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The Acheson Myth

★ Style is back in style. Dean Acheson is back in fashion. And the time has come to dissipate an old myth that has affected American foreign policy since 1950. That is when the late Senator McCarthy began a campaign to "rid the State Department of Communists." It centered perforce on Acheson, who was then Secretary of State and had declared he did "not intend to turn my back on Alger Hiss" when Hiss was convicted in January, 1950, of having perjured himself in denying that he worked for a Soviet espionage apparatus while he was a State Department official.

As became an Episcopal bishop's son, Acheson had invoked the spirit of Christ's Sermon on the Mount in justification of his stand. But that was brushed aside by many of the Democratic as well as Republican products of Christian-Judaic civilization then sitting in Congress. The late Senator Bridges took to calling him "The Red Dean" and, with other Republicans, to blaming him for "our loss of China" and "Truman's war" in Korea. Out of it all grew a myth that Acheson always had been unpopular with Congress, a myth espoused by the late John Foster Dulles who, as Acheson's Republican successor, set himself to getting along with Congress at any cost and with results still evident in relations between the Department of State and the Capitol.

In fact, Acheson, the real inventor of the Marshall plan and, with David Lilienthal, of what came to be called the Baruch plan for atomic disarmament, had been notably successful in dealing with congressmen. That is, he had been

until Republicans, sensing a chance of victory at the polls in 1952, looked around for a safer target than Truman himself and hit upon Acheson.

His success up to that point in dealing with the federal legislators dated from February, 1941, when he had rejoined the Roosevelt Administration as an assistant secretary of state. It was not only notable but surprising to those who, unaware of the Elizabethan earthiness Acheson displays in private, viewed him from afar as a haughty patrician certain to irritate congressional champions of the common man. Alistair Cooke, likening Acheson to a Spanish grandee by Velasquez, showed only an unfamiliarity with well-bred Connecticut Yankees akin to that of lesser newsmen here who ascribed to Acheson a "British accent."

Acheson enjoyed a brief respite from partisan denigration in September, 1951, when he presided at the Japanese peace conference in San Francisco. But with the Truman Administration's end in January, 1953, he went into automatic eclipse. But now the greatest stylist among contemporary American statesmen is back in the spotlight here after a lapse of 13 years and, oddly enough, owes his recrudescence to that other great stylist, General de Gaulle.

When France's President began moving forthrightly a few months ago to dismantle NATO, another of Acheson's inventions, President Johnson called Acheson, now 73, back into service to help guide his "Save NATO" operations, and there were cheers all around.

Back from Eclipse

★ On the Hill, Republicans as well as Democrats welcomed him, and newsmen also rejoiced. James Reston, for example, hailed Acheson as "the most vivid personality in Washington today outside of the Big Man himself" and "the most active, interesting and pugnacious character in town - a poet among the mechanics, a believer among the skeptics, and almost the last of our contemporaries who believes that history and power have a future."

Reston was perhaps referring in that last to Acheson's discourse on the nature of power in an April, 1965, speech that also contained a characteristic thrust at de Gaulle, and what now

reads like an anticipatory rebuttal to Senator Fulbright's more recent laments about the "arrogance of power" he sees suffusing American foreign policy.

Americans had been brought up to think, like Lord Acton, of power as "the instrument of corruption," Acheson said, but had "learned in a rough school the importance of power, its nature and its limitations; two wars, and our behavior between them, made clear its importance."

"Its composition, we learned from having to produce it again after 1940," he continued, adding: "The formula calls for population, resources, technology and will. Napoleon rated the importance of the last element to all the others at a ratio of three to one. His successor, General de Gaulle, by substituting will for all the others, seeks to create an illusion of power."

And Now Rumania

★ Acheson has not yet had occasion to pass judgment on de Gaulle's Rumanian counterpart, Nicolae Ceausescu; according to reports from both Bucharest and Moscow, the Rumanian Communist leader is bent on doing to the Soviet bloc's Warsaw alliance what de Gaulle threatens to do to the Western powers' Atlantic alliance.

Celebrating on May 7 the 45th birthday of the Rumanian Communist Party he now heads, Ceausescu made a hyper-nationalistic, "go it alone" speech championing just such a Europe of *patries*, or individual fatherlands, as de Gaulle advocates.

Acheson calls that "atavistic mysticism" on the part of the Frenchman, who is his elder by less than two-and-a-half years.

But Acheson has also warned against capsule appraisals of public men. Asked by Felix Frankfurter for an appraisal of Justice Brandeis, Acheson replied: "Talking about greatness in men is always an unsatisfactory business. . . ." He thought that some of the people who praised Brandeis and who "proceed with more warmth than knowledge - some of these people would like the Justice less well if they checked up their vague impressions of him and discovered his of them." That could also be true of some opinions concerning Dean Acheson.