

worldview

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FOREIGN POLICY IN A PLURAL WORLD

Charles de Gaulle has excluded Britain from the Common Market, Selwyn Lloyd has said that the allies of the United States are getting "tired of the feeling that they are being pushed about," and Peking continues to attack Khrushchev, in the various persons of Tito, Thorez and Togliatti.

The world remains incorrigibly plural, as the ongoing disruptions within the great power blocs serve to remind us. During the years since 1945, the end of the second world war, we have grown accustomed to phrases which run counter to this reality or, at least, do much to obscure it. An entire lexicon has developed around the idea of the "cold war." For the purposes of convenience, of polemics, of rhetoric, the complexities of international relations have been reduced to the simplicities of slogans. The world is described as being half-slave and half-free; a choice is posited between communism and democracy, with no middle ground. Those who are not with us are, necessarily, against us.

There is enough substance to this view to make it seem momentarily compelling. And there are still many people who would defend it. But the necessary qualifications and exceptions increase in number. One can run through a long roster of names, each of which recalls some event or attitude which disturbs this view, to see how difficult its rational defense has become: Suez, Albania, Yugoslavia, the Congo, Algeria, Goa, Skybolt, Diefenbaker, Red China and General Charles de Gaulle.

The list could readily be extended but the lesson would be the same: namely, that nationalism remains a potent force; that more than one seam runs through a divided world—it is not dual but plural; that the choices open to any single nation are many; that ideology is only one, and not always the strongest, factor in the determination of political policy.

These are not startling statements and they would hardly have been questioned before the last great war. But since then the new groupings

of power, clustered around the nuclear nations, have tended to obscure them. Whatever the drawbacks of de Gaulle's adamant stand and the brusque assertion of his own leadership, one of the virtues of his recent action is that he has clarified much that was obscure and confused in recent political thought. He has shown the need for thorough reappraisal.

The need for reappraisal does not imply a headlong rush from past policies, however ill-founded, or past illusions, however thoroughly shattered. A retreat to a chauvinistic narrow nationalism—which has new supporters in England, France and the United States—would simply mean the exchange of one bad habit for another. In terms of the United States, what is called for is a reassessment of our own position as a leader in world affairs and how far we can reasonably expect our allies to trust and follow that leadership. Certainly not everything we have done, even in the last few months, would inspire trust and confidence. And the fact that the military strength of the United States is a bulwark for all its allies does not mean that all our interests will be common interests, that we will always see eye to eye.

Our foreign policy cannot then, be based on the simple axiom, "Either they are with us or they are against us." Our closest allies will sometimes wish to travel a path that is not ours, and we must accept it. But sometimes we will want to sacrifice their interests to our own, which are primary, and we must be ready to do so. We can be neither completely self-serving nor completely subservient. If our foreign policy is to be successful and acceptable it must steer between the two, making proper evaluations of what is essential and what peripheral to our interests. This is as difficult to accomplish as it is easy to state, but the task is not made easier by falsely simplifying an insistently plural world.