It may well be that

Presidents do a better job when politics requires them to respond to popular needs and concerns than they would if constitutionally empowered to ignore popular needs and concerns for the sake of ideological gratification.

Ideology is the curse of public affairs because it converts politics into a branch of theology and sacrifices human beings on the altar of abstractions. "To serene Providence," Winston Churchill wrote an American politician nearly 90 years ago, "a couple of generations of trouble and distress may seem an insignificant thing . . . . Earthly Governments, however, are unable to approach questions from the same standpoint. Which brings me to the conclusion that the duty of governments is to be first of all practical. I am for makeshifts and expediency. I would like to make the people who live on this world at the same time as I do better fed and happier generally. If incidentally I benefit posterity—so much the better—but I would not sacrifice my own generation to a principle—however high—or a truth however great."

In this humane spirit we may save not only our generation but posterity, too.