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AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY VS. REALITY

-By-

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Loss of sense of reality may provide a pleasant dream. It is also a prime characteristic of insanity. Loss of sense of proportion, too, (and with it humor) may bring contentment; but with it comes the end of wisdom. The foreign and domestic policies of the United States today appear to lack, alarmingly, both these essentials, reality and proportion.

The United States today has no definite integrated foreign policy; and such tendencies towards one as are discernible are quite out of line with reality. I think it was Roger Bacon in the ~~XIII~~ ^{XIV} Century, who said "As for the philosophers, they make ideal States for ideal men. Their ideas are like the stars. They give but little light because they are so high." Our foreign policy today, like our domestic policy, rests on philosophy of that sort,--when it rests on any at all, which is rare. A nation may "hitch its wagon to a star" in the field of ideals, but only calamity can befall it if it fails to confront realities with practical, hard-headed common sense. There is no facile cure for national or international ills in the lazy muddled thought that "there ought to be a law." Neither are pacificism and sentimentality, nor yet little walls of dogmatic isolation, any protection against rising hurricanes of aggression.

The American people have ignored foreign policy because, unlike Europeans, they have felt no vivid frontier menaces. Generally, they have been too busy even to realize its effects on their business. The time has now come when Americans must learn that foreign policy is a most serious matter to their very security, and also that a sound foreign policy is an important one of the numerous "corners" their long-range prosperity is "around." We must awake from the false dream of security between the broad expanses of the Atlantic and the Pacific. We have a reliable friend on the North; but we must not be misled to assume we can lean upon the fragile reed of Pan-Americanism. Americans must also beware of allowing their opinions to be formed by public men whose utterances rise like miasms from frivolous ignorance, prejudice, politics,--or even visionary aspirations.* The first question every American should ask himself, on the subject of foreign affairs, is, "What would happen to the United States and all its interests if the British fleet were sunk and we were menaced, say, ^{by Germany,} Italy and Japan in alliance against us?"

*During the Navy debate in the House on February 24, Representative Koppelman asserted that "the action of Prime Minister Chamberlain in going along with the dictatorships means that we have been double-crossed." And Representative O'Malley said that "about 90% of this big navy propaganda comes from our old friend 'Perfidious Albion,' originating in the able minds in Downing Street of which we have a shirt-tail brigade in our State Department." These statesmanlike and elegant remarks were made in opposing the over-due increase in the U. S. Navy, in which opposition Representative Maverick joined in his usual thoughtful and restrained style. (N.Y. Herald-Tribune, February 25.) The curious allusion to the new British Premier is a strange reaction to the shift at London from the somewhat visionary and uniformly unsuccessful policy of Eden, as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, to the more matter of fact position of Chamberlain.

Americans have of late been adjured to change their governmental ideas to meet changed conditions. They have been invited to scorn the "horse-and-buggy" age. If anything has changed, it is world conditions. It is not clear, therefore, why the United States should not revise its foreign policy. The world changes without consulting us. Today the farthestmost nation on the face of the globe is vastly nearer us, from the point of view of effectively attacking us, than Europe was in Washington's time. Then we were a few million souls along the Atlantic sea-board. It was quite a job to bring troops over here. By resisting a world power, we had shown we could defend ourselves. "Entangling alliances" indeed! What would have then been the sense in entering them? But would a wise and practical statesman like George Washington, in the world of today, dogmatically reject an alliance for national security and the preservation of civilization? It is a bankrupt statesmanship that misapplies the wisdom of the past.

Politicians have a lazy habit of dogmatizing about "avoiding entangling alliances," and "keeping out of other peoples' wars." There is a widely cultivated falacy that we entered the World War on some Quixotic theory to "make the world safe for democracy," to make it "a war to end wars," and what not. Some demagogues have ascribed our participation to the machinations of bankers, to "vested interests," or to wicked munitions makers. Brushing aside all such nonsense, the plain truth is that we entered that war as a measure of self-defense,--defense of our lawful rights

on the sea and of our future security. Had we not then turned the scales to defeat German dreams of world domination, we might before now have found ourselves feverishly preparing to meet a still greater German menace all alone. How many readers of this article ever saw that extraordinary map, coloured far and wide with lands marked off for German conquest? How many remember that even the socialist editor of The German newspaper "Vowarts" caught the fever of conquest? Few indeed know of Germany's astounding attempt, before the war, to gain from the Republic of Panama a concession of the Gulf of Darien and its hinterland, to provide a deep-water base menacing the Canal. Few know of the arrogant demands made about the same time regarding Liberia.*

Such things slumber in the archives. But we should not slumber while aggression brews anew in several quarters.

Just after the World War ex-Secretary of State Knox, then a senator, analyzed the circumstances of the entry of the United States into the conflict, and then traced a course to envisage and attempt to forestall a recurrence of those circumstances to the point of danger. The result was a speech in the Senate which suggested a joint resolution of both houses of congress, signed by the President,--the most authoritative possible statement of policy,--which was to contain the following formula (I quote from memory):- "If the peace and security of Europe shall be threatened by any aggressive menace, wherever arising, the Government of the United States will regard such a situation as a threat to its own peace and security, and will consult with the other Powers affected with a view to the appropriate measures."

*The writer happened to be Acting Secretary of State on the two last mentioned occasions.

President Wilson's proposed Anglo-American-French defensive treaties, like the obligation to go to war to protect foreign frontiers under Article X of the League Covenant, were far from being acceptable by the Senate. The Knox formula was a practical substitute. Moreover, since only Congress has the constitutional right to declare war, it indicated the furthest point to which this Government can go in the direction of a military alliance. It was an example of a realistic foreign policy that faces facts. It was a piece of mature and sophisticated diplomacy; but unfortunately it seemed to pass over the heads of most of the senators of that day.

A good foreign policy is the efficient external promotion of aims of domestic policies that are intelligible and generally accepted within the nation. The national purpose is expressed at home in domestic policy and abroad in foreign policy. The facts that the American people seem to have no very clear conception of what they wish to be and to do, and that the domestic policy of their present government is a confusing mass of inconsistencies, make it difficult for the United States to have, at this time, a foreign policy worthy of the name. Foreign policy must have back of it an accepted national ideal which it is to promote; an accepted view of the national interests which it is to foster and to safeguard in relation to the rest of the world. The Germans call this "weltanschauung,"--outlook on life and the world.

Amiable and intelligent people, in casting about for something to approve in his administration, have flattered the diplomacy of President Franklin Roosevelt. Now diplomacy is merely the technique

of foreign policy; and if we are without a foreign policy, the quality of our diplomacy does not much matter. Indeed, if a foreign policy is bad, the less efficiently it is carried out, the better.

A foreign policy designed to gain the votes of ultra-pacifists, or of special groups of Nazi haters, Fascist haters, or Moscow haters, or, equally, of lovers of any of these,--or of British lion baiters,--cannot make sense. To put one's feelings in any of these matters above the general interests of the United States is to confess to a double allegiance. When government responds to the pressure of such groups, the integrity of foreign policy is vitiated. It ceases to stand, as it should, for the whole nation. Domestic policies are supposed to be limited by the Constitution. Foreign policy is limited only by the foresight, wisdom, courage and ability of those who conduct it,--and of the elected representatives who stand behind them.

The long-range object of government, besides preserving domestic peace and promoting justice and welfare at home, is to work for the welfare of future generations. In that respect the governments of Germany, Italy, and even Russia,--and Japan,--from their respective points of view, have done wonders. It is well to remember that the first three of these governments grew up out of chaotic and intolerable conditions. Germany and Italy have to show for their expenditures and sufferings restored national morale and discipline, vast public works of undoubted benefit, and great military power. And the Germans have been the first nation to try practical eugenics and prevention of the multiplying of the unfit, realizing that under any

form of government the quality of the people is the first condition of lasting greatness and usefulness to the world for any nation. We ourselves have huge debt, some public works and an alarmingly widespread demoralization to show for our efforts to end the depression.

All forms of government, including all types of democracy, are permanently on trial. Only a future historian, looking back upon them can be sure which was best. He will inquire which best preserved peace and order and justice at home, which gave opportunity and reward most according to merit, which tended to a finer quality of citizen and to a diminishing number of criminals and unfit, which heartened the nation with a high ideal and purpose, individually and as a whole; which form of government was least corrupt and most frugal, and most able and efficient in its operation; which had a wise foreign policy to promote its aims and safeguard its interests; which was most prompt to be armed to back up its policies and to defend its interests and its security and peace.

The mutual "pot calling kettle black" between democratic and authoritarian governments is silly and tragic. Immemorial China has made great contributions to philosophy and ethics and art, and some even to invention in the physical field. Still, building upon foundations of Christianity, Indian mysticism, Greek philosophy and culture, Roman law and government, ancient Germanic popular assembly, Arabic science, and so on, it is the

Western nations of Europe and the far-flung English-speaking peoples whose genius has made the preponderant civilization of today. Can they view the centuries of work of their races so lightly as to think of destroying it by destroying one another? To this surely even a Hitler or a Mussolini must answer no. War, instead of conciliation and cooperation among the great Western nations, is, in any long view, nothing but an attempt to prosper through suicide.

Execrating all dictatorships may please some voters, but it gains nothing. After all, the dictatorial governments are the actual and official governments of three or four great powers. We have to deal with them. It is none of our business what kind of government other peoples have or are suited to. We are not concerned with the forms of government of other nations. We are concerned with the question whether any government, irrespective of its form, respects our rights and deals justly with us. We are concerned even more with the question whether any government or nation, or any group of governments or nations, is or is likely to become a menace to our security and to whatever we hold dear. In the long run every people will probably get the government they deserve. Perhaps that is our trouble now, although I do not think we are so bad as all that. Official abuse of foreign dictatorship is like Mussolini's frequent abuse of the democratic form of government; and it only engenders that sweetness and light in international relations illustrated by Mussolini's journalistic mouth-piece

when he calls us cowards for not having already gone to war with Japan.

It is indeed rather irritating to hear democracy hotly defended, and all forms of authoritarian government (except the Russian form) violently abused, by groups that think of democracy only as something they hope to exploit for their own purposes, often quite foreign to any American conception of democracy. Such defenders harm the cause they pretend to espouse. Even democracy is a means to an end, not an end in itself. The English-speaking peoples still believe it is the best means to a good national life. We Americans still believe that the Constitution of the United States and the federal representative democracy designed by its framers, in their far-seeing wisdom and knowledge of human nature, are as valid as ever. So is the spirit of the Mayflower Pact. So is our long background of Anglo-Saxon thought, tradition, institutions and common law. With patience, honesty, public spirit, and a little wisdom, we have in our hands the tools for adjusting all our modern problems. If we want roast pig, let us not burn down the house to produce it.

The foreign policy of each of the great powers is today of a vital importance perhaps unprecedented in history. In Europe tension between Germany and Italy on the one hand and Great Britain and France on the other, aggravated by foreign participation, for ulterior motives, in the civil war in Spain, lays the ground-work for a great war. In Asia Japan, fanatical and determined, has cast

prudence to the winds and is running amok over China. The decline of foreign trade through the distortion of international economic relations has lessened wellbeing and has increased discontent. Wherever democracy permits freedom of action and expression, the struggle between economic groups and schools of thought weakens the country internally, and therefore as a power in the world. Just now France and the United States are examples of this.

The League of Nations has failed both as a preventative of war and as a composer of international differences. Trust in it has cost some countries dear. But for that trust Great Britain would scarcely have allowed it's armament to become inadequate, and China might not have been caught so unprepared, and the present worries of France would have been less. Harsh reality at last has dissolved the myth of collective security on a world wide scale. From the first the League has really been only a pious show case. Through it's transparency it has always been easy to see at work the groupings according to interest, the strivings for a balance of power, which are still the real, the natural and the enduring bases of foreign policy. In the world of reality the policies of some half dozen great powers are bound to determine the course of events, as they always have; and it is hard enough to fit the policies of those powers into any peaceful pattern without injecting forty or fifty more governments into the discussion. Inclusion in the League of powers of every degree of unimportance has served only to add to the confusion and broaden a convenient field of intrigue. Today ^{the League of Nations} ~~it~~ seems to be little but a monument to an impracticable ideal.

A world crisis today can be differentiated in many ways from one occurring before the xxth century. Consider the airplane, the submarine, the dirigible, the tank, the incredible artillery, machine guns, bombs and gasses that are today's engines of slaughter. Think of the lightening-like rapidity of communication and of transportation of men, food, munitions and supplies. Think also of modern propaganda to break down patriotism and morale, to imprint the conqueror's ideas in the minds of the conquered. There is abroad, too, a new disrespect for the pledged word, for international law, and for the decent humane feelings of civilized men.

In a world thus changed it becomes possible for a less numerous people, well armed, to conquer and even to dominate and govern, a much more numerous but poorly armed people. In 1896 the Italians were defeated at Adowa. In 1936, with the new engines of slaughter and the new ruthlessness, they conquered Abyssinia. It is true that China finally assimilated her Mongol and Manchu conquerors; but in the different conditions of today, unless Japan meanwhile breaks down at home, the western world may some day be face-to-face with a colossal united Asia imbued with the boundless warlike ambition of Japan; Tamerlaine and Genghis Khan afield again; European Russia again in the role of outpost against Asiatic hordes. The German Kaiser thought he saw a "yellow peril" years ago. Today Hitler, with greater power, and Mussolini, betray Europe to abet Japanese conquest; and by threatening Britain in the Mediterranean, tie her hands in the Far East. Getting little help from the West, even in money and arms, China may conclude her former western friends are now indifferent to her fate and may embrace peace, in despair, as a pawn of Japan.

Such are the fruits of the struggle between the satisfied and the dissatisfied powers in Europe. That struggle, rather than any necessary war between democratic and authoritarian forms of government, is the issue. The Russian Government, quite as authoritarian as the fascist or Nazi, is glutted with territory, and so unlikely to go to war for more land. Its communist pretences, in collision with human nature and reality, have been much toned down. Even with the worst intentions, authentic Russian propaganda should be no great threat to the sane ideology of other countries. (This is not to say that the Russian communist label is not affected by subversive elements everywhere.) Only by realism can the struggle between the satisfied and the dissatisfied nations be composed. It may be unpleasant, but it is true that the doctrine of sanctity of sovereignty and the dogma that self-determination is an absolute right, (whatever the quality of peoples or governments concerned), find no counterpart in the laws of nature; and that a policy that carries those theories too far becomes dangerously Utopian and may hamper the progress of civilization and the evolution of a better world. Nevertheless, to allow the dissatisfied powers to achieve, without the consent of other powers affected, even a moderate and possibly legitimate territorial ambition, by force of arms and through treaty breaking and unprovoked attack, is to condone international burglary. The alternatives seem to be equitable concessions, for abundant quid pro quo,--or war. As to faits accomplis, long drawn out refusals to recognise conquests, belligerency, or changes of government seem a rather childish form of shadow-boxing.

A solidarity of the great Western powers sufficient to prevent their mutual destruction and to protect the civilization they have built carries no threat to the legitimate aspirations of other powers. It would serve to keep those aspirations legitimate. A special solidarity of the English-speaking peoples would carry no threat to any nation's legitimate aspirations and would tend strongly to keep those aspirations legitimate. British-American close understanding and real cooperation ^{are} necessary, in the long view, to the security of America, as ^{they are} ~~it is~~ to that of every other English-speaking people. It would insure European peace during the difficult period of European appeasement and would greatly hasten and stimulate that appeasement.

It is a tragedy of democracies that their governments so seldom dare to tell the people the truth but prefer to sway them with dreams and slogans; hardly a compliment to the intelligence of the electorate. If in 1913-1914 the United States had been well prepared in army and navy, and if our Government had made clear the deep concern and resentment we were bound, as realists, to feel at Germany's arrogant aims at conquest; indeed if our Government had even preserved an ominous silence, that cruel war might not have occurred. Instead, everything was said to indicate our indifference and aloofness. And Germany believed in it.

Now, in another world crisis, much is being said and done again to lead aggressor nations into a belief that the United States can be left out of their calculations. In this way we tend to repeat the mistakes of 1913-1914 and, by our seeming unconcern, to encourage rather than forestall the outbreak of another war in Europe.

Without the weight of America to turn the scales in the balance of the powers, Japan's ruthless conquest goes on unchecked in China; a war of "frightfulness" and a diplomacy of deceit trample arrogantly upon foreign rights and close the "Open Door" to peaceful commerce. The tragic fratricidal war going on since a year and a half ago in Spain is a struggle between two groups of extremists (anarchists, syndicalists, communists, extreme socialists,--and reactionaries,--with liberals, democrats, and the Republic helpless between the two). Neither extreme group stands for the kind of government the majority of Spaniards would desire. Active help from Italy and Germany, and from Russia, has been based solely on self-interest. An end to the senseless slaughter through compromise has been impossible without the influence of the United States to break the deadlock. American humanity cannot view the scene with indifference. Because the situation sorely aggravates already serious threats to world peace and menaces the preponderance of law-abiding governments, American statesmanship should not view it with indifference.

Yet the same American people whose government took part in Algeceiras conferences, whose navy once suppressed the Barbary pirates and made the Mediterranean safe for commerce, are without influence in the matter. America's enormous potential influence is stultified by an ostrich-like and fictitious isolationism. There are many positions a government may take, all the way from futile indifference to actual war. Germany and Italy would precipitate no war in Europe, the Spanish tragedy could be ended, and Japan could be restrained in the Far East, and the world would be

given time for appeasement by negotiation, if it were believed that the United States and the British Empire would stand together to the point of war, if necessary.

Let us compare America's course with reality in some other respects. In response to a Senate resolution the American Secretary of State wrote January 10, 1938:--"Referring expressly to the situation in the Far East, an area which contains approximately half the population of the world, the United States is deeply interested in supporting by peaceful means influences contributory to preservation and encouragement of orderly processes. This interest far transcends in importance the value of American trade with China or American investments in China; it transcends even the question of safeguarding the immediate welfare of American citizens in China....The interest and concern of the United States in the Far Eastern situation, in the European situation and in situations on this continent are not measured by the number of American citizens residing in a particular country at a particular moment nor by the amount of investment of American citizens there, nor by the volume of trade. There is a broader and much more fundamental interest--which is that orderly processes in international relationships be maintained....The American government is also upholding principles, as it has always done. It has asked and is asking that the rights of the United States and the rights of our people be respected, and at the same time it has sought and is seeking to avoid involvement of this country in the disputes of other countries."

> A foreign policy that is interested only in "principles^{and}" "orderly
> processes in international relationships", and ^{that over-} emphasizes "peaceful means"

and avoidance of "involvement" is, in the present state of the world, a quaintly unreal and wishful one. Those are the things we should like,--but try and get them! In its international effect the announcement of such a policy does more harm than silence. In diplomacy silence is usually especially golden.

The serious discussion of and large vote for the Ludlow bill demanding popular referendum before going to war was a measure for self-stultification of American influence in the world. Pleased by the proposal as a symptom, its passage would have brought sheer delight to every predatory government or potential enemy. It would have meant shillyshallying and delay in any true crisis. It would have submitted to the mass of voters, patriotic and otherwise, questions of the utmost complexity requiring for their solution the wisest and most far-seeing statesmanship that a nation can find to represent it.

Another disastrous measure for the stultification of American influence in the world is the current neutrality law, with which the name of Senator Nye is associated. International law on the subject of neutrality is the result of centuries of experience and thought. It fixes the rights of belligerents and neutrals at law and in the conscience of mankind for great and small nations alike. It seems its protection must be sufficient for a great country like this. But it did not seem so to the peace-at-any-price groups, to the unconditional isolationists, to those who do not understand why we entered the World War. It did not satisfy the fanatics who think munitions makers and bankers, rather than world forces, bring about wars; who would sacrifice every international right and interest of

the United States to their misguided strivings for peace. John Bassett Moore, the greatest American authority, and probably the greatest world authority on international law and diplomacy, described this neutrality legislation when first considered as "a curious mixture of homicidal and suicidal mania." Yet "fools rush in where angels fear to tread."

This law makes mandatory the abandonment of rights of trade and shipping, and a general scuttle, whenever there is war between foreign countries. Meanwhile, it seems that the major war now going on in the Far East is not "war," because the belligerents have not "declared" it. There is obviously something queer about a law if national policy requires that it be evaded the very first time a case comes up under it. This neutrality law hampers the executive in the conduct of foreign relations. It makes policy rigid where it should be flexible and conformable to the national interest, direct or indirect, at the moment. It helps to build up the dangerous theory that aggressor nations can leave the United States out of their calculations, because it flaunts a peace-at-any-price indifference that is at variance with the facts.

The too sweeping law forbidding loans to countries in arrears to us in payment of the old war debts (about which there is a good deal to be said on both sides) seems rather petulant and shortsighted. It is easy to envisage a case where our international interests would require its instant repeal as affecting certain countries. Let us suppose, for example, that England went to war in circumstances where her victory was essential to our own interests. It might be a war to arrest in time the growth of some new world menace. Is there doubt

that the United States would wish to be free, in such a case, to supply money for munitions and provisions? In appraising all these measures it is useful to ask ourselves how we should like to have them applied to us, if we were engaged in a life-or-death struggle with some powerful aggressor.

In the world as it is, a policy of "scuttle," foolish laws, indiscreet talk, pretended isolation, and inadequate naval and military preparedness does two things. First, it exposes us, in return for temporary peace, to "bigger and better" wars later on. Second, it reduces almost to zero what should be the tremendous influence of this great country for international peace and justice.

We may thank President Franklin Roosevelt for his will to provide us an adequate navy and merchant marine. We may thank him, too, for the one useful official utterance on American policy recently made, namely his intimation that this is not a peace-at-any-price nation,--that America is not yet the "Casper Milquetoast" of the world. On the other hand, he is responsible for the acts and pronouncements of his Administration and their repercussions abroad. And this includes all that fosters disunion at home and is noted by foreign countries as a sign of national weakness. And we can surmise that, if he had fought them with the vigor of his attack on the Supreme Court, projects like the neutrality law would not have got far. One wonders if we may still hope that by honest and courageous leadership he will advocate, establish in the national mind, and put into effect a foreign policy of far-seeing wisdom and realism. In this field, at least, personal and partisan politics will, one hopes, be laid aside.

In that very important branch of foreign policy which deals with international economics, one can find much to approve in the idealistic efforts of Secretary Hull to break down trade barriers between countries and thus to foster restored foreign trade and economic appeasement. In the face of very low wage production and artificially debased currency (as in the case of Japan), campaigns for economic self-sufficiency, as in Germany; excessive tariffs, quotas, exchange controls, subsidies, managed currencies, and so on, the ideal of fairly free trade appears a remote one. And it seems strange that, in the name of reciprocity, we should give favorable tariff treatment to one country in return for tariff favors from that country, and should then apply the unconditional favored nation clause and give the same favors to all other countries, no matter how badly they may treat us. This veiled lowering of general tariffs is quite different from reciprocity with a conditional favored nation clause under which equivalent favors may be extended to third countries in return for corresponding concessions. Tariff and financial discriminations are among the weapons of diplomacy. They can be used to strengthen the friends and weaken the enemies of peace. Definite mutual exchange stabilization between the dollar and the pound and mutually beneficial tariff arrangements between the United States and the British Empire are of the first importance; but there seems to be danger that our indiscriminate application of the illogical unconditional favored nation clause may nullify the value of the tariff favors we extend.

We Americans, if we think we possess anything worth preserving for ourselves, and perhaps for the good of the world, must know ^{That} that precious thing is, above all, what we hold as a common heritage with all the rest of the English-speaking peoples. In language, institutions, and laws (the criteria by which Julius Caesar grouped peoples) we are, roughly, the same. So in ideology and literature. So, and perhaps most important of all, in a certain reasonableness of outlook, instinct of individual conduct, and sense of fair play. Every cousin may not always like every other cousin; but when the safety of the family is threatened each knows his own safety lies in family solidarity.

The keystone of American and British foreign policies should be close understanding and real cooperation among the English-speaking peoples, and the tariff and exchange arrangements referred to have their greatest importance in contributing to that end. Such a virtual alliance, even if, like the British Constitution, unwritten, would be the greatest possible force for peace and decency in the world. It would tend to draw into the sphere of its influence various other nations and it would menace no nation's reasonable aspirations. By such a policy, and not by one of scuttle, muddle, and words, can America best contribute to its own security and to the cause of world peace.

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