



Anna Mycek-Wodecki

Don't Tread on Us

by Thomas Fleming

In the closing days of 1993 two familiar specters, recently absent from our nightmares, returned to haunt the global consciousness: the Russian bear, in the person of Vladimir Zhirinovsky, and the Yellow Peril, in the form of North Korea. There were, of course, other bugbears to frighten the children of democracy—the parade of new Hitlers led by Miloshevitich and Aidid, but neither the Serb nor the Somali possess the great talisman of fear, nuclear weapons.

Why is the bomb so important? After all, even our conventional weapons could pave over North Korea in a matter of days, and until the Russians can manage to subdue Ukraine and Kazakhstan, they are hardly in a position to menace Poland, much less Western Europe. But the bomb is a symbol both of American supremacy—we are, so far, the only nation barbaric enough to use it—and of the Cold War, whose principal strategy consisted of a vast computer game that measured victory in terms of potential megadeaths.

Yes, the world is a dangerous place. It always has been. Only in America could an idiot become rich and famous by predicting the end of history. The same people who promoted Francis Fukuyama are the type to laugh at our ancestors for table-rapping and witch-hunting, but no superstition of the past can possibly rival the absurdities promulgated every day by university professors prophesying doom and bliss in virtually the same breath.

There is more than one way to confront a dangerous world. The governing classes of the United States, knowing that much of their power derives from the terror they have systematically inspired for 50 years, would like us to go on wringing our hands and rattling our sabres till the end of time. But after so many years the sabres sound more like rattles designed to pacify a baby—in this case, the American people.

Pacifists have their own perilous answers to the problems of

violence—unilateral disarmament, and turning the other cheek until the victim's head spins and there is no more cheek to punish. The older American attitude, which might be described as an armed and dangerous neutrality, was summed up in Teddy Roosevelt's maxim, "walk softly and carry a big stick." Our first flag, the coiled rattlesnake, bore the legend: "Don't Tread On Me," and we have adopted it here as our personal motto, both in foreign and domestic affairs. Leave others alone; respect their property; treat them fairly; and punish them swiftly and severely, whenever they break faith or violate your rights. Such a "Tit-for-Tat" strategy is the long-term winner in the computer games analyzed by George Axelrod, and it is the most secure basis for all human relations.

It was also the American foreign policy, in a nutshell, down to World War I. (In the Spanish-American War we managed to deceive ourselves into thinking we were the injured party.) But the "war to end all wars" was, in Woodrow Wilson's opinion, a crusade to change the world, and in sending an army onto European soil, the President was repealing the policy of isolation that had been declared by George Washington. Ironically (in the modern sense of "inevitably"), we went to war not for the sake of France but for the very empire from which we had to liberate ourselves in two wars.

"Lafayette, we are here." This famous declaration was made on July 4, 1917, in the Parisian cemetery where the Marquis de Lafayette lay buried. On behalf of the entire American Expeditionary Force, Charles E. Stanton proclaimed that "here and now in the presence of the illustrious dead we pledge our hearts and honor in carrying this war to a successful issue." An army of conscripts was an odd tribute to a man who had gone to America as a volunteer, but the Wilson administration knew that world power could never rest upon a basis of citizen-volunteers. Empires require conscripts and mercenaries, and

even though there were plenty of red-blooded Americans itching to take a crack at the Kaiser, the army preferred compulsion to patriotism.

From another perspective, though, the July 4th tribute was symbolically appropriate. The nephew of Lincoln's dictatorial Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton was an ideal choice for announcing imperial America's arrival on the European continent. His chief, General Pershing, had first acquired fame in the campaign against Geronimo, and he was later to command American forces against the Philippino insurgents who preferred not to take lessons in democracy from an occupying army.

From the very beginning, General Pershing had insisted upon an independent American command. The French openly condescended to the Americans, whose troops were ill-trained and whose officers were not up to the logistical and strategic demands of modern warfare. Acknowledging the obstacles that lay before him, Pershing nonetheless resisted every move to amalgamate American forces into a joint command under French authority. Indeed, the fear of foreign entanglements was still so much a part of the American character that President Wilson never formally joined the alliance—we were associates rather than allies.

Most Americans must have assumed that victory would mean withdrawal from Europe. The President had other ideas, and among his Fourteen Points was a proposal for collective security in Europe. The Republicans shrank back in horror from the League of Nations and were able to recapture the White House by promising an end to the experiment in command economy and a return to normalcy.

Twenty years later a new German menace brought American troops back to Europe, this time under a "Supreme Allied Commander," Dwight Eisenhower. There are those who said—and some who still say—that we could have sat out World War II: that it was a result of the vindictive peace terms imposed at Versailles; that nothing good could come of an alliance that included the master-butcher of the century; that the war that began as a crusade to liberate Poland ended by turning her over to the tender mercies of Joseph Stalin; that war was a godsend to the planners, socialists, and traitors who staffed the New Deal. Once the shooting started, the arguments lost their point, and by the time the shooting stopped, most of the great isolationists were either dead or in retirement.

For a brief period—roughly the five years between 1945 and 1950—there was a political debate on America's future role in Europe. The contest could be seen as a struggle between two major parties: on the one hand, the dupes and traitors, such as Henry Wallace, Harry Dexter White (the author of the World Bank), and Alger Hiss; on the other hand stood the infant cold warriors, Harry Truman, Arthur Vandenberg, and Dean Acheson.

If Truman and Acheson were willing to be warriors, it was only cold warriors, and the administration refused to back up the military men who were willing to fight for victory. There are people who want to believe that when Truman sacked MacArthur, it was a victory for the Constitution. Where in the Constitution does it say that a President may commit American troops to an undeclared war, under the auspices of an international agency, without having victory as an object? If MacArthur slipped in disobeying his Commander-in-Chief, he could be defended on the logic of the Nuremberg Trials. Korea was an unconstitutional and immoral war in which

American soldiers were slaughtered for some vague idea of containment, and the fault does not lie at the door of Douglas MacArthur but with the U.S. House that did not impeach Harry Truman.

**It is time for Uncle
Sam's nephews to
grow up and take
responsibility for their own affairs.
We shall be lucky to save our own
country from the ethnic and social
conflicts that are turning major cities
into miniature Bosnias.**

Meanwhile in Europe, General Lucius Clay was insisting that a determined military resistance to the Berlin blockade would bring the Russians swiftly to their knees. But Truman had no taste for a real war, and his successors have, ever since, preferred to fight with surrogates, to bomb Third World countries, and to fund insurrections that have cost untold lives in Africa and Central America. By now, the very term "freedom fighter" ought to sicken an honest American, no matter what his politics.

If the hot warriors in uniform were a different breed from the cold warriors in striped pants, there is another party at the other end of the spectrum, men who knew the Soviets for what they were but who refused to enlist in a global crusade, whether hot or cold. The prototype for the pragmatists may have been Truman's Secretary of State, James F. Byrnes. Often regarded as an appeaser, Byrnes was a South Carolina conservative who loathed everything he knew about communism. He had been a major figure in the Democratic Party, and many had assumed that he would replace Henry Wallace as FDR's Vice President. As it turned out, "Mr. Jimmie" was too conservative for the leftists who ran FDR and chose, instead, a harmless machine politician from Missouri. Unlike Truman, Byrnes had a mind of his own, and even when conducting the most important business with the Russians, he kept his President in the dark.

Considering the President, how could he not? He had known Truman since the little haberdasher entered the Senate, and to know Harry was to despise or, if you were his friend, patronize him. Intelligent foreigners could not get over the fact that such a little man could be the leader of the most powerful nation on earth. Evelyn Waugh, who did not know him, found Truman "a wholly comic man," and Malcolm Muggeridge, who did, describes his reelection as a "really comical turn of events. Thought of the little man, as I remembered him, so utterly asinine . . . and how inconceivably funny it was that he should have been voluntarily chosen, against enormous odds. . . ."

Jimmie Byrnes knew how to be tough on the U.S.S.R. with-

out entering upon a war, either hot or cold. In his dealings with the Russians, he made Yalta a dead letter, and already in 1946 he was saying that the Germans ought to be put in charge of their own affairs. Because he was willing to deal with the Russians without tipping his hand to either the President or his subordinates, Byrnes was often thought to be either an appeaser or a prima donna. George Kennan, who was irritated with the secretary's aloofness in Moscow, began to think deeply about the proper American response to the Soviets. Both in his famous telegram and in his more famous "Mr. X" article, Kennan outlined a strategy for containing Soviet aggression, a combination of hard realism in dealing with the Soviets and a rebirth of American idealism.

Unfortunately, the effect of Kennan's warnings was greater than he anticipated. Kennan's hope was that the United States, in opposing communist aggression, would help to put the European countries back on their feet, with the ultimate goal of making them independent of American military aid. What actually happened was the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Kennan was present at the working group sessions where NATO was born, but one member of the British team, Sir Nicholas Henderson (in his memoir *The Birth of NATO*), recalled Kennan's participation as largely negative and critical. In their zeal for world order, the American leadership pushed aside Kennan's vision of a vigorous and independent Europe as antiquated. NATO's court historian (Don Cook), conceding that "Kennan had one of the best and most stimulating minds ever enlisted by the U.S. Foreign Service," goes on to criticize

his "nineteenth-century concept of the future of Europe—a view, incidentally, that was shared by General Charles de Gaulle. It was to be a Europe standing on its own feet, sorting out its own affairs, its Iron Curtain divide gradually giving way to a Pan-European understanding, with America intervening only from a distance to maintain peace and the balance of power, the kind of role that England had played for two centuries."

But other heads prevailed—the same heads that were declaring the Constitution an outmoded document—and NATO would become a collective security organization presided over by one dominant power with a virtual veto power. The Spartans had called their own hegemony "Sparta and its Allies," and it was in that sense that Britain and France entered into alliance with the United States. Kennan resigned from the Foreign Service, and the voice of pragmatism was stilled by impotence as surely as the voices of isolation had been silenced by persecution.

The test came early, in the Suez Crisis of 1956. When the French and the British attempted to respond in force to the closure of the canal, they were sternly rebuked by the United States. The British were willing to accept their new role as very junior partners in an Anglo-American enterprise, but the French—being, after all, French—sulked and eventually withdrew from NATO. To this day, the French preserve more of their national dignity than Britain—look how M. Balladur beat us down in the GATT talks—and for all their problems, they continue to display a more robust sense of national identity than most European nations.

Musing Toward Grasmere

by Marion Montgomery

Outside, in the valley of the Kent
Below Kendal, the insistent light comes
Sweeping, rolling green downhill more rapidly
Than the starting sheep can reckon.

Moving,
Stopping under the willful clouds, white lambs
Cry the May air. Like orphaned drifts of mist
They plead the summer's mercy and their mothers'.
High in Two, White Cottage, Natland, I watch
A fine rain soften the dry-stone walls
On Natland Hall Farm.

Here names magnify,
A gift of anxious mind to the things in time's clutch,
History's long hold on the steep mountains.
The green swells, the breath of suspirus earth,
Natland Hall Farm.

Across the cobble road
Monks sang on damp mornings when the green came
Enriching Furness Abbey, their smoke rising
To praise God's light for labor.

Old days
Remembered, lichen and moss, stone-hinged fields,
Where May steadied the praise-full eye:
Stones greening, blossoming mist, song rising
Through the turning, the always turning years.