

THE PUBLIC AND THE PRIVATE FACE OF THE EAST-WEST STRUGGLE

by

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"I must confess", wrote a fellow historian to me recently, "that the tendency of strategic comment to deal with power situations in a sort of war-game spirit rather than as a reflection of real politics involving real people strikes me as misguided. I do not think that Third World people are merely pawns in what Kipling called 'The Great Game'." I agree with him. However, as conflict situations always have a public and a private face, I would add the caveat that one should attempt to distinguish between them. At an international workshop convened recently by the Centre for Conflict Studies a group of scholars attempted to do that: to examine the assumptions by which the public face of the East-West struggle is conducted, and to suggest means by which the West could direct conflict and competition away from the rhetoric-bound public face into the private arena, where the West's real strengths — intellectual, spiritual, economic and diplomatic — may be brought to bear with some expectation of success. In this article I will try to identify the distinctive features of the public and private faces of this struggle and to point towards those means by which the West can, if not predominate, at least survive the last two decades of this century with our political and philosophical heritage, and our societies, intact.

"The Great Game" whether we call it cold war, *détente* or superpower competition, is the Public Face; it has its own ideology and there are tacit conventions for its conduct. The moves in it appear ideologically consistent, to correspond with the public mood and an often vaguely-defined "national interest".

The United States and the Soviet Union are bound together by its rules in a *ritual dance in which cold war and détente have been the principal acts*. *Détente*, after all, refers not to an agreement to end conflict, but rather to a continuous debate about conflict's bounds and conventions. To end *détente* would mean *scrapping the existing conventions and some of the existing assumptions about conflict* — changing the rules of the Great Game and developing new ones.

The real game is the Private Face of conflict from which new conventions for the Great Game eventually evolve. The language of this face of conflict is less conventional, its practice and methods timeless and its realities concealed from the great mass of people accustomed to the conventional half-truths and jargon which characterize the Public Face. The latter is a front designed to persuade people that what they want to believe is true. Its language is that of assurance, of familiar devils and enemies who are always wrong. The Private Face is that of disequilibrium, of plans gone awry and of uncertainty. It is a gray area in which the opponents may share more in common, in means if not in ends, than the Public Face would lead us to believe.

This is scarcely a new situation. Medieval philosophers recognized much the

same phenomena and called it the "two truth" theory: there was one truth for the *cognoscenti* and another for the rest. For the benefit of the latter, information was simplified and packaged in tabloid form and doctrine was presented as dogma. The *cognoscenti* were made aware that this was but the public face; only an incomplete reflection of the truth. If we are to be the *cognoscenti* of our own age, then we must accept a similar caution against mistaking for the whole truth the published jargon of the cold war and détente, whether it is couched in Marxist-Leninist or so-called liberal-democratic language. The Private Face of conflict, concerned with real politics and real people, is more important. It is the face that strategic planners in both superpowers would ignore at their peril.

There is a considerable body of evidence to show, as was suggested at the beginning of this article, that the superpower strategists do ignore the Private Face or, at the very least, misuse it by superimposing the assumptions of the Great Game upon it, rather than the reverse. Successive American and Soviet administrations have assured us that the world scene should be seen in terms of struggle to the death between red-blooded private enterprise and democracy on the one hand and cold-blooded Marxist-Leninism and totalitarianism on the other. The author would not deny that such a struggle exists, or even that it is important, but would suggest rather that it is not the only way in which to interpret the current world scene. To do so would be to fly in the face of centuries of historical, political, cultural and economic development in Europe, whose leaders regard such views as simplistic and ahistorical. Moreover, they see the naked power struggle between the Americans and the Soviets in real, not abstract terms; if the Public Face conflict gets out of control it is Europe which will suffer first and most. Nor is the "East versus West" framework entirely appropriate to the Third World. Although the era in which Europeans bestrode the world is over, much of what we now call the "South" is stamped with European ideas. This influence cannot be expunged totally from the heritage of the peoples it touched. And it may be that Europe's most long-lasting legacy to the South is nationalism which, harnessed to both older and newer creeds in the emergent nations, cuts across the neat "East-West" boundaries of Public Face of conflict.

Except in Latin America, which was the product of the earlier stage of decolonization, today's state systems have been shaped by the experiences of the Europeans, their erstwhile colonies and their client states in the recent period of imperial decline and fall. Furthermore, although the process of withdrawal is virtually over now, the language and attitudes formed during it still pervade international relations. However, judging by the policies, the rhetoric and the literature of the Soviets, the U.S., the Europeans and the Third World that now includes so many ex-colonial territories, each has its own conception of what it has inherited from the imperial era and how that era will affect the post-colonial one which they have entered.

A reason for the divergence of view is that imperial withdrawal, which gave birth to successor states all over the world, coincided with the emergence of the superpowers which saw themselves as successor states on a world scale. In consequence of this second and simultaneous upheaval, a cold war took shape in a

new bi-polar power system. The considerations of the polar powers, engaged in what they conceived to be a world struggle, infected the actions and conceptions of states primarily concerned with imperial withdrawal and national liberation. The cold war, in over-lapping the imperial withdrawal, caused the concerns of one to confuse policy-making in the other. The confusion has been greater in American policy-making for, whereas following Lenin's theory about imperialism and capitalism allowed the Soviets to pose unequivocally as the champion of the forces of liberation, the US, although ideologically opposed to colonialism, found that its interests lay, in some respects although not in all, in supporting forms of neo-colonialism.

The conflict between the superpowers started in Europe where the "iron curtain" was established to separate the states in the Soviet system from those that were Western or neutral like Austria and Finland. Turbulence accompanying the alignment of this front, in Czechoslovakia and Germany particularly, was of low intensity although the front was eventually secured by emplacement of conventional and nuclear forces. But with China "lost" conflict spread to the East when war began in Korea. Subsequently, two quite different modes of conflict, one essentially bi-polar, as in Europe and Korea, and the other low-intensity and colonial, as in French Indo-China, merged during the American phase of the war in Indo-China. Equivocal about what had happened in Europe, and with their eyes still fixed on the bi-polar struggle that had started there, the Americans tried to establish a *cordon sanitaire* in the East against communism. Naturally, they were unwilling, in doing so, to allow their communist protagonist, who regarded himself as being engaged first in a colonial struggle against the French and then a post-colonial struggle against a puppet, to reach his goal of establishing a sovereign state in succession to the French regime. Similarly, the Middle East, a perennial fault system long regarded in the imperial era as sensitive, erupted into a front between the peripheral and containing US, on one side, and the potentially imperialist Soviet Union on the other. There, too, the indigenous peoples were engaged in an internal, post-colonial struggle of great complexity into which they were more or less reluctant to admit outsiders.

The differing goals and experiences of the actors in these simultaneous plays accounts for some of the confusion that prevails not only in Western policy but in Soviet too about the present scene. The world is filled with unstable states representing the detritus of two quite separate historical periods. First, there are the states created from pre-1945 colonies; then the autonomous clients and satellites of the super powers whose strategic resources and position are considered essential to one or other system. Many of these states, Iraq and Iran for instance, have suffered occupation in the past and they were the victims of power-play in the imperial era. In quite a different category are the states in Latin America that became independent in the nineteenth century but which have not been reconstructed since 1945 and have not shared in the Western reform experience.

The principal concern of all these states is to establish and maintain their influence, precarious integrity and sovereignty within a system of states with which they share common interests. Their success in doing so depends mainly on their political stability and economical health. In seeking stability, the assistance of the polar powers may be necessary to these states but it also has been unat-

tractive to them. For the East-West struggle has, at times, appeared to be a new version of the old imperialism. A consideration for unreconstructed states, and those that have not stabilized after reconstruction, is that they are under pressure from the forces that derive their ideology from the wars of liberation; one that has much in common with Marxist or Marxist-Leninist ideology. Consequently unreconstructed governments tend to be drawn into the East-West struggle by turning for help to the US against internal so-called "progressive" forces with leftist affiliations.

Since the form of conflict that has arisen in these states in the post-colonial period has been more often non-international than international, it has had the appearance of internal struggles to which the rule of non-intervention ought to be applicable. However the language in which that rule is expressed is that of the stable, imperial era and that of Europe. It may be successfully invoked by Poland, even, but the forces that assail unreconstructed states in Latin America, for instance, are using the language derived from the colonial wars of liberation. Ex-colonial "liberated" states use that language as a link with their heroic past. "Liberation" forces, in the post-colonial era fighting unreconstructed but indigenous "fascist", "feudal", "racist" and "colonialist" regimes find it equally useful. Even terrorist groups with no pretensions to be considered liberators and with no respectable political platforms use the language of liberation. It has become the *lingua franca* of conflict which provides a means of communication between diverse groups and is a badge of membership. However, it has also been the language of Marxist-Leninism, although those who use it are not necessarily Marxist-Leninists. And while language and thought processes and methodology are closely related, the message and the media need to be distinguished. The message is that the historical movement that started with the withdrawal from empire, and has now flowed on to overtake the other categories of unstable states, is more permanent and that it is independent of the polar ideological struggle although coloured and exploited by it.

In accepting the modes and inheritance of the imperial era as parent and guide in the present, rather than those of the *nouveau* and ephemeral bi-polar imperial struggle, we should note the diversity of the experience that has been inherited from it. Each of the conflicts that accompanied the transfer of colonial power to a "reconstructed" state was *sui generis*, although bi-polar ideology would suggest that a shorter or longer set of predictable objective and subjective conditions were common to all of them. For instance, the racial, religious, physical and economic factors that were decisive during the Malayan Emergency, were not equally significant in Kenya, Palestine, Aden or Northern Ireland. And although the French Army distilled its experience in Indo-China and applied what it had learned there in Algeria it failed in the latter campaign; for the political and moral environments were different and both had changed in France in the meanwhile. More important, world opinion, aired in the forum of the United Nations and in the Western media, had developed since the early fifties. Not to labour a point, each conflict was peculiar, and the side that had the clearer aim and had better studied the peculiarities of its own situation in time and space was the more successful. Ideology proved to be an impediment in the assessment rather than a useful tool if, by ideology, we mean one bought off

the peg and derived from a different time and different place.

Of course, it is the nature of the human mind to simplify complex situations by offering generalizations in the form of generic descriptions and ideological categories. For similar but opposed political reasons the leaders of the super-powers have been guilty of trying to “pigeon-hole” both the causes of and solutions to Third World conflict. But nearer to the scene, the indigenous participants are less able and less inclined to do so. How then, are we to cast “some light on our darkness” as we undertook to do in the first of these articles?

First it must be admitted that there are few, if any, reliable signposts to the future. In certain regions of the world — Africa, the Middle East and Latin America — conflict is inevitable and is likely to continue into the foreseeable future. Although overlaid with the jargon and the other *impedimenta* of the East-West struggle, these will remain predominantly conflicts of nationalism. They may, of necessity, be revolutionary, but not necessarily Marxist-Leninist. For it is not Marxism that is the dominant movement in the world, nor is it capitalism or democracy. It is the expansion of the world community of states.

For too long, Western responses to this movement have allowed the Soviet Union to pose, however inappropriately, as the moral, material and military champions of third world liberation and development. The West, indeed the world, can ill afford to grant the Soviets such an unchallenged monopoly. Quite apart from the economic and political implications for the people of the region and for the West, it would be morally inexcusable for the West to stand idly by when it has by far the greater economic power, technical resources and ability and the only political tradition truly committed to human dignity and peaceful political evolution. In short, we must coopt or pre-empt the Marxist-Leninist revolutionary tradition and accept a genuine and sincere long-haul commitment to national self-determination in the Third World. Indigenous reaction and Soviet imperialism run against this tide. We should not be seen to be doing so as well.

In practical terms, this might mean granting political, material, even military assistance to genuine national liberation movements, such as the freedom fighters in Afghanistan. The West can make an equally positive contribution by helping to resolve peacefully the conflicts of the Third World. The close cooperation of the British Commonwealth in overseeing the peaceful resolution of the Zimbabwe civil war and the free election of a black-majority rule government is an outstanding example of what the West and the Third World can achieve when working in concert towards a worthy common goal. Further opportunities await the West in Namibia and South Africa, as well as in Latin America. But such achievements cannot be regarded as ends in themselves; they must be followed up by foreign aid and investment, such as that needed desperately in Zimbabwe now. At the same time the problems of developing nations will not be solved simply by throwing money at them. That unfortunate Western tendency is inefficient, demonstrates insensitivity and breeds corruption. Moreover, the West cannot afford a commitment that would amount to a kind of economic “Vietnam”. Assistance must be applied with sufficient care so that it reaches the levels of societies where it will do the most good. Joint venture projects — Western technical assistance supported by OPEC petrodollars — represent an

obvious option.

Finally, we must be prepared, if necessary, to help guarantee the integrity and the security of the new nations. This could mean helping to defend them militarily, though surely that is a last resort. Their best defences will be healthy, educated populations and stable productive economies. This is where we can be of greatest assistance and it is in our interest as much as theirs. In short, the West must look beyond the Public Face of the East-West struggle and see the Great Game in the Third World for what it really is. To win the support of the South would be to win in what is the most important arena of conflict.

BOOK REVIEW

THE TIE THAT BINDS

by

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THE TERROR NETWORK

Holt Rinehart Winston, New York, 1981

The Reagan Administration took office on the very day the American hostages, victims of a major terrorist act, were flown to freedom. The new Secretary of State, General Alexander Haig, was himself the intended target of an assassination attempt in 1979. These two facts may go some way to explain the new administration's preoccupation with terrorism as a foreign policy issue, an issue which has become clouded in controversy in recent months. Secretary Haig opened the debate on January 28th when he accused the Soviet Union of "training, funding and equipping" international terrorists and of fostering, supporting and expanding their activities.¹ The issue reached a high point at the end of April as the new Senate Subcommittee on Terrorism and Security opened its hearings with testimony from four witnesses (Mrs. Sterling among them) who stated that there was evidence to support Mr. Haig's assertions.²

Some of the controversy relates to the perennial problem of defining terrorism. Secretary Haig's remarks seemed to leave the definition broad enough to encompass all national liberation movements, including those the Americans might feel inclined to support — the Afghan resistance, for example. The clear absurdity of so sweeping an interpretation caused the *Manchester Guardian* to query, not without some ironic justice, "Was George Washington a