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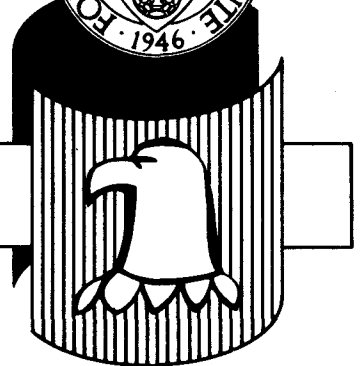
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**THE NEW ISOLATIONISM:
ANTECEDENTS AND PROGENY**

Case Study by JOHN RICHARD BURKE

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THE NEW ISOLATIONISM

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

If one is looking for a single dominant strain running through the record of American foreign relations in the first two centuries of the nation's existence, one is forced to conclude that the most important theme is a desire for freedom of action, uninhibited by foreign alliances or engagements of any sort. Ancillary to this is a well developed suspicion of the motives of other governments and nations, even those to which the new nation was temporarily obliged to turn and ally itself in its earliest formative years. The thoughts and writings of the founding fathers are replete with such references. In a letter to Henry Laurens in 1778, Washington warns that "it is a maxim founded on the universal experience of mankind that no nation is to be trusted farther than it is bound by its interest" In his oft-quoted Farewell Address, he counsels his fellow countrymen "to steer clear of permanent alliances, with any portion of the foreign world." Jefferson, in his turn, also warns against "entangling alliances" as does Monroe:

In the wars of the European powers in matters relating to themselves we have never taken any part, nor does it comport with our policy so to do.

Through the years, in history texts, Fourth of July addresses, and in a massive body of campaign oratory, a consensus developed that this policy laid down by the framers of the republic was essentially sound, that it had served us well by permitting the nation to expand and prosper and that each time the government had deviated from this policy, the results had proven to be unsatisfactory, unprofitable and disappointing.

The nation's reaction following the end of World War I was a perfect example of this impulse. In retrospect, it seems quite remarkable that the citizens concluded so quickly that the nation's participation in that adventure had been a mistake, that the high sounding phrases used to rally them in 1917 had so quickly proven hollow, and that the interests and goals of our erstwhile allies were not as lofty or altruistic as they had at first been portrayed.

A general conviction hardened during the period between the two wars that the United States had been drawn too easily and too naively as an active participant into the First World War, without sufficient reflection and without a clear understanding of just where the nation's real interests lay. As a consequence, the government and people resolved that a series of safeguards must be created which would prevent the United States from being stampeded into another foreign war. This did not mean, however, that the nation withdrew -- or that a majority of the people favored a withdrawal -- into some sort of myopic isolationism; it meant simply that the government and majority believed that national sovereignty should not be easily and quickly compromised by some future alliance and the nation's decision-making authority and freedom to maneuver be thus limited and shared thoughtlessly with foreigners.

The barriers to involvement created in the minds of the populace as well as juridically in the form of the Neutrality Acts amounted to a formidable set of attitudinal and legal obstacles to America's entry into World War II. Indeed, the great debate over the precise definition of America's national interest as it related to World War II continued right up to the eve of Pearl Harbor and, had the Japanese not resolved that discussion on the morning of December 7, 1941, it might well have persisted for many months and even years, assuming, of course, that Britain and Russia on their own had been able to continue the conflict without capitulating to the Axis.

CONCLUSION

But Pearl Harbor and the subsequent declarations of war by Germany and Italy swept away all uncertainty and suspended further debate regarding America's participation. A wonderfully simple "black-and-white" situation had been created, one which was free from ambiguity, and though the nation's freedom of action had been circumscribed by the Japanese and their allies, America's course was clear.

World War II, viewed through an American optic, was clearly a contest between obvious good and obvious evil. This fact, plus the smashing victory eventually achieved, erased all doubts and reservations regarding the pre-eminent international role the nation must play. Such a resolution was reinforced by the conviction the American public had come to share that the failure of the nations of the world to agree upon and support an effective supra-national body after the First World War had been a principal cause of the Second. It was unthinkable, therefore, that the most powerful nation in the world should refuse to cooperate as a major partner in the shaping of the world's future, hopefully in a prosperous and peaceful direction.

We now stand a full generation removed from the end of World War II at the far edge of a period of time wherein the U.S. has played a dominant and furiously active role in the world. A world body has been created with America as a principal architect, alliances have been forged with nations in every quarter of the globe, economic and military assistance has been extended on an order of magnitude never before seen in the history of mankind, and the nation has spent blood and treasure in various and often remote parts of the world to preserve freedom and contain communism. The strains and pressures of these exertions have been enormous and the fatigue of the nation and its people is understandable.

Viewed another way, a case might be made that the U.S. moved almost uninterruptedly from World War II into the Cold War and that, as a consequence, the war period -- both hot and cold (including Korea and the hostilities in Southeast Asia) -- stretched from 1941 to approximately 1972. Only with the phase-out of U.S. forces from Viet-Nam and the waxing of detente was a period of peace approximating that which followed November 11, 1918 achieved. Thus, beginning with Pearl Harbor, the United States may be said to have become involved in a "thirty years' war", a conflict that engaged the nation's attention, sapped its material and moral resources and left it weary and ready for a period of introspection and regeneration.

In any event, there are unmistakable signs that the American people are again being attracted by the hoary policy laid down by the nation's forefathers. The idea of abandoning the responsibilities and obligations to others and abdicating the burden of world leadership is a powerful magnet and there are indications that it has wide appeal to many, particularly as they look at magnifying and multiplying problems at home and a dearth of tangible successes abroad.

It is undoubtedly true that Clio repeats herself, but never in precisely the same words. It is pointless, therefore, to expect any exact replay of the turning inward which followed World War I to be repeated today. Nevertheless, there are interesting parallels developing which deserve attention and consideration, not only as an intellectual exercise, but also as an insight into what they portend for tomorrow.

CONCLUSION

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Chapter II

THE FLOWERING OF ISOLATIONISM

"The recorded progress of our Republic, materially and spiritually, in itself proves the wisdom of the inherited policy of non-involvement in Old World affairs. Confident of our ability to work out our own destiny, and jealously guarding our right to do so, we seek no part in directing the destinies of the Old World. We do not mean to be entangled. We will accept no responsibility except as our own conscience and judgment, in each instance, may determine.

"Our eyes never will be blinded to a developing menace, our ears never deaf to the call of civilization. We recognize the new order in the world, with the closer contacts which progress has wrought. We sense the call of the human heart for fellowship, fraternity and co-operation. We crave friendship and harbor no hate. But America can be party to no permanent military alliance. It can enter into no political commitments, nor assume any economic obligations which will subject our decisions to any other than our own authority.

"We are ready to associate ourselves with the nations of the world, great and small, for conference, for counsel, to seek the expressed views of world opinion; to recommend a way to approximate disarmament and relieve the crushing burdens of military and naval establishments In expressing aspirations, in seeking practical plans, in translating humanity's new concept of righteousness and justice and its hatred of war into recommended action we are ready most heartily to unite, but every commitment must be made in the exercise of our national sovereignty. Since freedom impelled, and independence inspired, and nationality exalted, a world supergovernment is contrary to everything we cherish and can have no sanction by our Republic."

Warren G. Harding
March 4, 1921*

* Warren G. Harding, "Inaugural Address," in Inaugural Addresses of the Presidents of the United States, House Document 93-208, 93d Cong., 1st Session, Washington, 1974, pp. 207-14. Given Harding's low rank on the totem pole of Presidents, it is somewhat surprising to find that his inaugural address is superior in terms of substance and literary quality to those of many of his presidential 'betters'. Though undoubtedly 'ghosted' as such works almost always have been, he obviously must have approved it personally. Curiously enough, toward the end it contains the paraphrase of a paragraph Harding used in a speech before the Republican convention in 1916 and which was to be echoed in another inaugural address some forty years later: "In the great fulfillment we must have a citizenship less concerned about what the government can do for it and more anxious about what it can do for the nation."

WOODROW WILSON

Thus did the evangelist of "normalcy", the most handsome of Presidents, and probably the best golfer ever to occupy the White House, eloquently and succinctly set the isolationist tone which was to characterize much of the period between the two world wars in the United States. In view of subsequent events, it seems clear that he had caught the mood of the times. The United States, heavily dosed with the propaganda efforts of George Creel, head of the American Committee on Public Information during the war, had marched off on the Great Crusade of 1917, had reveled in victory, and then had been somewhat let-down when the grand phrases of Wilson and his hopes for a post-war structure to insure the peace had been diluted at Versailles and eventually talked to death and defeated in the Senate. A suspicion quickly developed that America had somehow been duped into participating in the war, that Wilson had been bamboozled by wily foreigners at Versailles, and this suspicion was probably confirmed by the anecdotes of any number of disillusioned doughboys straggling back from their experiences in the trenches and in the fleshpots of "Gay Paree."*

That the Presidential election of 1920 was a blunt repudiation of Woodrow Wilson and the Treaty of Versailles there can be no doubt. He, himself, by choosing to take the treaty "to the people" had left room for no other interpretation.

Turning out the "war party" on the conclusion of a conflict is, of course, not unheard of in the American political tradition or the British, for that matter. One need only recall the abrupt turn-over in Congress in 1946 when the Republicans won sweeping victories in both houses; there is also the classic case of Winston Churchill's unceremonious ouster as prime minister in 1945 when, flushed with victory, he and his Tory colleagues were drubbed at the polls by Clement Attlee's Labour Party. Wilson's rebuff in 1920 was, however, especially brutal because he had given so much of himself to the cause in which he believed.**

The full force of isolationist sentiment did not, however, immediately sweep over the land in 1920. That wave would remain poised until the economic collapse of 1929 and the hardships that followed forced the government and people to look hard at what was essential and affordable. At stressful moments like that, frills such as foreign initiatives, unless they have clearly demonstrable 'bread-and-butter' implications, are usually the first ballast jettisoned from the Ship of State.

* When lofty rhetoric is used by politicians to define their goals, oftentimes, due to repetition or possibly because intrinsically there is less there than meets the ear, the gold and silver content of what they say is quickly lost and the expression becomes dross. Through frequent reiteration such high-sounding phrases come to sound almost ludicrous and, in the end, parody the concept they were coined to explain. This seems particularly true of the oratory Wilson employed in taking the nation to war in 1917 and in defending the Versailles Treaty.

** Wilson, in his race for re-election in 1916 on a "he kept us out of war" platform, ran a close race with Charles Evans Hughes, winning by a mere twenty-three electoral votes (277-254). He did, however, manage to get a majority of the popular vote, something he had failed to do in 1912 when the combined totals for Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft exceeded his own. Thus his mandate was somewhat shaky throughout his eight years in office.

WOODROW WILSON

In fact, the United States became quite active diplomatically during the decade of the 1920s and the populace seemed at least tolerant, if not always totally approving, of what was being done. The one thing insisted upon, however, was that the government, in all such efforts, remain completely free to maneuver and that sovereignty not be compromised in any way.

The first order of diplomatic business facing the Harding administration was the need to write an official finis to America's participation in World War I. The nation's rejection of the Treaty of Versailles meant that the original declaration of war was still in force. To correct this legal ambiguity, the simplest of expedients was resorted to: hostilities were formally terminated by a Joint Resolution of the Congress on July 2, 1921 with the U.S. reserving to itself all the rights and privileges of the victorious powers.

This accomplished, the new Administration, in keeping with Harding's inaugural promise, moved decisively to undertake its most important foreign policy initiative, the Washington Naval Conference of 1921-22. At this convocation, Harding's Secretary of State, the redoubtable Charles Evans Hughes, achieved on behalf of the United States, a diplomatic triumph of major proportions. His boldness and skill demonstrated at the conference, as well as the obviously careful planning that went into its preparation, stand in marked contrast to Wilson's efforts at Versailles. Here was diplomacy as the American public likes -- with the United States playing a leading, unilateral role and not being led about by the nose by foreigners. In many ways the most remarkable feature of that conference and the Senate's subsequent ratification of the treaties growing out of it was the key role played by one of U.S. delegation's members, that staunch isolationist, Henry Cabot Lodge.

Though one contemporary pundit described the Coolidge administration as providing "the country with government stripped to the buff . . . government that governed hardly at all,"* under "Silent Cal's" stewardship certain diplomatic initiatives were undertaken, some grandiose, others minor. There was much concern over the money owed the United States by foreign governments as a result of the war, and vigorous efforts were expended (1) to get these governments to acknowledge their debt, and (2) establish a schedule for repayment. The reluctance of the debtor nations to pay and the publicity the eventual negotiations received undoubtedly did much to confirm popular suspicions that our former allies were ungrateful for our wartime efforts and bent on reneging on their obligations.

The more interesting diplomatic efforts of Coolidge approximated a sort of 'back door' edging up to the League of Nations, culminating in conditional senatorial approval of adherence to the World Court in early 1926.** The next year saw an effort to repeat the success of the Washington Naval Conference with a follow-on meeting in Geneva to extend limitations to smaller vessels. After forty-five inconclusive days of haggling the meeting broke up without result.

* H. L. Mencken, A Mencken Chrestomathy. (N.Y., A A Knopf, 1949), p. 254.

** Despite this approval, adherence was delayed for several years until the reservations the Senate had attached could be negotiated with the Court. A formula was finally worked out and submitted to the Senate where, after many delays, it was voted on in early 1935. Under heavy isolationist pressure it failed.

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The one public relations triumph achieved by Coolidge and his Secretary of State, Frank B. Kellogg, was the Pact of Paris, concluded with fourteen other governments in the French capital. This highly touted agreement provided for the "outlawing of war as an instrument of national policy," an accomplishment which equates roughly with setting aside a day in May for mothers. It was enthusiastically received by the public and by many members of the Congress as a practical instrument for the prevention of another world war. Viewed from this cynical moment in time, it appears naive and impractical, both of which it was. Nevertheless, it faithfully represented the aspirations of the American people and probably most of the people of Europe at that time. The unfortunate thing is that when the Pact was exposed as a hopeless gesture, it served only to disillusion those who pinned hopes on it and caused them to confirm their desire to withdraw into isolationism.

This was only too soon in coming when a series of events in the Far East shortly revealed the essential weakness of the Kellogg-Briand Pact, as the Pact of Paris informally came to be called. Impotent China became the target of aggression by Russia in 1929, Japan in 1931 and Japan again in 1932. President Hoover's Secretary of State, the audacious and resourceful Henry L. Stimson, took the lead in attempting to resolve these clashes using the moral pressure of the Pact and threatening non-recognition of any arrangements forced upon the Chinese, a brave effort which Hoover and Stimson hoped might generate support in European capitals. In this they were disappointed. The economic collapse of 1929 so preoccupied governments and populations that there was little interest in events at the other end of the world. Reaction at home was also mixed and support for the effort was far from substantial.

The nagging problem of the war debts also plagued the Hoover administration. In the face of the world-wide depression Hoover proposed a year-long moratorium on the repayment of all such debts in mid-1931. Despite opposition from isolationists the measure received Congressional approval, but Hoover's attempt to be helpful turned sour when, in late 1932, six of the debtors (including France and Belgium) defaulted outright. The perfidy of former allies!

The considerable impact of unpaid war debts on public opinion should not be underestimated. This complex problem on which the economists of the day had trouble agreeing, could not be understood in its detail by the man in the street. The one thing he did understand, however, was that the money was owing to the United States and was not being paid. Sympathy for defaulting states became a scarce commodity against the backdrop of the depression, while the single nation that honored its obligation and repaid its debt in full, Finland, became a household word with connotations of honesty and thrift in the United States.

Adding to the disillusionment over World War I was the considerable body of fiction which began appearing during the 1920s by such writers as e.e. cummings, Dos Passos, Hemingway and others which pointed up the futility of war in general and World War I in particular. The seamy underside of the conflict was revealed for the first time by such works and they served to confirm for many the impression that it had all been a tragic mistake. Revisionist histories of the conflict also began to appear -- notably at first Sidney Fay's articles in the American Historical Review and C. Hartley Grattan's Why We Fought which was published in 1929 -- and these furnished a scholarly basis for the theory that the nation had been misled into war.

Thus, by the end of the decade of the '20s the various crystals that were to combine and take shape as the isolationist movement had already begun to precipitate out of the chemical solution of American politics, and it was the shock of the economic collapse of 1929 that hastened the process. Isolationism would undoubtedly have developed as a movement even without that

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catalytic event, but the depression certainly served to accelerate its formation and the rate at which it gathered strength.

In any examination of the anatomy of the movement, what is so surprising is its diversity and the fact that the concept had appeal all along the political spectrum from extreme left to extreme right, from hard hat to egg head. It brought together the millions who bought the Hearst newspapers each day and who hung on every word uttered each Sunday afternoon in the sermons of that pastor from Royal Oak, Michigan, Fr. Charles E. Coughlin, as well as the intellectuals who regularly read and contributed to the Nation and the New Republic.

Many of the thoughtful people who came to espouse isolationism did so for economic and political reasons. They felt that the New Deal was committed to important reforms of the political and economic system, reforms with which they could associate. They feared, however, that Roosevelt might be deflected from this purpose if his administration became involved in foreign adventuring. In their view, there was a real risk that Roosevelt would tire of trying to do the hard things they felt were needed and choose instead the apparently easier course of moving the country out of the depression by going to war.

The masses who could identify with isolationism did so for an amalgam of reasons. They saw it as consistent with policies which had served the nation well since its inception. They had come to feel that World War I had probably been a mistake in view of the fact that the world "safe for democracy" for which it had been fought had never materialized; furthermore, the nation had achieved no discernible material benefits from the conflict and, in fact, had been defrauded by unreliable foreign allies who had subsequently turned unfriendly.

Given its diversity, the isolationist movement was obviously no homogeneous whole. Such groups as the National Council for the Prevention of War, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, American Peace Mobilization, the Congress to Keep America Out of War, and America First were separately formed to support the cause. Other existing groups lent support for specific reasons: e.g., the American Legion which staunchly favored "taking the profits out of war." Individuals, who had little else in common, became identified with the movement such as Charles A. Beard, Oswald Garrison Villard, Chester Bowles, John T. Flynn, Senators Nye, Norris and Johnson, Congressman Hamilton Fish, and on and on. It was a cause with a powerful capacity to attract.*

Conspiracy, intrigue, plotting, secret deals and enormous profits have always had unflinching appeal for the readers of tabloids and Sunday supplements -- as well as almost everyone else. And it was to be congressional investigation of just such activities in connection with the U.S. involvement in World War I which served to focus popular attention, capture the

* Under the category of strange bedfellows, one finds in April, 1940, the strange spectacle of Congressman Fish inserting approvingly in the Congressional Record the isolationist foreign policy resolution adopted by the Socialist Party at its convention.

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imagination of the American public, and provide "good reason" for an isolationist course. The precursor of later, grander investigations was a 1929 inquiry into the activities of one William B. Shearer who had served as a lobbyist for certain ship-building interests during the ill-starred Geneva Naval Conference of 1927. Whether Shearer fully deserved his reputation as the "man who sabotaged the conference" was never conclusively proven. What was established, however, was that Shearer earned very large sums as a propagandist for the companies and that he had generated a good deal of confusing "smoke screen" concerning proposals before the conference and its goals in his briefing of newsmen in Geneva.

But it was the celebrated Nye Committee hearings held during the years 1934-36 which were to convey in the words of one observer, "a general impression . . . that if J. P. Morgan, the Bethlehem Company, and other bankers and munitions makers were not responsible for the war of 1917, they had much to do with it; and that if profits were drained out of war, peace would be fairly well insured." *

The genesis of these hearings is interesting. For the preceding two years pressure had been building on the Congress for just such an investigation. There had been two significant articles published on the subject in 1933 and 1934. The first was William T. Stone's devotion of an entire issue of Foreign Policy Reports to the arms traffic and the threat they posed to peace. Fortune's article, "Arms and the Men," which appeared in March, 1934, was probably even more influential, however, and it was followed by several books on the same theme. In the wake of such publicity, pacifist groups, veterans' organizations, and others caused such an uproar that Congress, with some reluctance on the part of the leadership and the Administration, felt compelled to act.

Curiously enough, the make-up of the seven-man special committee established to conduct the investigation was weighted four-to-three in favor of the isolationists. Furthermore, despite the fact that the Democrats controlled the Senate, the chairmanship went to Senator Gerald Nye, a Republican. True, Nye along with Senator Vandenberg (also a member of the committee), had pressed hard for such an investigation from the beginning; yet, there was still surprise in certain quarters when Vice President John Nance Garner permitted the committee to choose its chairman knowing full well that Nye would be selected.

Nye, who by that time had had eight years experience in the Senate, was no novice as an investigator. Indeed, he had already built something of a reputation as a reformer and corruption-fighter from earlier investigations into such subjects as the illegal sale of public lands and campaign irregularities in the 1930 elections. These had taught him the public relations value that could be drawn from the well-orchestrated investigation of some sensational subject. And, as one might expect of a former journalist and editor, Nye organized the hearings for maximum public impact so that they would attract full press coverage.

* Allan Nevins, The New Deal and World Affairs. (New Haven, Yale Univ. Press, 1950) pp. 60-61.

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In their first phase, the committee's investigations concentrated on the arms dealers such as Bethlehem, Vickers, Dupont, Remington, the Electric Boat Company and the others. After reams of testimony, much of which tended to confirm the charges contained in the Fortune article, the committee concluded that the conduct of some of the companies had been "highly unethical" and that they were "a discredit to American business." Charges were also leveled at foreign officials for their "illegal" involvement with the companies. The committee proposed legislation to "permit the commandeering of plants, goods and industrial equipment for public use in war, without the determination of 'fair compensation.'" It was further proposed that Congress tax "for war-profits control on such bases of investment or fixed capital as it finds to be fair and just." *

In an attempt to pre-empt the ground, Roosevelt proposed on December 12, 1934 the creation of a committee headed by Bernard Baruch and Hugh S. Johnson to lay plans for "taking the profit out of war." Nye countered by charging that his committee had found "that departments of government (War and Navy) are co-defendants with the munitions industry and the profiteers"; how, therefore, could the Administration be expected to police itself in this area? **

Next the committee began digging into the files of the State Department for the years just preceding America's entry into World War I, particularly correspondence that had passed between President Wilson, Secretaries Bryan and Lansing, and Treasury Secretary McAdoo. From the documents and the testimony of such witnesses as J. P. Morgan and Thomas Lamont, Nye and his colleagues came to feel that the United States had been pushed into war by the pressure of bankers on politicians to lift the ban on credits to France and England. ***

For many Americans the Nye Committee hearings were convincing evidence that the only profiteers from war were shady vested interests that manipulated governments and nations on both sides. To avoid future conflicts, one need only insure that the profit was taken out of war. But "another idea was also forced into the American mind: . . . Congress could be better trusted to keep the peace than the Executive." ****

* Manfred Jonas, Isolationism in America 1935-1941, (Ithaca, Cornell Univ. Press, 1966) p. 145.

** Nevins, New Deal in World Affairs, p. 59.

*** In his book America in Mid-Passage, Charles Beard (himself a prominent isolationist) pays meticulous attention to this phase of the Nye Committee's work. An objective reading of his version would assign more blame to Wilson, Bryan and Lansing and considerably less to the House of Morgan and First National City Bank. The 'pressure' of the bankers is not convincingly demonstrated.

**** Nevins, New Deal and World Affairs, p. 61.

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From this point until the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Congress became the focal point for isolationist pressure. The first Neutrality Act was drafted and passed even before the Nye Committee had completed its work and there is no doubt but that this legislation accurately reflected a national consensus. It would be extended the following year and be replaced by a new revised act in 1937.

The Neutrality Acts were sober efforts to come to grips with a perceived problem. There were however other less logical efforts being made by the isolationists on Capitol Hill. The Ludlow Amendment was one. This proposal for a constitutional amendment requiring a national referendum before any declaration of war was the brain-child of the Indiana congressman, Louis Ludlow, whose name it bears. Despite efforts over a decade it remained locked in committee, but once, in January, 1938, Ludlow with strong backing from isolationist groups almost succeeded in bringing it to the floor for consideration. Mobilizing its forces, the administration succeeded in forcing the genie back in its bottle, but the vote was close; had eleven votes gone the other way Ludlow would have had his debate. *

In retrospect, it is surprising how cohesive the isolationist movement remained in the United States right up to the eve of the nation's entry into the war. There were some defections over the years as the character of the German, Italian and Japanese regimes was revealed. But any defections in reaction to the Italian attack on Ethiopia or the Spanish Civil War were more than offset by a strengthening of the resolve of those remaining.

When war broke out in Europe in the late summer of 1939 there is no doubt but that the sentiments of the majority of the American people favored the British and French, but this too was matched by a tenacity to avoid American involvement. Congress continued to scrutinize and question closely all the administration's proposals for assistance to Britain. The mood for war was just not present in the United States despite Britain's desperate situation. Responsible citizens continued to devote their efforts to the isolationist cause with speeches and rallies and a not-uncommon refrain was the line that an eventual attack by Germany on the U.S., even were Britain to collapse, was a military impossibility.

The Congress was, however, responsive to certain requests in the realm of national defense. A selective service act was passed in 1940 but an Administration proposal that the year's service be extended to eighteen months passed the House by only a single vote on August 18, 1941. Certainly from the evidence available, Roosevelt's judgment as reportedly expressed in late 1940 that "we would not enter the war if the Japanese attacked Thailand, or the Kra Peninsula, or the Dutch East Indies . . . and even the Philippines . . ." seems a valid reading of the Congress and the public will. Had the Japanese contented themselves with nibbling away at British, Dutch and French possessions in the Far East, Roosevelt might conceivably have wrestled a declaration of war from the Congress and brought a divided, unprepared and reluctant U.S. into the war, but only at some date much later than December 7, 1941 -- perhaps too late to have made a decisive difference except in achieving some sort of negotiated, unsatisfactory settlement.

* There seems a direct relationship between this vote, FDR's "quarantine speech" in Chicago the previous October, and the sinking of the USS Panay in the Yangtze on December 12, 1937. The speech had frightened many isolationists with its hints at intervention, while the Panay sinking had worried some that it would produce a "Remember the Maine" reaction. Actually, both seem to have strengthened isolationist resolve in the populace and in a Gallup poll in January, 1938, seventy percent of those queried favored a complete U.S. withdrawal from the Orient.

DECLARATION
Chapter III

INTERNATIONISM'S HIGH-WATER MARK

"Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty.

* * *

"This we pledge and more.

"To those old allies whose cultural and spiritual origins we share, we pledge the loyalty of faithful friends. United, there is little we cannot do in a host of cooperative ventures. Divided, there is little we can do -- for we dare not meet a powerful challenge at odds and split asunder.

"To those new States whom we welcome to the ranks of the free, we pledge our words that one form of colonial control shall not have passed away merely to be replaced by a far greater iron tyranny. We shall not always expect to find them supporting our view. But we shall always hope to find them strongly supporting their own freedom -- and to remember that, in the past, those who foolishly sought power by riding the back of the tiger ended up inside.

* * *

"In your hands, my fellow citizens, more than in mine, will rest the final success or failure of our course. Since this country was founded, each generation of Americans has been summoned to give testimony to its national loyalty. The graves of young Americans who answered the call to service surround the globe.

"Now the trumpet summons us again -- not as a call to bear arms, though arms we need; not as a call to battle, though embattled we are; but a call to bear the burden of a long twilight struggle, year in, and year out, 'rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation' -- a struggle against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease, and war itself.

"Can we forge against these enemies a grand and global alliance, North and South, East and West, that can assure a more fruitful life for all mankind? Will you join in that historic effort?" *

* John F. Kennedy, "Inaugural Address, January 20, 1961," in Inaugural Addresses of the Presidents of the United States, 93d Cong., 1st Session, House doc. 93-208. (Washington, GPO, 1974), pp. 267-70.

These ringing words echoing from the Capitol that frosty snow-bound January morning contrast starkly with what President Kennedy's predecessor from Marion, Ohio had said on the same spot some forty years before. This was a call to the American people to be ready to participate boldly in adventures in all parts of the globe. He proposed no cautious wading in selected foreign ponds, but rather the heroic lead in a major epic.

President Kennedy was, of course, basing his 'call to greatness' on a demonstrated record of the nation's willingness to assume massive international obligations and responsibilities in the fifteen years since the end of World War II. In that period the American people had broken totally with their isolationist past and undertaken commitments never before shouldered in their history. What he had to say was not, therefore, all that radical in content; it was essentially only a call for the expenditure of even greater effort.

Actually, the ancient instinct had been there in 1945, at the conclusion of the war, to draw back and once again assume a role of isolated unilateralism. One need only recall the haste with which forces were brought back from Europe and the Pacific and returned to private life as quickly as possible. It has been contended by some that the clamor to "bring the boys home" as soon as possible was subversively inspired for the advantage of the Russians; nevertheless, the theme struck a responsive chord and was entirely in keeping with popular reaction at other, similar moments in the nation's history. There was a great desire to close the chapter of the war years and return to normal peaceful pursuits both individually and as a nation. The attention span of the public -- always brief at best -- had been stretched uncomfortably by more than forty-four months of war and there was an almost audible sound of relief when the tension was released. Politically, the pendulum began to swing back to the 'out' politicians; the Republicans captured both houses of the Congress in 1946 and probably would have taken control of the White House, too, if that had been a presidential election year.

It is the stuff of historical speculation to contemplate what might have been the shape of the nation's post-war foreign policies had someone other than Arthur Vandenberg been chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee from 1946-48. If, for example, he and Senator Taft had changed places during that critical period, how much of the Truman-Marshall-Acheson blueprint for the post-war years might have been adopted and in what form? The fact of the matter was, however, that Vandenberg, the isolationist-turned-internationalist, was there and did cooperate with the administration in framing a truly bipartisan foreign policy, one that amounted to the complete abandonment of isolationism and the nation's traditional policy of freedom to maneuver, uninhibited by foreign commitments.

There were the elements for the construction of a foundation on which isolationism might have been rebuilt immediately following World War II. The Pearl Harbor hearings brought out a wealth of material which, though not by any means making any sort of solid case that Roosevelt had in some sinister way maneuvered the Japanese into the attack, nevertheless, raised doubts and introduced grey areas into what had been in the minds of most Americans a stygian black canvas of Japanese treachery. Then, too, the revisionist historians were very quick off the mark with the prolific Charles Beard leading the way. In 1946, he published his American Foreign Policy in the Making, 1932-1940, and followed it up two years later with his exhaustively detailed President Roosevelt and the Coming of the War: 1941. These books called into serious question Roosevelt's motives and his handling of foreign policy as war approached. Beard was soon joined by others such as C. C. Tansill and George Morgenstern and due to their combined efforts the 'devil' theory of World War II rapidly began to take shape.

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A body of war fiction also emerged, which was similar in many ways to the school that flourished in the 1920s (Dos Passos, Hemingway, e.e. cummings, et al). But though the post-war novels of Mailer, Irwin Shaw, James Jones and the others pointed up the filth, boredom and inhumanity of the conflict, there was no immediate questioning of the purpose for which the war had been fought; and thus their work did not produce the same wave of disillusionment with World War II as the earlier writings had generated vis-a-vis the first World War.

The post-war isolationists might have made important headway had the pre-war movement not been so totally eclipsed and discredited by the abrupt way in which World War II came to the United States. Furthermore, during the war there had been an avalanche which Beard described as "articles, books, pamphlets, leaflets . . . thick as autumn leaves" * constantly restating the thesis that the Senate's refusal to ratify the Treaty of Versailles after World War I and the consequent failure by the United States to join the League of Nations and play a leading international role were responsible in large measure for the coming of World War II.

But obviously the prime impediment to the renaissance of an isolationist movement in post-war America was the rapid emergence of a clear and present danger in the shape of an aggressive, expansionist and hostile Soviet Union. This very real, burgeoning two-dimensional threat recalled to many the developing Nazi menace of the 1930s and reminded them of the various sins of omission and commission of the democracies in facing up to the Hitlerian challenge. The consequences of refusing to react to Stalin were thus obvious and when containment was publicly proposed in the spring of 1947, it found a receptive audience.

The concept had its critics, of course. Some objected to it because of the essentially defensive, counter-punching posture it implied, while others (Walter Lippmann and Hans Morgenthau, to name but two) felt that it would require, in application, global commitments which would overtax the nation's strength and inhibit its freedom to maneuver. Nevertheless, it made sense to and had appeal for the majority; they accepted it and acquiesced in the creation of a global network of security commitments to over forty other nations. Thus, containment replaced the basic policies which had governed the nation's conduct of foreign relations since the formation of the republic.

The world-wide competition with communism which containment required caught the imagination of the American people. And in certain ways it came to resemble the 'Great Game' played by Russia and Britain on the Indian frontier during the nineteenth century. There is really no other way to describe the reaction the competition inspired. Symptomatic of the times was a poorly written, slap-dash book called The Ugly American which appeared in 1957 and which implied that the Russians were much more adept at winning hearts and minds in Southeast Asia with their Cold War tactics than were the Americans. Written by a U.S. Navy captain who had been public relations officer for CINCPAC and a University of California political science professor who had never set foot in Asia, the book caught the popular fancy and spurred Washington to re-double its efforts to turn diplomats and CIA agents into language and area specialists. The book also firmly enshrined "winning the hearts and minds of the people" in the American bureaucratic lexicon whence it found its way into innumerable reports, airmgrams, speeches, congressional presentations and other official and quasi-official documents to describe an elusive, but primary objective in our various efforts in Viet-Nam and elsewhere.

* Beard, American Foreign Policy in the Making, p. 19.

The multi-volumed adventures of James Bond, several series on television, and scores of movies flooded the media during the 1950s and early 1960s, recounting fictionally (but with a good deal of verisimilitude) the struggles and successes of American and allied Cold Warriors against their opposite numbers from the east. "Dirty tricks" were duly recorded in this "literature" and when one recalls the general acceptance and approbation this outpouring received, it seems remarkable that investigations into CIA activities are capable of generating interest, surprise or shock today.

The national resolve to prosecute the Cold War remained remarkably steady for the first two decades after the end of World War II despite Berlin crises, the Hungarian crisis, the Quemoy and Matsu crisis, and the many others. There was, however, a significant wavering during the Korean "police action." The initial public approval accorded President Truman's decision to intervene (the Gallup poll reported a 65% response that intervention was not a mistake in mid-August, 1950) melted rather quickly in the face of adversity so that by January, 1951, fifty percent of those polled felt that American intervention had been a mistake. By October, 1951 56% of those polled agreed that the Korean War was "an utterly useless war." On the eve of the presidential election in 1952, a mere 32% of those polled by the Gallup organization approved of the way President Truman was "handling his job as President," while 55% disapproved and 13% had no opinion. As to which of the candidates, Eisenhower or Stevenson, "could best handle the Korean situation," those polled voted for the general by a 67% to 9% margin. *

Despite the United Nations "fig leaf", Korea was viewed by most Americans as their war. They were obviously unhappy to see it drag on inconclusively with a continuing loss of American lives for what seemed an interminable period. The thirty-seven months it lasted sorely tried the nation's patience and spirit and the public wished ardently to be done with it. Certainly, it would be wrong to say that it became the single issue in the 1952 Presidential campaign; nevertheless, it bulked large and weighed heavily in Eisenhower's favor, particularly when he promised to "go to Korea" if elected -- the implication being that he would find some way to extricate the nation from the Korea quagmire.

There was obviously a lesson in the Korean experience with application for later Cold War skirmishes. That lesson counseled that such adventures should be as brief and bloodless as possible -- and demonstrably successful. Korea undoubtedly reawakened latent isolationist stirrings in some, but the nation was able to terminate the affair -- thanks in large measure to the fact that Stalin finally chose to die in March, 1953, leaving the Kremlin in some confusion over the choice of a successor and temporarily distracted from distant adventures -- with containment accomplished and national honor, though slightly frayed, essentially intact.

But when President Kennedy addressed the nation on January 20, 1961, his audience had forgotten the momentary faltering in Korea and seemed prepared to continue playing an active, wide-ranging foreign policy role throughout the world. The response to the young President's words was immediate and enthusiastic. The post-war policies which the United States had pursued had apparently served well the national interest; perhaps with more imaginative application they would have continuing relevance. Certainly, there was no indication that any important segment of the populace favored withdrawal from the forward positions, both moral and geographic, that the nation had staked out since the end of World War II.

* Gallup, George et al: The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935-1971 (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 1097.

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Chapter IV

THE NEW ISOLATIONISM

"In 1966 and 1967 -- culminating in 1968 -- the American people began to tire of playing a role in world. We had fought four wars, selflessly and for no gain. We had provided some \$100 billion in foreign aid, much of it to former enemies who are now competitors like Japan.

"And we found ourselves committed in Vietnam, in a war where there are no heroes, only goats. Our people became sick of Vietnam and supported our men there only in order to get them out

". . . .if America winds up the war in Vietnam in failure and an image develops that the war was fought only by stupid scoundrels, there /will/ be a wave of isolationism. This /will/ embrace the U.S. role everywhere -- including the Middle East.

". . . .the people who, after World War II, supported the Greek-Turkish aid program, the Marshall Plan, NATO today are in disarray because of two things. They are terribly disillusioned about Vietnam and they have an enormous concern with home problems of a sort and a degree that did not face us a generation earlier.

"I understand these factors but we have to assume our responsibilities both abroad and at home. We have to do both. After all, if we manage to improve the environment and living conditions in this country we must also assure that we will be around to enjoy those improvements."

Richard M. Nixon*
March 9, 1971

* Interview with C. L. Sulzberger, The New York Times, March 10, 1971, p. 14.

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Was President Nixon right? Did 1968, give or take a year or two, mark the moment when the United States took departure on a new foreign policy course divergent from the one it had set in the immediate postwar years and had pursued without important modification through the administrations of four Presidents representing both parties?

There are many who agree with the thesis. Secretary of State Kissinger obviously does, as he indicated at a press conference:

This administration came into office at what I am sure will appear as one of the great transitional periods in American foreign policy. These periods do not always coincide with the announcement of them.

In the early 1960s there were many who thought that a tremendous new change had come across American foreign policy. But I suspect that in retrospect that will appear as the last flowering of the period which was ushered in by the Marshall Plan as a more energetic application of the principle that unless the United States did everything around the world at every moment of time it would not be done at all... It was not this Administration which said:

'We will pay any price; we will bear any burden; we will meet any hardship; we will support any friend; we will fight any foe to achieve' -- I forgot what the exact rhetoric was -- 'the survival of liberty.' And I don't say this as a criticism. I say this analytically, to point out the tremendous change that has occurred in the structure of international relations.*

Others outside the Administration also seem to agree. For example, one of the more serious political reporters in Washington recently stated flatly that "the national consensus on foreign policy has been shattered ... by a series of disturbing events/which/ have forced Americans to examine the consequences of their previous beliefs." ** A European pundit of considerable renown predicted in his conclusion to a major review of America's postwar foreign policy that "a phase of relative lack of interest in the world at large will ... succeed the quarter century of American paramountcy, a paramountcy which has now in any case been relegated to the past." ***

* Press briefing, October 12, 1970, quoted in The New York Times, April 5, 1976, p. 20.

** David S. Broder, "Foreign Policy Upheaval," The Washington Post, March 24, 1976, p. A-5.

*** Raymond Aron, The Imperial Republic. (Prentice-Hall, Inc. Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1974) p. 327.

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The leap from the bounce and optimism of President Kennedy's Inaugural Address to President Nixon's bearish interview with The New York Times' Sulzberger spans a decade virtually jam-packed with events that rocked the Republic to its foundations, shook the confidence of the nation and caused the American people to question for the first time since emerging victorious from World War II whether there might be limits to their ability to solve all the domestic and foreign problems confronting them. One need only rehearse a kaleidoscopic litany of some of the major events to recall again the psychological battering the nation sustained during the decade: the Bay of Pigs, the Congo, the Cuban missile crisis, the civil rights movement, the building of the Berlin Wall, a geometric expansion of the Viet-Nam commitment, the assassination of President Kennedy, Tonkin Gulf, introduction of U.S. combat troops into Viet-Nam, the Dominican intervention, urban riots in major U.S. cities, space flights, the protest demonstrations on campuses, President Johnson's withdrawal, the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy -- coming out the other end after this roller-coaster ride the nation emerged anthropomorphically shaking its head to dispel the disorientation caused by these experiences.

But the most interesting and probably the most significant development of the decade of the 1960s was the growing estrangement between the executive and legislative branches on questions of foreign policy. The obvious focal point of the developing dispute was the question of U.S. involvement in Viet-Nam and, as the U.S. commitment grew larger, the Congress became ever more questioning and ever more insistent that it be involved by the White House in the formulation of policy. Consultation after the fact would no longer be an acceptable palliative; the two chambers demanded to be "present at the creation" of future policy. As an example of just how acrimonious the relationship between Capitol Hill and White House did become, one need only recall Secretary Rusk's open, televised hearings in March, 1968 before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Called to the Hill ostensibly to defend the entire aid bill, the subject was soon narrowed down to Viet-Nam and for the next two days the Secretary and his senatorial inquisitors indulged in a 'happening' which resembled nothing so much as the shoot-out at the O. K. Corral without actual bloodshed and with Rusk playing the roles of both Earp brothers and Doc Holliday, opposed by the Congressional Clanstons. *

Viet-Nam was just the entering wedge in what became Congress' broad-scale offensive to reinvolve itself in the foreign affairs process. Foreign assistance was another subject of active interest and the increasing scrutiny this legislation began to draw from both houses in the 1960s was another symptom that Congress was reawakening after, as one observer described it, "a quarter of a century of virtually unchallenged Presidential management and manipulation of the instruments of war and ... diplomacy." **

* The New York Times, March 12, 1968, pp. 1,16; March 13, 1968, pp.1,14.

** Max Frankel, "The Lesson of Viet-Nam," The New York Times, July 6, 1971, p. 1.

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How much of this developing, cold and occasionally hot war between the two branches of government was based on personality is obviously impossible to assess unless memoirs yet unwritten might offer a clue; certainly, there must have been an element of this present. It is impossible to imagine that Lyndon Johnson coming to the Presidency after having dominated the Senate during the late 1950s and having presided over it as Vice President was not -- at least, occasionally -- condescending in his attitude toward his former colleagues and those who had more recently come to that chamber. The easy victories he had gained in the field of domestic legislation in the aftermath of the Kennedy assassination could only have confirmed his conviction that he enjoyed a mastery over the Congress. But this is not the only nor necessarily the most important explanation of the developing rift. It also had its genesis in the fact that many members of the Congress were honestly reflecting their own unease and the doubts of an important segment of their constituencies as they began to challenge the conduct and even the bases of the policies of Cold War, containment and global involvement by which the nation had been guided in the postwar years. And though the leaders of the Congressional revolt against total White House domination of foreign affairs would protest loudly against any attempt to label them "isolationist," the sum total of their various efforts amounted to a retrenchment in American activities abroad. *

The growing rivalry between the two branches of government did not abate as a result of Lyndon Johnson's decision to retire and Nixon's victory in the election of 1968. Indeed, as might have been expected, the conflict intensified considerably with the White House passing into the hands of the Republicans, while Congress remained firmly under Democratic control. Over the next four years there were several Congressional efforts to force the Administration's hand in foreign policy matters, related principally but not exclusively to Southeast Asia. In the Senate, for example, there were moves designed to fix a firm date for troop withdrawal from Viet-Nam. Efforts were also made to tailor or modulate policy toward a particular nation or group of nations, using the leverage of appropriation and foreign assistance legislation.

Finally, in the election of 1972, the new isolationism became an active issue. For the first time since the end of World War II one of the major party candidates questioned the size and variety of the nation's overseas activities in a fundamental way. Though he was sensitive to and vehemently denied the charge that he was "isolationist," Senator McGovern missed few opportunities to declare that he favored programs that would focus on the nation's domestic problems. In his acceptance speech, for example, he sounded the major theme of his campaign when he promised to turn the country away from "excessive preoccupation overseas to rebuilding our own nation." **

* For one interested in historical parallels and regionalism in politics, it is amusing to contrast geographic origins of the various isolationists of the 1920s and compare them with those of the Senators leading the challenge to the White House in the late 1960s. Thus, we see Senator Nye (N.D.) paired with Senator McGovern (S.D.); Senator Borah with Senator Church (Idaho); Senator Hiram Johnson with Senator Cranston (Calif.); Senator LaFollette with Senators Proxmire and Nelson (Wisc.) -- Senator Wayne Morse (Ore.) was born in Wisc.; Senator Mansfield with Senator Wheeler (Mont.).

** The New York Times, July 14, 1972, p. 1.

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On another occasion, although protesting he was not an advocate of isolationism, he said that he wished to stop measuring internationalism in terms of troops the U.S. has in other countries. * His opponent, President Nixon, as well as Vice President Agnew, obviously considered that McGovern was vulnerable on the "isolation" issue; together, they kept up a steady drumfire aimed at McGovern's "foreign policy of withdrawal" and seldom missed an opportunity to affix firmly the "neo-isolationist" label to the South Dakota Senator. **

The outcome of the 1972 election did not turn solely on the isolationist issue. In fact it is difficult to assign it appropriate weight in the outcome. The Nixon campaign had so much authority and momentum in contrast to the effort mounted by McGovern that one has an impossible task in attempting to measure how much he might have been hurt by the neo-isolationist charge or whether, possibly, it might have gained him some votes that he would otherwise have lost. There were just too many other factors in the campaign, most of which were balanced against McGovern.

It is ironic that without being accorded the public attention it deserved, Nixon, himself, had already moved to reduce U.S. commitments abroad early in his first Administration. The Nixon Doctrine can be read in no other way. The retrenchment theme is also obvious in his foreign policy report to the nation issued in 1971. It seems accurate to deduce that Nixon was responding to what he perceived to be the mood of the nation. The World War II veterans, who had grown up in the 1930s and had understood and accepted the foreign policies of Truman, Marshall, and Acheson, had begun to pass into retirement by 1970, out of government and out of active service in the private sector. Nixon was obviously sensitive to the different outlook of the new generation and adjusted his policies in the direction of an orderly scaling back of commitments abroad to a level which might be more tolerable at home while at the same time not signalling a pell-mell retreat to friends and rivals abroad.

Along with other factors, there was probably an important element of economic determinism motivating Nixon's decisions to scale back. The year 1971 had, of course, been the year when the inexorable indices of international trade had forced Nixon and his Secretary of Treasury, John B. Connally, Jr., to adopt stringent and unpopular measures both at home and in our economic relations with the free world. Economic consequences of these measures aside they undoubtedly shook public confidence in the state of the nation's fiscal health and raised doubts amongst friends and allies abroad about America's willingness to consult and concert when policy is being decided on such tough issues by Washington. Though the analogy is far from exact, the unilateral nature of the American position presented at the Smithsonian in December, 1971, must have stirred memories in certain European minds, of the role played by President Roosevelt's emissaries, on his instructions; at the London Economic Conference of 1933.

* The New York Times, March 30, 1971, p.18.

** e.g., Ibid., August 24, 1972, p. 1; October 11, 1972, p. 43.

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Nixon's Second Inaugural, though warning against a retreat into "isolation that leads to stagnation at home and invites new dangers abroad," goes on to make clear that there are very real limitations on just what the U.S. is prepared to do abroad. A continuing, important foreign affairs role for the nation is indicated, but other nations will be expected to do their share. The era of paramountcy seems clearly to be drawing to a close. *

What some observers called the "power contest between Congress and the White House" ** became much more intense as Nixon's Second Administration began. The domestic dimension of the struggle obviously grew more important as the crisis called "Watergate" deepened. In foreign affairs, the major battles turned around Congress' continuing efforts to force a conclusion to U.S. military involvement in Southeast Asia. In June, 1973 the Administration was obliged to agree, under Congressional pressure, to an August 15 date for the cessation of military activities in Cambodia, with a further promise to seek prior approval from the Congress before resuming activity there.

The Congress undertook a series of investigations in 1973 into the foreign activities of certain American-owned multinational corporations, which were a follow-on to earlier investigations into the alleged involvement of U.S. corporations in the internal politics of Chile. Of particular interest to the Congress was the possibility of joint efforts by these firms with U.S. officials in questionable activities abroad. (Though far from identical in terms of goals and scope of work, these investigations are reminiscent of Senator Nye's probe of the banks and arms dealers during the period 1934-36.)

Finally, toward the end of 1973, the Congress won a most significant victory in its battle with the executive branch when, over Nixon's veto, it passed the War Powers Act, placing strict limitations on the President's powers as Commander-in-Chief. Though just how the law will function in practice remains to be seen, the intent of the legislation is obvious to anyone be he American or foreign.

The inward turning trend described by Nixon in 1971 does not appear to have reversed itself in the interval since that time. If anything, it has strengthened. In early 1974, a carefully designed, highly professional effort was made to gauge the strength of isolationist sentiment in American public opinion, and to contrast it with earlier attitudes. In an analysis of the survey's findings, the questionnaire's architect described the general mood of those surveyed as "dispirited"; he observed further that the optimism which had characterized earlier surveys had largely dissipated and been replaced by doubt and self-criticism. As to specific findings: the more than fifteen hundred respondents questioned in the survey asked to rate subjectively where, in their opinion, the U.S. stood in terms of power and prestige on a ladder scale of one to ten, past, present, and future. The results indicated a steady decline from 9.2 for past, 8.8 for present, and 8.0 for future. By contrast, the sample group considered the USSR, Communist China, Western Europe, and Japan all to be ascending and, though not as yet on a par with

* R. M. Nixon, "Second Inaugural Address," January 20, 1973, Inaugural Addresses of the Presidents of the United States (93d Cong., 1st Session -- House Document 93-208). Washington, 1974, pp. 280-3.

** The New York Times, September 23, 1973, IV, 17.

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the U.S., steadily improving their positions. Asked whether the U.S. should strive to maintain its dominant position as the world's most powerful nation, only 42 percent agreed by contrast with 56 percent who had felt that way in a similar poll taken a decade earlier. On the question of whether the U.S. should take into account the views of its major allies when taking foreign policy decisions, 69 percent agreed that the government should -- a clear majority but a 12 percent drop from ten years before. Asked if the U.S. should go its own way in international matters, without worrying too much if other nations agree or not, 32 percent voted for pure unilateralism whereas only 19 percent had done so in 1964. Finally, when asked to characterize themselves as essentially internationalist or isolationist, 41 percent saw themselves in the former category while 21 percent placed themselves in the latter group. The comparable figures for 1964 were 65 percent vs 8 percent. *

This survey would appear to confirm statistically a basic trend which took form in the last half of the decade of the 1960s and which has steadily gained in strength and importance since that time. It will obviously make itself felt to an increasing extent in the political life of the United States and in the evolution of the nation's foreign policy. It is hardly alien to America's political tradition; in fact, it has firm roots in the American past. And when, for example, the Senate Majority leader recently told a nation-wide television audience that Cuban intervention in Africa was not the responsibility of the United States and that "it is not for us to say who should or should not become involved; certainly we shouldn't," he was doing no more than faithfully reflecting and giving voice to this trend. **

* Donald Lesh (ed.), A Nation Observed; Perspectives on America's World Role. (Washington, D.C., 1974) pp. 133-50.

** The New York Times, March 29, 1976, p. 13.

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Chapter V

CONCLUSION

It seems clear that popular support for the nation's post-war foreign policy is evaporating, not necessarily because the nation has failed entirely in achieving its goals, but rather because in recent years success has not been convincing and demonstrable or profitable. Indeed, given the nation's relatively brief attention span when faced with complicated international problems, it is remarkable that successive administrations were able to engage and focus the national will for such an extended period following World War II. This was due to the efforts of articulate and persuasive individuals, both within the executive and legislative branches of government, assisted by a consensus among the more influential and thoughtful commentators and pundits who generally agreed with basic policy and differed only on questions of emphasis. It was also due, however, to the fact that our goals could be rather simply stated and easily understood by the citizenry.

But now times have changed. Against the background of the nation's long involvement in Viet-Nam and that effort's tragic dénouement, there has been a serious, perhaps irreparable breakdown of the bipartisan collaboration which characterized the postwar diplomacy of the United States and in its place we have seen substituted a growing adversary relationship between the executive and legislative branches which may be unrelated to and transcend partisan politics. In the public at large, a growing disenchantment has developed over the way in which the nation has fared in such multi-lateral fora as the United Nations, a body which in the minds of many Americans has failed to live up to the great expectations which attended its birth. There has also been disappointment at the failure of old allies "to rally round" and form a common front in the face of such common challenges as the oil embargo and the resultant energy crisis. And reinforcing all this -- the recession of 1974 which shook the nation's confidence in the same way, but to a lesser degree, as did the Great Depression of 1929; in the wake of its impact foreign affairs became subordinated to the more pressing domestic problems which faced the nation.

Furthermore, the world order the nation had become familiar with in the two decades following World War II began to break down at an accelerating rate. New nations proliferated and many, rather than being attracted by the leadership of the free world, sought models elsewhere in the ranks of our rivals and formed blocs which, if not openly hostile, were aggressively competitive. At the same time, some of the nation's old allies began to falter and various multi-lateral creations of the postwar period such as CENTO and SEATO became obsolescent while others, notably NATO, appeared to be in need of important repairs without the inner resources necessary for their accomplishment.

The world has become a much more dangerous and complex place than it once seemed and the burdens of leadership are wearisome in the extreme. The allies with whom we have shared the trials of the past thirty years are less willing and less capable of doing as much in the future as they have in the past. Given these factors, it is hardly surprising that an urge has developed within the body politic to return to an earlier, less complicated way of life when the nation enjoyed "freedom to maneuver uninhibited by responsibilities and obligations to others." The problem obviously is to fit that desire into the realities of the mid-1970s.

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Accomplishing this will not be easy. The nation could, of course, opt for an independent role much as was played in the period between the wars. Such a course is superficially attractive because it would seem to permit a certain flexibility, allowing us to tailor relations with each individual country as we saw fit, and shifting our focus of concentration from one nation or region to another as opportunities presented themselves. It would also allow the nation to play as much or as little a leadership role as popular will would tolerate, much as Stimson did as Secretary of State and as Franklin Roosevelt did in the period of the 1930s.

But in reality this attractive path is not open to us. The world of today is far different from the one that existed in the 1930s, but, more importantly, the United States is a vastly different state in relation to the other nations of the world than it was in those relatively simpler days. The burdens of the recent past cannot be quickly put aside except at great risk to the nation and its future. Somehow a way must be found to galvanize the popular will to permit the nation to go on playing a leadership role in the 1970s. No easy task given the cynicism and disenchantment abroad in the land. But some way must be found. Tom Wolfe's phrase, "You can't go home again," applies equally to nations.

APPENDIX

In an attempt to quantify the unquantifiable, I conducted my own personal public opinion poll while preparing this study. I circulated a three page questionnaire containing nine questions to a small but elite group of students in their junior, senior, and graduate years at a sprinkling of institutions of higher education which included the University of South Carolina, George Washington, Wellesley, Princeton, the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, and the University of Wisconsin. In each case the small samplings from the various campuses were taken through the good offices of various faculty friends -- but the responses were completely anonymous and no attempt was made to break down the results by institutions.

In addition to the college sampling, I circulated the questionnaire to a group of approximately equivalent size drawn from what I would call the Acheson-Dulles-Kennedy generation, people who, in most instances were twenty to thirty years out of college and were largely professionals. Again, I would say, an elite group.

Originally, I had thought of folding all of the responses together, but as they began to trickle in, there seemed such a clear distinction between the replies of the ADK generation and the college group, which I would label the "Now" generation, that I decided to generate percentages for each group in order to compare and contrast the attitudes of the two generations.

For my first question, I listed ten possible concerns which would confront the President who assumes office next January and asked the respondents to rank-order them 1 through 10 in terms of importance or urgency. The list included:

- _____ re-vitalizing the economy and reducing unemployment
- _____ improving relations with our traditional friends and allies
- _____ improving relations with the third and fourth worlds
- _____ addressing the problems of minority groups in the US
- _____ world hunger
- _____ improving the quality of the environment
- _____ the world population explosion
- _____ re-building American prestige and influence in the world
- _____ reassessing and improving our defense capability
- _____ improving relations with the USSR and Communist China

On this first question the generations were in agreement at several points. They agreed that the most important concern facing the President who is sworn in next January would be the revitalization of the economy and the reduction of unemployment. They were also in agreement on the least important concern -- the world population explosion -- and though not in precise agreement, each group placed world hunger and the improvement of the environment well down in the second half of their priority order. Where they did diverge

was in their choice of second and third priority concerns. The ADK generation felt that after revitalizing the economy, the next most important task was the re-building of American prestige and influence in the world, and this was closely followed by the need to reassess and improve the nation's defense capability. The "Now" Generation felt that these two concerns rated no better than sixth and ninth respectively in their scheme of things. Their second and third priority concerns turned out to be "improving relations with traditional friends and allies" and "improving relations with the third and fourth worlds." Obviously, these concerns cannot by any stretch of the imagination be characterized as isolationist, but there is a difference in emphasis here between the two generations which becomes more pointed when we review the responses to the other questions.

Next, I asked my respondents whether "over the next decade, they felt that the U.S. should

- _____ play as active an international role as it has since World War II
- _____ reduce its international commitments
- _____ expand its activities abroad, particularly in the humanitarian sector
- _____ expand its activities abroad in an effort to check communist expansionism"

The ADK generation provided what I considered a predictable response. A solid fifty-six percent felt we should play as active a role as we had since the end of World War II. The Now generation did not agree. Only 27% felt that the US should play as active an international role as it had since the end of World War II. An equal number felt that the country should reduce its international commitments, though a plurality within the student group (33%) would agree to expanding activities abroad in the humanitarian sector.

As a third question, I framed a query to separate the cold warriors from the rest of the flock. Listing eleven specific nations or geographical areas, I asked if the respondent "without regard for any existing security arrangements," would favor the use of US military force to protect the following nations or regions if they were threatened by some unidentified hostile external power. The territories and nations identified were Australia/New Zealand, the Caribbean, Latin America, Western Europe, Japan, the Philippines, Taiwan, South Korea, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Canada. With the single exception of Taiwan, the ADK generation voted in favor of the employment of US forces to protect all the various regions and nations on the list. The percentages of course varied significantly with Canada and the Caribbean receiving solid 100% votes while Israel and Saudi Arabia tied for low at just over 56% each. The next most defensible after Canada and the Caribbean was Japan, with Western Europe being virtually tied (97% and 94% respectively).

The Now generation was considerably less hawkish on this question than their elders. The students were unwilling to use force in four cases -- the Philippines, Taiwan, South Korea, and Saudi Arabia -- and in those cases where they favored the use of force the percentages favoring were considerably smaller than those of the ADK generation. For example, only 71% favored the use of force in the Caribbean and only 87% to protect Canada (contrasted with the solid 100% vote within the ADK generation). In only one instance do we find the Now generation favoring the use of force by a higher percentage than their elders and that is the case of Israel, where 57% favored its employment, but even here this represents only a single percentage point difference.

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More surprising in my view were the much smaller percentages favorable to assisting and protecting Japan, Australia, and New Zealand. In each case a bare 60% favored the employment of force compared to the thumping majorities -- 97% and 87% respectively -- registered in the ADK generation.

My next four questions were designed to measure the extent of a continuing popular will to involve the US in peace-keeping and in the honoring of treaty commitments. In the first of these I asked: "Assuming that war breaks out between two smaller nations in Africa, Asia, or Latin America, should the USG

- _____ take a leading role in the UN or elsewhere in an attempt to resolve the situation
- _____ lend its good offices, but leave to other nations the primary responsibility for settling the dispute
- _____ avoid involvement at all costs "

Sixty percent of the ADK generation voted in favor of taking a leading role to resolve the situation while the Now generation was much more tentative, opting with a 51% majority for a good offices' role and leaving primary responsibility to others.

Next I asked about the US bases and force levels abroad, using the following language

- Assuming there is no drastic change in power relationships presently existing, do you believe the US should (choose one)
- _____ retain its military forces and bases abroad at present levels
 - _____ plan the gradual reduction of troop levels and the selective closing of bases abroad
 - _____ repatriate military forces and close bases abroad at an accelerated rate
 - _____ none of the above

Again, the ADK generation voted to retain the status quo by a clear but not overwhelming majority (53% to retain at present levels with 34% favoring the gradual reduction of troops and selective closing of bases). The Now generation was more closely divided: 43% favoring the status quo and 40% inclining toward gradual repatriation of forces and selective closing. Curiously, 14% of the Now group voted in the "None of the above" column. It would be interesting to know what alternative proposal this percentage of the group had in mind.

The final two questions in this segment of the survey concerned NATO and SEATO and were framed as follows:

- In your opinion, should US participation in NATO (choose one)
- _____ be re-examined
 - _____ continue as at present
 - _____ be discontinued

In your view, the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO)
(choose one)

_____ though weakened, has a continuing usefulness for the US
_____ is obsolete and should be dismantled.

A solid 69% of the ADK generation voted for a continuation of our participation in NATO "as at present." This was predictable and provided no surprise. Equally unsurprising was the fact that sixty percent of the Now generation felt that our membership in NATO "should be re-examined." "Re-examined" is, of course, a word with connotations of withdrawal or, at least, a less active involvement. So I take this percentage along with the 5% who voted to "discontinue" as amounting to a weakening of conviction in the Now generation that NATO, at least in its present form, has a continuing pertinence for the US.

SEATO was something that both generations could agree on: By sizeable majorities each group felt that it is obsolete and should be dismantled.

Questions 8 and 9, the last two questions in the survey, required the respondent to give value judgments of US foreign policy since the end of World War II from two different aspects.

8. Which of the following words or phrases best describes US foreign policy in the period since the end of World War II? (choose one)

- _____ altruistic
- _____ selfish
- _____ enlightened self-interest
- _____ has prevented World War III
- _____ disastrous

Three of the possible replies -- altruistic, enlightened self-interest, and has prevented World War III -- amount to an approving response. Thus we see that the ADK generation was overwhelmingly approving, assigning almost ninety-four percent of their votes to those categories and with just over six percent describing foreign policy since World War II as "disastrous." None, interestingly enough, would define it as selfish.

The Now generation was considerably less approving. Almost 35% would describe US policy since World War II as either "selfish" or "disastrous." (This total, added to the eight percent who found none of the descriptions to be satisfactory, gets one up toward the fifty percent mark.) And even though a majority of the Now generation could be said to be approving most of these voted for "enlightened self-interest" rather than "altruistic" or "has prevented World War III."

In question 9 the respondent was asked to judge objectively US foreign policy since the end of World War II and measure it in terms of the achievement of stated goals.

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9. Strictly in terms of achieving stated goals, is it your opinion that US foreign policy since the end of World War II has been (choose one)

largely successful

a failure

on balance, a limited success

on balance, a limited failure

The results here are, I feel, quite revealing. Again, the ADK generation is considerably more upbeat than their progeny, with just over ninety percent indicating the view that America's foreign policy since World War II has been either largely successful or at the least, a limited success. None saw it as a failure, and less than ten percent felt that it was even a limited failure.

By contrast, over 55% of the Now generation believe that the nation's postwar foreign policy has failed to achieve stated objectives.

What does all this add up to? I'm inclined to feel that my little poll is supportive of the results obtained in the more comprehensive sampling undertaken by Lloyd Free and the Gallup organization in 1974. The introspective trends toward a somewhat hybrid form of isolationism, related to national tradition, but modified by today's realities and perceptions, seem to be continuing and irreversible in the foreseeable future barring the appearance of some imminent and obvious threat which might galvanize the populace.

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QUESTIONNAIRE

RESULTS

1. The President who takes office in January, 1977 will face a variety of concerns in several sectors. Given the domestic and world situation prevailing at present, how would you rank-order the following subjects on his agenda (1 through 10 with 1 being most important or pressing):

"Now"	ADK	
1	1	_____ re-vitalizing the economy and reducing employment
2	4	_____ improving relations with our traditional friends and allies
3	6	_____ improving relations with the third and fourth worlds
4	7	_____ addressing the problems of minority groups in the US
8	9	_____ world hunger
7	8	_____ improving the quality of the environment
10	10	_____ the world population explosion
6	2	_____ re-building American prestige and influence in the world
9	3	_____ reassessing and improving our defense capability
5	5	_____ improving relations with the USSR and Communist China

2. Over the next decade, do you feel that the US should (choose one)

27%	56%	_____ play as active an international role as it has since World War II
27%	19%	_____ reduce its international commitments
33%	12%	_____ expand its activities abroad, particularly in the humanitarian sector
8%	13%	_____ expand its activities abroad in an effort to check communist expansionism
5%		(No check)

3. Without regard for any existing security arrangements, would you favor the use of US military force to protect the following nations or regions if they were threatened by a hostile external power?

	"Now"			ADK		
Australia/NZ	yes 60	no 32	? 8	yes 87	no 13	? -
the Caribbean	yes 72	no 19	? 9	yes 100	no -	? -
Latin America	yes 64	no 27	? 9	yes 78	no 22	? -
Western Europe	yes 82	no 10	? 8	yes 94	no 6	? -
Japan	yes 60	no 27	? 13	yes 97	no 3	? -
Philippines	yes 40	no 51	? 9	yes 66	no 34	? -
Taiwan	yes 29	no 63	? 8	yes 34	no 66	? -
South Korea	yes 27	no 64	? 9	yes 66	no 34	? -
Israel	yes 57	no 38	? 5	yes 56	no 41	? 3
Saudi Arabia	yes 25	no 62	? 13	yes 56	no 44	? -
Canada	yes 87	no 7	? 6	yes 100	no -	? -

(N.B.) The assumption is that US assistance is requested by the legitimate government

4. Assuming that war breaks out between two smaller nations in Africa, Asia, or Latin America, should the USG (choose one)

"Now"	ADK	
44%	60%	_____ take a leading role in the UN or elsewhere in an attempt to resolve the situation
51%	37%	_____ lend its good offices, but leave to other nations the primary responsibility for settling the dispute
2%	0%	_____ avoid involvement at all costs
3%	3%	(No check)

5. Assuming there is no drastic change in power relationships presently existing, do you believe the US should (choose one)

"Now"	ADK	
43%	53%	_____ retain its military forces and bases abroad at present levels
40%	35%	_____ plan the gradual reduction of troop levels and the selective closing of bases abroad
3%	-	_____ repatriate military forces and close bases abroad at an accelerated rate
14%	12%	_____ none of the above

6. In your opinion, should US participation in NATO (choose one)

"Now"	ADK	
60%	31%	_____ be re-examined
35%	69%	_____ continue as at present
5%	-	_____ be discontinued

7. In your view, the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO)
 (choose one)

"Now"

ADK

- | | | | |
|-----|-----|-------|---|
| 33% | 31% | _____ | though weakened, has a continuing usefulness
for the U S |
| 56% | 69% | _____ | is obsolete and should be dismantled |
| 11% | | | (No check) |

8. Which of the following words or phrases best describes US foreign
 policy in the period since the end of World War II? (choose one)

"Now"

ADK

- | | | | |
|-----|-----|-------|-----------------------------|
| 6% | 13% | _____ | altruistic |
| 21% | - | _____ | selfish |
| 43% | 56% | _____ | enlightened self-interest |
| 8% | 25% | _____ | has prevented World War III |
| 14% | 6% | _____ | disastrous |
| 8% | | | (No check) |

9. Strictly in terms of achieving stated goals, is it your opinion
 that US foreign policy since the end of World War II has been (choose one)

"Now"

ADK

- | | | | |
|-----|-----|-------|-------------------------------|
| 3% | 28% | _____ | largely successful |
| 13% | - | _____ | a failure |
| 41% | 63% | _____ | on balance, a limited success |
| 43% | 9% | _____ | on balance, a limited failure |

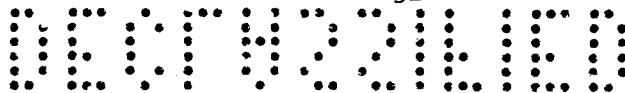
NOTE: Two hundred of the questionnaires were distributed, divided equally
 between the ADK and the Now generation. Response rate from the
 former group was 71%, while 76% responded from the latter.

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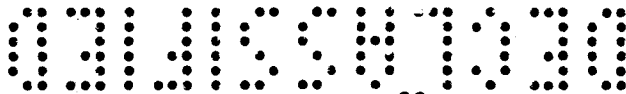
Selected Bibliography

In the preparation of this paper I consulted a multitude of sources including the obvious periodical ones such as The New York Times and those covered in the Readers Guide. The most useful of the primary and secondary sources are listed below. In addition, I benefitted greatly from conversations with many friends both in the foreign service and academia. Several were kind enough to read the paper in draft and offer many useful comments. However, lest they be associated with the shortcomings of my work, they shall remain anonymous.

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