The Wave of the Past

WHEN IN THE summer of 1914 the young men of Europe marched forth to war from under the flowers that had been showered upon them by their exultant fellow countrymen and countrywomen, swept along by their own conviction of the righteousness of their cause and their longing to rescue the fatherland from its peril, neither they nor their leaders had any idea of the kind of war it would turn out to be. Uhlans rode into battle with their lances, poilus in the bright uniforms of another century; it was the cut and thrust and headlong charge on the bloody but glorious field of battle depicted on the canvasses that filled the museums and the history books that they saw before them—not the fields of mud, the mechanical mass slaughter of the trenches. Learned books have been written on the failure of the generals not only to foresee what would happen, but also, after the war started, to learn from what had happened; of the generals' clinging to historical habits of thought and practice while hundreds of thousands of men died of their arteriosclerosis. The preparations for World War II were far more adaptable, in part no doubt because of the criticisms that had been made of what had occurred in World War I, and the lessons that were drawn from the experimental battle field in Spain. But even so, the Poles again sent lancers into the field and a more advanced military theory, attempting to wrench itself free of past errors envisaged such a wide range of possibilities that almost nothing was left out. It was the German army more than any other that in 1939 selected and combined from among the vast choices presented by these theories the mechanized, motorized, and airborne army of specialists and footsloggers that produced the *Blitzkriege*. It was the then current blueprint of the National Socialist revolution that made it im-

possible to turn these victories into anything more than armed occupations, under military force and a secret police, that imposed the necessity to expand further. But the ineptitudes, as in the case of World War I, were international. The French had more tanks on the western front in 1939 than did the Germans, they had more troops, and they had the world's most renowned system of fortifications which had been superimposed on the world's most renowned system of alliances—a massing in the early and mid-thirties of the forces of Europe against the German Reich so overwhelming as to represent, on paper at least, the greatest coalition of all time: Russia, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Great British, Belgium, Yugoslavia. It was a formidable array and it fell apart in a matter of months.

Wrong and stupid judgments, miscalculations, brainlessness can have more deadly consequences more quickly in the twentieth century than they had in the nineteenth or in the centuries before it. It is one thing to misdirect an army and lose a great battle in which a few thousand men are deployed, after which a peace treaty shifts the lines of states that were changed before and will be changed again as the luck or the genius of battle changes and the fortunes of states ebb and flow in the accepted context of a Western order; it was another thing to make a similar miscalculation in 1914 and again in 1939 and it is still another in the late 1960's. When Adolf Hitler mistook his paranoid, fanatical, parochial view of history for a world view and imposed his rule of violence and illegality on his own people first and then on the major part of the continent of Europe it was to have effects far beyond the twelve years of his tyranny. When Franklin Roosevelt failed to grasp the essential realities of Soviet Russia and put all his cards on the postwar collaboration of the USSR with the United States and the other "peace loving" nations of the world, the effects of such incomprehension were far more long-lived than when he thought the China of Chiang Kai-shek should be one of four policemen putting down aggressors in the postwar international society of his imaginings. The two men are not otherwise easily to be compared—what is comparable is the long-range effect of decisions made on the basis of their private worlds, the one filled with terror and concentration camps for the pariah races or for those who resisted him, the other created in humanitarianism, in cherishing the forgotten man and all those lacking the four freedoms. But the laws governing nations and human societies doubtless work as surely as those of nature and we still bear, as we will for years to come, the burden of the violence and hatreds Hitler unleashed and the fatuous concepts of the nature of communism held by Mr. Roosevelt.

It is easy to understand the desire on the part of de Gaulle and many others less intransigent than he for a third force. American policies, like those of other states, are made in part with domestic politics in mind and in addition a long frontier has to be taken into consideration that must be maintained far beyond the borders and immediate interests of the European states. The crises in Korea, in Cuba, in Vietnam were further away in the judgment of many European observers then even the remote quarrel Mr. Chamberlain alluded to when he was speaking to the British people in 1938 of the Reich and Czechoslovakia. American policy has often seemed unduly belligerent in these postwar years to many foreign observers, although what has seemed to be an over-bold or even aggressive American posture has depended on the nationality and political orientation of the critics and the circumstances that gave rise to their criticism. Thus in 1948 and later when the Russians again seemed intent on

causing a showdown many good people maintained that it was impossible to hold Berlin. Berlin lay in the middle of Soviet-held territory, the mistakes had been made at Potsdam and earlier in dividing the city, now it must, in one way or another be acknowledged a victim of its present allies and the inscrutable conqueror. The Berliners themselves violently disagreed with this view of their situation, but I have heard such defeatist notions uttered by other Germans, including a professor in a well-known university who told me West Berlin should be acknowledged as lost and a new Berlin rebuilt somewhere in West Germany. We need not go through in detail the entire list of invitations the United States has been tendered to withdraw from its commitments or to refrain from undertaking new ones. Greece in 1947, Korea in 1950, the off-shore islands of Formosa and then Formosa itself, the ultimatum to Cuba, the intervention in Santo Domingo, in Vietnam, all the acts taken to resolve the crises in these areas have been denounced in succession as war-breeding or immoral or both, and they dealt mainly with crises seemingly far removed from those of a divided Germany and a comfortable Europe. Not only traditional diplomacy but long experience have taught statesmen to ask, what's in it for us, what can we gain and what do we not stand to lose by being drawn into the folly of war, of utter destruction through the whims of a foreign power intent on its own concerns?

The answers to such questions must depend in large measure on our view of the nature of the enemy. First let it be pointed out that in no case that I have cited has the attack come from the West or from the United States. I do not like to use the word aggressor because it has come to have no precise meaning; the aggressor is always the other side and the Soviet Union and Red China have known for years in advance who the aggressor is and what constitutes a just war to defeat him. So I speak of an attack, of the attack made on the Greek government by Communist forces inside the country with infiltrated aid from the then pro-Soviet government of Yugoslavia; of the attack on West Berlin by means of blockade; of the attack against South Korea mounted by the North; of the attack by the Red Chinese on the offshore islands of Formosa; of the preparations for an attack on the United States directly by the installation of missile sites in Cuba; of the attempt to extend by civil and guerilla warfare the Castro branch of Soviet imperialism in Santo Domingo and other Latin American countries; of the attack of the North Vietnamese on the South. What were we to do about these? Retreat from each one separately as so many Americans and Europeans have urged as each crisis arose? Retreat from some of the areas and stay in others depending on their strategic importance to the continental United States or to its allies? The latter would be called a flexible strategy which is what all strategy should be. But where do we retreat to? Let us begin, as we might have, with Quemoy and Matsu, the offshore islands. Even Mr. Kennedy when he was a presidential candidate suggested that these islands might well be the subject of negotiations. Had we persuaded the government of Chiang Kai-shek to surrender the islands, what then? Would this have appeased Red China, caused her to accept the fact that Formosa is in non-Communist hands and to withdraw her claim to that island? Or might it not have whetted the appetite of the government of Peking which, like the governments of the rest of the postwar Communist countries, establishes its boundaries as deep in other people's territories as its power or its threats can move them. And had Greece, or West Berlin, or

Formosa been surrendered, would that have appeased the dynamic forces of world communism? Would Soviet Russia then have settled down to negotiate the reunion of East Germany and the Bundesrepublik and Red China renounced its further claims to the leadership of a world revolution and the territory of its neighbors and of the imperialist enemy? Was it not the refusal to surrender—despite the demonstrations that in one form or another withdrawal was the prudent and the moral course—that has kept the peace, that has in fact produced the *détente* that enables General de Gaulle to journey to Moscow and to indulge himself in the illusion that he is aiding the forces of security and of French prestige when he leaves his place in the alliance that has sheltered the recovery of France and Europe—and its extensions in Japan?

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It would be folly to miss the opportunity that has been presented to us. We have in being an association of nations representing a breakthrough from the past, from the wicked past of useless slaughter for ends that are now trivial for this society. We not only have a military alliance in being but a moral alliance and to foster it means treating its members as equals, as partners in a defensive network, who can also be the source of a future system of security that might at some ripe time exclude no one.

Before long atomic bombs will be produced by nations other than France and Red China; our system of security must be alert to many vicissitudes. But this is clearly a stage in the political development of the West with enormous possibilities of good and evil and it has been our good luck that the time has demanded precisely those forces of reconciliation and mutual support that have been lacking in the past and the lack of which has resulted in such monumental disasters.—E.D.

This editorial is condensed from a paper delivered in September 1966 at Wiesbaden for an international conference, sponsored by the Foundation for Foreign Affairs, on "Elements of Change in Eastern Europe."