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## THE CHALLENGE TO AMERICANS

*By Henry L. Stimson*

**W**E AMERICANS today face a challenging opportunity, perhaps the greatest ever offered to a single nation. It is nothing less than a chance to use our full strength for the peace and freedom of the world. This opportunity comes when many of us are confused and unready. Only two years ago we triumphantly ended the greatest war in history. Most of us then looked forward eagerly to the relative relaxation of peace. Reluctantly we have now come to understand that victory and peace are not synonymous. Over large areas of the world we have nothing better than armed truce; in some places there is open fighting; everywhere men know that there is yet no stable settlement. Close on the heels of victory has loomed a new world crisis.

Particularly to Americans the appearance of disquieting facts and possibilities has been upsetting. We are having our first experience of constant, full-scale activity in world politics. Other nations have lived for years as principals in the give-and-take of diplomacy. Until now we have been, except in wartime, on the fringe. It is no wonder that, when suddenly placed in the center of the alarms and excursions of international affairs, we are abnormally sensitive. And, of course, it does not help to find ourselves selected as chief target for the abuse and opposition of a very bad-mannered group of men who take their orders from the Kremlin. It is not surprising, then, that many of us are confused and unhappy about our foreign relations, and that some are tempted to seek refuge from their confusion either in retreat to isolationism or in suggested solutions whose simplicity is only matched by their folly. In the main, our difficulties arise from unwillingness to face reality.

It must be admitted that the elements of the new unrest appear to be unusually complex and trying. The war-shattered world must be rebuilt; the problem of atomic energy insistently demands solution; the present policy of Russia must be frustrated. But it is my belief that the American people have it well within their power to meet and resolve all of these problems. The essential test is one of will and understanding. We require a skillful foreign policy, of course, but we may have confidence that the

farsighted and experienced men now in charge of our State Department know how to frame a policy. In outline the President and the Secretary of State have already set their course. They can develop their policy with success, however, only if they have the understanding support, on basic principles, of the American people.

## II

First, and most important, Americans must now understand that the United States has become, for better or worse, a wholly committed member of the world community. This has not happened by conscious choice; but it is a plain fact, and our only choice is whether or not to face it. For more than a generation the increasing interrelation of American life with the life of the world has out-paced our thinking and our policy; our refusal to catch up with reality during these years was the major source of our considerable share of the responsibility for the catastrophe of World War II.

It is the first condition of effective foreign policy that this nation put away forever any thought that America can again be an island to herself. No private program and no public policy, in any sector of our national life, can now escape from the compelling fact that if it is not framed with reference to the world, it is framed with perfect futility. This would be true if there were no such thing as nuclear fission, and if all the land eastward from Poland to the Pacific were under water. Atomic energy and Soviet Russia are merely the two most conspicuous present demonstrations of what we have at stake in world affairs. The attitude of isolationism—political or economic—must die; in all its many forms the vain hope that we can live alone must be abandoned.

As a corollary to this first great principle, it follows that we shall be wholly wrong if we attempt to set a maximum or margin to our activity as members of the world. The only question we can safely ask today is whether in any of our actions on the world stage we are doing enough. In American policy toward the world there is no place for grudging or limited participation, and any attempt to cut our losses by setting bounds to our policy can only turn us backward onto the deadly road toward self-defeating isolation.

Our stake in the peace and freedom of the world is not a lim-

ited liability. Time after time in other years we have tried to solve our foreign problems with halfway measures, acting under the illusion that we could be partly in the world and partly irresponsible. Time after time our Presidents and Secretaries of State have been restrained, by their own fears or by public opinion, from effective action. It should by now be wholly clear that only failure, and its follower, war, can result from such efforts at a cheap solution.

We have fresh before us the contrary example of our magnificent success in wartime, when we have not stopped to count the cost. I have served as Secretary of State in a time of frightened isolationism, and as Secretary of War in a time of brave and generous action. I know the withering effect of limited commitments, and I know the regenerative power of full action. I know, too, that America can afford it — as who does not know it, in the face of our record in the last seven years?

It is altogether fitting and proper, of course, that we should not waste our substance in activity without result. It is also evident that we cannot do everything we would like to do. But it would be shriveling timidity for America to refuse to play to the full her present necessary part in the world. And the certain penalty for such timidity would be failure.

The troubles of Europe and Asia are not "other people's troubles;" they are ours. The world is full of friends and enemies; it is full of warring ideas; but there are no mere "foreigners," no merely "foreign" ideologies, no merely "foreign" dangers, any more. Foreign affairs are now our most intimate domestic concern. All men, good or bad, are now our neighbors. All ideas dwell among us.

### III

A second principle, and one which requires emphasis as a necessary complement to any policy of full participation, is that we are forced to act in the world as it is, and not in the world as we wish it were, or as we would like it to become. It is a world in which we are only one of many peoples and in which our basic principles of life are not shared by all our neighbors. It has been one of the more dangerous aspects of our internationalism in past years that too often it was accompanied by the curious assumption that the world would overnight become good and clean and peaceful everywhere if only America would lead the way.

The most elementary experience of human affairs should show us all how naïve and dangerous a view that is.

The most conspicuous present examples of this sort of thinking are to be found among those who refuse to recognize the strong probability that one of our great and powerful neighbor nations is at present controlled by men who are convinced that the very course of history is set against democracy and freedom, as we understand those words. A very large part of what I believe to be the mistaken thinking done by my friend Henry Wallace about Soviet Russia results simply from a goodhearted insistence that nobody can dislike us if we try to like them.

We have been very patient with the Soviet Government, and very hopeful of its good intentions. I have been among those who shared in these hopes and counseled this patience. The magnificent and loyal war effort of the Russian people, and the great successful efforts at friendliness made during the war by President Roosevelt, gave us good reason for hope. I have believed — and I still believe — that we must show good faith in all our dealings with the Russians, and that only by so doing can we leave the door open for Russian good faith toward us. I cannot too strongly express my regret that since the early spring of 1945 — even before the death of Mr. Roosevelt — the Soviet Government has steadily pursued an obstructive and unfriendly course. It has been our hope that the Russians would choose to be our friends; it was and is our conviction that such a choice would be to their advantage. But, for the time being, at least, those who determine Russian policy have chosen otherwise, and their choice has been slavishly followed by Communists everywhere.

No sensible American can now ignore this fact, and those who now choose to travel in company with American Communists are very clearly either knaves or fools. This is a judgment which I make reluctantly, but there is no help for it. I have often said that the surest way to make a man trustworthy is to trust him. But I must add that this does not always apply to a man who is determined to make you his dupe. Before we can make friends with the Russians, their leaders will have to be convinced that they have nothing to gain, and everything to lose, by acting on the assumption that our society is dying and that our principles are outworn. Americans who think they can make common cause with present-day Communism are living in a world that does not exist.

They are not alone. An equal and opposite error is made by those who argue that Americans by strong-arm methods, perhaps even by a "preventive war," can and should rid the world of the Communist menace. I cannot believe that this view is widely held. For it is worse than nonsense; it results from a hopeless misunderstanding of the geographical and military situation, and a cynical incomprehension of what the people of the world will tolerate from *any* nation. Worst of all, this theory indicates a totally wrong assessment of the basic attitudes and motives of the American people. Even if it were true that the United States now had the opportunity to establish forceful hegemony throughout the world, we could not possibly take that opportunity without deserting our true inheritance. Americans as conquerors would be tragically miscast.

The world's affairs cannot be simplified by eager words. We cannot take refuge from reality in the folly of black-and-white solutions.

## IV

In dealing with the Russians, both uncritical trust and unmitigated belligerence are impossible. There is a middle course. We do not yet know surely in what proportion unreasonable fears and twisted hopes are at the root of the perverted policy now followed by the Kremlin. Assuming both to be involved, we must disarm the fears and disappoint the hopes. We must no longer let the tide of Soviet expansion cheaply roll into the empty places left by war, and yet we must make it perfectly clear that we are not ourselves expansionist. Our task is to help threatened peoples to help themselves.

This is not easy. It is quite possible, indeed, that the blind reaction of some anti-Communist governments may succeed to some extent in nullifying our labors. We must make every effort to prevent such a result. Success in this task depends so much on men and circumstances that I do not venture to prescribe a theoretical solution. It is an undertaking that demands a bold and active policy, combined with skilful and understanding execution. In such an undertaking, it is only the exceptionally well-informed who may properly give advice from the sidelines.

But our main answer to the Russians is not negative, nor is it in any sense anti-Russian. Our central task in dealing with the Kremlin is to demonstrate beyond the possibility of misunder-

standing that freedom and prosperity, hand in hand, can be stably sustained in the western democratic world. This would be our greatest task even if no Soviet problem existed, and to the Soviet threat it is our best response.

Soviet intransigence is based in very large part on the hope and belief that all non-Communist systems are doomed. Soviet policy aims to help them die. We must hope that time and the success of freedom and democracy in the western world will convince both the Soviet leaders and the Russian people now behind them that our system is here to stay. This may not be possible; dictators do not easily change their hearts, and the modern armaments they possess may make it hard for their people to force such a change. Rather than be persuaded of their error, the Soviet leaders might in desperation resort to war, and against that possibility we have to guard by maintaining our present military advantages. We must never forget that while peace is a joint responsibility, the decision for war can be made by a single Power; our military strength must be maintained as a standing discouragement to aggression.

I do not, however, expect the Russians to make war. I do not share the gloomy fear of some that we are now engaged in the preliminaries of an inevitable conflict. Even the most repressive dictatorship is not perfectly unassailable from within, and the most frenzied fanaticism is never unopposed. Whatever the ideological bases of Soviet policy, it seems clear that some at least of the leaders of Russia are men who have a marked respect for facts. We must make it wholly evident that a nonaggressive Russia will have nothing to fear from us. We must make it clear, too, that the western non-Communist world is going to survive in growing economic and political stability. If we can do this, then slowly — but perhaps less slowly than we now believe — the Russian leaders may either change their minds or lose their jobs.

## v

The problem of Russia is thus reduced to a question of our own fitness to survive. I do not mean to belittle the Communist challenge. I only mean that the essential question is one which we should have to answer if there were not a Communist alive. Can we make freedom and prosperity real in the present world? If we can, Communism is no threat. If not, with or without Communism, our own civilization would ultimately fail.

The immediate and pressing challenge to our belief in freedom and prosperity is in western Europe. Here are people who have traditionally shared our faith in human dignity. These are the nations by whose citizens our land was settled and in whose tradition our civilization is rooted. They are threatened by Communism — but only because of the dark shadows cast by the hopelessness, hunger and fear that have been the aftermath of the Nazi war. Communism or no Communism, menace or no menace, it is our simple duty as neighbors to take a generous part in helping these great peoples to help themselves.

The reconstruction of western Europe is a task from which Americans can decide to stand apart only if they wish to desert every principle by which they claim to live. And, as a decision of policy, it would be the most tragic mistake in our history. We must take part in this work; we must take our full part; we must be sure that we do enough.

I must add that I believe we should act quickly. The penalty of delay in reconstruction is to increase the size of the job and to multiply difficulties. We require a prompt and large-scale program. The government must lead the way, but we who are private citizens must support that leadership as men in all parties supported help to our Allies in 1941. The sooner we act, the surer our success — and the less it will cost us.

The need of Europe is a challenge partly to our generosity and partly to our good sense. We have ample justification for action on either ground. It is an opportunity for the best that is in America, a chance for us to show the practical idealism on which we have with reason learned to pride ourselves.

This is the way to disappoint the Russians. But it is not anti-Russian. This is a course which must be followed not because we fear the Russians, but simply because we have confidence in ourselves.

As we take part in the rebuilding of Europe, we must remember that we are building world peace, not an American peace. Freedom demands tolerance, and many Americans have much to learn about the variety of forms which free societies may take. There are Europeans, just as there are Americans, who do not believe in freedom, but they are in a minority, and — as the Editor of this review so clearly explained in its last issue — we shall not be able to separate the sheep from the goats merely by asking whether they believe in our particular economic and political

system. Our coöperation with the free men of Europe must be founded on the basic principles of human dignity, and not on any theory that their way to freedom must be exactly the same as ours. We cannot ask that Europe be rebuilt in the American image. If we join in the task of reconstruction with courage, confidence and goodwill, we shall learn — and teach — a lot. But we must start with a willingness to understand.

The reconstruction of western Europe is the immediate task. With it we have, of course, a job at home. We must maintain freedom and prosperity here. This is a demanding task in itself, and its success or failure will largely determine all our other efforts. If it is true that our prosperity depends on that of the world, it is true also that the whole world's economic future hangs on our success at home. We must go forward to new levels of peacetime production, and to do this we must all of us avoid the pitfalls of laziness, fear and irresponsibility. Neither real profits nor real wages can be permanently sustained — and still less increased — by anything but rising production.

But I see no reason for any man to face the American future with any other feeling than one of confident hope. However grave our problems, and however difficult their solution, I do not believe that this country is ready to acknowledge that failure is foreordained. It is our task to disprove and render laughable that utterly insulting theory. Our future does not depend on the tattered forecasts of Karl Marx. It depends on us.

## VI

In counseling against policies which ignore the facts of the world as it is, I do not, of course, mean to argue that we can for a moment forget the nature of our final goal.

Lasting peace and freedom cannot be achieved until the world finds a way toward the necessary government of the whole. It is important that this should be widely understood, and efforts to spread such understanding are commendable. The riven atom, uncontrolled, can be only a growing menace to us all, and there can be no final safety short of full control throughout the world. Nor can we hope to realize the vast potential wealth of atomic energy until it is disarmed and rendered harmless. Upon us, as the people who first harnessed and made use of this force, there rests a grave and continuing responsibility for leadership in turning it toward life, not death.



But we cannot have world government or atomic control by wishing for them, and we cannot have them, in any meaningful sense, without Russia. If in response to our best effort there comes no answer but an everlasting "NO," then we must go to work in other fields to change the frame of mind that caused that answer. We cannot ignore it.

It is a part of any practical policy that it must keep our principles out in the open. In the imperfect, veto-ridden United Nations there is now incarnate the hope of people everywhere that this world may become one in spirit as it is in fact. No misconceived idea of "realism" should induce us to ignore this living hope or abate in its pursuit. We should be foremost among those who seek to make the United Nations stronger; if the Russians will not help us, let them be forced to make their opposition clear. As a starting-point, we might simply ask for a clear ruling that there shall be no veto on the right of investigation and report.

Because the United Nations can at present be hamstrung by the obstruction of a single major Power, we will probably find ourselves sometimes forced to act outside its system. So far as possible, we should avoid this course, and we should so conduct our operations as to make it wholly clear to all the world that it is not we who choose to make the United Nations weak, and that when we act outside it we are still acting in harmony with its declared objectives. It must be our constant endeavor to conduct our policy with full and deep respect for our signed and ratified adherence to this new league which we have done so much to build. Our insistence upon world coöperation must be unremitting; only so can we deserve and win the confidence of those who, caring nothing for the politics of power, now see only the overriding need for peace. Both policy and principle bind us to the support of the United Nations.

## VII

It is clear, then, that in this country we are still free to maintain our freedom. We are called to an unprecedented effort of cooperation with our friends in every country. Immediately, we are called to act in the rebuilding of civilization in that part of the world which is closest to us in history, politics and economics. We are required to think of our prosperity, our policy and our first principles as indivisibly connected with the facts of life every-

where. We must put away forever the childishness of parochial hopes and un-American fears.

We need not suppose that the task we face is easy, or that all our undertakings will be quickly successful. The construction of a stable peace is a longer, more complex and greater task than the relatively simple work of war-making. But the nature of the challenge is the same. The issue before us today is at least as significant as the one which we finally faced in 1941. By a long series of mistakes and failures, dating back over a span of more than 20 years, we had in 1941 let it become too late to save ourselves by peaceful methods; in the end we had to fight. This is not true today. If we act now, with vigor and understanding, with steadiness and without fear, we can peacefully safeguard our freedom. It is only if we turn our backs, in mistaken complacency or mistrusting timidity, that war may again become inevitable.

How soon this nation will fully understand the size and nature of its present mission, I do not dare to say. But I venture to assert that in very large degree the future of mankind depends on the answer to this question. And I am confident that if the issues are clearly presented, the American people will give the right answer. Surely there is here a fair and tempting challenge to all Americans, and especially to the nation's leaders, in and out of office.

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