[redacted]

reviewed by HANSON W. BALDWIN

A Soldier's Reflections

Swords and Ploughshares, by General Maxwell D. Taylor. New York: W. W. Norton, 1972. Pp. 434. $10.00.

THE dark clouds of pessimism—first painted in dramatic overtones by Oswald Spengler—which overshadow the future of the Free World are thickening over Western skies, in these, the decades of our discontent.

Has the United States reached the ridgeline of our history; are we on the downward slope, trod over the centuries by so many great nations of the past? By the 21st century historians and political scientists will be able to answer that question with far greater precision than any contemporary writer. But it is already clear that we live today in an era of deep malaise and the ills affecting our body politic are many; some are malignant, as old as Man, and for others no therapeutical measures have, as yet, even been tried.

Consider the problems: Our basic form of government has been irremediably altered—no longer a republic but now a democracy, sometimes verging on mobocracy; highly centralized but often seemingly powerless to govern. As in the days of the Roman circus, government too often caters to the Street, and the one-man, one-vote principle has been used by many who have no stake in society except to batten on it. And the politicians have promised, and are trying to deliver—"pie-in-the-sky."

The melting pot no longer melts. This is not a new manifestation, but its effects were dramatized only in the 1950's and 1960's. U. S. society now consists of many ethnic—and particularly many racial—minorities—too small for any single one to dominate, too large to assimilate in any forseeable future. The result is a fractionalized society, with all the problems of differing value systems and clashing social and economic aims. The "Black Revolution"—no matter what its political or moral justification—has not strengthened the nation or its armed forces; it has, to date, weakened them. A homogenous society—a nation with common aims and standards—has usually fielded the best, if not the biggest, battalions; a "band of brothers" is hard to beat.

The revolution in values, still continuing, has set many Americans adrift. From Victorian prudishness and profound faith, we have changed to over-permissiveness, often to license and doubt. Small but organized minorities of predatory criminals and political anarchists have exploited freedom—a few of them pulled like puppets by communist propaganda are dedicated to the overthrow of freedom.

The technological revolution has foreshortened the map of the world. ICBM's, supersonic aircraft, missile-firing submarines and nuclear weapons have exposed the United States to more deadly peril than in any prior epoch and have transformed the future parameters of even a relative security into more elusive and shadowy—and yet costly—patterns than ever before in our history. The world—despite SALT, despite

Hanson Baldwin was graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy and served for many years as Military Editor of the *New York Times*. A respected commentator on military and strategic matters, he is the author of numerous books and articles, including *The Price of Power*, *World War I*, *Great Mistakes of the War*, and most recently, *The Strategy of Tomorrow*.

the widely-hailed "end of the Cold War"—is still rent by ideological differences as tenacious as the religious wars of the Middle Ages, with the communist powers—far stronger absolutely and relatively than in any prior era—still dedicated to the creation of a global system inimical to the basic values of the Western past.

The United States—once a "Have" nation, rich with the wealth of the earth—is now increasingly dependent upon external sources of raw material—in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, South America—for its economic-industrial health and its military security. The development of a global energy gap will accentuate the acute nature of our future needs: by the mid-1980's the United States will have to import more than half our petroleum from the Middle East, already threatened by Soviet expansionism, and from other foreign sources. We must import or die, but to pay for those increased imports, we must export to live. Yet we are already faced with a tremendous imbalance in foreign trade: our pervasive labor unions and the abandonment of the "hard work" ethic and individual initiative of the American pioneer past have priced us, in many instances, out of the world market, and the growth of new industrialized power centers in many hitherto undeveloped parts of the world have provided stern competition we find hard to meet. The dollar, once the hardest of currencies, is now unstable and fluctuating, and our hard-pressed economy is beset with inflation, unemployment and the great burdening taxation of the welfare state and the high but essential cost of pollution control changes.

THIS incomplete summary of some of our pending problems—all of them vital to the United States—is pertinent to this autobiographical account of the stewardship of a well known soldier-statesman, General Maxwell D. Taylor. For, in effect, *Swords and Ploughshares*, though an accounting of the public life of a man who was Chief of Staff of the Army, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Ambassador to Vietnam and Presidential Consultant, deals in its final chapters with all of these problems and the future of America. His book, which describes the author's career from his graduation from West Point in 1922 to his retirement as President Johnson's consultant in January 1969, closes on a sombre—indeed, a pessimistic—note, a viewpoint which is undoubtedly shared today by many men, in and out of government, who have studied closely the trends of power.

Taylor points out that U. S. absolute power has declined, to which I would add that our military power relative to Soviet Russia is declining daily; the most dangerous period will be in the ten to fifteen years ahead of us before new programs—now in gestation, still stubbornly and blindly opposed by many—repair the ravages of the years of the locusts (Kennedy-Johnson-McNamara).

> *. . . the future depends* [Taylor notes] *not only on what we do but on what other powers do. Will they join in the nuclear arms race or save their resources for later, more remunerative uses? Will they increase their productivity while we succumb to inflation and its social and economic consequences? Will they live in harmony at home while we remain riven by factionalism and terrorized by crime? Most important of all, will they choose their goals wisely and pursue them relentlessly while we flounder in aimlessness or exhaust ourselves in internecine struggles? . . . the international challenge tends to merge more and more with the domestic challenge until the two become virtually indistinguishable. The threats from both sources are directed at the same sources of national power which provide strength both for our national security and our domestic welfare . . . we cannot overcome abroad and fail at home, or succeed at home and succumb abroad . . .*

These pejorative questions and statements are, of course, truisms, but not until the decades of the 1950's and 1960's had we needed to ask them, and never until today have they assumed such mordant gravity. In effect Taylor, and many others are asking—are we singing a requiem, as our enemies so profoundly hope, over the body-politic of America?

THE last portion of this book—from Korea and the Bay of Pigs, to today—defines the problem and has, by far the greatest interest and relevance to the reader. What little that is new—new largely in the sense of interpretation and background rather than basic factual information—is contained in this portion of the book; the rest traces largely familiar ground. As a public record of a life of service, the book has considerable importance; as an autobiography it has grave deficiencies. It is not a personal record: one never gets to know Taylor the man; he presents in this book the same image of the somewhat reserved, highly intelligent, cooly humorous, handsome and attractive military intellectual that he presents in public life. But the author is perhaps both more and less than his own pen describes. Many of his Army peers, perhaps awed by his brilliant mind, considered Taylor somewhat of a "political general." And others in Washington noted that some of Taylor's thinking, though cloaked in the broad perspective of national policy, appeared to be tinged with some Army parochialism—notably his mistaken emphasis on the unsatisfactory Pentomic division organization (to get a slice for the Army of the nuclear pie) and his strong opposition to the doctrine of massive retaliation (useful in its time) and his persistent stress on counter-insurgency, civic action and the "option" of limited war.

Nor can this writer forget a conversation in the Pentagon when Taylor was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, which dealt, prior to the event, with Vietnam. I had suggested that the situation appeared to be deteriorating so rapidly that U. S. ground combat troops might be needed. Taylor's reply was emphatic, definite and almost completely negative. "It would require perhaps twelve divisions", he said, "and the Army is not trained or equipped to fight a guerrilla war in the jungles."

General Maxwell D. Taylor

This decisive judgment, expressed before any U.S. ground combat troops were sent to Vietnam, is not fully reflected in this book. Indeed, somewhere along the line either Taylor's opinion changed, at least in degree, or the President failed to get the word, or some of the interim and compromise measures Taylor (and others) suggested (*viz.*, his recommendation of 1961 to send U. S. helicopters and troops to Vietnam under the guise of flood relief) were a partial genesis, an unintended first step, in the pernicious policy of gradualism, later adopted by President Johnson.

It is probable that all three factors had something to do with our involvement in Vietnam and the way the war was fought. Certainly a case can be made in retrospect that somewhere along the line between the JCS and the President, the military evaluation was diluted or modified. In part the dominating personality of Robert McNamara, who did not hesitate to second-guess his chiefs, was responsible for this; in part, the system that has developed under so-called unification of the armed services, in which the Secretary of Defense (a civilian) and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs—rather than the responsible heads of the individual services—have become the funnels and filters through which military advice flows. The politicalization of the Joint Chiefs—a process which has gone too far since the days when Senator Robert Taft publicly suggested a "Fortress America" security policy, and General Omar Bradley, then chairman, undertook (improperly) to answer him (instead of, properly, the Secretary of Defense)—has reduced the usefulness of the JCS. Each administration now looks upon them as "my chiefs" and part and parcel of the partisan executive apparatus then in power. Another factor that has diluted the effectiveness of military advice has been the insistence of a number of Presidents and Secretaries of Defense that the chiefs, in their appraisals, must color their military opinions with political, economic and other factors. And, as far as Vietnam is concerned, another part of the explanation for our mistakes is the personalities and methods of doing business of the two Presidents primarily concerned: under Kennedy, the White House was run helter-skelter like a Senator's office; under Johnson, all the cards were played close to his chest and his face-to-face meetings with the JCS were few and far between.

When all is said and done, it seems clear that the war in Vietnam would never have been fought as it was—on a "guns-and-butter-business-as-usual," one-arm-behind-the-back, hesitant escalation basis, if the President had fully understood and appreciated in late 1964 and early 1965 the estimates and evaluations of the men charged by law with the onerous task of "principal military advisors." It seems hard to believe now that *prior* to the dispatch of the first U. S. ground combat troops to Vietnam (in March, 1965) both the Army Chief of Staff and the Commandant of the Marine Corps had estimated that victory in Vietnam (*i.e.*, the defeat of the communist invaders and guerrillas and the establishment of a viable non-communist government in Saigon) would require from half a million to one million Americans committed to a struggle of years. Did the Government tot up the possible gains to be achieved against the estimated costs of victory, a calculation which as General Taylor notes, must be the first requirement of any policy decision? If it did, if President Johnson knew of the cost estimates and understood the significance of the military evaluations, it is almost impossible to understand why he followed the feckless policies—gradualism, open harbors (no mines, no blockade, no bombing of the docks), retaliatory pin-prick air attack—which ultimately helped to condemn thousands of Americans and scores of thousands of Vietnamese to death.

Arleigh Burke, the most outstanding chief of naval operations in post World-War II history, may have put his finger on it, when he once said—about the fiasco of the Bay of Pigs—that "we (the Joint Chiefs) may not have banged the desk enough." By that, he meant the chiefs may not have insisted sufficiently that their military views be presented, stark and undiluted, to the President.

The obverse side of the coin is clear: more of our high-ranking military leaders, if faced with the dilemma of supporting military policies which they believe to be dangerous to the nation's future, should resign their posts—not as a mutinous gesture but as conscientious indication that they cannot carry out the policies of the administration without fatally compromising their duty to the country and their loyalty to the men they command. Resignation, particularly by high-ranking military men, should never be a casual gesture, but it can represent the only honorable alternative.

I labor this point—the relationship of his military advisors to the President and the organization in Washington at some length

—for it is fundamental to U.S. security. For contrary to the Monday-morning quarterbacking of snide and partisan critics, history has shown that the military input into decision-making in Vietnam was not over-emphasized; it was, to the contrary, ignored, down-graded or diluted. And, as Vietnam has so graphically shown, bad policies, wrong decisions, can lead to decline and fall. Quite clearly fundamental U.S. failure in Vietnam was in highest policy-making levels of the government—inadequate weighing of anticipated costs against anticipated gains, and a decision to fight the war on a gradualism, no-win, point-of-no-return basis. Washington faltered too in implementation of the decision made—failure to call up the Reserves, dependence on the draft, nit-pick bombing, rationed ammunition and supplies. The machinery of government faltered, too, in Saigon; the U.S. "country team" was too often a creaky steamroller; there were far too many idea inputs and programs, many esoteric, launched and never completed, far too little concentration on basic essentials.

Thus, the fundamental lesson of the Vietnam war as General Taylor sees it and as General MacArthur saw it in Korea before him, is that once the bullets begin to sing, "there is no substitute for victory," no matter how the term is defined.

Gradualism—tried and found wanting once before in the closing stages of the Korean war—defeated its own purposes in Vietnam, as Taylor repeatedly notes:

> *Designed to limit the dangers of expanded war, it ended by assuring a prolonged war which carried with it the dangers of expansion. The restrained use of our air power suggested to the enemy a lack of decisiveness . . . If gradualism worked against the political purpose of inducing the enemy to seek an accommodation, it also violated the military principles of surprise and mass as means to gain prompt success with minimum loss . . . No one, not even the President, has the moral right to put a man on the battlefield or in hostile air space and restrict him from taking all the measures needed for his survival and the execution of his mission . . . in a variety of ways, gradualism contributed to the prolongation of the war and gave time not only for more men to lose their lives but also for the national patience to wear thin, the antiwar movement to gain momentum, and hostile propaganda to make inroads at home and abroad.*

General Taylor notes, as many have before him, that the adverse turning points for the United States in Vietnam were the Tet offensive of 1968, a psychological victory for the communists which broke the patience of American public opinion, and the earlier overthrow and assassination of Diem in the autumn of 1963 (for which, "President Kennedy and all of us who advised him bore a heavy responsibility . . . by having encouraged the perpetrators through the public display of our disapproval of Diem and his brother").

Taylor is extremely and correctly critical of the conduct of the Vietnam negotiations in Paris and of our lack—despite long and bitter experience at Panmunjom—of adequate preparation for them. He attributes, less convincingly, our piecemeal involvement and our "soft" approach in Vietnam to inadequate information which led to mistaken forecasts. Yet the Central Intelligence Agency from the beginning forecast, as did some of the Joint Chiefs, a long, hard and bitter struggle, and except for a few Air Force enthusiasts, there was no general expectation by the experts that the kind of nit-pick bombing that President Johnson permitted could possibly accomplish its purpose. (Many of our political experts, it is true, were woefully wrong: our intervention in Vietnam did not, as some forecast, bridge the Sino-Soviet rift, but widened it. This completely mistaken analysis did contribute materially to our initial guarded military measures.)

On the home front, Vietnam was a catalyst—not the cause—for the youth revolt; the activists, encouraged by liberal and left-

Hanson Baldwin

wing professors, picked up where civil rights demonstrations had ended. The frustration, alienation and anti-establishment feeling felt by large segments of the population and the credibility gap encouraged active or passive dissidence, an atmosphere of discontent. Clever communist propaganda, and in some cases, communist organization (the strings for some of the student protests were pulled, and even the dates were set, by the International Students Union in Prague), capitalized upon discontent. The new era in "advocacy" journalism was not adequately anticipated. Vietnam was the first war "covered" (illustrated and dramatized are better words) by television, and blood in the American living room made a tremendous psychological difference. So did "involved," "interpretive," "subjective," "selective," or just plain biased, reporting, as General Taylor notes.

THERE were many other basic causes besides Vietnam for today's illnesses—most of them still unresolved—in the American body politic: too many people, too few services, decaying cities, increasing taxation, decreasing security, too much leisure, too little challenge, threats to the environment and inner trauma, too much government, too little responsiveness.

What then, of the future? Taylor feels that "we are entering the decade of the 70's in a condition of declining power while facing increasingly difficult and complex problems . . . that will challenge our claims to world leadership." Will we become a kind of giant Sweden, living in a sterile regime of a "cradle-to-the-grave" socialism, an ordered welfare state, a "brave" (and to me, horrible) New World of Huxley; will we withdraw to what Senator Taft suggested years ago—a "Fortress America" concept?

In the decades prior to and during World War II, before the advent of supersonic aircraft, long range missiles and nuclear explosives, when we were still largely self-sufficient in raw materials, this was a viable alternative. It is not today, and can never be again. We cannot draw a defense line three miles off our coasts and expect to survive. We must import or die. Whether we like it or not, we are of the world and must remain in it.

This does not mean that we can or should be a policeman to the entire globe, that we must become militarily involved in every fracas. It does mean that we must protect our interests overseas, especially those that are highly important or vital to us; it does mean that we cannot remain disinterested or complacent in the face of creeping aggression anywhere.

Selective reduction of our political commitments overseas is vital to a sound security policy and this has been done in part. A new strategic concept and a re-definition of important foreign interests need to accompany the elimination of some of our foreign commitments, installations and bases and the reduction of U. S. ground forces in foreign lands. Such a concept would include a strengthened navy and air force. Also necessary would be at least a quantitative parity and qualitative advantage on the part of the United States in nuclear weaponry, which is not now the case.

We still possess some important qualitative advantages and a powerful deterrent to nuclear war, but the adverse political and psychological effects of Soviet nuclear superiority are still to be felt in the dangerous years ahead in the eastern Mediterranean and other hot spots of the world. Conventional forces can operate successfully only under the umbrella of a nuclear superiority. Will counter-insurgency and limited war still be a possible option for the President of tomorrow?

General Taylor in his provocative and wise final chapter, "Adjustments to Declining Power," expresses his belief that the maintenance of a "limited war option," as an ultimate sanction to meet non-nuclear threats to U. S. vital interests, is indispensable. His basic argument is sound, though he does not, I think, sufficiently stress the high importance to a revised U. S. political, military and economic strategy of quantitative parity and qualitative superiority in nuclear arms, of highly mobile sea power—Navy and Merchant Marine—second to none, and of land-based air power, organized and sited so as to be capable of effective intervention in geographical areas vital to the United States. He is correct, too, up to a point, in his definition of limited war: the objectives, he says, must be limited (this must be true of any war, or else one follows the Hitlerian will o' the wisp, the megalomania of unlimited conquest), but the tactics and resources should not be.

To this reviewer, limited war is not limited if half a million Americans must fight it and the cost approximates $100 billion. If tactics and resources are completely open-ended, the war becomes an unlimited conventional war for a properly limited goal.

The stakes in some instances may well be worth such unlimited escalation, but it seems clear that such wars, if they should come in the future, must be fought under a better authority than a Tonkin Gulf resolution. The executive power of the President to take prompt emergency action must never be impaired, but there must be no more political-military gradualism. Congressional and public authorization and support, in the form of a war declaration are essential safeguards, not alone to victory—no matter how defined—but to democracy itself.

Thought
A Review of Culture and Idea
The Quarterly of Fordham University

An outstanding journal of scholarship and ideas, THOUGHT discusses questions of permanent value and contemporaneous interest in every field of learning and culture from a humanistic, cosmopolitan, Christian point of view.
In addition, each issue carries authoritative book reviews in such fields as Literature, Art, Theology, Philosophy, Political Philosophy, History, Sociology and Education.

Published March, June, September, December
Single Copy . . . $2.25 Yearly . . . $8.00

SPECIAL INTRODUCTORY
SUBSCRIPTION $6.50
(FIRST YEAR ONLY.
NOT AVAILABLE THROUGH AGENTS)

Address THOUGHT, Fordham University Quarterly, Bronx, N.Y. 10458
Name: ____
Street: ____
City: ____
State: ____ Zip Code: ____
Subscription to THOUGHT for ____ Year(s) beginning ____ Check enclosed: ____ Bill me: ____