
The American Mercury

OUR SPINELESS FOREIGN POLICY

BY

JAMES BURNHAM

AT SOME point during the spring of 1949, it became customary in the United States to say that "we are winning the cold war." In editorials, speeches and articles, U. S. foreign policy was judged and found not wanting. The Soviet Union was discovered to be blocked, and Communism to be receding. "The tension had lessened"; internal affairs began to take precedence again over foreign in the business of Congress and the plans of politicians.

This optimistic estimate does not seem, however, to have been sup-

ported by the facts. We should not regard a businessman as particularly successful if, instead of going bankrupt as feared, he had finished 2 or 3 million in the red. Nor would we label a man healthy if, instead of dying, he had only lost a half-dozen limbs and organs.

Let us, in order to disentangle our judgment from day-by-day moods, compare the world position of the United States in 1939 to its position ten years later. In 1939, what was taken to be the principal concentration of enemy power was confined to

JAMES BURNHAM, professor of philosophy at New York University, is the author of three widely discussed books on politics: *The Managerial Revolution*, *The Machiavellians*, and *The Struggle for the World*. This article is a slightly condensed version of one chapter in his latest book, *The Coming Defeat of Communism*, to be published soon by John Day.

a limited area of Central Europe. Within this area was a population of less than 100 million. The enemy technological level was high and his military machine formidable. He lacked, however, both the possession of, and direct access to, many of the most essential raw materials. His power was extended outside of his boundaries by the manipulation of fifth columns within other nations; but, since these were cemented only by a narrowly chauvinist and racial ideology which could have no wide appeal, their strength was negligible.

The enemy power concentration in 1939 was, in fact or potentially, counter-balanced by several other autonomous power centers of some magnitude: the Soviet Union, Great Britain with her Empire and Dominions, France, and Japan (as well, of course, as the United States).

In 1949, the enemy power concentration is based upon a vast territory which includes the most favorable strategic position of the world, the heartland of Eurasia. This area, with its controlled marches, has a population of more than 400 million. Though technologically backward, the enemy's military machine is also formidable, and he has at his disposal nearly all essential or important raw materials. His fifth columns, not handicapped by overt chauvinism or racialism, have penetrated deep into

the tissue of all political organisms outside of his direct control, and are in their own right massive fighting forces.

Moreover, except for the United States itself, there no longer exist any other counter-balancing power centers of any magnitude. Germany (the previous enemy concentration) and Japan have been broken; France has been dissolved; and Great Britain, with her Empire shorn and her economy in desperation, though by no means finished is no longer capable of independent action.

II

Since 1945, the Soviet Union has proceeded steadily with the reduction to its domination of the nations of Eastern Europe. In spite of the fact that in 1942 and 1943 it had been thrust back hundreds and in many directions thousands of miles inside its own frontiers, and was close to total defeat, the Soviet Union has stretched an ever-tightening hand over Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Rumania, Albania. By careful diplomacy and infiltration, it has gained a foothold in the Near East; and, by exploiting the social difficulties in Egypt, the Belgian Congo and South Africa, it has for the first time made a crossing of the land bridge into

Africa. It has developed task forces in nearly every Latin-American nation, and has carried through major actions in Colombia and Costa Rica — immediately north and south, that is, of the Panama Canal.

In France and in Italy, the two major countries of Western Europe, mass Communist Parties, surrounded and covered by millions of voters, give the Soviet Union a veto power over economic recovery and political decision, and induce a permanent paralysis of military potential. Through minor but skillfully planned actions in Greece, Turkey and Berlin, the Kremlin, at a minimum cost to itself, continues to drain vast sums and energies from the United States.

On the ideological front, there has occurred a cumulative growth of despair and the feeling of betrayal among the peoples of Eastern Europe. The morale of these peoples depends upon the conviction that their present subjection to the Soviet Empire is temporary, and that the perspective of the West includes their liberation. No important actions of the West have furthered or even sustained this conviction. The Atlantic Union, as this has been publicly presented, runs directly counter to it; the makeup of the Union, and its announced defensive purpose, seem to imply acceptance of the present division of Europe. So also do the commercial

agreements that have been negotiated between Western nations and the Communist satellite governments. Meanwhile, at the United Nations and in every international conference, the Soviet representatives maintain the ideological initiative. This is plain even in their supposed “re-treats.” The first proposals always come from the Soviet spokesmen, who always set the direction of the proceedings. The spokesmen of the West, even though their showings are often better than in the days of Teheran or Yalta, are always “reacting” to the Soviet moves.

In drawing up the balance of these years, the purges and liquidations that have been going on continuously within the Soviet Empire must not be omitted. In these purges, millions of persons have been executed, imprisoned, or sent to slower death in the slave labor camps. These millions include especially those who have been, or might have been, oriented toward the West: that is, it is our allies and potential allies who have been purged. Their ranks are the equivalent of more divisions than the Atlantic Pact is going to produce.

By far the greatest triumphs of Communist policy during these years since 1945 have, however, been in Asia. Manchuria and northern Korea have been brought within the Soviet Empire; a considerable part of China

proper has been overrun; and on the southern flank, in the big islands and in Burma and Malaysia, turmoil has been successfully maintained. Already, in 1949, the probing into southern Korea and Japan had begun. From the standpoint of the Kremlin, it would be hard to overstate the importance of the Asian victories.

During these same years since 1945, the Soviet Union has suffered only one major and unambiguous setback: the defection of Tito. This setback, however, is not yet final; and it was not gained by our policy.

In judging the success or failure of recent U. S. foreign policy, we must be careful not to distort our readings. It is true that the results, however melancholy, are not as bad as they could have been. If we had continued the 1943-46 line of conciliation and virtual capitulation to every Soviet demand — if we had adopted the line of Henry Wallace — then the balance would have been still more heavily weighted. Without the turn to a tougher line, without the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan and the airlift, the Communists would by now have Iran, Greece and perhaps Turkey, and they would quite possibly be in control of France, Italy and Germany. Moreover, it would be utopian to suppose that any policy, confronted by the problems of a

world crisis, could have had quick and easy success.

We must, however, dispel illusion. Though U. S. policy has so far avoided the worst possible, and has cut some threatened losses, it has as yet produced no clear-cut and positive gains. The supposed or real gains are at best negative or potential; none that are concrete and positive has yet been realized. The Soviet Union has given up nothing, nothing whatsoever, and has added much.

III

The principal defects in U. S. foreign policy are, I believe, the following four:

(1) *The policy is not sufficiently unified.* From this it follows that a move in one direction tends to have its results canceled by another move in a counter-direction. This has been true at every stage of the policy as it has developed since 1945. For example, we rush in money, goods and even military help to "contain Communism" in Europe at the same time that we decrease or withdraw efforts to contain Communism in China. We condemn Communism in Czechoslovakia by denouncing the persecution of the Church, and at the same time accept overtures to ourselves and our allies for increased trade with Czechoslovakia of a kind that is certain to aid the Communist rule of that coun-

try. We help Tito against Stalin by making economic deals with Tito, and at the same time solidarize ourselves with Stalin against Tito by signing a joint agreement on Carinthia. We spend hundreds of millions against the Communists in Greece, and at the same time, by withdrawing economic aid, hinder the Dutch in their efforts to control Communists in the East Indies. We denounce de Gaulle as a fascist because he wants to suppress the Communists; and at the same time denounce the Third Force French government as hopeless because it fails to suppress the Communists in Indo-China.

On the same day, one government leader will give a speech proclaiming that the Communists are irreconcilable and will never abandon their aim of world revolution, while another will insist that the Kremlin is "sincere" in wanting to decrease tension, increase trade, and come to some agreement. In laying down the perspectives for the Marshall Plan, we list as one of its goals the revival of trade between East and West Europe; and immediately thereafter we draw up lists of prohibited exports from West to East. We expose Communist propaganda as lies and moral poison, and at the same time permit UNESCO, the international propaganda organization financed largely by our money, to be infiltrated, ex-

ploited and to a large extent controlled by fellow-travelers and Communist Party members. We enter into an Atlantic Pact that can have no content unless it is directed against the Soviet Union, and insist to the world that it has no relation to the Soviet Union. We protest the economic draining of other nations by the Soviet Union, and at the same time agree, in discussing an Austrian treaty, on how the Soviet Union shall be permitted to pillage the Austrian economy.

This disunity is not merely stultifying by its direct effect on our own policies and their implementation. It is equally injurious through its effect on the confidence of other peoples in us. The rest of the world is bewildered and disoriented by what it observes, and cannot help observing, of the practical conflicts in U. S. policies. The dramatic conduct of the Berlin airlift seems to call for a spirit of firm resistance to Communism, and much of the rest of the world responds. Just as its spirit rises to the contest, it learns of secret friendly negotiations between U. S. and Soviet representatives; and the President of the United States expresses his reliance on the Kremlin's sincerity. It reads a brave speech that seems to promise the liberation of the nations behind the iron curtain; and the next day it learns that Gromyko and Baruch and

American industrialists are talking about big trade on the present political basis. It hears of a great welcome in New York and Washington to Soviet deserters and refugees; and in the DP camps, the International Refugee Organization, financed by U. S. funds, propagandizes other refugees and deserters to return to what they know will be death or enslavement in their homelands. The observed contradictions in policy, which are at first experience a puzzle, tend to lead toward cynicism and despair.

(2) *The policy is too narrow.* Unlike Communist policy, U. S. policy is not yet based on the clear realization that the present struggle for the world proceeds simultaneously and integrally along political, economic, ideological, sociological and military lines. What happens in each of these fields affects what happens in every other. It is difficult, for example, to solidify political relations with Britain if economic measures harmful to Britain are undertaken. Communist lies spread in Europe about the United States cannot be combated unless the truth about the United States is made widely available in Europe. The Chinese are not encouraged to resist Communist rule if American business insists on aiding the Chinese Communists by trade.

The United States is accused by

Communist propaganda of being "militaristic." In the sense meant by the Communists, this is almost ludicrously untrue. However, in another and very important sense, U. S. policy might well be considered too militaristic. There is a tendency for Americans to reason, not altogether consciously, somewhat as follows: After all, we have at our disposal nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. These can be relied upon. However many mistakes we make, whatever deficiencies and omissions there may be in our day-to-day actions, and even if we sustain a good many setbacks, all can quickly be made right when the showdown comes by dropping a few hundred bombs at the right spots. U. S. "militarism," that is to say, does not mean a militarization of our society — which, though doubtless increased as compared with our previous history, remains at a lesser degree than that of almost all other nations. We do run the danger of being narrowly militaristic in our historical attitude, in this seldom expressed but widely held belief that arms alone, that force, can if necessary solve all our problems. This belief is not only dangerous but false. Though great historical problems cannot be solved without force, force alone solves nothing.

The defect of narrowness is understood by many within the govern-

ment and the armed services, and during recent years steps have been taken to overcome it. The Marshall Plan, the Voice of America, and the intervention of both the AFL and the CIO in the international trade-union movement are recognitions of the importance of, respectively, the economic, the ideological, and the sociological phases of the struggle.

(3) *The policy is defensive.* So far as U. S. foreign relations since 1947 have been integrated into a single policy rather than a loose collection of conflicting policies, this has been done through the conception of "the containment of Communism." The containment of Communism is unquestionably something to be desired. "Containment," however, cannot be the end objective of a policy. More generally, a defensive policy — and containment is a variant of the defensive — can never win.

The defensive has, of course, its appropriate use, both as tactic and as strategy. In a battle by which an army implements an offensive strategy, there will always be individual units which, for a time or even for the entire battle, remain on the defensive. Not only the tactic but the strategy of an entire army or group of armies may be correctly defensive, as in the case of Eisenhower's armies at the end of 1944. Nevertheless, the

defensive never wins, except for rare and uncontrollable accidents where the opponent is already in a state of internal collapse to begin with, and in reality licked before he starts. In the case of dynamic social forces, whether nations or classes or competitive business organizations, or even rival Garden Clubs or families, victory and even, in the long run, survival come only by carrying through an attack, only by passing to the offensive. The defensive, properly understood, can never be more than a partial and temporary expedient.

A perpetual defensive is particularly fantastic in relation to the struggle against world Communism. The containment-line is almost immeasurably vast. It is not limited to the tens of thousands of miles of the Soviet Empire's border, which is itself far too great to encompass. By the methods of propaganda, subversion and infiltration, the Communist front is carried into and through every nation of the world on both sides of the border. The "front" itself is not merely geographic, but ideological, sociological and political as well. To suppose that such an opponent can be countered indefinitely by containment is to concede him victory.

(4) *The policy has no objective.* If anyone believes that there is a clear-cut objective, let him then declare

what it is. No unequivocal answer has yet been authoritatively given, nor is it implicit in the actions that have been taken. Eternal containment of Communism cannot be an objective; it is both empty and impossible. Containment can make sense only as a temporary device for the sake of some genuine objective to be gained later on.

Is the objective an agreement, a deal, with Communism? If so, what kind of deal? A deal that leaves Communist power intact where it is now established, and Communist fifth columns free to extend that power wherever they find or make an opportunity? If so, what business do we have denouncing internal measures taken within the Soviet Union itself and within the satellite nations? what concern is it of ours that Hungary or Czechoslovakia tortures or kills priests who, by Communist standards, are enemies of the State? why do we impose embargoes on exports, and order FBI agents to guard ships sailing in from behind the Iron Curtain? what objection have we to Mao Tse-tung or to the Political Bureau of the American Communist Party? If we want an agreement, we should listen to Henry Wallace or Frederick L. Shuman or Harlow Shapley. They can tell us the kind of agreement we can get, and how to get it.

But if not a genuine agreement,

then what do we want? It illuminates nothing to seek refuge in vague abstractions about "peace" and "international law" and "friendship" and "cooperation." We must be concrete: what kind of peace, on what basis? whose law, enforced by whom? what terms of friendship? cooperation toward what ends?

This lack of clear-cut objective, which vitiates so many even of those policy moves which in themselves are intelligent and promising, is not by chance. Obscurity here reflects a profound hesitation. We have not been willing to face the fact that there is only one possible objective of U. S. foreign policy: the destruction of Communist power.

IV

I wish to illustrate these defects, in particular the last two, by several examples. In order not to prejudice the evidence, I shall select policy moves which have been among the wisest and most successful.

(1) *The Berlin Airlift*. What, we must ask, did the airlift accomplish politically? What was it even supposed to accomplish?

In the spring of 1948, as the Communists gradually choked off access to Berlin, the United States leadership was challenged by the developing situation to a decision. The practical situation was novel, without exact

historical precedent. The United States, together with its allies, was manning an isolated enclave deep within enemy territory, without local resources or secure communications. In law and in fact the status of the enclave was equivocal in the extreme.

Two intelligible decisions were possible. One was to regard the position as untenable, and to withdraw. This would have meant a clear defeat. The other was to deny the enemy the right to blockade, to refuse to recognize the barriers, and to send armed convoys through with supplies. It is widely believed that General Clay, then Military Governor for the United States, was in favor of this second decision.

To send armed convoys through would have risked an armed clash; and an armed clash before the gates of Berlin would have risked, however remotely, the outbreak of general war. But well-grounded opinion in the spring of 1948, and almost universal *ex post facto* opinion, rate this risk as negligible. Everything in Soviet behavior indicates that the armed convoys would have got through without armed opposition.

The minute risk was linked to the chance for enormous gain. The direct smashing of the Berlin blockade would have been a rolling defeat for the Soviet Union which would have had cumulative repercussion through-

out the world, and above all in Eastern Europe. It would have proved that the Communists are beatable.

The United States made neither of the two possible decisions. Instead, without a previous plan and without knowing what could or should be done or for how long, the airlift was improvised. But the airlift was not a decision; or, if a decision, it was a decision not to decide. It was a means for temporizing, for putting off decisions. After it turned out to be a great technical success, and had excited the admiration of the world, it could of course be advertised as a brilliant victory. But a victory means the achievement of a goal. What was the net political gain from the triumph of the airlift? Were the Communists anywhere driven back? Were the communications to Berlin any more fully secured and guaranteed?

(2) *The intervention in Greece.* From 1947 on, as part of what has become known as the Truman Doctrine, the United States has carried out in Greece an intervention of massive scope in relation to the size and population of the country. Hundreds of millions of dollars worth of food, supplies, machinery, and weapons have been shipped in. Personnel from the United States has aided in the supervision of economic reconstruction, has considerably influenced internal

Greek politics and government measures, and has been in close liaison with the Greek armed forces.

If it had not been for this intervention, it is almost certain that the Communists would have taken control of Greece. The Soviet Empire would thereby have been extended well into the Eastern Mediterranean. Tito's defection would have become much more difficult, perhaps impossible. The Near East would have been directly threatened, and the road to Africa smoothed. The intervention has blocked these disastrous results; and thus, as we have seen, is rightly considered a success, though it is only a negative success. The United States has gained nothing by the Greek intervention, but has merely avoided an important loss. The relative cost of the negative success has been high: as against the vast resources poured out by the United States, the Communists have committed a few thousand auxiliary troops, conscripts, and dupes, small amounts of arms, and a core of trained leaders. "The Greek problem" has not been solved, and cannot be under the present defensive policy.

Greece's military and political problem cannot be solved within Greece itself, but only in the Balkans beyond Greece. That is, there can be no secure defense at Greece's borders from the Balkan Communist forces,

and therefore these forces must be got rid of. Tito's break with the Cominform, the unrest in Albania, and Bulgaria's violations of the peace treaty, present the chance of doing so at perhaps less cost than that of two years of Greek intervention.

Greece's economic problem can be solved only if the European economic problem is solved. This consideration, however, leads to a third U. S. policy.

(3) *The Marshall Plan.* There were a number of motives that led the United States to adopt and put into effect the Marshall Plan. From the point of view of the general public, there is little doubt that a directly humanitarian motive was prominent. There were also economic aims. Just as a penniless tramp is not a good customer for a storekeeper, so an impoverished Europe would be useless for trade. Moreover, not a few American businessmen saw that through the Marshall Plan credits they would have a European market for export products that could not otherwise be sold. Unquestionably, some sections of American business saw the Marshall Plan as a device that could be used to increase our economic supremacy.

The political motive, however, was derived from the containment policy. Europe, in its shattered postwar condition, was an easy mark for Communism. The economic reconstruc-

tion of Europe would permit European political stability; and the two together would give Europe a better chance to resist Communism both internally and externally. From a political standpoint, thus, the Marshall Plan was exclusively defensive in conception. As always, the defensive move is inadequate, even to fulfill the defensive purpose.

With the help of the Marshall Plan, the West European economy has somewhat improved. The Communist movements within the West European nations are somewhat weaker, though still very powerful. Nevertheless, the European economic position remains fundamentally unsound, and, granted a continuation of the present policy, it will be so at the conclusion of the Marshall Plan and of any number of post-Marshall Plans. It is not hard to understand why this must be.

The economy of continental Europe has always functioned through an interchange between the East and the West, with the East exchanging food and minerals and other raw materials for the machines, finished goods and capital of the West. Moreover, the Continent as a whole has had to trade with the rest of the world. In addition, the development of production methods at the present time has become incompatible with the political division of Europe into small, rigidly independent states.

European economic recovery, therefore, is possible only if the European iron curtain is lifted, if some measure of European unification is brought about, and if the whole world is opened up to relatively free economic interchange. One further condition should be added: West European economic and political reconstruction is impossible so long as there are mass Communist movements within the major West European nations, since these movements can and will block the reconstruction.

To achieve these conditions of European recovery is an offensive task. Many measures of the Marshall Plan might contribute to the fulfillment of that task if they were linked to a positive, offensive general policy conception. But they have not been; the Plan has been restricted by the defensive framework of containment. Therefore, once again, the Marshall Plan can have no more than a negative success; it cannot produce positive gains. Consequently, when the Plan's termination is reached, the power balance will not have significantly altered. The same problems will be present as those that originally called forth the Plan. If the same reasoning is used, a second — and a third and a fourth — Plan will have to be successively launched.

The problem is to escape from this treadmill.

FANTASTIC JOSÉ ITURBI

BY ARTHUR BRONSON

JOSÉ ITURBI must marvel occasionally at the fantastic curve of his life-line. At the age of seven he was doing a twelve-hour piano routine (2 P.M. to 2 A.M.) in a dingy movie-house in his native Valencia, in Spain, taking breaks only when Papa Iturbi would slip in at mealtimes to push some food down his throat. At the age of 54 Iturbi finds himself playing again for the movies, but this time on the screen instead of in front of it — a distinct film personality, at home in the heady company of the Walter Pidgeons, Bing Crosbys and Van Johnsons.

In between those celluloid markers lie richly exciting years in an entirely different field — the concert world. Here Iturbi gained international distinction as a pianist, an only slightly lesser prominence as a conductor, and a somewhat less enviable reputation as a Latin Peck's Bad Boy whose eruptions against women, popular music, jazz conductors and the hot dog landed him consistently but unpleas-

antly on the nation's front pages.

Iturbi has appeared in only seven films, but he already has cut a giddy figure in this medium, while enhancing his drawing power tremendously in the music world. His concert fees and grosses have skyrocketed so sharply since his film debut, according to concert managers, that today he has outstripped even Ignace Jan Paderewski, the greatest pianistic draw of all time. At the box office he far outdistances any contemporary pianist in the field, even such sure-fire attractions as Vladimir Horowitz, Rudolf Serkin and Artur Schnabel.

Between film assignments some time back, Iturbi went off on a brief three-weeks' tour of the South, and in eight recitals grossed over \$100,000. In New Orleans he drew \$15,192; in San Antonio, \$14,642; in Charleston, West Virginia, \$11,664; in Wichita Falls, Texas, \$11,240. Iturbi's concert grosses, before his film splash, ran to a third of these figures. Where his fees once ranged from \$750 to \$1500 a per-

ARTHUR BRONSON, a member of the staff of *Variety*, has contributed articles on the entertainment industry to the *MERCURY* and many other magazines. His last previous article in these pages was a profile of Burton Holmes, which appeared in the issue of December 1946.