

EDITORIAL

Towards a Policy for the 1980s

The year 1980 began with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and continued through the noisy but confused Western response, which was inhibited by the Iranian hostage crisis and the developed world's energy dependence on Middle Eastern supplies. Soviet intentions seemed suddenly more threatening and the Alliance took stock of its defences and found them wanting. In the Far East, wars between communists of varied allegiance continued, with refugees being used as *political weapons*, a technique which was adopted by Fidel Castro when he unloaded his human liabilities on to the United States. The war between Iran and Iraq seemed to possess the almost unique distinction of being inspired by neither superpower, while posing a threat to Gulf stability and oil supply. Resistance in Afghanistan prevented the Soviet Union from closing the embarrassing chapter written by that intervention, and resistance of another kind in Poland presented further dilemmas for the Politburo. These events have created a keener awareness in the West of the needs to coordinate a response and to develop a policy for the future. Wiser and perhaps sadder, the smaller members of the Alliance are looking anxiously towards the new Administration in Washington, half hoping for stirring leadership, half dreading it.

Hopes are centered around the prospect of a mature, well balanced United States foreign policy that neither ignores nor overstates the danger from the East, that remedies deficiencies in defence procurement and preparedness without excess of militaristic zeal, and which recognizes the competition between the two major power blocs as essentially one of ideas, vitality and accomplishment, rather than of military power. Dread arises out of the possibility of initiatives aimed at "quick fix" solutions to the East-West problem by the methods of systems analysis, high technology and confrontation diplomacy. The Alliance is looking for leadership that stabilizes the power balance and then steers the conflict away from the brink of war.

Four years ago the International Institute for Strategic Studies described the Soviet Union as "economically uncompetitive, culturally repressive and ideologically increasingly barren", and went on to assert that "her primary claim to global power and influence is military might".¹ The intervening years have underlined every word. If the weaknesses of the USSR outnumber her strengths, are we not playing into our opponent's hands by allowing her to dictate the choice of weapon? By leaving the initiative for too long in Soviet hands, the West has done little but respond to a series of cautious and intelligent military moves directed from Moscow. Too often, these actions have caught us off our guard, wrong-footed and divided. By the skilful use of propaganda, a weapon the West seems to have tacitly agreed to forgo, the Soviets have often managed to round off a direct or surrogate military victory by winning the competition for apparent moral superiority, particularly in the eyes of Third World audiences, and has even succeeded in making the West feel guilty. The Alliance needs to gain the initiative by diverting the main clashes in the conflict between East and

West away from military confrontation into such arenas as economics, political activity, culture and ideas, thus reducing the risk of full-scale war and improving our chances of success. Provided we develop the conventional strength to hold our positions in Europe and the Middle East, and at the same time deter conflict at high intensity, the final outcome between West and East may be decided through *performance*. To some extent, at least, this competition will occur in the Third World, particularly among the poorer nations.

At the start of this century the world contained some two billion people. Today there are 4.3, and by the year 2000 there will be about 6.3 billion.² Already many of these souls lack food, opportunity and hope. Marxist propaganda tries to attach blame for the emerging tragedy onto the West even though, having failed to provide adequately for its own populations, the communist system does almost nothing to alleviate Third World suffering. The West cannot solve this problem simply by accepting liability and giving charity, and any crusade with that intention would likely fail, giving rise to an economic Vietnam with all its guilt-ridden consequences. But this does not mean that we should do nothing. The United States is a revolutionary nation founded upon the notion that all men are created equal, being entitled to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. The union of liberal political institutions and a free enterprise economy which these principles have produced is sometimes uneasy, but it has nevertheless provided the most direct road to a better life. Having accomplished the revolution internally, the United States and her allies may need to mobilize these ideals a second time, for the wider benefit. The Carter Administration was idealistic, but its capacity to act in accordance with Western principles was uncertain, and its good intentions were therefore doomed to failure. Our ability to compete must be underpinned by an understanding of and confidence in our own system, which hostile propaganda has been allowed to erode. The creation of a strong sense of commitment on the part of the West is the most important and challenging task facing the new Administration. With confidence and cohesion, the Alliance should be able to resist Soviet pressure, direct competition away from military confrontation, and lay the foundations for a more equitable distribution of wealth between North and South. Failure could be serious. The hungry, humiliated and alienated nations of the world, equipped as inevitably they will be with weapons of mass destruction,³ may eventually destroy capitalism and communism with singular indifference.

Footnotes

1. International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Strategic Survey 1976* (London, 1977), p. 3.
2. Quoted Edward Heath, "The Role of Western Military Power in the World Today", in *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies*, (June 1980), p. 19.
3. See Jane House, "The Third World Goes Nuclear", in *South*, no. 3, 3 Dec. 1980, pp. 31-35. (The article deals with nuclear power, but technology, once acquired, can readily be transferred to military use.) *South*, published at 80 Haymarket, London SW1Y 4TS, provides a Third World perspective on world events that is free of the rhetoric that so often discredits this important viewpoint.