

# *The last white paper*

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THE TRANSFORMATION OF AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY. By Charles E. Bohlen. Norton. 130 pp. \$3.95.

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By Richard J. Barnet

Since the day in 1934 when Karl Radek over dinner told him, "You Westerners will never understand Bolshevism," Charles Bohlen has been working at it. Roosevelt's interpreter at Yalta and Eisenhower's ambassador in Moscow, Bohlen was in a crucial position throughout the postwar period to influence the direction of U.S.-Soviet relations. In his little book which ranges over a vast expanse of history he surveys twenty-five years of State Department policy towards the Soviet Union, and finds that he and his colleagues came very close to doing exactly what was needed.

There is very little new information in the book. Occasionally he provides an illuminating footnote such as President Truman's observation to General Marshall that the only way to get the Senate to pass the Greek-Turkish aid bill in 1948 was to overstate the case "a bit" by exaggerating the Communist issue. But, as the author takes pains to explain, the book is not meant as history but as analysis.

Two themes recur throughout the volume. The first is that there is no conflict of interest between the United States as a country and the Soviet Union as a country. "The tension between us is, in my opinion, caused by the ideological factor." The United States did not maintain diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union during the first sixteen years of its life because of "the particular philosophy of the Soviet Union." One dangerous aspect of that philosophy, according to Bohlen, was "the continuing Soviet nightmare" that the capitalist countries would unite against her. Noting that the U.S. in the early years of Bolshevism "took a very critical attitude" towards the regime, he unaccountably neglects to mention that U.S. troops along with those of her allies invaded Soviet territory and occupied portions of it for more than a year after World War I.

How the U.S. and the Soviet Union actually used their power against one another, how and why the one may have actually feared the other, how the actions of one may have influenced the other seem of no account to Bohlen. The only conflict he is interested in is the continuing struggle with "the classic principles of Marxism." The ideological war, Bohlen believes, is a more or less permanent fixture. Although he never attempts to explain how to destroy an idea with a bomb, much less to justify such procedure, he assures us that the continuing ideological war makes smaller military budgets impossible.

It is astonishing how much more impressed Bohlen is by words than by acts. For him the authentic events at

the root of the cold war are a turgid article in *Cahiers du Communisme* by Jacques Duclos in 1945 that affirmed that the U.S. still had "trusts" and "classes," and an "election" speech by Stalin in 1946 that "called for an immense Soviet effort to rebuild the country and develop its national economy for its security." These dangerous notions, Bohlen feels, "were the origins of the cold war as it involved the United States." The U.S. atomic monopoly, the abortive effort to assert residual U.S. interest in Eastern Europe, the maintenance of distant U.S. bases including a Mediterranean fleet are barely mentioned.

Here and there Bohlen indicates that he has a better understanding of Stalinism than his simplistic cold war

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Charles E. Bohlen

rhetoric suggests. He points out, "Stalin was very reluctant to consider promoting a revolution that would be outside the range of the Kremlin." The author recounts that the Soviet dictator advised the Chinese Communists to "go back to China and make the best peace they could with Chiang Kai-shek." Indeed, whenever he mentions specific events, Stalin appears not as the master ideologue but as a crafty manipulator always ready to make a deal with his enemies by selling out his friends.

Why is it important for American policy whether the cold war is primarily a fight over ideology or power? Bohlen's book, which faithfully mirrors the long-standing State Department view he helped to mould, makes clear the importance of this question. He sees the Soviet Union as essentially autistic, responding only to inner ideological drives, impervious to the outside world, reachable, if at all, only through the language of threat.

A Soviet Government which can be dealt with only through ever increasing military power rather than diplomacy is the perfect adversary for an American Government whose primary activity is war preparation. It is the indispensable partner. That the Soviets are guided by a fixed hostile ideology rather than limited and possibly flexible interests has been an essential part of American ideology, for it has relieved diplomats like Bohlen of the responsibility for trying to end the cold war.

The second note that is sounded again and again in these pages is that the United States is continually being "forced" by "history" to do things against our "strict material interest." To State Department ideologues like Bohlen the cold war is simply a tale of good and evil. Our policy, he assures us, "is not rooted in any national material interest." The United States fought the cold war "to meet a challenge which had no origins or roots within our country and to adopt a policy not dictated by any American ambition or desire." Our aimless altruism has made us the "strongest power on earth" but we are "not an empire" even though our armies and navies are spread across the globe and we control vastly greater resources than anyone else. Our exceptional virtue has transformed our wars into crusades. (As for Vietnam, Bohlen is not "in a position to go into the matter" because, after forty years in the State Department, he has "no expert knowledge of the area.")

*In The Transformation of American Foreign Policy*

Bohlen avoids any mention of U.S. motives in fighting the cold war. Even less is there any suggestion that domestic politics or domestic economic interests play a role in policy making. He completely ignores the work of such important scholars as Walter LaFeber and Gabriel Kolko, whose careful historical research cast serious doubt on Bohlen's Manichean view of Soviet-American relations.

One would like to believe that the author wrote this book as his final effort at a State Department white paper, a piece of diplomatic allegory to raise our flagging spirits. But the reader is left with the uncomfortable feeling that he means every word of it. \*