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Soviet Geopolitics and Strategy

Edmund A. Walsh

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FOREWORD

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SOVIET GEOPOLITICS AND STRATEGY

An address
at the Naval War College
Newport R. I. on
June 5, 1951

by
Edmund A. Walsh, S. J.,
Vice President, Georgetown University;
Regent,
School of Foreign Service

May I at the outset express to Admiral Conolly and his staff my deep appreciation of the privilege accorded me of participating in the important work of this Conference. The announced objectives of these Global Strategy Discussions and the comprehensive program organized for these days give testimony to that consciousness of urgency which we all experience. The United States of America face the most challenging menace to our national security ever encountered in the 162 years of our existence as a free nation.

I do not exclude nor seem to minimize the issues raised by our civil war of 1861. That sanguinary conflict was a domestic tragedy confined to our own territory. But the present danger does not stop there nor involve us alone. It strikes at the very roots of international order threatened by the prospect of being corrupted into international chaos.

This generation has fallen heir to the most dangerous heritage of responsibility ever devolving on Western man since the fall of the Roman Empire. The disappearance of that stabilizing power in the ancient world ushered in a period of political frag-

The Reverend Walsh is Vice President of Georgetown University as well as Founder and Regent of the School of Foreign Service.

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mentation and conflict among nations which lasted for a thousand years, as feudal rivalries and undisciplined localism succeeded to the unifying genius of Roman law and Roman jurisprudence. The retreat of the last consul to his embattled capital on the Tiber created an administrative vacuum which profoundly influenced the emerging pattern of Western Civilization. It took ten centuries for Europe to arrive at the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 and inaugurate the modern state system. But the cure was a dubious prophylaxis, as narrow nationalism and an exaggerated sense of sovereignty plunged the world into a series of wars culminating in two global conflicts, each progressively more devastating than any of its predecessors.

We of the Western Hemisphere are no longer cast in the role of detached onlookers but as leading players in this recurring contest of power. Four great empires have perished within our memory and under our very eyes:— the Russian, the Austrian, the German, and the Japanese, while a fifth, the British, has, like the Roman, retreated to its island stronghold and taken a defensive position on the Thames. The wheel of history has come round full circle. And we know what has rushed in to fill the political vacuum created in the wake of the recent global convulsion. A new tide of conquest has rolled westward on the continent of Europe up to the Iron Curtain and eastward to the China Sea. The inevitable confrontation is now at hand between the growing Soviet Empire and the awakened conscience of America accepting leadership for the mobilization of defense in the non-communistic world. On our understanding of Soviet strategy and on our ability to counter it may well depend the quantity and quality of human freedom in the world for an unpredictable future. If it is not met and its advance halted, life on this planet will not be worth the living. Eight hundred million people, approximately one third of

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the human race, have already come within the expanding orbit of Soviet domination.

The issue is drawn and the cards are dealt. There is neither ambiguity nor divided counsel in the camp of our enemies. That luxury has been monopolized by the democracies. "We live", Lenin once declared,....."not only in a state but in a system of states, and the existence of the Soviet Republic side by side with the imperialist i. e. non-communist states for a long time is unthinkable. In the end either one or the other will conquer. And until that end comes, a series of the most terrible collisions between the Soviet Republic and the bourgeois states is inevitable."

Again, he warned his followers: "As long as Capitalism and Socialism exist side by side, we cannot live in peace. One or the other will finally triumph. One will hold the funeral oration for either the Soviet Republic or World Capitalism. It is only postponing war."

Where and with what power or coalition of powers the final war must be waged was more than once specified by Mr. Stalin. During an interview with a delegation of American workers visiting Moscow in 1927, he frankly pictured the future zig-zag of Soviet policy, adding a prophecy directed toward the United States. ".....Thus, in the course of further development of international revolution," he predicted, "two centers will form on a world scale The struggle between these two centers for the possession of the world economy will decide the fate of capitalism and communism in the whole world."

Here we have plain talk from an expert. His general estimate of the United States is amplified by numerous passages in his other writings and addresses, in which he refers to the United

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States of America as "the chief country of capitalism, its stronghold." He expressed the same conviction in the interview with Governor Stassen in 1947. On other occasions, notably in conference with leading representatives of the American Communist Party on May 6, 1929, Mr. Stalin intimated that America will be a tough case for the Communist nutcracker because of the strength and power of American capitalism. Social revolution, he thought, will come to the United States only at the end of the revolutionary cycle. But that it must come is a cold, intellectual supposition always present in Communist thinking and never doubted by Mr. Stalin. He urged his visitors to greater efficiency in hastening the revolution in the United States.

It was on February 9, 1946, however, that Mr. Stalin in a public address dropped all pretense at honest co-operation and openly proclaimed that World War II was not due to diplomatic inefficiency among negotiators, but to that old enemy, modern capitalism. He argued that wars are inevitable in the future so long as capitalism as a system continues to exist. Agreement and peaceful settlement is impossible "under present capitalistic conditions of the development of world economy." Coexistence of the two systems in a permanent balance of power is not possible in Mr. Stalin's logistics, though a truce is always possible—particularly when the Soviet Union is faced with a dangerous emergency. Such a temporary truce became advisable when Hitler invaded Russia in 1941. To dramatize the situation, Stalin dissolved the Third International.

The Political Bureau of the Party, those fourteen men blessed with a passion for anonymity who direct world unrest from the Kremlin, are experienced strategists and flexible tacticians. They are realists and cautious planners, though fanatic in their thought. Hence, their reaction to American foreign policy will be of a far

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different type from the line employed against Finland or Turkey or Norway or Iran or Korea. Such contiguous countries possess little depth in defense and can expect but little respect for their material power or capacity for resistance when the cards are down. But in the case of the United States extreme caution is indicated, in view of the demonstrated ability of this country to wage a devastating campaign once its industrial resources are mobilized and its man power summoned to technological warfare. If outright attack on America is not among the probabilities at the present time, it could take place with ruthless speed if some internal disaster, such as a paralyzing industrial crisis, overtook us. Since this hoped-for depression, long entertained in Moscow, has not been realized, a revision of the Kremlin's timetable is probably in progress.

Although amazing the world by the audacity of its maneuvers in eastern and central Europe, the Kremlin's assault there has been largely of the indirect and covert kind. The Politburo is letting the satellites carry the ball and harass the opposing team by constant fouls, brass knuckles in the scrimmages, and brazen defiance of rules. The offensive has been limited, moreover, to pre-cribe and carefully chosen areas. In Europe and Asia they are playing on their home grounds and know the hazards. But the risk of overextension is not unknown to the planners, and the consequences of each move have been carefully calculated. Miscalculation could prove fatal. This caution seemed at one time to be operating in China, where Moscow appeared reluctant to have her Communist allies push their advantage too fast, too far, or too indiscriminately. She was not sure how far she could trust the present native leadership there. But the inhibition proved ineffective in the face of a tempting prize, and the red tide of conquest has rolled relentlessly southward and eastward to the China Sea. Moreover, the new conquest of vast territory in Asia

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has served to offset the diplomatic defeat administered by the Berlin airlift.

Turning now from the ideological blueprints of the Soviet conspiracy, let us examine the geographical application of them in recent years. It will be remembered that Nazi Germany made its own the celebrated theory of the British geographer, Sir Halford Mackinder, respecting the influence of geographical environment on history. As early as 1904 and again in 1919 and finally in 1944, he warned the Western World that the pivot of history lay in that vast inner mass of Eurasia to which he gave the picturesque title of the Heartland. Describing it as roughly coinciding with what is now Soviet territory, he declared, with extraordinary foresight, that if this natural fortress, inaccessible as it is to sea power, should ever be properly garrisoned militarily and developed economically by a virile people, it could become the center of an empire capable of ruling the world. Mackinder's brilliant hypothesis ended with the warning: "Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; who rules the Heartland commands the world island; who rules the world island commands the world."

This thoughtful condensation of much human history and accurate observation of the influence of geography on history was conceived and formulated, to be sure, in an age when air power had not yet become a major component of military potential. Hence, the theory has been modified, but not entirely canceled out by the coming of the age of air power. Soviet Russia, consciously or unconsciously, is supplying the deficiency in terms of military aviation. I believe the unknown geopoliticians behind the Iron Curtain have adapted Mackinder's formula to the new circumstances of the air age. They have probably changed and shifted some elements and emphasized others so that their consolidation

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of land power in central and eastern Europe now leaves them free to accelerate control of marginal lands on the rim of the world island. It may well be that they are saying: "Who controls the rimlands of Europe and Asia can protect the Heartland of the World Revolution." The growth of Soviet sea power, especially of submarines, is not without meaning in such a program.

We may assume that the planners of global strategy in the Kremlin have drawn their specifications for a world State in terms of the resources at their disposal and with due consideration of the opposing forces. There are certain geographical regions of prime importance because of the number and quality of the States there clustered together. Natural location, climate, food supply, population, economic resources, industrial potential, social and political organization, and cultural development all coalesce to render such regions recognizable as reservoirs of power superior to less favored areas. Three such power centers exist in the world today—all situated north of the equator.

The first coincides broadly with the area within which the Politburo sits: it comprises European Russia, central Europe, eastern and southeastern Europe, and terminates in western Europe, including Britain. A second concentration of natural and political power, though of variable and less developed character, lies at the eastern end of the Eurasian plateau: China, Korea, Japan, Manchuria, the maritime provinces of Russia, and the teeming lands that stretch into southern and southeastern Asia. The third center arose in the transatlantic world with the principal power potential located in that area of North America which includes the eastern regions of the United States and southeastern Canada.

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All three of these power centers lie in the beneficent latitudes within which the major events of world history have occurred; within that complex are found the three fountainheads of Western civilization, Rome, Athens, and Jerusalem, as well as the focal points of Oriental thought and religions. Geographers have pointed out that these regions accommodate nearly three-fourths of the human race, although covering but one eighth of the land surface of the earth. They are the favored sports of nature, richly endowed in many instances, potentially productive in others. Effective control of them by any one political force could guarantee world empire.

Considering the first of these strategic areas we find that the eastern half of it is already controlled by Soviet Russia. Outside the Iron Curtain, reaching to the English Channel, the North Sea, and the Mediterranean, lie the critical non-Communist regions of the West which the Marshall Plan visualizes as the last stronghold of freedom, democracy, and Christianity in Europe. The second power center, already occupied by Soviet Russia in the north and in process of being rapidly absorbed into the Communist orbit in the southeast, is the present major theater of operations in the open conflict between World Communism and the non-Communist States of the Far East.

The remaining power center in the Atlantic world is as yet free from direct and overt assault by the Revolution. Distance has conferred a temporary immunity; youthful vigor, resiliency, and awakened consciousness by Americans of their inherent power have induced considerable caution in the Kremlin. Hence the conflict here remains in the preliminary stages of ideological warfare, diplomatic skirmishing, infiltration, manufactured confusion, and world drama will be played out between this formidable power

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espionage. On Mr. Stalin's showing, however, the final act of this center in the West and the Oriental strongholds of World Communism. Meanwhile the Revolution is consolidating its position in the old world by geographic stages and by measures which become significant when viewed in their totality and in the relationship of each to the master plan.

Take a map of the world and follow with your finger the creeping progress of the Soviet empire since the disappearance of the Nazi and the Japanese empires. Through Pechenga on the north, acquired from Finland by force, she now has a new outlet to the Atlantic. Drop a line from that point, through central Europe, to Albania, her satellite on the Adriatic, noting as you pass, Yugoslavia, slated to be repossessed when Stalin finally decides to deal with Tito. Through Albania, on the fringe of her power, she has access to the Adriatic and, hence, to the Mediterranean. Her march toward Greece was countered by the Truman Doctrine and her hopes for Communist triumph there have been frustrated with American assistance. Had her plans succeeded in the Hellenic world, she would have been enabled to anchor her power firmly in the eastern end of the Mediterranean, then turn to a corresponding western anchor in Spain, which always remains a factor in her planning. But her hopes for gaining control of Spain, which go back even before 1935, have been frustrated thus far by the tough hidalgos. Should she finally succeed in fomenting civil war in the Iberian Peninsula, with the emergence of a satellite Communist State such as the Marxist pattern always assumes will follow a domestic revolution, Gibraltar would be the next target. Istanbul and the Dardanelles have always bulked large in the expansionist program of Russian imperialism, and this craving for that traditional objective, inherited from the Tzars, has not been neglected by the new autocrats. Unreasonable

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concessions have been demanded from Turkey in recent years but denied with equal determination, and the refusal has been backed up by American economic aid. But the demand will surely be renewed at a propitious moment.

Meanwhile the atmosphere of pressure will serve to maintain that psychological tension and expensive defense program along the Dardanelles which Moscow utilizes so consistently in its war of nerves. The measure of validity in Russia's historical claims for free exit through the Dardanelles is not slight. More than one European statesman has gone so far in the past as to concede publicly that Russia should have Constantinople. Both England and France so declared in 1916; but that age-old controversy between Moscow and Constantinople was limited in its application to the ancient capital of the Byzantine emperors. It now carries a wholly different significance, in view of the Communist program of World Revolution and the hope to overthrow all non-Communist governments such as Turkey. This new messianic universalism is what Soviet Russia has added to her inherited tzarist tradition. This urge to the sea and the constant process of opening up new territories and colonization of them was noted by the greatest of Russian historians, V. O. Kluchevsky, as the principal, fundamental factor in Russian history. "All other factors," he writes in Volume I of his celebrated *History of Russia*, "have been more or less inseparably connected therewith . . . Debarred from settlement by the geographical features of their country, the eastern Slavs (in their historical evolution) were forced, for centuries, to maintain a nomad life, as well as to engage in ceaseless warfare with their neighbors. It was this particular conjunction of circumstances which caused the history of Russia to become the history of a country forever undergoing colonization, a movement continued

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up to, and given fresh impetus by, the emancipation of the serfs, and remaining in progress to the present day.”

An entirely new factor, possessing the dynamic energy which Lenin imparted to it by dialectical materialism, has now been super-imposed on Kluchevsky's summation of Russian National history. The evangel of World Revolution and the specific instruments to achieve it, whether in the form of the Third International or the Cominform, are commonly ignored by those who seek to justify Soviet conduct. They keep referring to certain old grievances, such as Russia's landlocked isolation, her legitimate striving to acquire warm-water ports, the ignoring of her existence at Versailles, the refusal to accord diplomatic recognition during so many years, and her exclusion from the powers which met at Munich — although the latter should now be cause for gratitude and not a stigma. Soviet Russia was predestined to bellicosity from the very moment Lenin turned the successful domestic revolution of 1917 into an organized Marxist revolution on a world scale. And each decade as it passes will add to her manpower. Her population trend and fertility rate indicate an increase by 1970 which should bring her population to something over 250,000,000, whereas the rest of all Europe combined will probably not exceed 400,000,000. And if we consider the population of newly acquired territories, the Soviet total should be 270,000,000 by 1970. This is not to include non-Russian satellite countries of Europe, and China, in both of which fertility is high. Since population is one of the important components of power, these new acquisitions will progressively encourage the Politburo to more frequent use of its favorite weapon — aggression by proxy.

Return now to the northern perimeter of Eurasia and continue along Soviet Russia's Arctic coasts with a geopolitical eye.

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She is dominant there, and has no contestant in those icy solitudes. She already claims approximately 50 per cent of all offshore territory lying within the Arctic Circle, including such potential landing fields as Novaya Zemlya, Wrangel Island, Franz Joseph Land, and the new Siberian group. Rounding the eastern shoulder of Siberia as it projects into the Bering Strait you will note that she possesses not only Kamchatka, Sakhalin, the Kurile and Komandorskie Islands, but exercises control over North Korea and still controls the important harbors of Port Arthur and Dairen, both of them strategic ports of China. The encirclement of East Asia, by control of its rimlands, is nearly complete. These developments underscore a cardinal point in the program of World Revolution: Communist strategists have always maintained that the way China goes furnishes the key to all problems on the international front. The general headquarters for the forthcoming struggle for Asia is believed to be located in Thailand, where Soviet personnel in Bangkok is reported to be enormously in excess of any legitimate diplomatic need. From the Pacific, then, to the Iron Curtain on the West, she will be in a position to mount an outer ring of offensive and defensive installations around her Heartland, particularly in marginal regions adapted to land-based air power.

If her efforts to secure a base in Tripolitania, the western half of Libya, had not been refused in the United Nations, she would have gained a coveted foothold in the Mediterranean basin. That great inland sea, if ever dominated by Soviet influence, would prove of inestimable strategic value in sealing the outer rim of protective areas, providing at the same time a sea route to western Europe and the Atlantic world. That is why Tito's rebellion particularly enrages the Moscow geopoliticians.

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The invasion of Tibet in early November, 1950, by Communist troops from China, reveals two constant factors in Soviet strategy. The geographical position of that hitherto inaccessible region makes it a strategic, though difficult passageway for a military advance on India, provided suitable airfields can be located somewhere among its towering mountains. Reports are already current that locations for the first potential air bases have been surveyed by Russian agents on a flat plain in western Tibet between Lake Rakas and Lake Manasarowar. This would bring Soviet striking power dangerously near the heart of India. New Delhi, the capital, lies approximately 300 miles to the southwest, an easy two-way run for Soviet bombers through negotiable passes of the Himalayas.

To meet the requirements of political strategy, the planners of the aggression invoked their usual pretext. They welcomed the existence of a rival Dalai Lama, another claimant to the position of ruler and high priest, who was living in exile in China. By supporting the claims of a second living Buddha of Mercy against the actual incumbent, the Communist Politburo of China staged another "liberation." They activated the familiar pattern of a civil war to be instigated by Communists and utilized by the Soviet Union for hidden intervention. The device was an old one and was employed in Greece, China, and Korea. It was tried in Finland, where a Communist regime was first installed under Kuusinen as prelude to the invasion of 1939. The erection of a puppet State usually follows and the Iron Curtain falls. Then, to preclude assistance from outside powers, the Communist legalists invoke international law as forbidding foreign intervention in a purely civil war. This concept was introduced into the Soviet argument against the United Nations' resolution to come to the assistance of South Korea. It makes both the United Nations and the United

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States of America not only iniquitous warmongers, but actual aggressors by unilateral, legal definition. Since, according to Mr. Vychinski and all Communist jurists, the Soviet concept of law is the only valid interpretation of legality in any situation, the invasion of Tibet, like that of South Korea, became an act of moral heroism and dialectical purity.

There may well be other considerations arising from the historical development of Tibetan autonomy. China, to be sure, has never officially acknowledged the separation of that remote province from her sovereignty, although for a long time Tibet has acted independently. The significant fact for humanity is the steady advance of the Communist World Revolution into another area of Asia and the establishment of new outposts in what has been called "the roof of the world." This geographical pattern would seem to extend itself to other significant spots much nearer the Western World, where forward bases would be indispensable for logistical preparation of the eventuality prophesied so unequivocally by Mr. Stalin: ". . . a series of the most terrible collisions between the Soviet Republic and the bourgeois states is inevitable."

Two other Soviet maneuvers acquire special geopolitical meaning when related to this persuasion of inevitability, and when integrated with the concrete position already taken by Soviet strategists and diplomats. In December of 1946, Ecuador was requested to grant "fishing rights" to the Soviet Union in the waters adjacent to the Galapagos Islands, a highly strategic area off the west coast of South America approximately 1000 miles from the Panama Canal. The distance could easily be covered in five hours by hostile war planes launched from the deck of a properly camouflaged "fishing" bark. One bomb would be enough

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to cripple the locks and sever one of the vital defense lines of the two Americas. Then, in January, 1947, Norway was presented with a Soviet demand for bases on Spitsbergen, the ice-covered group of Arctic islands, 3500 miles from New York, Chicago, and the industrial heart of the United States. Modern bombers, with a 5000 mile one-way cruising range from Spitsbergen, could reach not only industrial centers represented by Detroit and Pittsburgh, but penetrate deep into continental America. The same holds with respect to bombing ranges from the coast of Eastern Siberia.

Should the Communist empire ever advance as far as the English Channel on one side of the world and eventually dominate the full coast line of China and its pendants on the other, the position of the United States would indeed be perilous. Consult your map of the world again—a Mercator projection will do if no other is available—and note the geographical position of the United States. But be sure to take a map which does not put the two Americas off on the fringe of the land mass of the earth but midway between Europe and Asia. That is our true position in the composition of world movements and world forces—an insular power encircled east and west by the two major old-world continents. Soviet Russia, if finally dominant in both of them, would then be ready for the kill.

The cost of preventing final achievement of Moscow's projected world domination will indeed be staggering but must be weighed in the balance with the alternatives. There is need of complete thinking at this point, not spurts of enthusiasm, of volatile sentiment, nor unfounded fears nor programs for the partial containment of Soviet aggression. The cost of a needed commodity or of an essential service is not truly stated by the price tag but by the foreseeable consequences if it is not bought.

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A fire extinguisher for a modest home or a sprinkler system for an industrial establishment may seem expensive in terms of the present income of the respective buyers; it can be immeasurably more expensive, possibly fatal, not to have them on hand and in working condition when the fire breaks out.

There is a fire aflame in the world today, kindled and fanned by a band of international arsonists bent on spreading the conflagration as widely as possible. The Revolution is on the march from Berlin to Korea. Eight nations have had their freedom burned to ashes already. The final confrontation now has come and American blood has been shed in a major war. The two central figures, whose emergence Stalin predicted, are committed to combat in the Far East while their diplomats sit facing each other across conference tables which stretch from the Kremlin to the English Channel, from Brussels and Paris to New York and Washington. The unprecedented character and stark realism of the conflict became evident when the President of the United States could bluntly declare a year ago that he could no longer put faith or credence in any promise made by Soviet Russia.

The President's later analysis of the Soviet program, in his Report on the State of the Union, compared it with the imperialism of the Tzars. Previous Russian expansionism, he pointed out, "has been replaced by the even more ambitious, more crafty, and more menacing imperialism of the rulers of Soviet Russia. . . they are willing to use this power to destroy the free nations and win domination of the whole world. . . . The gun that points at them, points at us, also." This forthright language conveyed no news to informed students of the Russian Revolution and probably not to Congress. The news element derived from the official pronouncement of it by the President of the United States before such a legislative assembly, followed by an impres-

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became acknowledged facts for incorporation in a State paper as public basis for stronger public policy.

In normal times such statements from the head of a government would have meant instant rupture of diplomatic relations and a probable full mobilization for war on both sides. But we are not engaged in conventional diplomacy under accepted standards of international decency such as prevailed at Vienna in 1815 after the Napoleonic Wars. We are embarked on a kind of cosmic poker game for the highest stakes in history. Some there are who believe one of the players has been prolonging a colossal bluff which began at Yalta and Tehran and which succeeded notably against the leading player on the opposite side, who was then in failing health. The government of the United States finally decided to call for a showdown on the Korean crisis and was supported by the United Nations. Had both done so earlier, the odds in favor of true peace in Europe and Asia would have been far more favorable and Soviet Russia would not have scored the gains that began with the desertion of Poland by her former allies. On the issue, when the cards eventually fall, may well depend the quality and quantity of human freedom for generations to come.

The record is clear and the designs of Soviet Russia were never unclear. Her gamble in Korea was logical perfidy as is her present intriguing to capture the oil resources of Iran. Edmund Burke in 1772 warned Europe that the partition of Poland by Prussia, Austria, and Russia would not be the end of the feasting. It was, he pointed out, only a breakfast for the great armed powers; but where would they dine? He knew that neither history nor appetite for power ever stops short.

The true question before the American people and before

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their representatives in Congress is not so much the cost in dollars, though heavy, but the alternative possibilities. If the grim record of the past five years of Soviet-American relations has achieved anything, it has clarified the cold war down to a basic consideration. The debate is not whether we can afford to do the necessary things for the defense of Christian civilization — but can we afford not to do them?