

Apostle of Brinkmanship

The Devil and John Foster Dulles, by Townsend Hoopes, *Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1973. xiv and 562 pp. \$15.00.*

IN SPITE of its over-whimsical title, for which no credit is given to Stephen Vincent Benét, this book is serious biography and a fine piece of work. The examination of John Foster Dulles, from cradle to grave, is done with clinical thoroughness and generally successful objectivity. As a result Mr. Hoopes, who knows the Washington Establishment from the inside, has presented a well-written and indeed fascinating character study, along with an enlightening survey of a most critical period in American history.

"The Devil," of course, is international communism and the major emphasis of the book is on the efforts of Mr. Dulles, as Secretary of State from 1953 to 1959, to cramp, cabin and confine this sinister force, so ironically built into world power by the diplomacy of Franklin D. Roosevelt. As a West German ambassador (Albrecht von Kessel) said of Dulles, he believed that "Bolshevism was a product of the Devil and that God would wear out the Bolsheviks in the long run." But he carried on this quasi-religious contest with tactics which, in Mr. Hoopes' opinion, have done more to alienate America's allies than to undermine its enemies.

The implacable Dullesian intolerance towards communism is the more interesting for its contrast with his earlier refusal to take umbrage over implications in the Nazi rise to power in Germany. As in the case of his lifelong friend and rival, Bob Taft, this was probably because both had sought to modify the Treaty of Versailles and were disgusted by the impossible and intolerable obligations which it fettered on the defeated enemy. Dulles regarded this treaty as "an exercise in self-destructive madness." Over President Wilson's vain pro-

tests the victors had chosen to identify peace "with a rigid status quo" which could not be maintained in a world of change. Since the United States was not responsible for the conditions which had brought Hitler to power, there was neither legal nor moral obligation for this country to check the Führer's course.

Indeed, as late as 1939, on the eve of the Second World War, Dulles published a book on *War, Peace and Change* which argued persuasively against the theory of "good" nations and "bad" nations, emphasizing the necessity of "mechanisms" with impartial direction competent to revise unjust or outworn treaties. Procedures, more effective than those provided in the Covenant of the League of Nations, must be developed to "check the tendency to identify one's personified State with deity" and to "check the tendency to identify the other nation-personality with evil."

Dulles did not reverse this calmly judicial attitude until after he had achieved his most memorable diplomatic triumph—the peace treaty with Japan. This was negotiated, in concert with the British, while Truman was still President and Dean Acheson Secretary of State. Leaving his post as head of the prestigious law firm of Sullivan and Cromwell, Dulles had secured appointment, by Governor Dewey, to fill the unexpired term of Senator Wagner. This was in the summer of 1949 and there is no doubt that Dulles, always politically alert, foresaw that a senatorial toga might float him towards the State Department. It was scarcely over his massive shoulders before former Governor Lehman narrowly defeated him in the off-year election of 1949. Dulles had, however, established a reputation for unusual insight in foreign affairs and in April, 1950, was made a diplomatic "consultant" by President Truman, who saw this as an opportunity to emphasize bi-partisanship. Republican opposition was bitter in regard to Far Eastern policy, where the State Department was blamed for the Communist triumph over the Chiang Kai-shek régime. So Dulles was assigned the important task

of negotiating a peace treaty with Japan—no easy job in view of the many countries and conflicting viewpoints which were involved.

Mr. Hoopes agrees that the “consultant” did supremely well in drafting this treaty, not less so because the picture was complicated by the North Korean attack across the 38th parallel while Dulles was negotiating in Japan. Undoubtedly this helped to set his thinking in an intolerant anti-communist mold. But it also made the envoy’s task easier by demonstrating that friendship with Japan must be developed, if any American interests in Asia were to be securely maintained. Dulles therefore conferred at length with Japanese leaders in many fields. It was a refreshing contrast with the procedure followed in Paris in 1919, when the Germans were merely summoned as convicted criminals, to subscribe to the crushing sentence vindictively imposed upon their country.

It was September, 1951, before the Japanese Peace Treaty and attached security agreements could be signed, at San Francisco, following which President Truman suggested that its architect become our first postwar ambassador to Japan. Dulles declined, with the pointed observation that he “could be more useful . . . at the powerhouse than at the end of the transmission line.” It was fair warning both that he planned to be Secretary of State and that once there he would run the show. Undoubtedly he had then already decided to oppose Taft’s nomination for the presidency. Dewey was his sponsor; Dewey would support Eisenhower and with the latter in office the long-time ambition of John Foster Dulles would be fulfilled. It is none too certain that Ike wanted him for the post but, three weeks after the election, the appointment was made.

Crisis was inherent in the Dulles conduct of diplomacy. In his oft-quoted words: “The ability to get to the verge without getting into war is the necessary art. . . . We walked to the brink and we looked it in the face.” Soon labeled “Brinkmanship” this

insouciant approach roused consternation in shattered countries which all too recently had glissaded over the slippery verge. Winston Churchill, himself no mincer of words, privately described Dulles as “a bull who carries his china closet with him.”

“Massive retaliation,” not excluding nuclear warfare, was the Dulles prescription for meeting Communist aggression. Since the Korean war had been virtually settled when he took office, Vietnam, after the French catastrophe at Dien Bien Phu, was the first arena where this seemed applicable. “Complete withdrawal of the Communists from Indo-China,” said the new Secretary of State, would be “a satisfactory solution.” The French, however, hoped to retain their strong influence in this former colony and were entirely willing to treat with Ho Chi-minh to that end. The British were equally reluctant to poke the hornet nests in Hanoi so Dulles had to content himself with stultifying the Geneva Conference and establishing the SEATO agreement, “never a usable instrument for collective response,” says Mr. Hoopes.

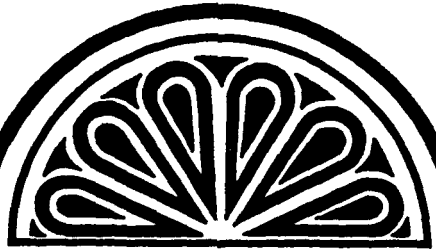
The same insensitivity to Anglo-French concerns was apparent in Egypt two years later. The Dulles reasons for withdrawing American backing for the building of the Aswan Dam are not wholly clear. This biographer suggests that the Secretary thought Russia would take over the project and fail. Moscow did promptly fill the breach, but with complete success. Nasser then nationalized the Suez Canal, leading to the shockingly ill-judged Anglo-French-Israeli attack on Egypt. President Eisenhower had to intervene to dissipate the ugly muddle and the United States was placed in the confusing position of lining up with Russia, against its principal allies, at the United Nations. The Secretary of State never regained his former commanding influence thereafter, though Ike was loyal to him to the end.

Other major crises, over the Formosa Straits and the eventual status of Berlin, did less to rile Anglo-French susceptibilities. But Dulles never seemed to realize that

an "agonizing reappraisal" of foreign policy could be directed against, as well as by, the United States. De Gaulle's resentment for the Secretary's imperious tactics has certainly outlived "Big Charley." Its heritage is seen in the blunt refusal of France to play second fiddle to contemporary American diplomacy. Indeed the entire legacy of the Dulles policy towards what he considered monolithic communism seems to Mr. Hoopes both slim and dubious. The master plan of a world wide military network isolating both Russia and China has few advocates today. CENTO has collapsed and SEATO was scuttled by the Vietnam war. Only NATO remains and that "troubled alliance," as Secretary Kissinger has described it, was constructed before Dulles came to office.

It is only fifteen years, this May, since John Foster Dulles died. That may be a little early for a definitive analysis of his work. Mr. Hoopes, however, makes a strong case for his conclusion that "Dulles imposed a tenacious continuity on United States policy at a time when conditions, at home and abroad, cried out for searching reappraisal of basic premises." A less negative and insistently self-righteous diplomacy, says this biographer, might have produced in 1953 what was "finally achieved by the Nixon-Kissinger initiatives of 1972." He also argues that by making himself "the sole intellectual wellspring of conception and action," Secretary Dulles did much to demoralize our Foreign Service. It is a strong indictment, more poignant because the early peace treaty with Japan stands out as a lasting and luminous exception.

Reviewed by FELIX MORLEY



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