

THE IRONY OF ANTI-COMMUNISM: IDEOLOGY AND INTEREST IN POST-WAR AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

Alan Wolfe

Since 1945, US leaders have pointed, with depressing regularity, to Soviet actions as proof that communism is an evil force destined to spread around the globe **unless** stopped by a firm hand. Of all Soviet actions, the one that perhaps had the greatest effect in solidifying the Cold War was the coup that brought a **pro-Soviet** leadership to power in Czechoslovakia in 1948. Yet the very same case can also be used to illustrate another fascinating feature of the **cold** War: the degree to which aggressive actions by the Soviet Union were literally welcomed by the United States in order to build a domestic consensus around anti-communism. Consider the history.

In early 1945, Soviet troops, sweeping westwards, occupied Moravia and Slovakia. On May 5th, Prague residents took to the streets and began to fight the last remaining Nazis. General **Patton** and the US Third Army were fifty-six miles away. Although American military commanders and OSS activists urged General Eisenhower to move into Prague, the Allied Commander, after consultations with Soviet **Chief** of Staff, Alexei Antonov, turned them down. By political agreement, the US had already conceded Czechoslovakia to the Russians.

The only problem with the agreement lay with the Czechs themselves. Although the Czech Communist Party was genuinely popular, the last hope for the divided and defeated country was a coalition government including both the communist leader Klement Gottwald and Czech patriots Jan Masaryk and Edward Benes. In May 1946, elections were held and the Left—split between Communists and left-wing socialists—won a tiny majority. For the next two years, Gottwald and his allies intensified the pressure to move Czechoslovakia closer to the Soviet Union. American policy seemed almost intentionally designed to help them. Washington rejected a request from Masaryk for wheat, undermining his domestic support. President Truman and Secretary of State George Marshall **deliberately refused to see the Czech hero** on his trip to Washington. On **October 6th 1947**, Marshall informed the US Cabinet that Moscow 'will probably have to clamp down completely on Czechoslovakia, for a relatively free Czechoslovakia could become a threatening salient in Moscow's political position'. Soviet efforts to control the country, Marshall concluded privately, were 'purely defensive'.¹ Masaryk, disappointed and uninformed of Washington's write-off, returned to Prague to face a

communist-inspired coup. Without any support in the US, his position was helpless, and **Gottwald**, backed by the NKVD and 18,000 nearby Soviet troops in Austria, soon took power. Czechoslovakia had become a Soviet 'satellite'.

Responding to the February 1948 crisis, the Truman administration invoked the metaphor of appeasement. 'We are faced with the same situation with which Britain and France were faced in 1938-39 with Hitler', Truman wrote to his daughter. In March, after the news of Masaryk's mysterious death reached the West, a mood of near hysteria swept over Washington. On March 17th, Truman addressed a joint session of Congress and denounced Soviet aggression: '... the Soviet Union and its agents have destroyed the independence and democratic character of a whole series of nations in Eastern and Central Europe. It is this ruthless course of action, and the clear design to extend it to the remaining free nations of Europe, that has brought about the critical situation in Europe today. The tragic death of the Republic of Czechoslovakia has sent a shock-wave through the civilized world.'

The domestic consequences of Truman's speech were immediate and dramatic. Henry Wallace, a potential threat to Truman's re-election from the Left, was isolated and eventually marginalised. In April 1948 Congress approved the Marshall Plan and the appropriations followed in June. A three billion dollar supplement to the defence budget, intended to expand the Air Force, won approval in April and it was soon increased. By the time the Czech crisis subsided, the budget of the Air Force had doubled. No other twelve month period witnessed as many changes in the structure and operations of the US military establishment as those that followed February 1948. An uncertain, quasi-isolationist economic giant had become a military superpower as well.

From the standpoint of international relations, the US reaction to the Czech crisis is difficult to understand. As George Kennan would write, there was 'nothing unexpected, nothing out of the ordinary, in any of the communist behavior—the Czech coup, and the Berlin blockade—that caused so much alarm in Western capitals. ... Washington's reactions were deeply subjective, influenced more by domestic political moods and institutional interests than by any theoretical considerations of our international position'.² Indeed, from the standpoint of domestic politics, the Czech crisis initiated a process that would be repeated time and again throughout the history of the Cold War. The significant elements of that process include the following:

1. Unquestionably, the Soviet Union acted like a major military power. It attempted to take advantage of every situation in order to establish control over any area of the world deemed essential to the national interest.
2. Far from contesting such Soviet control, the United States tacitly urged

it, comfortable with such Soviet moves and almost relieved to see them take place.

3. In public, however, the United States stated the exact opposite of what it came to expect in private.
4. In short, Cold War rhetoric and anti-Soviet hostility were never directed against the Russians but were for the benefit of the American public and congressional leaders, and the European Allies. Such rhetoric became essential to the process of stalemate-breaking, producing action where before resistance had existed.

While American policymakers saw an analogy with Munich, there was one essential difference between Prague's fate in 1939 and in 1948. Neither Chamberlain nor Daladier denounced Nazism while granting it legitimacy, but Truman and his advisors publicly excoriated the very society whose control over Czechoslovakia they tacitly accepted. In this sense, the Cold War began with a clearly recognised gap between ideology and interest. Anti-communism, as an ideology, demanded military action and a state of permanent readiness against the enemy. Yet in reality, Americans were not prepared to go back to war. Capitalists were beginning to profit from peace, and stability, not counter-revolution, became the West's ultimate objective. For US policymakers, one problem above all others would come to monopolise their attention: how to 'manage' anti-communism, to keep the flame high enough to serve domestic political objectives without turning it so high that it would lead to a conflagration.

I will argue three propositions in this essay. The first is that the US foreign policy establishment, a generation after the Cold War began, has failed to manage the gap between ideology and interest. The ideas advanced purely for public consumption in 1948 have become the private belief system of the policymakers themselves in 1984. Put another way, Washington has become more and more enamoured with one particular reading of contemporary history as the rest of the world is beginning to accept it less. The advent of the Reagan administration has resulted in a process by which the objects of a propaganda campaign become its subjects.

My second proposition is that the confusion between ideology and interest has transformed the nature of the superpower rivalry. In the late 1940s, both the United States and the Soviet Union sought strategic advantage while cloaking their ambitions in humanitarian rhetoric. In America, however, this was denied. The Russians, it was said, as perpetrators of a totalitarian ideology were forced by circumstances to act as their chiliastic vision demanded. The notion that a 'totalitarian' state would always follow the dictates of ideology turned out, in retrospect, to be a false displacement of the Nazi experience onto the Soviet Union. In actual fact, Soviet leaders, conservative to the core, demonstrated a remarkable ability to finesse the rules of realpolitik. A fact as disappoint-

ing to the Left as it was welcome to capital. It was the United States, a society convinced of its pragmatism and realism, that began to base its foreign policy on theories of how the world worked rather than the real world itself.

Third, and most troublesome, I contend that the belated triumph of anti-communist ideology, its ability to become the very reality it was invented to distort, occurs at the precise moment when a theory of nuclear strategy compels nation states to make policies based on perceptions rather than capabilities. Deterrence, as it has evolved between the super-powers, accords a much greater importance to the subjective perception of intentions than it does to the intentions themselves. The Soviet leadership, presiding over an authoritarian state with little if any internal freedom, has much less need to concern itself with the ideological distortion of its antagonist's nature than does the American leadership. Ironically, then, the Soviet Union's very undemocratic structure makes it less susceptible than the United States to the displacement of interest into ideology; contrariwise, in America, leaders are constantly forced by the dynamics of electoral campaigns to simplify the world and reach down for the lowest common understanding of their antagonist's motives. Thus a democratic society is more likely to become captivated by ideology than an authoritarian one, and as a result, its foreign policy in the nuclear age is far more likely to be unpredictable and unstable. And, since in deterrence theory, the perception of intentions has become elevated to strategic importance, it is also far more dangerous.

American policymakers were retrospectively candid about their deliberate exaggeration of the Soviet threat in the late 1940s. The Truman administration, as we have seen, shared a private understanding of Soviet conduct that differed markedly from its public statements. Two years after the Czech crisis, Paul Nitze, Leon Keyserling, and others in the administration completed work on NSC-68, their top-secret review of Soviet intentions. Dean Acheson later spoke of the importance of being 'clearer than truth' in writing the document, so as to better 'bludgeon the mass mind of "top government" . . .', while Nitze told a later interviewer that bureaucratic infighting demanded a certain sharpening of the language of 'the Soviet threat'.³ In other words, once a decision was taken to deceive the public about what officials knew to be true regarding Soviet intentions, it was a short step toward self-deception and the need for even highly placed officials to agree among themselves over the image of Soviet expansion. An image that would become official. As John Lewis Gaddis writes of NSC-68, 'Imprecision, its drafters believed, was necessary to gain action. . .'.⁴ Thus, America's overall foreign policy in the Cold War was to be quite rationally based on an imprecise and bureaucratically distorted view of its antagonist.

There was nothing remarkable or unique about the decision of the

Truman administration to deceive the public. Political elites throughout history have said one thing while doing another with unbending consistency. What is worthy of comment is the process by which America's leaders came to forget that they were lying. The explanation for this forgetfulness is rooted in the peculiarities of American political culture.

Economically, the United States became a global power as early as World War I, if not sooner. Were economics the sole explanation for the behaviour of nation states, the growth and expansion of the American economy would have led uneventfully and predictably to the assumption of global political ambitions as well. But that process was anything but smooth, for even though America had become an economic giant, its political system and assumptions about the world remained embedded in the eighteenth century. Isolationism, decentralisation, localism, balanced budgets, low taxes, the separation of powers and other American homilies were thin material for the creation of an imperial state. America's uniqueness as a world power stems from the massive discrepancy between a cosmopolitan capitalism and a parochial democracy. A pre-modern political culture has been combined with a post-modern economic system, and as a result, American policy is characterised by frequent swings from one pole to another, as if each change in a cycle requires the complete repudiation of what came before.

Although American capitalists revolutionised the means of production in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, they were, when compared to Europe, reluctant to modernise the state, preferring to articulate a *laissez-faire* ideology that became more obsolete with time. This repudiation of a political project by the economic elite placed a real burden on elected officials. Their choice was to capitulate to conventional wisdom and be forgotten or to strive for 'leadership', which meant state-building and modernisation. What came to be called Progressivism (or reform, or today, liberalism) was this latter course: the building of government capable of responding to the national and international needs of capital as a whole despite the strenuous objections of capital itself.

One method of overcoming entrenched short-sightedness was to rally public opinion behind a popular modernising crusade. By carrying an appealing message to 'the people' in some plebiscitary fashion, public opinion could be mobilised to undermine the entrenched opposition to **state expansion** that existed in local government, the US Senate, and the courts. The trouble lay in discovering an appropriate appeal. Populistic candidates often found themselves in touch with a mass base, but their agenda (controlling banks and railroads and attacking the profit motive) asked for trouble in respectable places. In the search for a programme of mass appeal that would expand the scope of government, yet at the same time would not court dangerous passions, public officials soon discovered the realm of foreign policy. In the period between the

administrations of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, the modern American state was invented.

Although Roosevelt and Wilson were both expansionists, there was one significant difference between them. The former was an unabashed imperialist whose explicitly stated goal was the triumph of American power and prestige. The latter, whose global ambitions were fully as strong, consistently subsumed his objectives under more appealing rhetoric, including even anti-imperialist notions. Of these two models, the Wilsonian one soon established its superiority. Americans seemed not to object to the creation of an empire, but they never wanted it acknowledged that this was what they were doing. Theodore Roosevelt's explicitness was his undoing. Wilson implicitly understood that American political culture was parochial and pacifist, therefore requiring that humanitarian symbols be used to explain actions in the national interest.

Of these two approaches, there is little question that Franklin Roosevelt, the next American president to take the country into war, borrowed Wilson's and not his cousin's method. The great political genius of F.D.R. was the elaborate ritual he developed to involve the American people in the European war gradually without seeming to do so.⁵ More than any other president in this century, F.D.R. established the tradition of stating one thing ideologically and doing the opposite in his international actions. As John Milton Cooper comments:

The main lessons that Roosevelt's successors have drawn from his foreign policies have been that the public usually has to be either hoodwinked or inflated into pursuing the right course and that attempting to educate the people only invites trouble. The muchdiscussed and frequently condemned 'imperial presidency' of the middle of the twentieth century has been Franklin Roosevelt's chief legacy to his presidential successors.⁶

Franklin Roosevelt's shadow was enormous, and it included, as William E. Leuchtenberg has noted, the birth of the military-industrial complex as well as the welfare state.' The capacity of the Truman administration to maintain both a private and a public view of Soviet intentions—a capacity shared by its successors—had its origins in the way F.D.R. managed domestic public opinion during World War II

The liberal presidents who cultivated an atmosphere of international crisis in order to build up support for their version of expanded state power (Truman, Kennedy, and Johnson in recent times) were taking a calculated gamble. They hoped, or at least assumed, that over time Americans would grow into their role as imperial protector, shedding their isolationism and quaint political customs in favour of the economic and material benefits they would gain from leadership in the world economy. When that point was reached, when the American political system was revised to bring it into line with what the American economy had achieved,

then presumably, the kind of anti-communist hysteria distastefully cultivated for domestic political reasons could be dropped. What democratic liberals never seemed to understand, and what Ronald Reagan and the Republican Right understood brilliantly, was the remarkable staying power of political culture, its ability to live on as an anachronism even as the economy seemed to dictate otherwise.

Neither American political culture nor the US state ever modernised the way that liberal reformers hoped. In the 1980s, America retains its global ambitions, but its domestic politics still linger in the past. The public is narcissistic, concerned with its own condition, barely cognisant of the rest of the world. When, for example, President Reagan's national security advisor, the most powerful position in government, did not know the names of the countries and leaders he would be dealing with, his ignorance was no obstacle to his appointment.

A rampant desire to keep taxes low affects both parties, even though all imperial ambitions are expensive and must ultimately be paid for from tax revenue. Ethnic considerations at home shape foreign policy decisions abroad, a process no self-respecting empire can tolerate for long. Partisanship is bitter, government divided, consensus fractured and the elite in disarray. In short, rather than America's global participation shaping its political system, the unique American political system has shaped America's imperial behaviour.

The result of the persistence of pre-modern politics into post-modern economics is a hybrid system that can only be described as isolationist imperialism. Americans want to be militarily strong, but they refuse to see their sons die in wars. They have Spartan longings for discipline combined with an Athenian taste for instant gratification and pleasure. They swing rapidly back and forth from belligerence to an overwhelming reluctance to use force. A nation that admires courage is constantly consumed by fear. When fear of war dominates, Americans search for controls on arms. But when fear of the Russians dominates, they urge their politicians to build the very arms they previously wanted controlled. It is as if there are two Americas, each one corresponding to different visions of the Soviet Union. Anti-communism brings out the worst of those two Americas, encouraging parochialism, self-righteousness, religious millenarianism, ideological rigidity, and excessive moralism. A society that combines isolationism with imperialism is a society that imposes itself on the world twice, once to control it economically, and then to preach to it morally.

The anti-communism fashioned at the end of World War II to smooth the transition from isolationism to imperialism has taken on a life of its own. To such a degree, in fact, that it has become counterproductive to capitalist needs themselves. The phantasmagorical increases in military spending contemplated by the Reagan administration, for example, while

of striking benefit to specific constituencies, threaten to undermine sustained economic growth for generations to come by creating permanent deficits. The challenge to American capital from Japanese and German firms is exacerbated by the reliance on cumbersome technology and top-down innovation inherent in a militarised economy. Any hopes for a kind of trilateral economic management of the world economy—the latest word in capitalist planning just a few years ago—have been doomed by the overt nationalism of the Reagan administration.

In the 1980s, in other words, anti-communism threatens to undermine the Western alliance. It leads to eventual economic stagnation, reduces America's capacity for innovation, pegs interest rates at exorbitant levels, creates future inflation, and convinces the rest of the world that America is an unstable partner. Yet anti-communism is so firmly entrenched in the incumbent administration that it would be barely relaxed should a new administration come to power. Men like George Kennan in the late 1940s saw anti-communism as a temporary device that would increasingly become less necessary. Rarely has a gamble proved more wrong, and with such serious consequences.

The persistence of anti-communism long past the time when its inventors hoped it would disappear must be regarded as testimony to the strength of democracy. There have been many empires in world history. There have also been many societies with universal suffrage. America is the first to combine them both for any length of time and with extraordinary results.

In the late 1940s, men like Reinhard Niebuhr and Hans Morganthau worried about whether Americans could be convinced to live up to their imperial responsibilities. Fully aware of the latent isolationism in American political culture, these so-called 'realists' questioned whether democracy was compatible with globalism. Let the people decide through some kind of mass politics, they reasoned, and Americans being as they were, people would opt for privatism and parochialism over sophisticated participation in world affairs. The concern of these men was well founded, but it had a twist they never understood. American democracy did permit a mass society, composed of an essentially unsophisticated public, to elect their political leaders. But instead of retreating from the notion of empire, such mass participation kept alive the anti-communism that was its rationale, even as the realists themselves, such as Morganthau and Kennan, came to question the very imperial premises they once advocated.

Democracy at home and imperial management abroad create an extremely unstable combination. Surely this is why the Soviet Union, with little need to worry about domestic dissent, contested elections, journalistic leaks, and public debate, can sign treaties with the United

States and expect to see them ratified; a simple matter that no American leadership can ever count upon. Surely this is also why America's most ambitious globalists (from the gentlemen free-traders of the late 1940s to the conservatives around Reagan today) are men uncomfortable with democracy, engaged in a perpetual quest to curb the press, place limits on public access to government, and rely on the most covert possible agencies of the state. Those Americans most hostile to the Soviet Union are also those who most emulate the anti-democratic character of the Soviet system.

There are limits to how far any American administration can go in placing restrictions on democracy for the sake of imperial ambitions. There is, and for most of this century has always been, a far more attractive alternative. Instead of narrowing the scope of democracy to dull its effects, one can achieve the same objective by expanding it. Since the days of Napoleon III, it has been no secret that a mass public can be mobilised to register support for elite objectives, so long as the elite takes sufficient care to flatter popular prejudice, play to public ignorance, and reinforce traditional symbols. The coexistence of empire and democracy has not abolished the latter but transformed it. Americans have little conception of democratic citizenship except a passive obligation to vote, and not even all Americans do that. The kind of democracy that has developed as a by-product of the Cold War is one that elites need not fear. Incumbents, so long as they are willing to pander to the public have unlimited opportunities to distort the national 'debate' and to win support for their programmes. Such leeway is not completely unrestricted; there was nothing Ronald Reagan could do to keep US troops in Lebanon, for example. But the passive, plebiscitary form that democracy has taken in the United States, especially since the late 1940s, is one that, with just a little bit of work, can become another aspect of proper imperial management. The American people can be treated in roughly the same way that one finds a new government for Chad.

The persistence of anti-communism and the transformation of democracy into plebiscite is, in reality, the same process. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the American political elite created a system intentionally designed to prevent the concentration of political power. Government was to be shared between state capitals and Washington, with, if anything, a preference towards the former. At every level of government, power was to be divided between executive, legislative, and judicial functions. Private factions—later to be called interest groups—were recognised to play a public role. Although a distrust of political parties was present, given the other assumptions of the system, it was inevitable that they too would divide and fracture power. Few of the early theorists of American democracy understood that such eighteenth century notions of the polity would prove incompatible with national

aspirations, though Alexander Hamilton was one conspicuous exception and John Marshall another. Many understand it now, however, and as a result, there are roughly three schools of thought seeking a solution to the problem.

1. There are those who would essentially 'reform' or abolish fractured political power and replace it with a national, modernised state. This is an especially popular view among Kennedy-type liberals like Theodore Sorensen.⁹ It is akin to rationalisation in the economic sphere, which appropriates the language of efficiency for the sake of more deliberately pursued objectives.

2. There are those who would keep fractured political power and be prepared to forego imperial adventures incompatible with it. At one time this position was lodged in the extreme Right. Now it has, with the exception of a kind of libertarianism, shifted to the Left. But in any case it is a minority tendency that has little weight in the national discussion on these matters.

3. Finally, one can keep the forms of decentralised political power—and even praise them constantly—while stripping them of power in favour of less accountable but more streamlined covert agencies or private concentrations. Thus, the Reagan approach, represents an updated version of Walter Bagehot's distinction between the 'dignified' and 'efficient' parts of government. For it to succeed, it must rely on crusades like anti-communism both to give unity and to deflect public scrutiny.

Expressed in this way, it becomes possible to offer an explanation of why it came to pass that the gap between anti-communism as ideology and as interest has been lost. It will be recalled that the theme of this analysis is not that policymakers in the late 1940s deliberately distorted the Soviet threat; it is in the nature of holders of political power to distort their objectives. The far more challenging phenomenon to explain is *by the foreign policy establishment ultimately came to believe in private what it once offered only to the public*. It seems clear that the reason for this failure is connected to what Allen Matusow has called 'the unravelling of America'. That is, the process by which the hegemony of the American liberals in the post-war period was undermined, which was mainly due to their misreading of the mood of the times.¹⁰

The Cold War liberals of the Truman administration, epitomised by men like Dean Acheson and Averill Harriman, were essentially nineteenth century elitists operating in a twentieth century, democratic political culture. Their vision of the state was one in which a small, well-bred, and informal elite would, through the appropriate channels, make decisions in conjunction with similar elites in other countries. In this, Great Britain was their model. Unable to contain their contempt for the public and its ways, and distrustful of the fractured and decentralised government that made coordinated decision-making outside the public

view close to impossible, they invited opposition from the more conservative interests which had their roots in local institutions. The McCarthy period, for example, had far more to do with the conservative distrust of men like Acheson than it did with any serious hunt for Communists or subversives. And it was because the liberal foreign policy establishment was so elitist by temperament, that the conservative opposition could monopolise democratic symbolism. From McCarthy to Reagan, the conservative attack on foreign policy liberalism has traditionally been cast in a populist and democratic language. When liberals essentially lied about their true objectives—writing off Czechoslovakia, or, of far more importance to the Right, conceding Korea and China to socialism—they were being realistic in international terms but naive in domestic politics. They enabled the Right to accuse them of arrogance, and prepared the way for a counter-elite, that really believed in its rhetoric, to take power.

The triumph of anti-communism as ideology is the revenge of the American Right. Since the New Deal, there has been a die-hard conservative movement in the United States waiting for an opportunity to end its isolation from American life and to roll back the gains achieved by working people and minorities." Ironically, it was foreign, not domestic policy, that gave them their chance. To this day, public opinion polls show that the specific programmes of the New Deal are still popular. No conservative government ever could have come to power in the United States by arguing for limits on social security and other New Deal programmes. Had liberals stuck to their domestic objectives, they might still be in power. But they did not. They possessed unquenchable imperial ambitions. And following their mentors Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt, they were never willing to state those ambitions openly. So long as they did not, so long as they told the public one thing while doing another, they ran the risk of losing not only their foreign policy agenda but their domestic one as well. Anti-communism could not be turned on and off at a moment's notice. Liberals' distrust of democracy gave rise to an anti-democratic Right that could achieve its anti-populistic objectives in the language of populist democracy. Hubris has its place in Greek tragedy, but in a democratic political culture, it is political suicide.

If there is a tragedy in this story, it comes not from the fall of liberalism, but from the fact that anti-communism as an ideology reached its culmination at a time when an important shift in strategic theory was taking place. The rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States, after all, is unlike any previous national rivalry in world history. When land-based, labour intensive, gruelling wars were fought between many different

states, capabilities ultimately determined victory or defeat. In the Cold War, where the existence of nuclear weapons between major powers makes such wars impossible, capabilities lose their meaning at a certain point. As this began to dawn on policymakers, intentions rather than capabilities became the key element in the theory of deterrence.

√ Once each side in the Cold War developed even a relatively small number of nuclear weapons capable of destroying the major cities of the other, national security considerations focused on second-strike retaliation. Once, that is, it was sufficiently clear that there was no effective defence against a nuclear firststrike. Deterrence logic held that the only secure method of preventing the other side from launching first was to convince it that enough retaliatory potential would remain to wreak total havoc. The premise of deterrence theory was that no leader of a superpower could be so irrational as to risk the inevitable destruction of his own society by launching first. There was substance to this argument. For a generation, deterrence seemed to prevent a nuclear war, or, to be more precise, no nuclear war took place while deterrence was practised. Moreover, there seemed to exist, especially from about the mid 1960s to the mid 1970s, a roughly stable pattern of mutual expectations between the superpowers.

Over time, however, something seemed to go wrong with the theory of mutually assured destruction. For one thing, new technologies offered fantastic new potentialities: MIRVing increased the number of targets, fire power was increased, and computerisation led to promise of pinpoint accuracy. In addition, strategic theorists began to argue that each side should begin to target each other's weapons (counterforce) in addition to their cities. A suggestion which seemed to run against the grain of second-strike planning. Third, both sides, but especially the US, began a fascination with weapons that contained the potential for a pre-emptive first-strike. The MX missile was the most notorious instance, with the Soviet SS-20s being somewhat more ambiguous but certainly destabilising. Finally, the US took the lead once again and planners began to think about reviving anti-ballistic missile systems. President Reagan's fascination with Star Wars technology is an aspect of this. These systems, however, because they seek to prevent an incoming first-strike, undermine the basic premise of mutually assured destruction.

There is a technological explanation for the gradual undermining of mutually assured destruction. It is that once certain first-strike or ABM systems can be developed, they will be developed. Ironically, one can take heart from such a technological determinism, for it implies that human beings themselves did not choose to bring the world a step closer to nuclear destruction but were forced to do so by means over which they had no control. Unfortunately for such optimism, the technological explanation is not sufficient, both because ABM and first-strike technology

is still imperfect and because it was also imperfect fifteen years ago. The breakdown of MAD, in short, must be located somewhere else, and I wish to suggest that a major cause, at least on the American side, lies in the dynamics of its domestic political system.

In retrospect, the flaw in MAD was political, not technological. It lay, not with the enemy's leaders, who could easily understand that there was no defence against a nuclear war, but with one's own population, which found it difficult to understand the proposition at all. For deterrence to work, a political leader would have to patiently explain to his own people that they must accept the reality of being left undefended against a first-strike in order to ensure that the other side did not launch one. Put another way, those state officials responsible for national security would have to confess, if MAD were to survive, that in the nuclear age there is no such thing as national security. No democratic leader, and certainly no American one, could make such a confession and survive politically.

Deterrence led directly to a situation in which the leaders of the two superpowers shared an understanding of the nature of nuclear war that they were incapable of sharing with their own people. There was only one solution to this problem, and that was not to share it at all. In the Soviet Union, the elitism implied by deterrence was not even conceptualised as an issue, since democratic expectations did not exist. But in the United States, national security considerations that precluded the discussion of their nature became an essential component of liberal arrogance. Men like Robert McNamara and his 'whiz kids' went along blissfully making the US more vulnerable to a Soviet first-strike in order to insure deterrence. They did not, however, offer any credible explanation of why they were doing this, even though it made perfect sense globally. In other words, the very factors that made deterrence work between states, made it unworkable within states, or at least within democratic ones. It was precisely because deterrence meant the creation of two political realms that it was incompatible with democracy. That is, the creation of one realm between the superpowers that was based on a logic totally different from the other, that between the leaders of a single superpower and its own people. Thus, in an age of nuclear war planning, a closed society can be more 'responsible' globally than an open society. At some point, a democratic society will have to choose whether democracy is important, in which case it can no longer practise deterrence, or whether nuclear superpower status is important, in which case it can no longer practise democracy.

America chose to forego deterrence, at least that version of it premised upon mutually assured destruction. As the anti-communist ideology that was launched for instrumental reasons in the late 1940s penetrated through both its society and leadership, it raised an obvious question that liberals committed to MAD could not possibly answer: if the Soviet Union

is as bad as you have been telling us since 1948, then why are we sitting here waiting for them to attack us first? For a surprisingly long time, that question was not asked, only because almost no questions about nuclear strategy were asked in the public realm. But as the conservative Right gathered strength and prepared to take power, it could not avoid such vulnerability for long. From the perspective of the Reagan administration (a perspective shared by conservative Democrats as well) the conversion of anti-communist ideology into policy meant living with the end of mutually assured destruction.

From this point forward, deterrence, if it exists at all, exists with a new set of premises. In order to prevent the other side from launching a first-strike against us, the new logic suggests, we must convince them that we are contemplating a first-strike against them. Thus, the clear strategic importance of the MX missile, leads directly to launch-on-warning concepts and to pre-emptive first-strike thinking. This shift in deterrence theory is perhaps the single most important event in international relations that has taken place in the last decade. It represents a major heightening of the danger of nuclear war. And a major reason for it lies with the fact that ideology interfered with interest in the articulation of strategic doctrine. If both superpowers had been authoritarian societies with no need to explain their global actions at home, we might still be living without first-strike planning. But to its credit, one of the superpowers was not authoritarian and, as a result, it found itself unable to live with what appears to be in retrospect a marginally safer logic than the one it is beginning to practise.

Unlike wars fought before the advent of nuclear weapons, mutually assured destruction shifted the focus of interest from capabilities to intentions. Now the shift from MAD to first-strike planning shifts the focus again from intentions to perceptions of intentions. A subtle, but vitally important, distinction. It is not enough, under the Reagan doctrine, to build first-strike weapons, one must also increase the hostile rhetoric associated with them in order to convince the Russians that we might just use them. This process is similar to the so-called 'mad man' theory of Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon, which was premised upon a willingness to convince the enemy that they were capable of even the most irrational acts. Thus, MAD was premised, however tangentially, on a theory of human rationality, assuming that no rational leader would launch first if that meant the destruction of his own society. On the other hand, the newly emerging strategic doctrine builds an expectation of irrationality into the mind of the antagonist. It is important, in the new logic, that the antagonist's perceptions of what we are capable of doing remain uncertain, so as to guarantee they will take no offensive action. In short, the shift from MAD to its successor is a shift from giving the antagonist the greatest possible assurance that he will know what we are going to do to one of maximising his uncertainty about what our

intentions are.

As perceptions of intentions replace intentions, in the logic of strategic theory, the final and most unsettling point in the narrative is reached. At the start of the Cold War, when the United States possessed a monopoly on nuclear weapons, its leaders created an ideology which differed substantially from what they knew to be the reality. Then, as parity between the superpowers and mutually assured destruction took hold, the United States began to believe its own ideology about Soviet intentions, becoming the victim of its own propaganda campaign. In this second phase of the Cold War, the Soviet Union as a closed society, was not susceptible to the process of substituting ideology for interest, its foreign policy could therefore stabilise around a pure balance of power model.

In the third stage of these developments, when the perceptions of intentions become more important than the intentions themselves, the ideological construct developed by one superpower becomes the model for the other. Faced with a relentlessly ideological campaign directed against them—one that even questions their right to exist as a society—the Soviet leaders respond in kind, reviving their own long-dormant ideological visions of the United States. This, of course, acts as a self-fulfilling prophecy for American leaders, who can now point with pride to Soviet ideological behaviour as positive proof that American ideological perceptions were correct all along. In summary, if the Cold War began with one power acting on ideology and the other on interest, and then reached a period when the two roles were reversed, it has culminated in a process where both act on ideology and neither on interest. That, surely, is the point where there is no longer any innocence and victimisation marks the relations between the superpowers. Each has become part of the other's worldview, each necessary for the other to justify itself.

The process begun when anti-communism became the public rationale for America's global ambitions has, in the 1980s, come full cycle. American leaders not only believe what they once hoped just the public would believe, but they have also managed to convince the Soviet Union to believe it, thereby reconfirming their own beliefs. Ideology needs such cyclical movement to keep it alive, especially, as in the case under discussion, when the ideology has less and less to do with the way the world actually works. It is a dangerous enough business, this process by which ideologies bring into being the behaviour upon which they are predicated. It is doubly dangerous when the parties concerned possess the kinds of weapons they do. Evidently, the cycle will only be broken when a political movement with an interest in survival and not with an ideology of apocalypse can assume enough power to force a shift in the dynamic between the two nuclear superpowers.

NOTES

Interesting accounts of the Czech events are contained in Richard Mayne, *Postwar*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), p. 118-139 and Daniel Yergin, *Shattered Peace*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978), p. 343-357.

2. Quoted in Robert Dallek, *The American Style of Foreign Policy*, (New York: Knopf, 1983), p. 176.
 3. Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, (New York: Norton, 1969), p. 375-76; Paul Y. Hammond, "NSC-68: Prelude to Rearmament", in Warner Schilling, ed., *Strategy, Politics, and Defense Budgets*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), p. 309.
 - John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 99.
 - See Robert A. Dallek, *Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Foreign Policy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979).
 - John Milton Cooper, Jr., *The Warrior and the Priest*, (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 361.
 - William E. Leuchtenbert, *In the Shadow of FDR*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 245.
 - See Ernest W. Lefever, *Ethics and U.S. Foreign Policy*, (New York: Meridian Books, 1957) for a discussion.
 9. Theodore Sorensen, *A Different Kind of Presidency*, (New York: Harper, 1984).
 10. Allen Matusow, *The Unravelling of America*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1983).
- On this point, see Michael Miles, *The Odyssey of the American Right*, (New York: Oxford, 1980).