

FREEDOM, DEMOCRACY AND THE AMERICAN ALLIANCE*

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I

The American alliance has been at the very core of the political life of all major capitalist countries (and of many minor ones as well) ever since the end of World War II, and has served as a crucial element of agreement between conservative, liberal and social democratic leaderships in the realm of defence and foreign policy. Even to raise the question of the desirability of the alliance, and of possible alternatives to it, such as some form of 'non-alignment', was until quite recently, in countries such as Britain, to infringe a very powerful taboo, and was certain to invite accusations of naivety or eccentricity, or of harbouring perverse and sinister predilections for Soviet Communism.

Of course, many organisations and movements have come into being over the years whose purpose was to oppose American interventionism, or to oppose the defence and foreign policies of countries allied to the United States as well as those of the United States itself—the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign in the sixties and early seventies, the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign today, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the movement for European Nuclear Disarmament, the campaign against the installation of cruise missiles in various European countries, etc.

However, no such organisation or movement has made the ending of the American alliance its main focus and purpose. One reason for this is that many of the people involved in these campaigns and movements have felt that, even though they might want to see this come about, an explicit commitment to such an aim, given its very radical and controversial nature, must jeopardise the immediate task at hand.

There are cases where this seems reasonable—for instance Solidarity Campaigns. In others, however, the question of the alliance impinges directly upon the immediate aims, and cannot realistically be eluded. It is not realistic, for instance, to demand unilateral nuclear disarmament, and the closing down of nuclear and other American bases in Britain,

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and remain committed to the NATO alliance, which makes nuclear 'deterrence' the central element of its defence strategy, and whose principal member has so far rejected even the 'no first strike' pledge to which the Soviet Union has long been committed.

But be that as it may, there are many powerful reasons for seeking an end to the American alliance for a country such as Britain. It is this which I propose to argue in this article. The idea of independence and 'non-alignment' has begun to make its way in political life; and what had until a short time ago been virtually unsayable outside the revolutionary Left (where the idea had been current since the last stages of World War II) is now said by many people who are made apprehensive and are repelled by American policies and actions.' It is for many reasons of the utmost importance that this should be encouraged and strengthened, and that a movement should be built up which is sufficiently strong to make the ending of the American alliance a central issue in political life, and eventually an attainable goal. Nothing less than a strong movement could advance an enterprise which is bound by its very nature to be exceedingly fraught and arduous. Its development requires among other things, the deployment of a reasoned case for independence and 'non-alignment'. The present article is conceived as a contribution to the making of such a case.

II

The first and perhaps the most basic question to be asked about the alliance is what purpose it is intended to serve. Ever since the end of World War II, a deafening chorus of American and European voices, speaking through very conceivable means of communication, has given an answer to that question which has been made so familiar by dint of constant reiteration as to seem to be expressing an incontrovertible truth: the purpose of the alliance is to deter Soviet expansionism and Soviet-sponsored Communist subversion.

I will presently argue that, far from expressing an incontrovertible truth, the proposition is essentially false. The notion of the Soviet Union as a state bent on expansion and world domination, and as deterred from aggression solely by the threat of American nuclear retribution, must rank as the greatest and most effective myth of the twentieth century; and much the same must be said about the notion of Soviet-sponsored Communist 'subversion'. As already noted, to say this is to invite accusations of naivety, blindness and active support for the many acts of repression at home and abroad for which the Soviet Union has been responsible over the years. But it is nevertheless imperative to say it, if any sense is to be made of contemporary reality.

The real purpose of the alliance, from its inception, has been very

different from the rhetoric which is constantly used to justify it and must be understood in terms of the policies and actions of its most powerful member. There have been occasions when these policies and actions have provoked reservations and disagreements on the part of America's allies; and this has been particularly frequent since Ronald Reagan assumed office in January 1981. In real terms however, this has amounted to little more than pulling at the sleeve of the President and begging him to speak or act in ways less embarrassing to his allies: at no time has this brought into question the alliance itself, or jeopardised the support which its allies have been willing to accord to the United States. On the contrary, the criticisms and opposition which 'mainstream' politicians have levelled at the United States (and this has in any case been quite muted) have always been accompanied by fervent affirmations of support for NATO. It is to strengthen the alliance, not to loosen it, that America's allies have occasionally sought to deflect American policies and actions, and that they have urged the United States to show greater flexibility in negotiations with the Soviet Union, or in its dealings with states which, like Nicaragua, have incurred America's wrath. All in all, and despite frequent complaints by American politicians and commentators that the allies were incurable 'appeasers' and inadequately zealous in support of the United States, that support has in fact been very steady. Nor is this very surprising, considering the real purposes which the United States has sought to serve.

In essence, the United States, ever since World War II, has been engaged, sometimes alone, sometimes with the help of its allies, in a formidable enterprise of global dimensions, namely the stemming, and wherever possible the stifling, not only of revolutionary change in the world, but of radical reform as well. There have been many variations in the ways in which this enterprise has been conducted, but its fundamental purpose has remained remarkably consistent throughout the post-war era.

The main objective, quite logically, has been to maintain in power governments which could be relied on not to depart from a firm commitment to capitalist enterprise, and not to adopt policies or take measures which threatened in any way home and foreign, notably American, interests. The concern however, is by no means the protection of economic interests alone, crucial though that often is. Other considerations, of a strategic and political nature, enter as well.

Thus, any country in the world, however insignificant it might appear to be, could become a source of untapped 'strategic' materials; and it could also be useful as a listening post or as a military base. But even if a country is of no conceivable use or significance at all, it should all the same be safeguarded, in the perspective of American and allied policymakers, from potential revolutionary upheaval, since any such occurrence provides a dangerous example for other countries, in a much-feared 'domino' sequence. Also, revolution and even radical reform, in so far as they adversely affect

American and allied interests must, if unchecked, cast grave doubts on American 'credibility', particularly in the eyes of many shaky regimes whose hold on power is dependent on American support; and this correspondingly encourages the opposition, and is also supposed to strengthen Soviet adventurism. Most crucial of all, the coming into being of 'unreliable' regimes in general and revolutionary regimes in particular may, it is believed, provide the Soviet Union with additional influence and new strategic advantages; and in so far as policymakers in the United States and elsewhere in the capitalist world are persuaded that the Soviet Union poses a grave threat to their 'national security', of which more later, and that it is a major source of subversion and instability in the world, any such additional influence or advantage must be taken to be disastrous.

Many if not most of the governments which require to be sustained on these calculations are exceedingly repressive and corrupt, and make a sinister mockery of the notion of freedom and democracy, whose pursuit and defence are supposed to inspire American foreign policy. This may be regretted in Washington, not least because support for these regimes raises embarrassing political problems at home and abroad, but support in military and economic terms is nevertheless forthcoming. It is only when the tyranny and corruption of a regime arouses so much internal opposition as to make it unviable (as happened in Iran in 1979 and more recently in Haiti and the Philippines) that the United States reluctantly abandons its friends and clients and seeks to ensure that the successor regime only undertakes a minimum of reforms, and leaves the existing economic and social structures virtually intact. From this point of view, the revolution which overthrew Ferdinand Marcos and brought Mrs Aquino to power in Manila represents a perfect 'scenario', at least so far: no wonder that she was invited to address a joint session of Congress and was given a standing ovation when she did so. Her wish to enter into negotiations with Communist and other guerilla movements is strongly resented by the United States; but it is a small price to pay for the confiscation of a massive popular movement.

The first purpose then, is always to prevent not only revolution but also radical reform, or at least to limit so far as possible the scope of reform. In this sense, the enterprise may be labelled conservative, in the literal sense of the word. 'Conservative', on the other hand, is a word which is never used to describe the purpose of American interventionism. On the contrary, what American and other capitalist governments proclaim to be their aim right across the world is freedom, democracy, progress, reform, justice, human rights, and so forth, none of which is immediately conjured up by the term 'conservative'. Indeed ever since 1945, a massive effort has gone into suggesting that the status quo was the very last thing that the United States in particular was seeking to defend and strengthen in a world of turmoil and change. Thus it was that

some ingenious ex-Trotskyists working on *Fortune* Magazine thought of appropriating the language of revolution for anti-revolutionary purposes by devoting an entire issue of the journal in **1950**, at the height of the first Cold War and the McCarthyite witchhunt, to the theme of *America: The Permanent Revolution*. The idea has had many imitators since then. In the real world, however, conservatism is a quite exact term to describe the efforts which the United States and its allies have deployed since the Second World War to prevent revolution and contain radical reform.

This is not always easy. Governments in one or other country of the capitalist world, notably in the 'third world', do come to power and seek to embark on far-reaching social and economic changes. A different American objective then comes into play, namely the deployment of all possible means necessary to destabilise and ultimately overthrow the delinquent government. How that government has come to power makes no difference. Popular support and electoral legitimation are an embarrassment, but not a crippling one, as has been demonstrated in the case of Nicaragua. Elections which return such a government are by definition fraudulent and invalid, even if, as in Nicaragua, they are conducted with remarkable honesty for a country under attack. By contrast, rigged elections conducted by a 'reliable' government, however repressive it may be, should be applauded as clear evidence of its dedication to 'democracy'.

Examples are common of American interventionism to destabilise and overthrow quite moderate but nevertheless unacceptable governments; and since memories are short, it may be useful to recall some of them here.

One such example is provided by Iran, where a coup sponsored by the United States in **1953** overthrew the duly elected nationalist government of Mohammed Mossadegh, who was guilty of **nationalising** the Iranian oil industry, and imposed, or re-imposed, the rule of the Shah upon the country, and the United States supported his autocratic and repressive regime for the following twenty-five years, until a massive popular uprising compelled withdrawal of that support.

Another such example is that of Guatemala, where an election in **1950** had given a moderate reformer, Jacobo Arbenz, the presidency with **65** per cent of the vote. Not content with legalising the Communist Party, in itself an unforgivable misdemeanour in the eyes of policymakers in **Washington**,² Arbenz pushed forward with modest measures of agrarian reform (in a country where **2** per cent of the population owned **72** per cent of farmland) and even went as far as expropriating **234,000** acres of land which the (American) United Fruit Company was not cultivating, and for which it was offered **\$1** million in compensation, against the **\$16** million which it demanded. Arbenz, it may be noted, 'had supported Washington in the United Nations on major issues, including those that required choosing sides in the Cold War'.³ This was scarcely sufficient to pacify the United States, and he was duly overthrown in an **American-**

sponsored coup in 1954.

A better-remembered and more recent instance of the same pattern was that of Chile, where Salvador Allende, elected President in 1970 and committed to a programme of economic and social reform strictly within the framework of Chilean bourgeois democracy, was subjected to an unremitting campaign of destabilisation by the United States, and was overthrown and murdered in the bloody military coup of September 1973.⁴ It is hardly necessary to add that the repressive dictatorship which was then installed under President Pinochet has enjoyed the steadfast support of the United States. Before much more time has elapsed, Pinochet will be found to be an encumbrance, and the United States will rediscover the virtues of 'democracy' for Chile: that will be the time to hoist into power a safe and reliable successor to him.

These and other instances, both successful and unsuccessful, serve to underline the consistency of America's policies in the post-war era. It has been the fashion since Ronald Reagan became President to compare him very unfavourably with his predecessors, and to deplore his reactionary views, his primitive chauvinism, his lack of intelligence, his crass ignorance and his often reckless words and deeds. All this is perfectly justified. But it should not obscure the degree to which Reagan's record, in practice, is by no means worse than that of his predecessors, Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon, with only Ford and Carter some way behind. The notion that there has been a sharp turn for the worse since Reagan arrived in the White House is correct in some respects—most notably in regard to the arms race and naked aggression against Nicaragua. All the same, Reagan's record is no worse than that of most of his predecessors since 1945; and the nostalgia for the supposedly more reasonable administrations of former presidents is thus quite unjustified. All American administrations since the end of World War II have pursued the same goals and sought to make the world safe for capitalist enterprise, notably American capitalist enterprise; and all American Presidents have engaged in murderous interventionism in the pursuit of these purposes. Indeed, in the formulation which Robert McNamara made current when he was Secretary of Defense at the time of the Vietnam War, the 'body count' to be credited to American presidents since 1945 has been much higher than the one which Reagan has so far chalked up. Of course, he still has some time left to do better.

A feature of the whole enterprise which must be underlined is its global character: the United States is deeply concerned with the nature of the political regime of every single country in the world, and seeks by economic, political, military and ideological means, to influence in pro-capitalist directions every regime which it can reach. This 'globalism' results from the position which the United States achieved in World War II as the strongest power in the world; and it also stems from the fact that

no country in the world since World War II could be taken to be altogether safe from the **d**anger, as the United States and its allies saw it, of social revolution, or from the possibility that a government might come to power with a serious commitment to policies and measures at home and abroad of which the United States and its allies strongly disapproved. The United States was the only country in the capitalist world that was in a position to give effect to such disapproval. 'We in this country, in this generation', President Kennedy proclaimed, 'are—by destiny rather than choice—the watchmen on the walls of world freedom'. What he meant was that the United States had turned itself into the watchman of world capitalism; and had, quite deliberately, chosen that role, with the agreement and support of the rest of the capitalist world.

III

Given this purpose, it was inevitable that the Soviet Union, from World War II onwards, should have appeared as a major problem to the United States, Britain and other capitalist powers. This had nothing to do with the threat of military aggression but rather with the danger, as western policymakers saw it, that the Soviet Union, for its own purposes, would seek to foster the one thing which they were most concerned to avoid, namely social revolution, wherever the terrain might seem propitious; and that it would do so either directly, or by way of the Communist parties it controlled.

The problem arose in its most acute form in the last stages of the War and in its immediate aftermath, and had to do with the Soviet claim to predominance in Eastern Europe, with the exception of Greece, in which Stalin was not interested.' That claim, it may confidently be said, would not have aroused much contention if it had not been for the fact that it involved social revolution. Stalin himself was not particularly interested in social revolution. But he wanted reliable governments on the Soviet Union's borders; and the only governments which he believed to be reliable, particularly as the Cold War became more intense, were thoroughly 'Stalinised' ones.

Galling though this was to the United States and Britain, there was little that they could do about it. The assertion of the Soviet claim to predominance in Eastern Europe and East Germany, and the Stalinist repression which went with that claim, were nevertheless very useful to the western powers, in so far as an appearance of plausibility was thereby given to the American and British claim that the fate of Eastern Europe provided ample proof of Soviet expansionism, and that Western Europe too was urgently threatened by that expansionism. From 1945 onwards and with gathering force, the threat of Soviet aggression in Western Europe (and the rest of the world), further aggravated by the subversive activities

of Communist parties acting as obedient tools of Soviet policy, became a major theme of anti-Communist propaganda everywhere in the capitalist world.

I begin discussing this by reference to the threat supposedly presented by western Communist parties (a notion much enhanced by the Communist seizure of power in Czechoslovakia in February 1948). The only two countries in Western Europe where Communist parties had massive support at the end of World War II were Italy and France. It has often been said that what prevented these parties from making a revolutionary bid for power was the presence of American and British forces in both countries. The implication is that these parties did have a strategy of revolutionary upheaval. This was not the case. There was no such strategy; and this had nothing to do with the presence of allied armies in their country, but with the very different strategy which did guide them then, and which has guided them ever since—and it was a strategy fully supported by Moscow, and indeed initiated in Moscow.

This was the strategy of the Popular Front (though the name was not used in the post-war years), adopted at the Seventh Congress of the Third International in 1935, and which, in practice, removed revolutionary upheaval from the Communist agenda, at least in capitalist-democratic regimes. The strategy suffered a major setback in the period of the Nazi-Soviet Pact between 1939 and 1941, when Communist parties, following the turn of Soviet foreign policy and opposing their governments for pursuing what was then declared to be an imperialist war, were then thrust back into isolation. With the entry of the Soviet Union in the war, Communists in occupied Europe took the lead in the Resistance but were, in Western Europe, fully committed to working within the constitutional confines of capitalist democracy once the war was over; and they were all the more so committed because Stalin himself was opposed to any notion of revolution in Western Europe, or anywhere else for that matter, save for the revolutions which the Soviet Union itself was able to engineer and control in Eastern Europe.

A crucial point about the politics of the whole post-war world, much obscured by anti-Communist propaganda which requires that Communist parties should be painted in the most 'revolutionary' colours, is that if 'revolution' is taken to mean not only the radical transformation of the whole social order in socialist directions, but also a seizure of power rather than working for the achievement of power by electoral means, then Communist parties in Western Europe (and in most other parts of the world as well) have not been 'revolutionary' in this sense since the thirties. In fact, they have strongly opposed any 'revolutionary' strategy of this kind and denounced it as 'ultra-left adventurism' and suicidal irresponsibility. Even at the time of liberation at the end of the war, when the Resistance was at its strongest in Italy and France, what might be called

the Communist Parties' constitutionalist strategy was unswervingly adhered to by the leaderships of the Italian, French and other western Communist parties. The same point of course applies also to the French Communist Party's attitude to the 'May events' in France in 1968.

The point here is not whether this strategy was right or wrong, but rather that the real problem for the United States and all conservative forces in Western Europe at the end of World War II was not the threat of Communist revolution, not to speak of Soviet attack, but something altogether different, namely the strong and very widespread pressure for radical renewal which had been generated by the war, by Nazi occupation, and by the discredit attached to traditional economic, social and political elites by virtue of their collaboration with the Nazis. The United States, for its part, wanted there-construction of a badly shaken capitalist order with the fewest possible concessions to the pressures for radical reform. What made the Communists dangerous was not their alleged revolutionary intentions, but the fact that they were the main advocates of radical reform on the political scene. However, Communist parties were also eager members of coalition governments whose main purpose was precisely to contain and subdue demands for radical reform. At one level, Communist parties were the voice of reform; at another, they made a crucial contribution to the (capitalist) reconstruction of the shattered economies of their country, to social stability at a particularly critical period, and to the defusing of militant pressure from below.

The incongruity was resolved in 1947 when, under American pressure (not that undue pressure was required), Communist ministers were unceremoniously thrown out of the coalitions which no longer needed them; but while their return to opposition freed them from the shackles of office and allowed them to reclaim their place at the head of movements of protest and pressure, this made no difference to their general strategy: the insurrectionary label that was then pinned on them by their enemies was and has remained entirely gratuitous.⁶

Outside Western Europe, the pressure for liberation from colonial and semi-colonial rule added a powerful national ingredient to the pressure for liberation from traditional conditions of economic, social and political oppression. It was these twin pressures which Britain, France, the United States and other lesser powers sought to contain at the end of World War II and beyond. and it was naturally the strongest capitalist power which soon assumed the greatest responsibility for that containment. The United States might not greatly favour the perpetuation of colonial rule; but it was very determined that the regimes which succeeded colonial rule should be very firmly kept within the capitalist orbit. Nor in any case did American distaste for colonial rule, such as it was, prevent the United States from according economic and military aid to France in the colonial wars it waged in Indochina and Algeria, or to Britain, or to Belgium and Holland.

In many instances (as in Vietnam), Communist parties played a decisive role in liberation struggles against colonial rule; and the notion that these parties were simply obedient tools of Moscow was always an ignorant transposition of the peculiar circumstances of Eastern Europe to very different terrains. In any case Communist Parties everywhere, from the late fifties onwards and following the 20th Congress of the CPSU in **1956**, assumed growing independence from Soviet influence; and even though they remained important forces of pressure and struggle, they were only one such force in most countries and often by no means the most important one. It was not, for instance, Communist Parties which made the revolution in Cuba or Nicaragua. In short, it is not Communist 'subversion' sponsored by the Soviet Union which the United States and its allies confront, but a gigantic and quite uncoordinated global movement of protest and struggle, notably in the 'third world', against intolerable conditions of oppression and exploitation.

What, then, of the notion of Soviet expansionism and the alleged Soviet urge to achieve world domination?

As I have noted, that notion was greatly nurtured by Soviet control over Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria and East Germany in the aftermath of World War II, with a somewhat looser control over Rumania, and with Czechoslovakia added to the list in **1948**; and it also derived great additional strength from Soviet intervention in Hungary in **1956**, in Czechoslovakia in **1968** and in Afghanistan in **1979** and after, for the purpose of maintaining Communist regimes in power.

It is of course possible to view such interventions as prime examples of expansionist ambitions. But it is much more reasonable to see them as based on considerations of 'national security'; and considerations of national pride and personal prestige no doubt also played a part in the determination of Soviet leaders not to 'lose' a country under Communist control. This does not justify such interventions; but it serves to explain them rather better than a notion of 'expansionism' for which no plausible reason can be advanced.

It may well be said that 'national security' has acquired such an elastic meaning as to be capable of encompassing the whole globe, so that the search for it becomes indistinguishable from 'expansionism'. The point however, is much better addressed to the United States than to the Soviet Union. For it is the United States which has constantly invoked 'national security' to justify its presence and interventions in countries far removed from its own borders. The Soviet Union, for its own part, has interpreted 'national security' in quite narrow terms, to cover some countries neighbouring it, and which had been given a Communist regime.⁷

Much brutality, repression and killing attended Soviet interventions. But this should not obscure the fact that Soviet foreign policy since **1945**

has been exceedingly cautious and 'conservative'. It is relevant in this connection to note that, if it had been left to Stalin, there would have been no Communist regime in Yugoslavia at the end of World War II or a Communist regime in China in 1949. In both cases, Stalin was urging caution and coalition governments, a counsel which, had it been followed, would have deprived Tito and Mao-tse-Tung of victory; and I have already noted Stalin's very careful observance of the accord which left the Greek Communists at the mercy of their reactionary opponents.

Stalin's successors have been at least as cautious. The notable exception was Khrushchev's installation of Soviet missiles in Cuba in 1962. In general, however, Soviet leaders have moved with extreme prudence in situations of acute crisis, for instance in relation to the Korean and Vietnam wars; and the same prudence has characterised their policies in the Middle East, in contrast to the military interventionism of the United States and the American support for Israeli adventurism.

It is also relevant here to note that none of the revolutionary regimes which have come into being since the late forties—in China, Cuba, South Yemen, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Nicaragua—owe their birth to Soviet intervention and pressure. The real problem, for the United States and its allies, is to be found elsewhere, namely in the fact that the Soviet Union does provide a measure of military, economic and political support to revolutionary regimes; and this in some cases has been crucial for their capacity to resist American attempts to destabilise and destroy them. Cuba is the obvious case in point. Similarly the Soviet Union has given support, again very 'cautiously, even parcimoniously, to various revolutionary and liberation movements in different parts of the world.

In short, the Soviet Union makes more difficult the anti-revolutionary enterprise in which the United States, with the support of its allies, has been engaged since World War II. It is this, rather than its alleged 'expansionist' ambitions, which makes it such a dangerous factor in the eyes of all conservative forces.

Soviet aid has extended far beyond revolutionary regimes, and has included such regimes as the Shah's dictatorship in Iran, Idi Amin in Uganda and the military junta in Argentina. The purpose, clearly, is to win friends wherever possible, which is also what other countries seek to achieve, but has nothing to do, on the evidence, with any desire to foster or foment revolution. Nor even does aid necessarily achieve the desired results: thus was the Soviet Union summarily expelled from Egypt and Somalia, upon which it had lavished extensive aid. In any case, nothing of this can reasonably be taken to demonstrate 'expansionist' ambitions. Many American policy-makers do believe with the utmost conviction that everything they do is a response to the 'Soviet threat'; and this provides them with a very solid carapace of self-righteousness and self-legitimation. But believing does not

make it so: in essence, the 'Soviet threat' has been no more than a marvellously convenient excuse for the struggle of the United States and its allies against revolution and radical reform throughout the world; and it is the same excuse which has fuelled an arms race to which the United States has made the decisive contribution, because of its absolute determination to retain effective nuclear superiority over the Soviet Union.

IV

American policymakers seek, as they see it, to counter the 'Soviet threat', and do so in the name of freedom and democracy. But they hold a peculiarly narrow, stunted and blinkered view of what these terms mean in many of the countries in which they are most interested. On the one hand, freedom and democracy tend, in their view, to be identified with the protection of capitalist enterprise; and on the other with the observance of what is often the merest façade of democratic procedures. The great advantage of such a view of freedom and democracy is that it makes unnecessary any consideration of the degree to which oppressive structures of domination and exploitation undermine and negate any serious notion of either freedom or democracy. The bitter irony of American interventionism is precisely that the only hope of giving effective meaning to these terms lies in the radical reforms and revolutionary endeavours which the United States is most concerned to stifle.

In country after country, particularly in the 'third world', existing economic, social and political structures condemn the vast majority of their populations to grinding poverty, disease and a premature death. The conditions which doom these populations are remediable, but remedying them requires, as an essential if not sufficient condition, the dissolution of these structures of power, privilege and property: but the United States has been a vital, indispensable factor in *the defence and consolidation* of such structures.

However, anti-revolutionary interventionism also has immediate and direct consequences in terms of death and destruction which should not be overlooked.

One extreme instance of this, which has now receded into the forgotten past, is the Korean War.

If it is the case that it was North Korea which sent its troops across a much fought-over 38th Parallel into South Korea in June 1950, the move was undoubtedly a reckless miscalculation. But this was well matched by the recklessness of the American decision, after North Korea had been pushed back behind the 38th Parallel by American military intervention, to undertake what amounted in effect to the conquest of North Korea, the elimination of its Communist regime, and the forcible reunification of the country under the murderous regime of Syngman Rhee. This move,

up to the Yalu River and the Chinese border, brought China into the war. But more notable in the present context than anything else about the war was the savagery of the retribution which the United States exacted by way of mass killing and destruction. 'By the time the UN forces got into the DPRK' (i.e. the Democratic People's Republic of Korea), Jon Halliday notes, 'the US had plastered the North with millions of gallons of napalm and other explosives and within five months of the war starting the US officially grounded its bomber force—because there were no more targets to hit (something which never happened in Vietnam)'; and Halliday also notes that 'quite unsympathetic US military leaders often referred to what had been done in Korea in terms of the worst slaughter ever known. UN ground forces systematically burnt down entire villages and towns, especially on the retreat in late 1950'.⁹ This slaughter was of course carried out in the certain knowledge that there would be no retaliation, and that not a single bomb would be dropped on the United States.

However, Korea was a mere dress rehearsal for the savagery which attended American intervention in Vietnam some fifteen years later. Once again, but on an even larger scale, death, destruction, defoliation by way of chemical warfare, and a long catalogue of other horrors were visited upon an Asian country in the name of freedom, democracy and the rest. This is the war Reagan and a host of other politicians and commentators have sought to rehabilitate as a 'noble war', so as to rid Americans of the 'Vietnam syndrome' which might inhibit other interventions.

Korea and Vietnam are the big cases. But there have been many other cases around the world where American interventionism has been disastrous for the vast majority of the people in the countries where it has occurred. The coup which toppled Arbenz in Guatemala, for instance, condemned the mass of its people to long years of tyranny, with torture and killing of opponents or presumed opponents of the regime as routine occurrences, with the full support, aid and advice of the United States. When the coup occurred in 1954, John Foster Dulles, Eisenhower's Secretary of State, pledged to the 'loyal citizens of Guatemala' that the United States would 'alleviate conditions in Guatemala and elsewhere which might afford communism an opportunity to spread its tentacles through the hemisphere.' But the only 'alleviation' which might have made any real difference to the majority of the people of Guatemala lay in the endeavours of the regime which the United States had just overthrown.

The story of Guatemala has been repeated in other countries of Central and Latin America, and elsewhere. No doubt, the United States would prefer to deal with 'democratic' regimes rather than dictatorial ones—but only so long as such regimes did not seek to implement reforms which the United States found unacceptable. Unfortunately, it is precisely this condition which 'democratic' governments cannot be relied on to fulfill.

There is nothing new in this. 'US Marines', it has been noted, 'entered the Caribbean region no fewer than twenty times between 1898 and 1920'; and the United States 'accepted, and soon welcomed, dictatorships in Central America because it turned out such rulers could most cheaply uphold order. Dictatorships were not a paradox but a necessity for the system. . . .'

This is obviously relevant to the present. For it is not difficult to imagine what kind of regime would be installed in Managua if the mercenary bandits whom President Reagan calls 'freedom fighters' were ever to achieve power in Nicaragua. What is different about the present, in comparison with an earlier epoch, is that the overthrow of regimes to which the United States objects, and the fostering of pliable tyrannies in their place, is a much more difficult task than it used to be, though the example of Chile demonstrates that it is by no means impossible. Objectionable regimes are now better able to resist, as Nicaragua is doing, and find support abroad, and for that matter in the United States as well.

Even this cursory glance at the record indicates the heavy price which American interventionism has exacted from countries in the 'third world'. Comparative 'body counts' are an obscene business. But the point has to be made, in the face of so much American self-righteousness, that, in those vile terms, the United States has established a formidable lead over the Soviet Union in regard to the number of people for whose violent death it has been responsible since 1945; and this is so, even after the most careful account is taken of all the interventions which the Soviet Union itself has undertaken since then, including Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

There is another kind of comparison that needs to be made, between a country such as Cuba, subject to bitter American hostility, on the one hand, and a country such as Guatemala, which has been the **beneficiary** of American protection and support for many more years than **Fidel** Castro has been in power, on the other. Cuba under Castro has had a repressive regime, with a poor record in the treatment of dissent; and even if account is taken, as it should be, of the fact that Cuba has been a beleaguered island ever since the revolution, that poor record should not be ignored. Even so, the advances which have been achieved in Cuba under Castro for the mass of its people are staggering in comparison with conditions in Guatemala or any other such country in Central or Latin America. The fact is that the mass of the people in these countries have nothing to hope for from the regimes which the United States favours, supports and sustains, simply because the whole purpose of these regimes is precisely to block reform, not to foster it. By contrast, revolutionary regimes are not paralysed by the economic and political forces which dominate other 'third world' regimes, and which doom the mass of the people to enduring destitution. Revolutionary regimes have their own manifold problems to contend with,

aggravated by American hostility; but they have at least broken through the most important political constraints against advance; and the achievements of the Cuban regime, even under the most adverse conditions, show what this means for the vast majority. The Nicaraguan regime, in the few years of its existence and under even more adverse conditions, has also begun to show what such a regime can achieve.

However, American interventionism has other very damaging consequences for revolutionary regimes. For American (and other) pressure, and attempts at the 'destabilisation' of a given regime, forces it into closer and closer linkage with the Soviet Union, simply because this is the only way in which it may hope to survive. Cuba is the classical case. All the evidence suggests that if it had not been for implacable American hostility and pressure, Fidel Castro would not have chosen to link his regime so closely with the Soviet Union. Such linkage, it must be noted, is by no means unwelcome to the United States. On the contrary: for it provides the United States with a retrospective and wholly fraudulent legitimation for the contention that the revolutions it opposes are Soviet-inspired, and that the United States, in pursuit of its 'national security', freedom, democracy, etc., has always been right to oppose them.

Also, the threats to its survival which a revolutionary regime faces, both because of American hostility and American-sponsored internal opposition, pulls it inexorably in the direction of increasing repression. Civic rights do not fare well in conditions of foreign-sponsored civil war. This too is not at all unwelcome to the United States. For it enables American administrations to point to the 'totalitarian' nature of 'Marxist-Leninist' regimes, and is further used to defend American policies and actions. In fact, it is these policies and actions themselves which create the very conditions the United States denounces.

V

Given the purpose and nature of American interventionism, the question arises why the American alliance should have commanded such wide support in Europe and elsewhere over so many years.

In the case of all the forces dedicated to conservatism, this is quite easy to understand: in the light of the purposes which the United States seeks to serve, such support is entirely logical. In a world which all anti-revolutionary forces everywhere are bound to find dangerous and uncertain, these forces quite naturally look upon the United States as the major source of strength against the pressures for radical change. Even in relatively secure capitalist states, class interests dictate solidarity with the role of the United States in the world, despite the fact that the military, commercial, financial and other policies which the United States pursues are not necessarily the policies which policymakers in other capitalist states favour. Dominant classes have always been willing to pay the price

entailed by the American alliance: general class interests supercede specific ones. France has long prided herself on her 'Gaullist' independence from the United States, as symbolised by her refusal since **1966** to participate in NATO's military command structure, and by her refusal to have American bases in France. But at no time has France questioned the American alliance itself. She participates in NATO's early warning systems and in NATO exercises and remains a member of the North Atlantic Council; and she has always been aligned with the United States on essential lines of policy, even though she might disagree with specific American policies, say over Nicaragua or the Middle East. Also, American presidents have always had good reason to be grateful to French leaders for their support at moments of crisis, as in the case of de Gaulle's support for Kennedy in the Cuban missile crisis of **1962**, or Mitterrand's support for the installation of cruise missiles in Germany and other west European countries (but not in France).

Conservative and liberal parties in other countries have also had their 'Gaullist' critics of American policies and actions; and some of them have occasionally spoken in blurred terms of a 'European dimension' in foreign and defence matters, and of greater European independence. But most conservative and liberal politicians have remained very firm in their support for the alliance.

Social democratic politicians, for their part, have always tended to be very strong 'Atlanticists', and played a major role after World War II in the forging of the American alliance. In so doing, they rendered a very great service to the United States, in so far as this social democratic support greatly helped to disguise the conservative purposes the United States sought to advance, and thus gave added plausibility to the assertion that its concern, and the concern of the alliance, was opposition to the 'Soviet threat', and also freedom, democracy, progress and reform, all of which were threatened by totalitarian Soviet designs. The Labour Governments of **1945-51** played a particularly important role in this connection in the crucial period when the shape of the post-war settlement was being set.¹² Any faint sentiment in the Labour leadership that Britain might lead a 'third force' was very quickly dispelled in favour of what was called, in Britain but not in the United States, the 'Anglo-American alliance'; and social democracy from then onwards, in Britain and elsewhere, was fully committed to the alliance.

One important reason for this was the strong and ancient anti-communism and anti-sovietism which had been a major element in social democratic thinking ever since the Bolshevik Revolution of **1917**; and this was quite naturally very greatly reinforced at the end of World War II and in the years thereafter by the hideous treatment of social democratic leaders (and others) by the Soviet regime. Even more strongly than in pre-war years, the murderous practices associated with Stalinism added an even sharper edge to the revulsion and hostility which social democratic leaders had in any case traditionally felt for Soviet Communism; and this made it

much easier for them to convince themselves and their followers not only that the Soviet leaders were evil men who were running a system they wholeheartedly rejected, but also that these men posed a direct military threat to 'the West'.

This view, and the policy implications that followed from it, notably support for the American alliance, were also the more acceptable to social democratic leaders because a radically different approach involved great political risks, uncertainties and struggles, and would have been entirely out of keeping with their basic ideological and political orientations. It would have meant a sharp break with the essentially collaborative relationship they had with their bourgeois opponents in the realm of defence and foreign policy; by contrast, support for the alliance provided a solid basis for collaboration and consensus, and was perfectly congruent with social democratic political thinking and perspectives.

The American record since World War II has been subjected to critical scrutiny by American writers **themselves**.¹³ But their work is dwarfed by the mountain of apologetic writing on the subject, both in the United States and in the countries of the alliance. Such criticism as this writing ventures to make, tends to be addressed to the means which the United States employs to achieve its purposes: the purposes themselves are generally taken to be altogether praiseworthy. In this respect, as in many others, the political culture of the countries allied to the United States, not to speak of the United States itself, has been saturated by an overwhelming consensus.

In the building and maintenance of this consensus, an important role has been played by journalists, commentators, academics and intellectuals as well as politicians. In all capitalist countries, beginning with the United States itself, such people, in very different ways and at different levels of sophistication, have provided precious ideological and political reinforcements for American interventionism. They have been able to do so in their own way without having to conform to officially laid down doctrine, and even with the freedom of express independent and critical views on this or that aspect of official policy. But however many and substantial the reservations and qualifications they might bring to their work, it is nevertheless the conservative enterprise on which the United States has been engaged that they have helped to legitimate. What depths this can plumb is well illustrated by a European Appeal to the American Congress issued by an organisation calling itself *Resistance International* and urgently requesting Congress to vote aid to the 'Nicaraguan Resistance', i.e. the *contras*. 'The freedom of Nicaraguans', the document affirms, 'is your freedom and ours. In this sense, it is indivisible. If you fail in Nicaragua, we have the right to ask you: where will you fail next time? If freedom and democracy are not worth defending in your own hemisphere, where are they worth defending? The Free World awaits your reply. So do its

enemies'.¹⁴ The signatories of this Appeal to Congress to continue support for what, rhetoric apart, amounts to massacre, pillage and torture in Nicaragua include writers, academics, journalists, politicians and others from nine European countries, among them **Emmanuel** Leroy-Ladurie, Olivier Todd and Leszek Kolakowski.

It would be simplistic and naive to think that the intellectuals and others who have supported American interventionism since 1945 have not for the most part been moved by the conviction that they were helping to defend freedom, democracy, etc. But while this, however misconceived, may be acknowledged, it would be equally naive to ignore the fact that acceptance and endorsement of America's self-image as a wholly benevolent power, and support of American purposes and policies, have provided these supporters with considerable advantages by way of jobs, foundation grants, travel, promotion, consultancies, prestige, status and other such benefits; whereas opposition to American interventionism carries with it the distinct risk—often the certainty—of loss of job, the withering of promotion prospects, the withholding of the aforesaid benefits—and the more outspoken the opposition, the greater the jeopardy. It may be difficult to touch anyone as distinguished as Noam Chomsky; but there is a great deal that can be done to discourage and dishearten less eminent writers, journalists, academics and others, and to induce them to exercise one of the most effective forms of censorship, namely self-censorship.

What is true for such people is also true, in somewhat different ways, for politicians, both in the United States and also in the countries of the alliance. Support, even qualified, for America's role in the world, or at least acquiescence, has been a crucial condition for the pursuit of a successful political career. Outright opposition, on the other hand, has usually entailed relegation to the fringes of political life. Here too, it would be naive to think that this does not influence what people say, and perhaps even more important, what they do not say. Of all the strands which have made up the 'dominant ideology', none has been more pervasive and potent than this one.

At the same time, there are many people who are not greatly impressed by the rhetoric of freedom and democracy, yet who support continued membership of the alliance, and who do so on two main grounds. One of them is the belief that membership of the alliance makes possible the exercise of a moderating and restraining influence upon the United States. This is one of the principal arguments which social democratic leaders advance against their critics on the Left.

In this respect, it may well be said that American policymakers are probably not impervious to the advice, pressure, criticism and objurgations which come from their allies. But it is nevertheless difficult to point to any important episode in post-war history when the United States has been decisively deflected by its allies from the courses it wished to pursue. The

lesson that American policymakers have mainly learnt from the pressure and criticism to which they have been subjected is not that they must change course, but that they must present their policies and actions in a better light—in other words, that they must improve the public relations side of their work, and do even more and better in the fantastic effort that is already being deployed in the realm of propaganda.

Moreover, the argument ignores the price that has to be paid for membership of the alliance. For that membership imposes burdens, obligations, constraints and complicities of the most diverse kind; and whereas the influence of its allies upon the United States is highly problematic, the influence of the United States upon its allies is not. On the contrary, that influence has always been heavy, persistent and effective. Not only does the alliance impose heavy military obligations upon the members of NATO: it has also turned their intelligence services into the auxiliaries of the activities in which the CIA and other American intelligence agencies engage in the pursuit of anti-revolutionary and anti-reforming enterprises." It is perfectly understandable that similarly-minded governments—not to speak of intelligence services themselves—should gladly accept this role. But it is a role which has also been accepted with complete equanimity—so far as one can judge—by all Labour Governments in Britain since World War II, and would be again by a future Labour Government, on the basis of the obligations dictated by the alliance.¹⁶ The simple fact of the matter is that membership of the alliance involves *direct complicity* in the crusade that the United States has been waging to make the world safe for capitalism. Such complicity is fine for people who share this purpose. It is not fine—or should not be—for anyone who does not.

There is however, the second and by far the most important reason why many people, despite their reservations, support continued membership of the alliance, namely the belief that it affords some protection at least against the possibility, even remote, of Soviet aggression, or of Soviet blackmail.

I have already discussed the notion of the 'Soviet threat' and argued that the evidence, on a sober reading, does not lend it substance. It is true, as I noted earlier, that the Soviet Union has used military means to impose or re-impose unwanted governments and regimes upon a number of countries. But this brings us back to the arguments presented earlier to explain (not justify) these interventions; and it does bear repeating that at no time in post-war history has the Soviet Union shown the slightest inclination to use such means in regard to any country other than Communist regimes closely linked to it. This is no cause for congratulation or gratitude: no country should have an unwanted government or regime imposed upon it. But a world torn by civil war on an international scale is not the world as it should be, and as it will one day be. Even so, it is

essential for a proper understanding of the world as it is to note the specific character of these Soviet interventions and not to draw from them entirely unwarranted conclusions.

The same point may be made about the notion of Soviet blackmail. The idea is that the Soviet Union would threaten a given country outside the alliance, say Britain, with attack and possibly nuclear devastation unless it pursued, or ceased to pursue, a particular course. This too seems wildly improbable. It cannot by definition be said to be impossible. But as Erich Fromm once put it, the difference between rationality and irrationality lies in the ability to distinguish what is possible and what is likely. It is always open to anyone to construct possible 'scenarios': but the 'scenarios' which are constructed in this connection defy common sense and are the product of prejudice and paranoia rather than serious analysis. It is also relevant to note that there are many countries which do not shelter under the American umbrella, yet which do not seem to fear Soviet blackmail and feel able to protect their independence without benefit of that umbrella.

The American alliance is not a shield against Soviet aggression or blackmail, but an instrument of containment and rollback of revolution and radical reform. Yet, there are many countries where radical reform or revolution is not only desirable, but a matter of the most urgent and vital importance. This is why support for the alliance and acquiescence in its membership, for anyone not committed to the status quo, is a fundamental moral and political contradiction. The only way out of that contradiction, congruent with reason and morality alike, is rejection of the alliance, and support, from an independent position, for the forces of radical renewal everywhere. It is also the position which best serves the advancement of the cause of nuclear disarmament, in Europe and elsewhere.

In due course, movements will arise in the United States which are strong enough to cause a fundamental shift in American policies abroad. Even now, and despite the massive indoctrination to which the American people is subjected day in day out, there are many Americans who oppose their government's purposes and policies. Their numbers will grow and they will eventually find ways of making their influence felt. Until this comes to pass, the world will remain a very dangerous place, where the escalation of local conflicts may lead to ultimate catastrophe. Anti-interventionist forces in the United States need help from abroad; and the best help they can be given is by opposition to the role which the United States has assumed in the world. The prime condition for such opposition is independence.

NOTES

1. These sentiments were greatly enhanced by the American raid on Libya in April 1986, but the taboo on the discussion of Britain's membership of NATO had been broken, at least in the Labour Party, some time before then: in March 1985, Tony Benn and Eric Heffer introduced a resolution at a meeting of the National Executive Committee asking that a public debate be held 'so that we can come forward with a fresh policy statement—designed to prepare the way for a withdrawal from NATO—to be put to Conference with a view to including it in our next election manifesto'. The resolution was defeated by 16 votes to 9. At the 1985 Labour Party Conference, a resolution stating, among other things, that Labour's policy regarding NATO required revision, and asking for a comprehensive report on 'all options including the option of withdrawal and working to establish expanding neutralized zones' obtained 2,469,000 votes against 3,863,000. On the other hand, a resolution asking that the next Labour Government should take Britain out of NATO was lost by 5,529,000 votes to 9,650 (Labour Party Conference Report, 1985, p. 248).
2. In March 1950, George Kennan, then the State Department's expert on Soviet affairs, addressed United States ambassadors in South America and told them that under no circumstances must Communists be allowed in power: 'The final answer might be an unpleasant one, but. . . we should not hesitate before police repression by the local government. This is not shameful since the Communists are essentially traitors. . . It is better to have a strong regime in power than a liberal government if it is indulgent and relaxed and penetrated by Communists' (W. LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions. The US in Central America* (1984) p. 107).
3. *Ibid.*, p. 119.
4. On American involvement in Chile between 1970 and 1973, see e.g. J. Petras and M. Morley, *The United States and Chile* (1975) and S.M. Hersh, *The Price of Power: Kissinger in Nixon's White House* (1983).
5. On the famous occasion of Churchill's meeting with Stalin in Moscow in October 1944, Stalin readily agreed with Churchill to 'percentages' reflecting 'degrees of predominance in Europe'. The 'percentage' for Greece was 90 per cent for the British, in co-operation with the United States. For Rumania, the 'percentage' was 90 per cent for the Russians; for Bulgaria 75 per cent for the Russians; for Hungary and Yugoslavia 50–50. For good measure, Stalin also agreed with Churchill that the Soviet Union should 'soft-pedal the Communists in Italy and not. . . stir them up' (W. Churchill, *Triumph and Tragedy* (1953), pp. 228–9; and D. Yergin, *Shattered Peace. The Origins of the Cold War and the National Security State* (1978), p. 60).
6. Even in Greece, where civil war raged from 1945 until 1949, armed struggle was forced upon the Communists, and the Resistance in general, by the determination of the British Government in 1944, and that of the American Government subsequently, to impose an exceptionally reactionary Right upon the country, and by the murderous repression to which it subjected the Left.
7. Such considerations, and what are viewed as the requirements of 'national security' may also be taken to have led to the Soviet absorption since 1939 of Eastern Poland, the Baltic states, the western part of the Ukraine and Byelorussia, all of which had also been part of the Czarist empire.
8. The Korean War was essentially an American operation, with South Korea as the other main participant. However, it was fought in the name of the United Nations, and with the participation of forces from NATO, notably Britain, and some other countries, such as Australia, Thailand and Colombia.
9. J. Halliday, 'Anti-Communism and the Korean War', in *The Socialist Register*

- 1984 (1984), pp. 145-6. General **McArthur** noted that 'the war in Korea has almost destroyed that nation. . . I have never seen such devastation'. (*Ibid.*, p. 160, ft. 58).
10. W. LaFeber, *America, Russia and the Cold War. 1945-1980* (1980), p. 161.
 11. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
 12. See, e.g. J. Saville, 'C.R. Attlee: An Assessment', in *The Socialist Register 1983*; *ibid.*, 'Ernest Bevin and the Cold War. 1945-1950', in *The Socialist Register 1984*, and *ibid.*, 'The American Bases in Britain' in the present volume.
 13. For instance, C.W. Mills, *The Causes of World War III* (1959); D.F. Fleming, *The Cold War and its Origins. 1917-1960* (1961); D. Horowitz, *From Yalta to Vietnam* (1965); G. Kolko, *The Politics of War* (1968) and G. and J. Kolko, *The Limits of Power* (1982); N. Chomsky and E.S. Herman, *After the Cataclysm. Postwar Indochina and the Reconstruction of Imperial Ideology* (1979) and *ibid.*, *The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism* (1979); N. Chomsky, *Towards a New Cold War* (1982).
 14. *Le Monde*, March 21, 1985.
 15. For a recent account of British intelligence cooperation with American intelligence, see N. West, *GCHQ, The Secret Wireless War. 1900-1986* (1986).
 16. This continued collaboration in intelligence matters by a future Labour government was explicitly pledged by Neil Kinnock at the 1986 Annual Conference of the Labour Party.