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The Honorable George Murphy, Director

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Reflections on an Anniversary

U.S. POWER: ITS SWIFT RISE AND SWIFTER FALL

Remarks of Charles J. V. Murphy on the occasion of the 50th reunion of the Harvard Class of 1926, at Cambridge, Mass., June 16, 1976.

I have been asked to discuss American defense policies--a subject about which I wrote for *Fortune* and *Life* and *The Reader's Digest* more years than I care to remember. A serious subject--too serious, possibly, for what should be a festive occasion.

The foremost question in that quarter today is a moot one: How does the United States rank militarily? Have we ceased or are we only ceasing to be Number One?

The question is one that never concerned us on the 10th anniversary of this class. In 1936, the only military tasks that American forces had been put to after the first great war were guerrilla harrassments in Nicaragua, Santo Domingo and Haiti.

And when the class came together again for the 20th, the nation had only just emerged victorious from the second great war in our lifetimes. The vast fleets, the air forces and the armies that we had known in one aspect or another had been scattered to the four winds, in the mistaken belief they would not be needed again.

And our 30th reunion, in 1956, found the nation between wars--between the grinding and unavailing ordeal in Korea in 1950-53 and the onset in 1960-61 of a succession of untidy, vexing experiences in the Bay of Pigs, Laos, and Vietnam and what used to be called the Congo. The forces had meanwhile been rebuilt, the draft reinstated; but now our sons were being called to serve, and the Pentagon budget was taking some 9 percent of the GNP.

By our 40th reunion, a scant ten years ago, war had become a serious and continuing business with Americans. In 1966, the Johnson Administration was moving tardily and uncertainly to save South Vietnam from an aggression supported by the entire communist bloc--China with the Russians. The armed forces were in rapid expansion; the Federal deficit was soaring and such questions as whether

that war was being fought sensibly, and whether Americans should even be in Indochina at all, were beginning to divide the nation.

Now, on our 50th, we meet in what President Ford assures us is a condition of peace. But we know that only yesterday we accepted a disastrous--and in the view of some, of whom I am one--a shameless and unnecessary defeat in Indochina. Last winter we stood aside in Angola and this summer we are standing aside in Lebanon, nervously averting our gaze from savage little wars of which the outcome will in the first instance affect the military balance in the Mediterranean and in the other in southern Africa.

Governor Reagan warns us that we have fallen behind the Soviet Union, that the military balance has swung against us. And many good men say that he is right.

President Ford assures us that the United States is still Number One and that the forces in place are adequate for any likely task.

Among the Democrats there is a strange silence. Jimmy Carter has said little on the subject of defense or foreign policy or the power balance. He has suggested that a cut of some \$7 billion in defense spending might be a good thing and he favors, in principle, a pullback of American troops from Korea and the NATO line.

The other Democratic candidates, with the sole exception of Senator Jackson, have simply ignored these prickly issues.

So the rest of us are left with two questions: Have we indeed slipped down the power scale? And if we have, does it really matter?

To know where we stand, it is useful to look back to the beginnings of the present situation and to examine afresh the circumstances that have governed national actions in what has certainly been a ride on the roller coaster of history.

A good place to start is with Eisenhower. The Eisenhower years ran from 1953-1961--eight years which too

many Americans tend to regard the past eight years off years in the American experience with world power and influence in two historical respects:

*On the side of military policy, they began with the Armistice in Korea early in 1953 and extended through a dramatic interval of invention that revolutionized military technologies and settled the balance to the side of the West.

*And on the foreign policy side, these eight years were marked by the consolidation of the alliance first strung together by Dean Acheson under Truman. The most important of these alliances produced in 1950 the North Atlantic Treaty Organization--NATO. The other was the mutual defense treaty with Japan, which had been preceded by the commitment to defend South Korea and would soon be amplified by the mutual defense treaty with the Republic of China on Taiwan.

The practical consequence of these arrangements was to move the American defense line eastward to the Elbe in the heart of Europe and to the 37th Parallel in Korea. The containment policy enunciated by Truman and Acheson was thus crystalized under Eisenhower and Dulles as a forward strategy sustained by interlocking coalitions on the far side of both oceans.

Stalin was still alive, still in dictatorial charge of the Soviet Union when Eisenhower entered the Presidency. Truman had blocked his threat against Greece and Turkey, but had chosen to hold aloof in Asia in 1945-49 when China was lost to communism. Then in 1950-52 he met and defeated the North Korean aggression banked by the Soviet Stalin and Mao Tse-tung. So the two systems were in collision across the width of the world when Eisenhower came to power some seven years after the end of the Second World War.

A profound change in American strategy now occurred. In 1954-55, Eisenhower directed the Defense Department to proceed under the highest national priority with the development of the Intercontinental Ballistic Missile System and the various other systems required for their support and use. He did so to exploit the thermonuclear solution which Truman had put in train several years earlier.

The eventual result of these decisions was to bring into being by the end of the 1950s the awesome panoply of strategic range ballistic missiles that we know as the ICBMs--the Minuteman, Polaris, Titan, Atlas and lately the Poseidon.

As matters turned out, we were none too soon. The Soviet Union arrived at the thermonuclear solution for the warhead almost as soon as we did, and were first with the strategic range rocket.

But once embarked, the Pentagon and the scientific community--all but a small minority that blamed American bellicosity for goading the Russians into the arms race--rapidly outdistanced the other side. In 1960, Eisenhower's last year, the United States had achieved unequivocal ascendancy in all the decisive military technologies--in numbers and approved for ICBMs, both sea and land based; in jet aircraft; in radar; in logistics; in the

means for meeting threats at a good distance from our shores.

We also developed the means, first with the U-2 aircraft and then the reconnaissance satellite, to look down from great heights into the Soviet Union and communist China and photograph what was going on behind their closed frontiers.

Thus when the Cuban missile crisis burst upon him in October 1962, President Kennedy knew for sure that Khrushchev could command no more than 70 ICBMs of dubious accuracy deployed in the Soviet operational forces. And he had many times that number and more reliable ones in place.

In fact, at that point the United States was deploying the Minuteman at the rate of one a day, and launching a new Polaris submarine and adding a dozen or so B-52s to the Strategic Air Command every month.

I cite these statistics not out of a vulgar and simple-minded obsession with numbers, but only to make the point that 15 short years ago the United States had clear ascendancy in the military technologies, especially the nuclear, and our capacity to act reflected the power situation.

Today we see Lebanon being torn apart. Only 18 years ago, in 1958, Eisenhower put a relative handful of Marines ashore--less than 5,000--in that country to save it from being taken over by Syrians and Egyptians armed by the Soviet. Their mere appearance on the sunny beaches dispelled the threat. It evaporated in an afternoon.

The same year, on the other side of the world, an unostentatious show of force by the Seventh Fleet in the Formosa Straits, combined with the gift of a few sidewinder missiles to a highly competent Nationalist Air Force, stopped in its tracks a massive invasion of the Quemoy-Matsu islands by communist China that was to have been prelude to the reduction of Taiwan itself.

Here was the high tide of American influence in a world in change. The alliances were firm. When in 1962 Kennedy dispatched Dean Acheson to Paris to show President de Gaulle the U-2 photographs of the Soviet missiles in Cuba and to explain why the United States was making ready to move against them, de Gaulle answered calmly that he assumed the United States would act decisively in defense of its interests.

Things worked better for us then not alone because of Eisenhower's strength and resolution. They worked because he was able to maneuver within alliances and means started by Truman and Acheson and supported by the nation.

What has gone wrong? How did the power slip away?

The turn in our fortunes started in the Kennedy years and it began with a return to isolationism wearing a new face. The isolationist sentiment runs deep and far back into American character. What was new about the

phenomenon in the 1960s is that the rationale against foreign involvements and heavy military investments now came more forcefully from the intellectual community--from the political scientists and historians who were persuaded that communism was a dynamic but mellowing force; the social scientists who wanted the capital given to defense invested instead in social programs and the physical scientists who felt they had sinned in bringing nuclear weapons into the world.

The fashionable view was that it was the American obsession with nuclear supremacy which had inspired Soviet fears of the West and that the way to stop the arms race was for the United States to stop accumulating strategic nuclear weapons.

That reasoning gripped the Kennedy planners hard. It gave rise during Kennedy's second year to two crucial decisions largely constructed by Defense Secretary McNamara.

Under the first decision the growth of the strategic forces was halted in 1964-65. The idea was to let the Russians catch up and achieve parity with us, if they wished.

Under the other, the U.S. strategic forces were moved into what was called a second-strike or strictly retaliatory posture. They would be left durable enough to emerge from a first strike by an aggressor with remnants strong enough to inflict in riposte destruction far too severe for any rational enemy to accept. Hence the term mutual assured destruction--the think tank jargon for Robert Oppenheimer's colorful figure of speech, Two Scorpions in a Bottle.

The confident expectation that went with this shift in strategic emphasis was that once the Soviet Union moved up to nuclear parity--to stalemate, that is--the Kremlin's fear of American perfidy would be removed, tensions would relax, and the arms race would slow down.

That is the reasoning that gave direction to American security policies in the middle 1960s--about the time of this class's 40th reunion.

Now the consequences of the Kennedy reasoning are in view.

What went wrong is that the Russians were not content with parity. They arrived at parity in purposeful momentum and went on accumulating more and heavier strategic weapons. They are proceeding on to full ascendancy.

This is what the SALT negotiations are about.

It supplies the principal issue between Reagan and Ford.

It made for the breach between Schlesinger and Kissinger--graduates together in a Harvard class, professors both, one an economist, the other an historian, and as far apart in their judgments of the power balance under

The mathematics of the balance as they relate to weapon systems involve factors beyond the experience of most of us. But there is one fairly simple way of judging how we have fared.

It is to look at the map.

The dominos have fallen. True, they did not all stand in a single line. But some are certainly down.

South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia are gone.

Thailand has asked us to fold our tents there and depart.

It is no secret that the Ford Administration would like to dissolve the commitment to Taiwan and move on to full diplomatic relations with communist China.

Our intervention in the struggle for Angola was covert, feeble, brief and failing.

Now Rhodesia and the Union of South Africa--their white populations, their minerals and other natural resources, and their strategic geography--lie quite naked and exposed to communist-supported aggression. And who among us today is calling out as Winston Churchill did some 40 years ago, when another totalitarian imperialism was in the flood, "Stop it! Stop it! Stop it now!"

It is hard to mark a place in the world where the American government of the hour would make war in defense of principle.

For that matter, it is hard to think of a principle affecting foreign policy that would unite Americans again for serious work abroad.

How profound has been the change in our former vision of ourselves that few of us care to dwell on may be judged by contemplating the spectacular improvement in Fidel Castro's fortunes.

Only 14 years ago, he stood by, seeming helpless and humiliated, while some 20,000 Soviet troops and technicians sailed home with the nuclear missiles which they had sneaked into Cuba in a gamble to redress the nuclear balance.

Last year a Cuban expeditionary force, almost as large as that one, armed by the Soviet bloc, crossed the South Atlantic and took up an imperial task halfway into Africa. There it provided, with some considerable dexterity and resolution, the principal means of an important conquest.

What are older Americans to make of the present unwillingness to act and to risk? Can the United States safely and in good conscience turn away and let the rest of the non-communist world go, too?

My good friend the late Arthur Krock concluded sorrowfully toward the end of an honest and wise career: "the tenure of the United States as the world's foremost power may well be the briefest in the annals of history."

It certainly looks that way now, but I, for one, would rather take a more hopeful view.

Where matters have gone wrong with us, I believe, in the failure of our political leadership and in the counsel of the intellectuals on the liberal side of politics to recognize a change in Soviet strategy that occurred after Stalin.

Stalin at the end of the war found himself faced in Europe by political parties sharing much the same principles of constitutional government and all inherently anti-communist. His counter was to subjugate the eastern European nations overrun by the Red Army. In so doing he destroyed the basic Leninist principle for regulating the relationship of the national communist parties and promoting world revolution. It was Lenin's thesis that communist parties should agree on common objectives for the overthrow of capitalism but that each national party should be left free in a life of its own.

Stalin cast that principle aside. He took Soviet communism down the imperialist path. The Molotov-Ribbentrop pact which ushered in the second great war was a cynical act. The German communist party was sacrificed for Soviet security.

Soviet foreign policy from Malenkov through Khrushchev to Brezhnev can be read in general terms as a patient and deliberate return to Leninism.

It took six years for the communist parties--the Soviet party in debate with the leaders of other national parties--to hammer out the terms of a common world strategy and the conditions for their future cooperation one with the other. The objectives agreed upon are now in view:

*To mark the United States as the main enemy and to isolate it.

*To neutralize the American nuclear advantage by political action--whipping up world sentiment against the alleged American monopoly that had ceased to be a monopoly--and then wipe it out with superior means.

*To weaken and divide the American alliances through political action, espionage and deception.

*To separate the underdeveloped societies of the Third World from their European and American connections through wars of national liberation--wars designed not only to jeopardize the noncommunist nations access to crucial raw materials and commodities, but also to provide bases for extending political action to communist apparatus in the adjoining societies.

*To row toward these objectives on the muffled oars of co-existence, lately called detente, fostering the illusion of openness and reciprocity in tactical situations, but changing nothing, yielding nothing of strategic importance.

How close the Soviet Union has come to bringing off the neo-Leninist strategy we are each of us free to decide for ourselves.

You and I may differ on how independent of Moscow's aims the French and Italian communist parties are prepared to be. But any one who paid attention to the recent prolonged proceedings of the 25th Party Congress in Moscow would have observed that the leaders of the European nationalist communist parties were as one with the leaders of the eastern European parties and with the Soviet leaders as well in hailing the victories won in the wars of

liberation in singling out the United States as the main enemy, and in calling for the dissolution of the American alliances.

Cuba under Castro is a splendid example of neo-Leninism in early flowering. Castro did not send his people deep into darkest Africa--troops, doctors, bridge builders, administrators--as puppets on Moscow's strings. On the contrary, he made his debut in that far-off place as a Marxist international statesman-dictator possessing collegial equality with the Moscow brethren. His technicians and soldiers dominated the battle there in league with the Soviet quartermasters. To be sure, he failed with Allende in Chile in 1973 and earlier with Che Guevara in Bolivia, but today his agents operate with increasing effectiveness in Puerto Rico, Panama, Jamaica and Venezuela. He is a young man as communist leaders go. Darling, too. We shall no doubt be hearing more of him, but not, I pray, as Dr. Kissinger's next friendly host.

I've refrained from any specific comment on Harvard's current celebrity, wishing to mind my manners on these hallowed grounds. And in any case, the debits and credits attaching to his diplomacy are coming into full view.

In your middle years and mine, Dean Acheson and Foster Dulles conducted foreign policy for strong-willed, intelligent and experienced men. Neither courted the favor of journalists. Neither cavorted with Hollywood stars or indulged in the cult of personality. Neither was known to lie or deceive and even less to consort with those who would do the United States in. They were much closer to each other in their faiths than their temperaments ever allowed them to admit.

For me, past 70, the most grievous waste flowing from current policies has been decay of the alliances these two men strung, the sapping of the confidence of famous allies in American purpose.

The United States is still far from being surpassed in the permanent assets that determine the relative strengths of nations over the long haul. Our unequalled resources of capital, our unmatched skill in growing food, our command of technology and invention leave us still with means in reserve to close the power margin at will.

The trouble, as Dr. Schlesinger keeps telling us, is a question of will and of moral purpose.

Do Americans have the will to return to world leadership? Do we have the stamina to stay the course? Do we have good purposes to serve in the world?

I want to believe so. What a pleasant thing it would be for those of us still around to return to Cambridge for our 60th reunion, to find that the Charles River Basin and Harvard itself were again the fertile seedbed of the principles for which this nation was conceived--or so earlier generations were told.