The Question of Survival

It is not the Communists who are being contained, but the demoralized Free World.

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It is, or should be, painfully obvious that the United States of America (among others): (1) is at war with the Communist bloc, (2) is losing that war badly, and (3) is likely to lose it completely in the relatively immediate future. It behooves us, then, to arrive at a better understanding of the enemy, and to formulate policies better designed to cope with his unlimited ambitions. The two books which form the subject of this review are of very considerable aid in this endeavor.

The authors of Protracted Conflict have made a painstaking study of the Communist doctrine and technique of conflict, a doctrine and technique which include “all possible relationships between states and groups-political, economic and cultural.” The function of the conflict thus waged, of course, is the ultimate establishment of a world-wide Communist hegemony. And one of the principal reasons (though by no means the most basic one, I would add) for the Communists’ success in advancing this goal has been “their ability to conceive
of the struggle for power—its terms, its theater, its methods and its goals—in larger dimensions than their opponents.” More precisely, they have been able to project this struggle on a wider screen than the West, which is prone to limit the application of strategic principles to military engagements.

A few closely related principles are considered the staples of the Communist doctrine of conflict: the indirect approach, deception and distraction, monopoly of the initiative, and attrition.

The first of these principles calls for the use of proxies or “volunteers” to accomplish missions which could not be undertaken openly by Soviet Russia or China without running a substantial risk of a direct, general military encounter with the West. Such an encounter is to be avoided, of course—at least until the balance of power has shifted so radically as to ensure a favorable result. In the interim, the use of proxies or “volunteers” is a highly useful technique, especially since it allows the West (as in Indochina, for instance) “to back away from a firm position without appearing to capitulate to Communist initiatives.”

It should be noted that the proxy need not be under direct Communist control, so long as it helps to achieve a Communist objective. For instance, Egypt was not acting as a controlled Communist “agent” when it nationalized the Suez canal, but its action furthered a Communist objective, was urged by the Soviets, and was made possible by Soviet assurances of support. Under these circumstances, Egypt qualifies as a Communist “proxy.”

The Communist faculty for deception has enabled them to reap a collateral and ironic dividend from every major policy alteration which circumstances have forced upon the Soviet leadership since 1917. The “de-Stalinization” program is merely the most recent occasion on which the sages of the West have concluded that the Soviet leadership has abjured its Communist faith. The same conclusion was being drawn as long ago as 1921, when the failure of “war Communism” necessitated the adoption of the New Economic Policy.

Deception also takes the form of a systematic exaggeration and misrepresentation of Soviet achievement in every field, including most prominently the scientific and economic areas. In this connection, it is sometimes argued that we should accept uncorroborated Soviet claims (e.g., as to the three Luniks) at face value, since we will be spurred thereby to greater effort. This argument fails to take into account the devitalizing effect such gullibility has upon our will to combat Communism.

“Distraction” and “monopoly of the initiative” are complementary aspects of the same tactic. Under the first aspect, every effort is made to distract the West from the opportunities presented to it by the “Achilles heel” of the Communist system, Eastern Europe. The Communists endeavor to focus the revolutionary struggle in the “gray areas” of Asia and Africa, where the “swelling ideological currents—neutralism, anti-colonialism, anti-Westernism, anti-imperialism, pragmatic socialism and nationalism—are, by their very nature, directed against the West . . .” rather than in Eastern Europe, where powerful nationalisms (and, I would add, an adherence to the historic cultural and religious principles of Christendom) mitigate against assimilation into the Communist empire. Our stupefied inaction during the Hungarian crisis testifies to the success of this tactic.

Combined with this deterrence of anti-Communist initiative (achieved primarily by psychological warfare techniques) is a continuous aggressive initiative, taking whatever form conditions will allow. This results in such anomalies as the shipment
of arms by Czechoslovakia to the pro-Communist Sukarno government, and the simultaneous denial of American support to the anti-Communist Indonesian rebels. Such paradoxes are both aspects and products of the continual war of attrition against the non-Communist world, which aims at isolating anti-Communist sentiment, dividing the anti-Communist nations, and promoting an aversion to serious anti-Communist resistance among important elements of the leadership of these nations (including quite particularly the opposition political parties in Western Europe).

Turning to Massive Retaliation, it seems to me that the unique contribution of this book lies in its discussion of the influence of “public opinion” upon the formation of foreign policy in this country. This is the focus chosen by the author, who set out to formulate a “case study of public opinion and government policy” centering around the doctrine of massive retaliation. And this study is unquestionably of vital significance, since an anti-Communist policy on the part of the free world is only as strong as the American commitment to that policy.

The “debate” concerning massive retaliation, as Dr. Peeters cogently demonstrates, was a national scandal. Its most alarming aspect was the irrationality and irresponsibility demonstrated by a goodly portion of the nation’s political and intellectual leadership. For instance, Senator Humphrey informed the Senate (on April 28, 1955):

Russia turns off the faucet one day, and on the next day. She is sweetness and light one month, then a vicious dragon the next. We should not be lulled by Communist strategy. We know its objective . . .

Yet he immediately added:

I think a defense based on nuclear or atomic weapons is just planned suicide.

. . . Therefore our policy must be dedicated to peace. It must be a policy which is based on strength and knowing what we want, and there must be a consistency of policy. Let us not talk about hydrogen bombs. We are scarying away our friends by that kind of talk. But there should be more talk and more emphasis upon our real resources and the real strength of our country, namely, our faith; our economics; our political system; our land system; our programs of health, education and welfare; and our love and understanding of people. We should also have a cunning understanding of the tactics and strategy of the enemy. (Emphasis added)

What is Senator Humphrey trying to say? If a “defense based on nuclear or atomic weapons is just planned suicide,” are we to foreswear such a defense? If not, why not?

Note, in this connection, that Senator Humphrey does not explicitly renounce the nuclear deterrent, and therefore does not have to face the implications of such a renunciation. But how long will our will to use this deterrent, if necessary, survive loose talk from supposedly responsible sources about “planned suicide”? Furthermore, assuming a continued will to retaliate if necessary, does not such loose talk invite a Communist miscalculation of our will to resist, and thus increase the risk of nuclear war?

If we are to foreswear nuclear defense, in what sense will the resulting policy be “based on strength”? Does the Senator believe that we have the military capability to deal with the Communist threat after rejecting the “suicide” of nuclear or atomic weapons? If so, what military authority does he cite for his position? If not, what deterrent do we offer to a Communist system, the objective of whose strategy the resolute Senator Humphrey has determined
to keep steadfastly in mind? In short, Senator Humphrey should be advised that if we wish to preserve the “real resources” of our country, we had best be prepared to defend them.

Now if Senator Humphrey’s mental meanderings were a singular departure from probity, we would perhaps owe them the courtesy of the averted glance. But it is the thesis of Dr. Peeters’ book that this sort of thing has characterized recent debate concerning American foreign policy. It is this reviewer’s belief that Dr. Peeters proves his case beyond a peradventure; and although it is impossible, in the nature of things, to prove my point in this review, I would invite the skeptic to ponder the problem of putting a practical content into the shibboleths of “flexibility” and “imagination” which does not amount either to a flight from reality or an adoption of staged capitulation. Or he might consider Senator Lehman’s solemn advice to the Senate, also on April 28, 1955 (a trying day for the Senate, it would appear), that it was “self-evident” that an abandonment of Quemoy and Matsu would “strengthen our position,” “add to our strength,” and “increase our prestige.”

Concluding, then, that our foreign policy “debates” are deficient to the point where they should arouse national concern, the question becomes: On what should that concern focus? Dr. Peeters concludes that the liberal performance in foreign policy debate is a special application of the mental and moral malaise into which liberalism is forced by its nihilistic rejection of all fixed value and principle. I would agree, noting that the authors of *Protracted Conflict*, by defining the Cold War as a struggle between the “open” and “closed” societies, seem to adopt the liberal argument that the West is most clearly characterized not by any special view of God, man, and society, but by a willingness to entertain all views on these (and all other) questions.

This is not the place for an extensive examination of these questions, but it should be kept in mind that our foreign policy will not rise above the level of our intellectual leadership, and that a resolution of these questions, and (in my opinion) a reaffirmation of and recommitment to the traditional values of Western civilization, is requisite to the successful prosecution of the war in which we are presently engaged. I do not wish to be understood as asserting that this rededication is likely to take place in time to save Western civilization, however much I may hope that it will, and however convinced I may be that the values and truths upon which that civilization has been erected will ultimately prevail.

I WOULD LIKE to consider at this juncture the course which American foreign policy will have to follow if it is to counter successfully the Communist bid for world domination. There is a temptation to settle for half measures in this area, since what appears to me to be necessary is wildly remote from the alternatives that receive serious public attention these days. Until John Foster Dulles’ death last April, American policy had, under his stewardship, held to a far firmer line than has since been the case. On the whole, the Communist world had been convinced that we would retaliate against any further overt aggression with as much force as was necessary to thwart it, and there was no guarantee that the retaliation would be limited to the area chosen for the aggressive maneuver. (As Dr. Peeters has pointed out, incidentally, this was the distinguishing feature of the doctrine of “massive retaliation,” which did not imply that the automatic response to any Communist aggression would be a full-scale nuclear war.)

The question that is receiving attention
today is whether we should continue to be willing to risk nuclear war to counter “minor” Communist aggression. For instance, I heard it said at a recent seminar on foreign policy at the University of Wisconsin that Berlin, whose surrender would probably spell the end of Western influence on the continent of Europe, was certainly not the sort of issue over which we would use our nuclear capabilities. In this climate of opinion, it is understandable that an invocation of the yet-untried policy of “liberation” is likely to meet with rather extravagant opposition. This, however, is exactly what I propose.

The paradox in which we find ourselves has been put rather succinctly in *Protracted Conflict*:

At this moment, we are not “containing” the Communists: they are containing us—behind a constantly shrinking perimeter of Free World defenses. Behind the Iron Curtain, the Communist “peace zone” is closed to our “interference”; the Free World is the “war zone” in which the Communists can, with impunity, bring all of their implements of conflict to bear.

In this “war zone” we hold, if we are lucky, the ground which the Communists have not yet captured—or we give way. Unless we change the peculiar rules of this strange game, the Communists, even were they much less adroit than they have proved themselves to be, cannot help but win.

The obvious answer to this paradox is to assume the offensive. As the authors of *Protracted Conflict* point out (and as James Burnham observed seven years ago, in *Containment or Liberation*), the offensive must focus on Eastern Europe, which is of vital strategic importance (since Europe is still the key stake in the struggle for the world), and which has yet to be comfortably assimilated into the Communist empire.

But we had best proceed immediately to the nub of the controversy: if “taking the offensive” entails (as it must) stirring up anti-Communist activity in Eastern Europe, what are we to do when (as in Budapest) this activity erupts into an open challenge to the Communist-imposed regime? And the answer is that we must, at least under optimum conditions, be prepared to guarantee the success of the challenge, and take the risks commensurate with that guarantee.

This conclusion is not one for which I can cite Dr. Peeters, who, in stating that “material conditions” were inappropriate for intervention in Hungary, implies (I believe) that he would not favor such a guarantee. The authors of *Protracted Conflict*, on the other hand, point out that there were available to the West tactics (offering asylum to defecting Soviet troops, airborne assistance of a non-military nature, etc.) which “would have forced upon the Soviets the choice of either acquiescing to them or increasing the violence of their intervention.” It is not made clear whether this argument implies a commitment to counteract such increased violence.

There may be cases in which we could not hope to guarantee the success of an uprising in Eastern Europe. The point is, however, that if we are going to write off the Hungarian uprising—where the Nagy government claimed the support of a good portion of the populace (including the people of the nation’s capital), and massive intervention by a foreign army was required to reassert Communist hegemony—then we are predictably never going to find an Eastern European uprising with which we are willing to cast our lot. Which means that we have no moral right to a policy of “liberation,” which would not be viable in any event. Which means that we are incapable of assuming the offensive. Which
means that, given time (and not too much will be needed), we will lose. Which means the extinction of every value which makes human existence worthwhile. And there is the point.

If the penalty for a failure to take the offensive will be the extinction of the values and principles on which Western civilization is based, then the risks involved in an effective commitment to the offensive literally must be accepted. Furthermore, it is not at all true that such a commitment will automatically result in a general war. Rather, as Willi Schlamm argued recently in *Germany and the East-West Crisis*, the Communists would be extremely unlikely to begin a general war over a limited setback, convinced as they are that history is irrevocably on their side, and divorced as they are from any “face-saving” pressures from the populations whom they hold in thrall. And there is a good deal of history to support the theory of a Communist willingness to take the long view (Brest-Litovsk, for example, or their retreat from Iran in 1946).

It is clear, to say the very least, that a Communist nuclear onslaught is very far from inevitable in the event that we begin to bring pressure to bear upon them. So that the argument against an assumption of the offensive is that it will increase the immediate risk of general war, a risk inherent to some degree in every policy except capitulation. It is further clear that the present situation, in which all the pressures are directed against us, must yield disaster. We are forced, then, to choose between two alternatives, and I will leave them with the reader as Dr. Peeters has formulated them:

Does one accept as a valid objective of policy the concept of a continued national existence (in a sheer physical sense), or does the concept of national survival imply the survival of the values for which the United States stands? The atomic age has rendered this alternative both concrete and unavoidable. Whether it likes it or not, American society has to face it. Loose talk about war being suicidal can obscure—but it does not eliminate—the necessity of this fundamental decision.