

AMERICAN MILITARISM

A POSTSCRIPT

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LOOK'S RECENT SERIES on the growth of American militarism was of particular interest to me because I have been shocked to discover the increasing power of the Pentagon since my return to the United States in April.

Ironically, America has never been a militaristic nation. In World War I, we waited nearly three years after the German invasion of France and Belgium before throwing our weight into the scales. And the moment the war was over, we began to beat a hasty retreat into our traditional national aloofness. In World War II, it took a massive Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor to convince a majority of Americans of our stake in an Allied victory. And once the victory had been won, our Government, under irresistible political pressure, proceeded to beat our swords into plowshares, lathes and typewriters in record time.

On January 22, 1946, on Capitol Hill, General Eisenhower, then Chief of Staff, was ambushed by militant representatives of the "Bring Daddy Home Clubs." Angry women backed him against a wall and laid down a barrage of demands that left him flushed, breathless and, in his own words at a subsequent hearing of the Military Affairs Committee, "emotionally upset." In this atmosphere, it is not surprising that congressional leaders of both parties sought to outbid each other for public applause in the drive to disband our armies and place most of our Navy and Air Force in mothballs.

In the 1950's, the political pressures were gradually reversed. By the early 1960's, almost any proposal for the expansion of our military forces was seriously considered and in most instances approved. How can this be explained?

As the war drew toward a close in 1945, our hopes for a stable, peaceful postwar world were high. But then, even before the fighting stopped, the Soviet Government, under Stalin, began its surge into Eastern Europe. In 1946, America's favorite Englishman, Winston Churchill, warned that the Soviets had established an "Iron Curtain" in Europe. Many observers saw this as the first step toward Lenin's dream of a Communist-dominated world. By the early 1950's, our fears were increased by evidence of the dramatic progress of Soviet nuclear and missile technology. Because our knowledge was sketchy, it was probably inevitable that we would overreact.

Sen. Joe McCarthy and others exploited our

growing sense of national insecurity by aiming wild charges at almost everyone who dealt with military matters or foreign affairs. Anyone who dared to suggest that the Communist world might not be as "monolithic" as it claimed to be was open to the accusation of being "soft on Communism."

In May, 1961, when I suggested in a State Department conference that the most realistic solution for the Southeast Asia crisis might be the neutralization of the entire area, including Vietnam, I was

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seriously charged by a colleague with "unknowingly presenting the Communist line."

Leaders of both political parties, reflecting this national mood, were soon calling for vigorous opposition to any Communist or Communist-tainted movement that threatened the security of a non-Communist government wherever it might be.

Inevitably, the Department of Defense, supported by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who were responsible for our national security, began to press for forces and equipment adequate to carry out this new, open-ended global policy.

In the mid-1950's, the expansion of our military budgets was momentarily slowed by John Foster Dulles' proposal that we meet Communist aggression anywhere on earth with "instant nuclear retaliation at a time and place of our own choosing."

Supporters of this new policy argued that it would provide a "bigger bang for a buck," but cooler heads suggested that the American people would be unlikely to support a nuclear bomb attack on the U.S.S.R. or China in response to a Communist-managed insurrection in Greece or Vietnam. Consequently, it was agreed that the more prudent course would be to create an Army, Navy and Air Force capable of effective non-nuclear action on every continent.

THROUGHOUT THIS difficult period, our intelligence services played a responsible role in analyzing the military capacity of our potential enemies. However, some hawkish members of the intelligence community allowed their imaginations to run riot. Even the most flimsy evidence that the Soviets could, under optimum conditions, produce a certain new nuclear weapon

evolved into the assumption that they not only could but actually were producing the new weapon in large numbers. Thus, possibilities became probabilities and probabilities became facts.

In this atmosphere, it is not surprising that many corporate managers decided that it would be more profitable to join the Federal Government establishment as working partners rather than to denounce it as "creeping Socialism," as so many of their predecessors had done.

Some members of Congress began to see the situation from a similar perspective. If the United States Government is going to build a vast defense establishment anyway, why, they asked, shouldn't important components be located in their states or districts? And so the pressures and the competition increased.

Responsible members of Congress who sought to achieve a better balance were at a serious disadvantage. Because modern military technology is infinitely complex, only a small number of senators and congressmen were capable of discussing it in a meaningful way with the highly specialized representatives of the armed forces.

Moreover, when Pentagon representatives were hard pressed for supporting evidence, they were able to assert that the relevant material was classified, and if the actual facts were known, our national security

would be gravely jeopardized.

In respect to our mad adventure in Southeast Asia, it was our overgrown military establishment that made it possible for us to become involved far beyond our original intentions. If this debacle helps us to understand the limits of military power, it will at least have served some purpose. But what can we do at this stage to bring our military budget into a more rational relationship to our domestic needs?

Millions of Americans are becoming aware that as long as more than half of our entire Federal budget is earmarked for military purposes, an effective effort to stabilize and develop our urban areas and to cleanse the air we breathe and the water we drink will be impossible. Another factor favoring a better balance is the suspicion that many Americans feel when large corporations begin operating in the political arena. The industrial-military complex that so concerned President Eisenhower calls to mind the giant, politically powerful monopolies of the early twentieth century that were first challenged by President Theodore Roosevelt.

At the same time, many observers, both inside and outside of Government, are developing a more sophisticated understanding of the Communist world. How can anyone speak convincingly of the "monolithic Communist axis" when right now the Soviets are much more likely to go to war with China than with the United States and when every newspaper and telecast reports the growing conflicts within the "Communist world"?

The problems we now face were created not by Communism but by an intense worldwide spirit of nationalism that threatens the Soviet and Chinese positions much more directly than it does our own. In this context, it may be persuasively argued that Marxism, Leninism and Maoism are no longer relevant to our present-day world.

The shoddy spectacle of high-pressure salesmen irresponsibly peddling U.S.-produced military equipment in such sensitively balanced areas as Latin America, the Middle East and South Asia is also causing increased public concern. Economists point out that if we had invested even two percent of our annual military expenditures in South Vietnam in the economic development of democratic India, this great country, with its one-seventh of mankind, would now be close to economic self-sufficiency. Another factor for moderation in our military spending is the much greater expertise of many influential members of Congress in dealing with the technical questions involving national defense in committee hearings and on the floor of the House and Senate.

Let me add one final word: while the lack of balance between our military budgets and other urgent needs of our society should be corrected, no responsible observer in this admittedly insecure world advocates a one-way reduction in our capacity to defend our country.

Our task is to create both an adequate national defense and a unified nation that all American citizens will consider worth defending.