Commentary

The Present Danger

Norman Podhoretz

On November 4, 1979, the day the American embassy in Teheran was seized and the hostages were taken, one period in American history ended; and less than two months later, on December 25, when Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan, another period began.

The past being easier to read than the present, we can describe the nature of the age now over with greater assurance than the one into which we are at this very moment just setting a hesitant and uncertain foot. Yet even to recognize whence we have come, let alone whither we are going, will require an effort to clear our minds of the cant that prevented an earlier understanding of the terrible troubles into which we were heading. I propose that we start, then, by renouncing the general idea that before Iran and Afghanistan we had moved from "cold war" to "détente" and that the old political struggle between "East" and "West" was yielding in importance to a new economic conflict between "North" and "South."

The assumptions behind this scheme have all been shattered by the events of the past few months, but they have served so well and for so long to disguise and deny the ominous consequences of a tilt in the balance of power from the United States to the Soviet Union that a fierce effort is being made to rescue them from discredit. If that effort should succeed, more would be lost than intellectual clarity. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that it would signify the final collapse of an American resolve to resist the forward surge of Soviet imperialism. In that case, we would know by what name to call the new era into which we have entered (though it would be an essential feature of that era that we would be forbidden to speak its name aloud): the Finlandization of America.

The period usually called the cold war began in 1947 when the United States, after several years of acquiescence in the expansion of the Soviet empire, decided to resist any further advance either in the form of military invasion by Soviet troops or political subversion by local Communist parties. Up until this point the Russians had enjoyed a free hand. They had been permitted to occupy most of Eastern Europe and to begin installing puppet regimes in one after another of the countries of the region. Now with Greece and Turkey threatened by the same fate, the United States finally began rousing itself from the semi-euphoric and semi-torpid state into which it had fallen at the end of World War II. In March 1947, announcing a program of military aid to Greece and Turkey, President Truman, in the doctrine soon to bear his name, declared that "it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressure."

Within the next few months, the Marshall Plan was launched to aid in the reconstruction of the war-torn economies of Western Europe. Then came a Communist coup in Czechoslovakia which destroyed the independence of another East European country and the only one with a democratic political system. Partly in response to a similar danger posed to Italy and France by huge local Communist parties subservient to Moscow, and partly to guard against an actual Soviet invasion of Western Europe, the North Atlantic Treaty Alliance (NATO) was formed.

The name given to this two-sided politico-military strategy of American resistance to Soviet imperialism was containment, and it remained the guiding principle of American foreign policy until it was replaced two decades later, in 1969, by a new policy and a new presidential doctrine bearing the name of Richard Nixon.

In one of the Orwellian inversions at which Soviet propaganda has always been so adept, this strategy of resistance, of holding a defensive line against their own imperialistic ambitions, the Russians described and stigmatized (in the words of *The Soviet Diplomatic Dictionary*) as a declaration of war by "the United States and . . . the imperialist military blocs" on "the Soviet Union and other Socialist States after the Second World War."

From that moment to this, any and every lowering of American resistance to Soviet imperialism has been praised by the Russians as a move away from the "cold war," and any sign of a reawakened concern, let alone of concrete action, has been denounced as a "return to the cold war." Thanks to

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the process of what Daniel P. Moynihan has called "semantic infiltration," this Orwellian use of the term cold war has come into currency in the United States and the West generally. The first thing to do, then, in the interests of clarity, is to discard it in favor of "containment" when we talk about the role played by the United States in the first act of the great historical drama which opened in 1947.

ALTHOUGH it was in the Truman Doctrine that the policy of containment was officially enunciated, it received its most authoritative expression in an article published in the July 1947 issue of *Foreign Affairs* under the title "The Sources of Soviet Conduct." The author, identified at the time as "Mr. X," was George F. Kennan, the first director of the Policy Planning Staff of the State Department. About thirty years later, in what was perhaps the most dramatic single case of the loss of faith in containment caused by the experience of Vietnam, Kennan for all practical purposes repudiated the position he had taken in this article. Like many others of his generation, the great theorist of containment became what he himself called, with a candor few of the others had the courage or the audacity to match, a "semi-isolationist." But even to Kennan's admirable candor on these momentous issues there were limits. Thus he suggested that it was not so much that he had changed his mind about containment, as that his conception of it had been distorted in practice by an excessive emphasis on the military component of a strategy that he had envisaged as primarily political.

Yet anyone who reads "The Sources of Soviet Conduct" today is unlikely to come away with the impression that Kennan meant to stress the political over the military. His two main points, made not once but several times, are that the Soviet Union is embarked on a long-range strategy to overthrow the societies of the capitalist world and replace them with Communist regimes, and that this aim can only be frustrated by an equally determined strategy of resistance. Thus "the main element of any United States policy toward the Soviet Union must be that of a long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies." Or again: ". . . the Soviet pressure against the free institutions of the Western world is something that can be contained by the adroit and vigilant application of counter-force at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points, corresponding to the shifts and maneuvers of Soviet policy, but which cannot be charmed or talked out of existence."

No doubt the "counter-force" Kennan had in mind was not exclusively military in nature. But there can be even less doubt that the American interventions into Korea and Vietnam were entirely consistent with his formulations. In fact, when we add to them the statement that the duty of "all good Communists" everywhere in the world "is the support and promotion of Soviet power, as defined in Moscow," we have to conclude that, in principle at least, Kennan's conception of containment imposed a prima-facie requirement on the United States to use military force in Korea and Vietnam. For on his view, in each of these cases an effort was being made to expand Soviet power through the expansion of Communist regimes serving Moscow's long-range purposes. That greater practical wisdom or tactical prudence would have counseled nonintervention into Vietnam—on the ground that the chances of success were so slight—says nothing about the principle, or about its applicability to situations where the local conditions might be more favorable to military action. Korea itself was the classic example of such a situation, and a test-case of the seriousness of containment.

In the years between the enunciation of the policy and the outbreak of the Korean war, the United States had given containment concrete expression in the formation of NATO, and in a variety of actions designed to deter any advance of Soviet power beyond the lines established at the end of World War II and thus far crossed only by the coup in Czechoslovakia (for which, perhaps, the defection of Communist Yugoslavia was regarded as an even trade). At first there had been opposition to the new policy from the Left as well as the Right. On the Left, the argument was that the Soviet Union—in contrast to what the theory of containment supposed—was pursuing a defensive rather than an aggressive policy, and that Stalin wanted only security and peace. On the Right, the theory of Soviet intentions lying behind containment was accepted, but the prescription for American policy was attacked as overly defensive. Whereas the Left advocated disarmament and "understanding," the Right demanded "rollback" and liberation. It was not enough to hold out the hope, as Kennan did, of promoting "tendencies which must eventually find their outlet in either the breakup or the gradual mellowing of Soviet power"; the East European satellites had to be helped to rise up and rebel against their Soviet masters.

Yet neither of these two opposing assaults on containment could make much headway in the early years. The left-wing attack organized itself in Henry Wallace's campaign for the Presidency in 1948 and was so badly humiliated at the polls (Wallace receiving not the ten million votes he had expected but fewer than a million) that it sank into oblivion as a political force. In the world of ideas, too, the benign interpretation of Soviet intentions suffered a severe pounding at the hands of critics who could point both to Soviet doctrine and to Soviet action in refuting the view that Stalin was interested only in security and peace.

As for the attack from the Right, it turned out to be more rhetorical than real. Thus when—encouraged by a Republican administration in which

John Foster Dulles and Richard Nixon, two of the leading critics of containment from the Right, served in high positions—the Hungarians rose up against their Soviet masters, the United States looked on sympathetically but took no action.

The Korean war had also broken out as a result of American encouragement. In that case, however, it was the Communists we encouraged, in the form of an announcement by Secretary of State Dean Acheson seeming to suggest that the defense of South Korea was not a vital American interest. Whether Acheson thus misled the Soviet Union and its North Korean clients by inadvertence, or whether the United States changed its mind at the sight of Communist troops actually invading a non-Communist nation, the American decision to hold the line against any further expansion of Soviet or Communist power was virtually unhesitant. We went to war; and in doing so we demonstrated in unmistakable terms that we were serious about the "application of counter-force at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points, corresponding to the shifts and maneuvers of Soviet policy"—that is, about containment.

At the same time, the way we fought the war in Korea became a first clear indication that the critics of containment from the Right—for all that they seemed to have one of the two major parties behind them—were to be no more influential in the shaping of American policy than the critics on the Left. In refusing to do more in Korea than repel the North Korean invasion—in refusing, that is, to conquer North Korea as the commanding general, Douglas MacArthur, and his supporters on the Right wanted to do—the United States under Truman served notice on the world that it had no intention of going beyond containment to rollback or liberation.

Any lingering doubt as to whether this was the policy of the United States rather than the policy of the Democratic party was removed when the Republicans came into office in 1952 under Eisenhower. Far from adopting a bolder or more aggressive strategy, the new President ended the Korean war on the basis of the status quo ante—in other words, precisely on the terms of containment. And when, three years later, he refrained from going into Hungary, he made it correlatively clear that while the United States would resist the expansion of Soviet power by any and every means up to and including war, it would do nothing—not even provide aid to colonies of the Soviet empire seeking national independence and wishing to throw in their political lot with the democratic world—to shrink the territorial dimensions of Soviet control.

In reality, if not entirely in rhetoric, then, there was a bipartisan consensus behind the policy of containment as outlined by Kennan in "The Sources of Soviet Conduct." But even putting it that way understates the case. The fact is that there was a *national* consensus which went deeper than the realm of electoral politics. Nor did this consensus express itself only in the negative terms of a weakening of the critics of containment from the Left and the Right. There was a positive dimension, caught by Kennan in the peroration of his article with an eloquent flourish that fully matched the magisterial brilliance of the analysis on which it rested:

> The thoughtful observer of Russian-American relations will find no cause for complaint in the Kremlin's challenge to American society. He will rather experience a certain gratitude for a Providence which, by providing the American people with this implacable challenge, has made their entire security as a nation dependent on their pulling themselves together and accepting the responsibilities of moral and political leadership that history plainly intended them to bear.

In "pulling themselves together" precisely for these reasons and in this way, the American people experienced a surge of self-confident energy. Instead of the depression which had been expected in the postwar years, there was unprecedented prosperity, and its fruits were being more widely shared than anyone had ever dreamed possible. Millions upon millions of people with low expectations of life found themselves being offered opportunities to improve their lot: in response they worked, they produced, they built, they bred. Even many intellectuals—so recently "alienated" and marginal—joined in what was petulantly derided by the few remaining socialists among them as the "celebration" of America. Yet far from resulting in a diminution of creativity, this new ethos generated a more exciting literature than the 30's before it or the 60's that would follow. (I think of the emergence in the 50's of such writers who shared in the newly positive attitude toward American society as Saul Bellow, Ralph Ellison, William Styron, Robert Lowell, John Berryman, Lionel Trilling, Reinhold Niebuhr, Hannah Arendt, and George Kennan himself.)

In addition to "pulling themselves together" in this way, the American people also realized Kennan's hope that they would accept "the responsibilities of moral and political leadership that history plainly intended them to bear." They accepted these responsibilities by supporting the Marshall Plan, possibly the most generous program of economic aid the world had ever seen, and by their willingness to pay the price in blood and treasure of policies designed to hold the line against a totalitarian system which had already destroyed any possibility of freedom in large areas of the globe and aimed to extend its barbarous reign over as much of the rest as it could. For this too they were rewarded by an upsurge of pride and self-confidence. It was a nation that believed itself capable of assuming leadership in the cause of defending freedom against the threat of totalitarianism. By the end of the decade, when John F. Kennedy succeeded Eisenhower as President, only a

small minority of people on the Left doubted that the cause was just or that the will and the means to fight for it were there.

So many Democrats, including the vast majority who served in the upper echelons of the Kennedy administration, have by now repudiated or quietly drifted away from their earlier views that it seems necessary to stress what would otherwise be self-evident about the Kennedy administration: that it was, if anything, more zealous in its commitment to containment than the Eisenhower administration had been. Kennedy ran against his Republican opponent Nixon, who had of course served as Eisenhower's Vice President, on a platform charging that the Republicans had neglected our defenses (allowing a "missile gap" to develop between the United States and the Soviet Union) and that they were, moreover, softer on Communism than he was. (Nixon later came to believe that a major factor in his narrow defeat was Kennedy's success in establishing this point—improbable though it may sound to the ears of a later generation that knew not John—during one of their television debates.)

Once in office, Kennedy and his Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara took immediate steps to move away from the Republican strategic doctrine of "massive retaliation"—according to which the United States would respond to any act of Communist aggression with a nuclear strike against the Soviet Union—toward a more flexible posture. As early as 1950 a group of professors from Harvard and MIT (including future members of the Kennedy administration like McGeorge Bundy, Carl Kaysen, Jerome Wiesner, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and John Kenneth Galbraith) had warned that the emphasis on nuclear weapons "provided the United States with no effective answer to limited aggression except the wholly disproportionate answer of atomic war. As a result it invited Moscow to use the weapons of guerrilla warfare and internal revolt in marginal areas in the confidence that such local activity would incur only local risks." Kennedy himself picked up this theme eight years later, and his call as a Senator for a military posture that could respond to such threats as "limited brushfire wars, indirect non-overt aggression, intimidation and subversion, internal revolution," he answered with his policies as President. Among those policies were the attempted invasion of Cuba in the Bay of Pigs and the decision to send American "advisers" and then actual troops into Vietnam.

Although a universally acknowledged disaster, the Bay of Pigs did little to discredit the strategy of containment in general. It was taken as a great tactical blunder and written off as an unfortunate but perhaps necessary stage in the education of a new and inexperienced President.

The decision to go into Vietnam, however, was to have much more radical consequences. In principle, to repeat the point once again, this decision was unremarkable. It followed upon the precedent of Korea in the sense that Vietnam too was a country partitioned into Communist and non-Communist areas and where the Communists were trying to take over the non-Communists by force. The difference was that whereas in Korea the North had invaded the South with regular troops, in Vietnam the aggression was taking the form of an apparently internal rebellion by a Communist faction. Very few people in the United States believed that the war in Vietnam was a civil war, but even if they had, it would have made little difference. For whatever the legalistic definition of the case might be, there was no question that an effort was being mounted in Vietnam to extend Communist power beyond an already established line. As such, it represented no less clear a challenge to containment than Korea.

The question, then, was not whether the United States ought to respond; the only question was whether the United States had the means to do so effectively. But given the fact that the new strategic doctrine of the Kennedy administration had been conceived precisely for the purpose of meeting just such a challenge ("indirect non-overt aggression, intimidation and subversion, internal revolution"), it was all but inevitable that Kennedy's answer should be yes. The only dissent from this answer within his administration came from those who argued that military measures would fail unless we also forced the South Vietnamese government to undertake programs of liberal reform. But this argument implicitly called for a greater degree of American intervention than the dispatch of troops alone (and led eventually to the assassination of Diem and the assumption of complete American responsibility for the war).

A case might have been made—and indeed was made, by Hans J. Morgenthau, among others, outside the administration itself—against American intervention into Vietnam on the ground that the chances of success were too slight and the consequences of failure too great. As Morgenthau saw it, there was nothing wrong with trying to save South Vietnam from Communism, let alone with the strategy of containment in general; what was wrong was the tactical judgment, the attempt to apply a sound policy in an inappropriate and unfavorable situation. Morgenthau added that if we allowed ourselves to get dragged into an interminable war in South Vietnam—which we would be unable to win in any case—it would have the same kind of divisive effects on our society as the Algerian war had had on the French. The interests at stake in Southeast Asia were simply not vital enough to justify the risk.

Sound, and even irrefutable, as this analysis seems in retrospect, it commanded very little assent in official Washington. There the prevailing

conviction was that we now had the kinds of counterinsurgency forces required to save South Vietnam from Communism, and there was also what can only be called an itch to test out the new techniques.

But if the only question raised by Vietnam in the early days was the tactical one of whether it was possible for intervention to succeed, more fundamental questions began to be raised as the war dragged on. Whether or not the intervention could succeed, was it necessary or desirable? One of the main assumptions behind containment was that any advance of Communist power amounted to an expansion of Soviet power, but was that necessarily true? Might this not be a case of Chinese expansionism? If so, given the ever widening rift between the Russians and the Chinese, in what sense did American resistance fall under the imperative of containing Soviet expansionism? And if we were now faced with a separate problem of Chinese expansionism, was a mechanical application of the same strategy we had developed to counter the Soviet imperial thrust the best way to deal with it? Or again: might the war in Vietnam actually be an internal Vietnamese affair—a case of covert aggression from the North with local purposes of its own (the unification of the country, and perhaps domination of the whole region, by Hanoi) having little to do with either Soviet or Chinese power? Or, finally, might it be an entirely internal *South* Vietnamese affair—a civil war of real significance to no one but the people of that country?

Obviously the rationale for American intervention into Vietnam depended on clear answers to such questions. Yet they were never forthcoming. Or rather, the ground of our policy kept shifting as the years wore on. First we were countering Soviet expansionism, then we were drawing a line in Asia against Chinese expansionism similar to the one we had drawn in Europe against the Russians, then we were fighting to preserve the independence of a friendly country which had been invaded by another, and finally we were preserving the credibility of our commitments to allies in other parts of the world.

In short, to the casualties in blood of the Vietnam war was added another casualty—the loss of clarity which had marked the policy of the United States for twenty years through Democratic and Republican administrations alike.

Nor was this the only wound suffered by containment in Vietnam. There was also a loss of confidence in the ability of the United States to discharge "the responsibilities of moral and political leadership." In saying that "history plainly intended" the United States to bear those responsibilities, Kennan (no American chauvinist, to put it mildly) surely had in mind not any inherent virtue in the American character but the predominance of sheer power with which history, working through two world wars that had finally exhausted the energies of Western Europe, had left the United States. Despite all the talk, friendly or hostile, about American "arrogance" or the "illusion of American omnipotence," this power was not exercised by Americans as though they thought it was absolute. If they really had entertained any such arrogant illusion of omnipotence, they would surely have refused to tolerate Soviet domination of Eastern Europe or the capture of mainland China by the Communists at a time when America enjoyed a nuclear monopoly. But it would on the other side be foolish to deny that before Vietnam, American confidence in American power was very great—not unlimited but great. Anything within reason we wanted to do we believed we had the power to do. This confidence in American power was the second major casualty of the defeat in Vietnam.

As with power, so with "moral and political leadership." If at the beginning domestic criticism of our military intervention into Vietnam was restricted to tactical issues, and if toward the middle the political wisdom of the intervention came into very serious question, by the end the moral character of the United States was being indicted and besmirched. Large numbers of Americans, including even many of the people who had led the intervention in the Kennedy years, were now joining the tiny minority on the Left who had at the time denounced them for stupidity and immorality, and were now saying that going into Vietnam had progressed from a folly to a crime. No greater distance could have been traveled from the original spirit of containment, reaffirmed in such ringing tones in John F. Kennedy's inaugural address ("Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty"), than to this new national mood of self-doubt and self-disgust. The domestic base on which containment had rested was gone.

IT WAS in response to this new political reality that a Republican administration, coming into office under Richard Nixon a little more than twenty years after containment was first enunciated, decided to begin moving away from it and toward a new international role for the United States. In a process not unfamiliar to other countries and other conservative leaders (France under de Gaulle, Israel under Begin), Nixon, who had once denounced containment as "cowardly" and would in the past have been expected to abandon it if at all in favor of a more aggressive stance, moved instead in the other direction—toward withdrawal, retrenchment, disengagement.

As getting into Vietnam had served under Kennedy and Johnson to discredit the old strategy of containment, getting out of Vietnam would now —so Nixon and his National Security Adviser Hen-

ry Kissinger thought—become the model or paradigm of a new strategy of retreat. American forces were to be withdrawn from Vietnam gradually enough to permit a build-up of South Vietnamese power to the point where the South Vietnamese could assume responsibility for the defense of their own country. The American role would then be limited to supplying the necessary military aid. The same policy, suitably modified according to local circumstances, would be applied to the rest of the world as well. In every major region, the United States would now depend on local surrogates (including Communist China—hence the opening to it—and of course Iran under the Shah) rather than on its own military power to deter or contain any Soviet-sponsored aggression. We would supply arms and other forms of assistance, but from henceforth the deterring and the fighting would be left to others. Thus did the Truman Doctrine give way to the Nixon Doctrine, and containment to strategic retreat.

To be sure, the new policy did not call itself by any such unattractive name as "strategic retreat." It was called "détente" and it was heralded as the beginning of a new era in the relations between the United States and the Soviet Union. In this new era, a "structure of peace" would be built, with cooperation between the two superpowers replacing "confrontation." Negotiations would proceed to limit the proliferation of strategic nuclear weapons; and the Americans and the Russians would also agree to exercise restraint in their dealings with third parties so as to lessen the danger that they might be drawn into direct conflict with each other.

To the critics of "détente" it was clear at the time, as it has become clear to almost everyone in retrospect, that the new strategy rested on the highly questionable assumption that the Soviet Union could be contained by any force other than American power. Nixon and Kissinger believed—or perhaps only hoped against hope—that a combination or "linkage" of surrogate force and positive economic and political incentives would be enough to restrain Soviet adventurism; and where this combination proved insufficient, a serious show of American determination would make up the lack.

In other words, in their conception of it, "détente" was the highest degree of containment compatible with the post-Vietnam political climate in the United States—a climate in which Congress, supported by the leading centers of opinion within the foreign-policy establishment and the major news media, wanted only to cut back drastically on defense spending and to curtail American commitments abroad to a sparse minimum. Kissinger evidently believed that the United States had suffered a failure of nerve and no longer had the will or the stomach to pursue a serious strategy of containment. He also seems to have believed that the Soviet Union had entered a period of imperial dynamism. His role, like that of Metternich when confronted with the impending collapse of the monarchical system in the face of a rising democratic challenge, was to delay the inevitable for as long as possible. To win time was desirable in itself and there was in any case a chance that unexpected developments might occur to change the entire picture.

Unfortunately for this conception, the only unexpected developments that actually did occur tended to undermine its viability as a modified strategy of containment. One such development was the failure of what had been the paradigmatic testing-ground of the new strategy in Vietnam, where the new idea of containment through surrogate power followed the old idea of containment through American power into an early grave (though the obsequies were not read until four years later, after the fall of the Shah). In the case of Vietnam, not only was the surrogate power unable to hold the line on its own, but in the event, the United States refused even to provide it with the promised aid to defend itself against a military invasion encouraged and supplied with massive quantities of Soviet arms. To make yet another of the many historical ironies generated by this story still more mordant, the "discredited" theory on which we originally went into Vietnam—that the victory of Communism there would be tantamount to an expansion of Soviet power—was vindicated after many detours in the end, as Communist Vietnam allied itself with the Soviet Union against China and then drove on to extend its rule over the whole of Indochina.

The even more "discredited" domino theory was thereby vindicated too—and not merely in Indochina. No sooner had Vietnam fallen than Soviet proxies in the form of Cuban troops appeared in Angola, and again the United States refused to respond. Kissinger and the new President, Gerald Ford, appealed to Congress for aid to the pro-Western faction in Angola which was being overwhelmed by its Communist rivals with the help of the Cuban troops. But Congress (again supported by the most influential sectors of opinion) said no, and for good measure cut down an effort by the CIA to provide covert assistance to the anti-Communist forces as well. Within the next few years—extending into the new Democratic administration under Jimmy Carter—five more countries were taken over by factions supported by and loyal to the Soviet Union, while the United States looked complacently on and congratulated itself on exercising "mature restraint."

Nor was this developing pattern of Soviet advance and American retreat confined to conflicts involving clients or allies. More ominously it showed itself in the changing balance between the two superpowers themselves. After being forced by American superiority both in strategic nuclear forces and in naval forces in

place to back down in the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, the Soviet Union had decided that it would never again be placed in such a situation. In line with that decision, the Soviets had embarked on a build-up in every category of military force—nuclear as well as conventional, on land, on sea, and in the air—that would turn out to be the greatest military build-up in the peacetime history of the world. Yet despite all the easy talk, then and now, about an arms race, the United States responded to this relentless marathon not by running but by standing still and even slipping back. Through the entire decade of the 70's, the Soviets spent three times as much as the United States on defense, and in 1979 alone (even after a minor reversal of the steadily downward trend of American military spending from 1970-76) they outstripped the United States by 50 per cent.* In most categories of conventional military force, the Soviet Union had long enjoyed an advantage over the United States, but the balance was maintained by American superiority in the quality of our arsenal and the quantity of our strategic nuclear weapons. Yet Soviet advances in both quality and quantity were combining with American "restraint" (a word which more and more took on the character of a euphemism for unilateral disarmament) to wipe out that advantage.

As the critics of détente began pointing out with mounting alarm, if these tendencies were to continue, the overall balance of power between the Soviet Union and the United States would shift in favor of the Soviets. And as the Soviets themselves began pointing out with scarcely concealed glee, such a shift would be translated into a greater measure of Soviet "influence" everywhere in the world. Influence could mean throwing their weight around politically in negotiations with the West; it could mean intimidating other countries by menacing shows of force; it could mean dispatching Cuban and East German proxies to intervene in Third World countries without fear of opposition or reprisal; it could—though this would come as a surprise even to those who expected the worst of the Soviet Union but who were aware of its almost legendary caution in sending its own troops outside the boundaries of its own empire—mean outright Soviet military invasion and occupation; and, in the worst case, it could mean the kind of political control over Western Europe, Japan, and ultimately even the United States that had come to be known as Finlandization.

Far from expressing concern over the changing balance of power between the United States and the Soviet Union or from worrying about the consequences it could and was indeed already beginning to have, the Carter administration seemed sanguine about it. In an obverse replay of what happened with containment when Eisenhower replaced Truman in 1952, the new Democratic administration which came into office behind Carter in 1976 continued and even accelerated the strategic retreat begun under the Republicans. Carter, who had campaigned against a putatively bloated defense budget and promised to cut defense spending by $5 to $7 billion, found it impossible to keep that promise as President. He did, however, cancel or delay production of one new weapons system after another—the B-1 bomber, the neutron bomb, the MX, the Trident—while the Soviet Union went on increasing and refining its entire arsenal.

Nor was any great alarm sounded by the Carter administration over the escalation of activity by Soviet proxies in the Middle East and Africa. To many observers all this activity seemed part of a developing strategy to put the Soviets into a position of control over the oil of the Middle East or at least over the routes through which it was transported to Europe, Japan, and the United States. But to Carter's ambassador to the UN—perhaps reasoning by analogy with the notion that Soviet achievement of nuclear parity was a necessary precondition for stabilizing the "arms race"—Cuban troops in Africa were a force for stability. As for the fear of Soviet encirclement of the Middle East, it was dismissed as paranoia by spokesmen both in the government and in the press.

BUT if in general terms the pre-Afghanistan policies of the Carter administration were continuous with the strategy of retreat inaugurated by the two Republican administrations preceding it, there was also a major difference in conception and attitude. Whereas Nixon, Ford, and Kissinger saw détente as an adaptation of containment to a set of changing circumstances—the best, in effect, one could now hope to do—the Carter administration seemed to see no need for containment at all.

Although Kissinger had on occasion flirted with the notion that the Soviet Union was becoming a "status-quo power," his net assessment was that it had entered a period of imperial expansionism. With the Carter administration, it was just the opposite. The President or his National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski might point in an extremity to Soviet misbehavior. But in statement after statement by the President himself, his Secretary of State, his ambassador to the UN, his leading expert on Soviet affairs, and his apologists in the universities and the press, the American people were told that the Soviet Union was pursuing the same objectives as we were—stability and peace.

To be sure—so this reading of the Soviets went—they were still primitive enough to think that military power was as important as it had been in the past. But with patient instruction from us—reinforced by lessons like their expulsion from Egypt—they would soon learn that the world had entered a new era in which military power was becoming

* These figures are based on a CIA report. It is worth noting that CIA estimates of Soviet military spending have usually been found to be too low, not too high.

less and less useful as an instrument of policy. In the nuclear field, strategic superiority (as Henry Kissinger himself had said—though he would later change his mind) was meaningless, and if the Soviets should remain so immature as to try to achieve it, they would gain nothing for their pains but economic hardship. As for sending their proxies into other countries, they would soon find that this too was a species of anachronistic activity. For not all the Cuban troops or Soviet weapons in the world could prevail against the force of nationalism which would bog them down in quagmires and then extrude them altogether, as had happened to us in our own foolish turn in Vietnam.

UNDERLYING all these considerations was the idea that the East-West conflict—the struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union—was becoming obsolescent and that a new axis of conflict was being drawn between the North and the South. The issues in this new conflict were not political—that is, they did not involve a struggle between Communism and democracy; they were, rather, economic, pitting the poor nations of the South against the developed countries of the North. Just as dozens of formerly subjugated peoples had demanded their political place in the sun and achieved it by becoming sovereign nations, so these same peoples and others too were now demanding their rightful share of the goods of the earth through the creation of a new international economic order. Such demands could not be resisted by force—which was another proof of the growing obsolescence of military might—and the problem was still further complicated by the fact that not all the economic power was in the hands of the North.

These propositions had been given a tremendous boost toward the status of axiomatic truth by the success of OPEC in imposing an embargo on sales to the West during the Yom Kippur war of 1973 and then in quadrupling the price of oil overnight. It was not, however, until the Carter administration took office three years later that they achieved the status of official American policy. In his now notorious speech at Notre Dame in May 1977, the President said that the "threat of conflict with the Soviet Union has become less intensive" and that the greater threat to peace came from a world "one-third rich and two-thirds hungry."

The upshot was that there was no longer any need for containment—whether in the Trumanesque form of American military power or in the Nixonian modification of local surrogates supported by American arms. As Carter himself put it, "Historical trends have weakened the foundation" of the two principles which guided our foreign policy in the past: "a belief that Soviet expansion was almost inevitable and that it must be contained."

Given this way of looking at the world, it was only to be expected that the Carter administration would react with "mature restraint" to the overthrow of the Shah of Iran. In the Notre Dame speech the President had said:

> Being confident of our own future, we are now free of that inordinate fear of Communism which once led us to embrace any dictator who joined us in that fear. I'm glad that's being changed.

The Shah being a prime example of just such a dictator, he might well have seen the writing on the wall in these words, especially when to their moral disapproval was added the idea of the obsolescence of containment even in the milder form of the Nixon Doctrine—which had made of the Shah a "pillar" of American security in the Persian Gulf. If the Nixon Doctrine had remained in force, it would have called upon us to support the Shah in doing whatever was necessary to stave off a revolution which might or might not have been pro-Soviet but was certainly anti-American. Whether even Richard Nixon himself would have had the stomach and the political base for such a policy—involving, as it would have done, American acquiescence in the massacre by Iranian troops of many thousands of demonstrators—is open to serious doubt. In any case, Richard Nixon was gone, and the doctrine bearing his name was not about to be rescued by a President who saw no need for it and even seems to have thought that the United States would be better off without allies like the Shah.

IN THIS, however, the President was lagging behind a new stirring in the public mind. Even some of his academic sympathizers were disturbed by the fall of the Shah and the rise of the Ayatollah. This strange new force was not the kind of thing the opponents of the Shah in the United States had counted on. Andrew Young and Ramsey Clark might praise the Ayatollah as a saint and a great believer in human rights, but most people were unsettled by his violent outbursts against the United States and his evident determination to take Iran not forward into the future but backward into a past darker from their point of view than the regime of the Shah. And there were those who, while priding themselves on being as free of the inordinate fear of Communism as anyone in the Carter White House, nevertheless began wondering if the Islamic revolution in Iran might turn out to be the prelude to a Soviet takeover of some kind. In any event, it was now acknowledged by sympathetic critics of the Carter administration like Stanley Hoffmann of Harvard and James Chace of *Foreign Affairs* that there could be no substitute for American power in the Persian Gulf or perhaps anywhere else. Either we would have to depend on our own power to hold the Soviets back, or we would have to rely on the hope that they would be contained by their own prudence and by their fear of local resistance.

But if the Nixon Doctrine collapsed along with its pillar, the Shah, the twin pillars of Carter's foreign policy were soon to collapse as well, one of them onto the same rubble heap in the streets of Teheran, and the other smashed by Soviet tanks in the streets of Kabul.

The first of these pillars was the idea that no great risk was entailed by the retrenchment of American power. In the new order of things, according to this idea, we could afford to divest ourselves of instrumentalities like a covert capability for intervention by the CIA and a rapid deployment force. Within days after the hostages had been seized in Teheran, the humiliating helplessness of the United States had led even some public figures who formerly favored a radical retrenchment to demand a restoration of these capabilities.

But there was another, subtler aspect to this issue which had to do not with the the availability of particular instruments of force but with the post-Vietnam American reluctance to use force at all. Here too an element of continuity between the Carter administration and the Nixon-Ford-Kissinger years was concealed amid all the differences both rhetorical and real. Thus the failure of the United States to take military action against OPEC in 1973-74 marked the beginning of a period in which militarily powerless parties were able without fear of retaliation to commit what would certainly in the past—even in the very recent past—have been regarded as acts of aggression and even war against the United States. It would be hard to prove that the Iranians who jeered at the impotence of the United States in 1979 had been emboldened by the message of American behavior in 1973. But it is harder still to believe that American passivity in the face of a threat to the very life-blood of its civilization did not lead to the obvious conclusion that the United States had lost its nerve and could now be taken on with impunity. For if the United States was not prepared to use force to insure its access to oil, for the sake of what could it be expected to do so?

The form in which this point came home to American public opinion was the contrast between the attack on our embassy in Teheran and the protection afforded the Soviet embassy there when a group of protesters tried to storm it after the invasion of Afghanistan. How was it, many people began to ask, that our embassies were sacked, and not only in Teheran, whereas Soviet embassies remained inviolate? Might it have something to do with a fear of Soviet retaliation as against the expectation that the United States would go to any lengths to avoid the use of force? Once the hostages were taken, there might be no way of getting them out safely by military action. But a vast number of Americans were now confirmed in or converted to the view that only the certain knowledge of retaliation could deter others from attempting the same thing again, and that only military power and the willingness to use it could prevent still others from aggressing in still other ways against the United States.

No sooner did its assumption concerning the utility of American military power collapse than the Carter administration found its ideas about the efficacy of Soviet military power disintegrating too. The President himself had only recently said that the negative effects of Soviet racism and atheism would lead of their own unaided weight to the defeat of Soviet aims in Africa, but the Russians evidently disagreed. They seemed to believe —on the basis of their experience in Hungary and Czechoslovakia—that such effects could be countered well enough by troops and tanks and planes both in Africa and in the Middle East.

Nor could the Carter administration take much comfort from the expectation of some of its supporters and apologists that Afghanistan would become a "quagmire" and soon administer the same lesson to the obdurate Soviets about the uselessness of military power that we had learned in Vietnam. There was no free public opinion in the Soviet Union to interfere with any military operation; there was no outside force supplying the kind of arms to the Afghan rebels that the Soviets themselves had given to the North Vietnamese and without which the "lesson" could never have been taught to the United States.

But the invasion of Afghanistan did more than destroy the administration's old ideas about the utility of force in Soviet dealings with the Third World. It shook the very foundation of the administration's conception of the Soviet Union in general. No matter how this extraordinary move was interpreted, it was not easily compatible with the notion that the Soviet Union had become a status-quo power. Even if, as some desperately reassuring voices maintained, the Russians were acting defensively—fearful of what would happen if a Muslim insurgency should overthrow a client state on their own border—there was no denying that the sending of Soviet—not Cuban or East German but Soviet—troops to a country outside the Warsaw Pact represented a new stage of Soviet expansionism.

Nor could it be denied that the decision to risk political and possibly other forms of retaliation bespoke a new level of Soviet boldness. For again, even if it were true, as the reassuring voices maintained, that the Soviets had underestimated the degree of outrage the invasion would provoke both in the United States and in the Third World, they certainly must have known that there would be *some* degree of outrage.

In either case, the invasion could not be reconciled with the idea of the Soviet Union as highly prudent in its international conduct. Or rather, it could best be reconciled with this idea in the opposite sense from what the reassuring voices intended. That is, given the normal reluctance of the Soviets to take undue risks, and given also their

belief—often reiterated by Brezhnev—that as the "relationship of forces" tipped in their favor, they would be entitled to a proportionate extension of their power and influence, the invasion of Afghanistan could only be seen as a vindication of those critics of détente who had been warning since the early 70's that the retreat of American power would open the way to Soviet adventurism and expansionism.

Finally, the invasion of Afghanistan persuaded the Carter administration that "North-South" had not yet quite replaced "East-West" as the central axis of conflict in our time. This idea had in any case always been dubious, smacking of a great desire to escape from the responsibilities of containment by proclaiming that there was no longer any need to exercise them. Moreover, even the distinction between East-West and North-South had always been problematic.

First of all, in its conflicts with the "South," the United States always had to worry about the possibility of a confrontation with the military might of the "East." This was true in 1973, when the last polemical resort against a forcible American takeover of the oil fields was the argument that the Russians might move in to prevent it; and it was true later in Africa, where, for example, the case against American backing of Bishop Abel Muzorewa in Zimbabwe Rhodesia was that such a policy might drag us into a war with the Cubans.

Secondly, despite protestations of neutrality, much of the "South" was for all practical purposes on the side of the "East" against the West. In their meeting in Havana last year, for example, the "nonaligned" nations passed a series of viciously anti-American resolutions and came close to following Cuba's lead into an alliance with the Soviet bloc—this after three years of punctilious nonintervention and positive wooing by the "imperialistic" United States while Cuban and East German troops and Soviet military advisers were busily absorbing countries throughout the "South" into the "East" by force.

That the ultimate objective of all this Soviet-inspired and -sponsored activity was extension of control by the "East" over that part of the "South" located in the Persian Gulf in order to gain political domination over the "West" (known for purposes of economics as the "North"), and also to insure a source of oil for themselves as their own supplies began to dwindle, seemed clear to many observers long before the invasion of Afghanistan. But it only became clear to the President of the United States after the invasion of Afghanistan. It was then that Carter declared that "An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the U.S." and that "It will be repelled by use of any means necessary, including military force."

Ten years after it was first proclaimed, then, the Nixon Doctrine gave way to the Carter Doctrine—a new version, or so it seemed, of the Truman Doctrine of old. If the President could be believed, the period of strategic retreat was over and a new period of containment had begun.

AND so we come to the present moment and to the question of whether the President can be believed. The reasons for being skeptical are clear. The President himself is so recent a convert to these new ideas that doubts inevitably arise as to the seriousness of his commitment and his steadiness of purpose. Some ungenerous critics have wondered at whom the Carter Doctrine is really aimed: at the Soviet Union or at the American voters in an election year? Others have asked how the new policy can be effectively implemented by an administration still made up of the same people who until yesterday were pressing in a very different direction.

Yet even if such unkind speculations are dismissed and even if the President is given the benefit of every doubt, a far more ominous question arises. *Is it too late?*

For a long time now, groups like the Coalition for a Democratic Majority and the Committee on the Present Danger have been sounding the alarm over the deterioration of our defenses and the build-up of Soviet military capability. They have warned that these trends, if not reversed, would lead to the opening of a "window of opportunity" for the Soviet Union—a period in which military superiority would embolden the Soviets to move forward quickly, before the United States could correct the imbalance and slam the window shut. The date at which this window would open was generally estimated—with Orwell as an unconscious guide?—to be 1984. But the invasion of Afghanistan may mean that the Soviets think the window is open *now*.

If they do, they have every incentive to keep going—with their own troops, or by encouraging internal insurrections and coups, or by some combination of both—until they have the oil. Even the steps toward mobilization now announced by President Carter—increases in military spending, registration for the draft, and the like—might paradoxically strengthen their incentive to press on now, before we can pull ourselves together and shut the window again. This is the point to which ten years of retreat may have brought us: damned if we do, and damned if we don't.

In short, the "arms race" we have allegedly been running has now left the United States with virtually no means other than a threat of nuclear war to protect the life-line and the life-blood of our civilization. From everything we know about the Soviets, they will be deterred by that threat so long as the nuclear balance is even or in our favor. This is why the contention, advanced by Senator Kennedy among others, that "nuclear weapons like the MX" have no "relevance" to a "regional crisis" (!) like Afghanistan is dangerously wrong.

If it is not already too late, and if we do get safely through the present crisis, we will only be delaying the inevitable unless we resolve now to use the additional time not only to restore our conventional capability but precisely to spend "the many billions more in defense systems" opposed by Kennedy but which alone can prevent the Soviets from achieving nuclear superiority and thus an unobstructed road to domination. The MX may or may not be the best such system we can buy, but there can be no question that at the very least we will need some new system—possibly the ABM—to make our Minuteman force invulnerable to a Soviet first strike.

It may, as I say, already be too late. The Soviets may think that the nuclear balance has now tipped in their favor. Or they may think that the parity which we have deliberately permitted them to achieve over the past fifteen years (on the theory that it would satisfy them and lessen the danger of war), has deprived the American nuclear threat of credibility. If so, the superiority of their conventional forces to ours means that there is nothing to stop them now from advancing but the "Arab nationalism and the Muslim religious feeling" on which Senator Kennedy—like President Carter in his pre-Afghanistan political incarnation—places his hopes. Yet the example of Afghanistan itself, where fierce nationalism and Muslim religious feeling have not exactly proved effective as "a powerful force against Soviet ambition," suggests that this is a frail reed indeed for us to lean upon.

Even if the Soviets should decide for one reason or another to pause, the great peril we are in will not disappear. If, for example, they should launch the "spring peace offensive" that many expect, there is a danger that the finally aroused American giant will once again be lulled back to sleep. In that case, the Carter Doctrine could turn out to be nothing more than an insubstantial election-year slogan, and the nascent new effort of resistance to Soviet imperialism might be cut off in its infancy: the extra billions for defense would be cancelled, and neither the MX nor any other such "irrelevant" system would be built. Meanwhile the Soviets would consolidate their gains, go on increasing and refining their arsenal, and wait for the window of opportunity to open even wider and lock itself permanently into position. Soon enough, perhaps by the date chosen by Orwell's prophetic soul—when to their political ambition to dominate the West would have been added the Soviets' own economic need for Middle Eastern oil—the President of the United States, whoever he might be, would have to choose between nuclear war or Soviet control over the oil supply of the West. By then the vulnerability of our missiles to a Soviet first strike would automatically dictate surrender—checkmate by telephone, as someone has called it.

But whether now or then, what would surrender mean? What would the Finlandization of America look like?

In contrast to the traditional kind, this new species of surrender would not be accompanied by the arrival of Soviet troops or formalized in an unambiguous declaration. There would be no military occupation, and the closest thing to an announcement of surrender might be a speech by the President abrogating the Carter Doctrine in words similar to those already used in a letter published only a few weeks ago in the New York *Times:* "Why . . . should we, at the risk of starting World War III, keep the Russians from displacing the present owners? They might be more efficient producers, and they might save us money by eliminating the corruption that is an element of the present price." Such words would be applauded by "responsible" people, and they would represent the beginning of a gradual but steady process of accommodation to Soviet wishes and demands.

For example, to forestall a cut-off of oil, we would immediately shelve any plans for deploying the new theater nuclear weapons in Western Europe. Then various SALT agreements, entirely skewed in the Soviet favor but universally described as "mutual" and "balanced," would be negotiated. Trade agreements involving the transfer of technology, grain, and anything else the Soviets might want or need would also be negotiated on terms amounting to the payment of tribute, and with an inexorably commensurate decline in the American standard of living.

In countries like France and Italy, where huge Communist parties already exist, they would undoubtedly come to power, in all probability by democratic means. Indeed, many non-Communists would vote for them as the party most likely to represent the lightest form of Soviet domination—Red Vichy regimes whose loyalty to the foreign masters would make military occupation unnecessary and would preserve a minimal degree of national independence.

In the United States, where there is no Communist party to speak of, Finlandization would take a subtler political shape. Politicians and pundits would appear to celebrate the happy arrival of a new era of "peace" and "friendship" and "cooperation" between the Soviet Union and the United States. Dissenters from this cheerful view would be castigated as warmongers and ways would be found to silence questions and criticisms which could, after all, only result in making things worse for everyone. Only those politicians would run who could be depended upon to support the terms on which the threat of nuclear war had finally been banished from the earth. Of course such politicians would work toward a socio-political system more in harmony with the Soviet model than the "unjust" and "reactionary" system we have today.

There is no need to go on filling in the details.

A world in which the Soviet Union had the military power to seize control of the oil fields would be a world shaped by the will and tailored to the convenience of the Soviet Union.

Let us, however, suppose—let us pray—that it is not already too late. Let us suppose further that the Soviets do in fact launch a "peace offensive." Will the American giant, so recently roused, be lulled back to sleep? No confident answer can be given to that question. On the one hand, the soporific forces among us remain powerful. There is, first and foremost, the fear of war—not only nuclear war but any kind of war. This normal human instinct has been strengthened and justified by a culture which in recent years has treated the pursuit of individual fulfillment as an absolute (has any culture in history ever before elevated selfishness into a moral ideal?), and which is very nearly incapable of conceiving anything worth fighting, let alone dying, for. "Anything" in this context preeminently includes the United States, which continues to be castigated in many quarters within America itself as the guilty party in every situation that arises. It is our fault that the Khmer Rouge murdered nearly half the population of Cambodia (because we drove them to desperate measures); it is our fault that the hostages were taken in Iran (because we supported the Shah for so many years); it is even our fault that the Soviets invaded Afghanistan (because by questioning the SALT treaty and taking steps to strengthen our defenses, we simultaneously frightened them and removed their incentive to restraint).

Even some influential commentators who do not reflexively blame the United States for everything evil that happens in the world often explain Soviet behavior in ways calculated to minimize American alarm. The Soviets, they tell us, are not really expansionist and certainly not out to dominate the world; all they want is to protect their own borders and their own security. Even the invasion of Afghanistan itself has been interpreted by several such commentators not as a sign of Soviet aggressiveness but as a symptom of Soviet weakness (in contrast, presumably, to the strength the United States showed in begging the UN and the World Court to do something about Iran). A striking instance is Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. In the 40's and 50's, when the Soviet Union was very much weaker than the United States, Schlesinger expressed great anxiety over the Soviet threat; yet now, when the Soviet Union is at least as powerful as we are and by any objective standard constitutes a greater threat, he keeps telling us how beleaguered and toothless the Russians have become.

All these elements, and others too, of the post-Vietnam mood remain in place; together they suggest a preemptive move toward self-Finlandization. On the other hand, a contrary tendency, and a very strong one, has been developing in the United States toward what might be called a new nationalism. The eruption of patriotic feeling in response to the seizure of the hostages was the most visible manifestation of this tendency, but there are many indications that it was not created or caused by Iran. One significant piece of evidence is the steady rise registered by public-opinion polls since the early 70's in support of increased defense spending and a correlative rise in favor of the use of force to protect American interests.

This change has by no means been confined to the attitudes of the general public. As the course of the SALT debate has revealed, there is a much greater willingness to face the facts of the Soviet military build-up than used to be the case only a few years ago in Congress, in the press, and in the universities. And in the world of ideas generally, everyone agrees, whether happily or with alarm, that the most dynamic force in recent years has been the group known as the "neoconservatives." There are grounds for wondering in what sense most members of this group are conservatives, "neo" or any other variety. But what cannot be questioned—and what makes them an unusual phenomenon in the history of the American intellectual community—is their highly positive attitude toward American society. Even more significant in this context is their conviction that the survival of liberty and democracy, here and everywhere else, requires the maintenance and exertion of American power.

Before Iran and Afghanistan, this new nationalist spirit had been spreading in influence and growing in intensity; since Iran and Afghanistan, it has all but swept away the last lingering traces of the post-Vietnam mood. No doubt as the weeks and months wear on, the twin furies of isolationism and appeasement unleashed by our humiliating defeat in Vietnam will recover from the blows of Iran and Afghanistan and will make their presence felt again. But one senses that the new nationalism is neither insubstantial nor evanescent. It will not easily be dissipated and politicians will ignore it, if they do, only at extreme peril to their chances at the polls. Therefore at the very least, before it runs its course, a variety of steps will be taken to strengthen our military capabilities. As "No More Vietnams" meant retrenchment and accommodation, "No More Irans" will mean making sure that we never again have to submit helplessly to being "pushed around"; and as the main "Lesson of Vietnam" was taken to be that we must never again intervene into the Third World, the great "Lesson of Afghanistan" is likely to be that unless we intervene under certain circumstances, we will find ourselves at the mercy of our enemies.

In my judgment, even if the new lessons were to go no further than they have already gone, they would constitute progress to-

ward a healthier and a safer America. Healthier because self-respect is spiritually superior to self-flagellation, in nations no less than in individuals; safer because the determination to defend our own interests will make us more secure than the inclination to appease.

Nevertheless something is still missing from the new nationalism. In the immediate aftermath of Iran, there was a good deal of talk about defending American honor. Since Afghanistan, most of the talk, in the streets, in the speeches, and in the official statements alike, has focused on defending our economic interests. That there is a political dimension to this crisis, that something more is at stake than injured pride or access to oil, no one seems to recognize or at any rate to emphasize. What this suggests is that the general American response to Iran and Afghanistan, while marking an end to the period of American retreat, has not yet carried us fully forward into a new period of containment.

The problem is that a key term has quietly disappeared from the discussion of the Soviet-American conflict. It is the term Communism. One would think from most of what has been said in recent months that the Soviet Union is a nation like any other with which we happen to be in competition. Yet if the Soviet Union really were a nation like any other—if it were, for example, still being ruled by the Czars—would we object to the extension of its power over the Persian Gulf? What difference would it make to us? Would we be worse off buying oil from the Czars than buying it from the sheiks? Might we not even prefer such an arrangement (as indeed the letter in the *Times* from which I quoted earlier does even now)?

We might, though even under those circumstances we would have cause for serious concern. But as it is, and to give us cause for far more serious concern, the Soviet Union is not a nation like any other. It is a revolutionary state, exactly as Hitler's Germany was, in the sense that it wishes to create a new international order in which it would be the dominant power and whose character would be determined by its national wishes and its ideological dictates. In such an order, there would be no more room for any of the freedoms we now enjoy than there is at this moment within the Soviet Union, or any of the other Communist countries, even the most lightly ruled of which are repressive beyond the most lurid nightmares of a politically pampered American experience.

In short, the reason Soviet imperialism is a threat to us is not merely that the Soviet Union is a superpower bent on aggrandizing itself, but that it is a Communist state armed, as Solzhenitsyn says, to the teeth, and dedicated to the destruction of the free institutions which are our heritage and our glory. To meet what George F. Kennan in 1947 called "this implacable challenge" will demand today, as it did then, that we recognize Soviet purposes for what they are. It is tragic that Kennan himself, in 1980, should be among those working to prevent such a recognition. Writing of the invasion of Afghanistan, he condemns the "extravagant view of Soviet motivation" according to which this "ill-considered" Soviet action was "a prelude to aggressive military moves against various countries and regions further afield." The American response he dismisses as "strident"—a case of "warning people publicly not to do things they have never evinced any intention of doing." Most astonishing of all, Kennan tells us that he is "not aware of any substantiation" of the extravagant American view "in anything the Soviet leaders themselves had said or done."

If he is really looking for substantiation, I would advise him to begin by reading his own essay on "The Sources of Soviet Conduct" which, though written over thirty years ago, tells us more about the invasion of Afghanistan than the sorry article Kennan produced a few weeks after the invasion actually took place. The Kennan of 1980 sees the invasion as merely defensive: has not Brezhnev himself characterized it thus? The Kennan of 1947 would have understood that the invasion represents a new stage in what he described then as the unremitting "Soviet pressure against the free institutions of the Western world."

OF COURSE, in defining our conflict with the Soviet Union as a struggle for freedom and against Communism, we run into two great questions. The first concerns China. If Communism is the enemy, why should we be aligning ourselves with China, the other great Communist power? The answer given by supporters of the "China card" is the same justification that was used for the free world's alliance with one totalitarian ruler, Stalin, against another, Hitler, who was at that moment more dangerous. It is a reasonable answer. The problem, however, is that whereas Stalin made a major contribution to the defeat of Hitler, Communist China is so weak that its contribution to the containment of Soviet imperialism may be negligible. In order to keep forty Soviet divisions pinned down on the Chinese border—divisions the Soviet build-up has made it possible for them to spare—we may be helping to turn China into a terror to our children and grandchildren. And since China's only interest in us is protection from the Soviet Union, if we rely on the China card as an excuse for failing to build up our own power, we may at the same time find ourselves promoting what we most fear: a Sino-Soviet rapprochement.

Another price of the China card is the loss of political clarity it inevitably entails. Playing one Communist power off against another may be sound geopolitics, but it increases the difficulty of explaining to ourselves and our friends what we are fighting for and what we are fighting against.

It may therefore make it harder to mobilize the political support without which a steady and consistent strategy of containment is impossible.

This problem of mobilizing support is perhaps even more difficult in Western Europe and Japan than it is in the United States. The farmers of Iowa have already shown that they can see beyond their economic interests, but the French, the West Germans, and the Japanese seem to care only, as Jacobo Timerman puts it, about "the orderly supply and consumption of raw materials and the inviolability of their markets." Thus trade agreements between the Soviet Union and the West, which were supposed to create incentives to Soviet moderation, have evidently worked in the opposite direction so far as Western Europe and Japan are concerned. The Soviets have not been restrained by the cut-off of wheat, but the French and the West Germans have hesitated to back even the relatively mild measures the President has taken against the Soviet Union. Many European commentators—Bernard Levin, Jean-François Revel, and Olivier Todd, to name a few—see this as yet another sign that the process of self-Finlandization has gone much further in Europe than in the United States. But believing as most of them do that the chief cause of self-Finlandization is the fear of Soviet power and the concomitant loss of confidence in American resolve, they also think that a serious new assertion of American will and American power might lead to, a reversal of the process and the beginning of a new determination in the other democracies to resist what Revel calls "the totalitarian temptation."

The other great question that inevitably arises in this connection is how we can speak of a "free world" that includes so many dictatorships of the Right. The answer here—as Pakistan is only the most recent case to make clear—is also based on geopolitical considerations. But from the point of view of freedom, there is a moral justification for preferring non-Communist dictatorships to Communist regimes. To this day it is hard to find a single Communist regime that permits the people living under it as much freedom as even the worst non-Communist dictatorships the world has known since the death of Hitler. These non-Communist authoritarian societies are not free, but they still remain—both ideologically and in practice—on the other side of what from the point of view of freedom is the greatest of all divides.

IN RESISTING the advance of Soviet power, then, we *are* fighting for freedom and against Communism, for democracy and against totalitarianism. Yet it is precisely this sense of things that the new nationalism thus far lacks. Nor does the Carter Doctrine express it with force and clarity. Without such clarity, the new nationalism is unlikely to do more than lead to sporadic outbursts of indignant energy. It cannot by itself supply the basis of support for what Kennan described in 1947 as "the adroit and vigilant application of counter-force at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points, corresponding to the shifts and maneuvers of Soviet policy."

The possibility that the new nationalism will only prove to be a first step toward a rededication of the United States to such a strategy is what frightens Kennan himself and many others like him who have grown weary and fearful over the years. But "the thoughtful observer of Russian-American relations" today will no more find "cause for complaint in the Kremlin's challenge to American society" than Kennan did in 1947, when he experienced

> a certain gratitude for a Providence which, by providing the American people with this implacable challenge, has made their entire security as a nation dependent on their pulling themselves together and accepting the responsibilities of moral and political leadership that history plainly intended them to bear.

I quoted those words earlier but they are worth quoting again as a stimulus and as a guide. Unless, of course, it really is too late—in which case Kennan's new defeatism will prove as appropriate a response to the present danger as his magnificent call to containment was to the danger of thirty years ago.