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Retreat To Defeat?

WALTER LIPPMANN, America's self-appointed supersecretary of state, seems to have set out upon the task of "conditioning public opinion" for a U. S. retreat from all the peripheral positions around

from several personal conferences with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, Mr. Lippmann has hinted broadly that our basic concept of defense against Russia must be changed and that President Kennedy desires to change it, being hobbled only by "strong bureaucratic interests" in the State Department, the CIA and the Pentagon.

On the heels of Mr. Lippmann's pronouncements, Moscow radio asserted that it would be necessary for the United States to depart from the "bankrupt policy" of negotiating from "positions of strength."

Here again we find a strange parallel in the writings of Mr. Lippmann when he said in his comment published in this page May 5: "This country has never yet had a leader who has dared to explain candidly the consequences of the change in the balance of world power since the Soviet Union broke the American nuclear monopoly in 1949."

Mr. Lippmann has put into words his oft-expressed desire for "bold new ideas." He now insists that we undertake to defend only "key areas," and relinquish the notion of "American satellite states."

A reporter at Secretary of State Dean Rusk's final press conference before his departure for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization at Oslo brought up this matter. He did it without identifying Mr. Lippmann by name, but with specific deference to his comment.

Secretary Rusk acknowledged familiarity with the quotation. But in

DAILY THOUGHT:

Our lives are merely strange, dark interludes in the electrical display of God the Father.—Eugene O'Neill.

denying that the administration intends to pursue Mr. Lippmann's policy, Secretary Rusk made the point that "peripheral points tend to become central points."

His logic, of course, is clear. Each retreat from Communist imperialism presents a new "peripheral position." If we retreat from it, too, the Communists advance again—and when we finally reach the "central points" that Mr. Lippmann speaks of, they, too, are "peripheral."

And indefensible.
There are several obvious flaws in the Lippmann thesis of withdrawal.

THE MOST OBVIOUS flaw is that we keep abandoning exposed positions—in the hope that they will tend to become neutral "buffer" states—the Communists will be relieved of the necessity of winning them by conquest or subversion: These exposed states will merely drop like ripe plums into the Communists' laps. As they drop, others will be under increased pressure to drop also.

A more basic fallacy in the Lippmann argument, although it may be less apparent, is that weakness—not strength—begets trouble with the Reds. On several occasions where we have stood our ground with the Russians, hostilities have not developed. It is when we have excluded territory from our defense perimeter—as Dean Acheson unthinkingly did in the case of South Korea—that an overt attack by Communist forces has come.

If Lippmann's advice should be followed, similar consequences may be expected.