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THE THREAT OF AN ANGLO-AMERICAN HEGEMONY

BY CRANE BRINTON

RIGHT after the British general election of 1945, there were commentators who remarked that now, of course, the British would line up with the Russians against the Americans in international politics. Such remarks sound absurd in 1946, and those who made them very confidently in 1945 were not among the wisest of their profession. But their error should remind us that it is very hard indeed to predict the combinations of international power politics. Research could no doubt dig up individual publicists or politicians who foresaw in 1701 the Prussia of Frederick the Great, who predicted in 1750 the famous Diplomatic Revolution of 1756 which made allies of Bourbon France and Hapsburg Austria after two centuries of enmity, who realized right after Sadowa that Prussia and Austria would fight on the same side in the next world war, or who guessed right in September 1939 as to just who would be fighting whom at the end of this war. But most even of the experts were wrong—or silent—at those times. Prediction in sports is hard enough, but at least the teams are known; in the bloody game of war, without umpire and without rules, not even the teams can be known very far ahead.

At the moment, however, it looks as though an Anglo-American team were lining up against a Russian team. Precedents of the half dozen world wars that have been fought since our modern system of nation-states grew out of the Middle Ages are against any immediate renewal of large-scale warfare in our day. There have always been squabbles among victors and near-victors at the end of such world wars, but something—perhaps just plain exhaustion—has kept the nations from renewed general warfare. Indeed, the general atmosphere of international relations seems no worse now than it was in 1815, and rather better than it was in 1713,

when cleaning up after the War of the Spanish Succession proved a long task. But precedent may not apply in these days of the atomic bomb; and any clear-cut dual alignment of powers or groups of powers must always be considered a threat to the peace. Moreover, the very great present strength of the United States and the British Commonwealth and Empire combined might be a temptation to leaders in both countries to try to realize something like Cecil Rhodes' old dream of a *pax anglo-saxonica*. The present opposition between a Russian and an Anglo-American bloc may not last; it may dissolve into other oppositions, or it may be resolved in a genuine international order. But at the moment it is the major fact of world politics, and worth trying to analyze.

A clear, conscious desire to achieve Anglo-American hegemony, domination, world-rule (the term must necessarily be imprecise if it is to be useful) is almost certainly held by relatively few individuals, British or American; and even in a foggier form of general imperialistic aggressiveness it is by no means common among Americans, British, Canadians, Australians and other English-speaking peoples. There simply isn't the combination of doctrine, organization and leadership for outright Anglo-American aggression such, for instance, as the Nazis had. For one thing, the two nations still have their own private super-patriots. A joint team of Beaverbrook, Harmsworth, Luce and McCormick would get even less far than journalists usually do in this world. And however closely many American and British bankers—or bureaucrats—see eye to eye on many matters, they have clearly not worked out any neat plan of world conquest. The best-organized Anglo-American groups are probably those associated with the aims of Mr. Clarence Streit for federal union between Britain and the United States; and Mr. Streit and most of his followers are kindly and unaggressive souls, with no desire to make their proposed union a means of world hegemony.

If there really is a plot for Anglo-American hegemony, the plotters are more astute than such plotters usually are. There is, however, the real possibility that, especially in opposition to

Russia and Russian satellites, Britain and the United States will gradually grow into the kind of practical identity that will produce a tool their own imperialistic minorities can hardly help using. We may jointly blunder into an empire as Rome is said by historians like Tenney Frank to have stumbled into hers. It is therefore worth while trying to list the forces that seem to be driving the United States and Britain together against Russia, and to estimate what other forces may resist or counteract this tendency.

We must, of course, note the existence in both countries of aggressive nationalist minorities who would like to have either the United States or Britain, or both, do what the Nazis have just failed to do. Right now, as we have seen, these people are by no means agreed, if only because they cannot get beyond British or American patriotism. But it is quite possible that a man like Churchill has worked out a satisfactory solution for himself, one that on the whole subordinates the British to the American element in the mixture. Important groups in the ruling classes in both countries may gradually come together on a formula for what will in fact be an American Commonwealth and Empire, with the British Isles by no means its center. Not all of the British ruling classes are anxious to accept a junior partnership in such an enterprise, and there are, of course, British Leftists (not necessarily Communists) who would oppose it to the last. Nevertheless, there clearly are conscious, if small, groups in both countries working toward an Anglo-American alliance for hegemony.

More important, at any rate at the moment, is the existence in both countries of thousands of people of all classes for whom Red Russia is already the unavoidable foe. It is probably true that in neither country is there an upper-class group quite as desperately frightened of Communism as were the French upper classes of 1939. On the other hand, it seems likely that in both countries distrust of Communism—and complete identification of Communism with the present Russian government—are perhaps

more widespread among ordinary people than on the continent of Europe before the war. The existence of such feeling is a commonplace, and there is no need to attempt here to analyze or measure it. The important thing is to note that such feelings are not readily or rapidly reducible by the best-meant liberal or Leftist propaganda, that they have undoubtedly been strengthened in recent months, and that they will have to be got round or surmounted rather than eliminated. Fear of Communism is one of the forces which may, especially among conservatives, cancel out the nationalistic feelings that still keep Britain and the United States apart.

Less obvious is the fact that in both countries all kinds of nice people—the kind that would normally be quite willing to accept labels like internationalist, liberal, humanitarian—have been brought by what they know of Russia's postwar policy in eastern Europe, in Iran and in Manchuria to regard Russia as possibly the next villain in the play, the heir to Hitler's aggressive role. Here again we need not go into the complex question of just what Russia is aiming at, and whether these British and American men of good will are or are not misjudging her. If you are cynical enough—or, perhaps, detached enough—you may maintain that the United States in China, Britain in Iraq, and Russia in Rumania are in practically identical positions. But only the already very disgruntled are ever converted by the argument of "a plague o' both your houses." Nothing could be clearer in the history of both Britain and America than that important groups of the kind we are now discussing—the nice people—very readily focus their moral indignation on the imperialist sins of other lands—France, Germany, Russia. Many of them are quite unshaken by the familiar biblical instance of the mote and the beam; and those who are shaken will conclude that in fact the foreign body in the neighbor's eye is a trifle bigger than the one in their own, and at any rate must be removed first.

Thus on both sides of the famous line through the Center, American and British opinion has of recent months grown more

anti-Russian, and therefore reconciled to what looks more and more like an Anglo-American bloc. Both powers continue to maintain commitments—especially those of Britain in the Near East and those of the United States in the Far East—which look very much like what used to be called “spheres of influence.” Each government seems to be pretty consistently backing the other up all over the world. Churchill’s Fulton speech merely said what a good deal of Anglo-Saxon precedent in political matters would regard better unsaid—but certainly not undone.

It is clear that numbers of important people in Russia are persuaded that there is a plan for Anglo-American world rule; it is also clear that Russian policy is at least in part conditioned by fear of such British and American aggression. Indeed, in the short run, in the present, the essential problems we face are the same whether we diagnose Russia’s behavior as due essentially to Russian fear and insecurity, or to a desire to expand and dominate. Common sense, as well as Freud, suggests that there is a direct and continuing relation between insecurity and aggression. Moreover, unless we are to neglect the lessons of modern social psychology, we must recognize that Russian fears of Anglo-American aggression will not be in the least allayed by the most rational arguments we may put up to show we are not aggressive, and indeed, will only slowly be allayed by anything at all we can do or say. The same holds true, no doubt, of our own fears of Russian aggression—which is merely to emphasize the depth of the world’s political neuroses.

An effective Anglo-American hegemony could be gained only after the defeat of Russia in another world war. Russia might, of course, not be defeated in such a war, in which case there would be at least an end of talk of Anglo-American world rule. Once established, however, a *pax anglo-saxonica* might turn out almost as good as the *pax romana* was during its relatively brief effectiveness. (We often forget how short in fact was the really orderly rule of the Roman Empire.) But it would be a poor thing compared with the union of free peoples men have dreamed of for so

long, and there are no grounds for believing it could last longer than such empires in the past. Its cost to us in the loss of freedom of thought and action, in the assumption of rigid disciplines, which is the price of empire, would be very great. In fact, we probably would not be able to pay it. We haven't the habits of an imperial people.

There are, of course, factors pulling us away from this Anglo-American bloc. There are Americans who for all sorts of reasons dislike the British, and refuse to cooperate with them under any conditions. Such Americans do not, however, commonly determine government policies, and they are not numerous in the business world—at least, not in its higher circles. There are Americans who love Russia, but they are relatively few and concentrated in metropolitan areas; and their actions seem on the whole unimportant. There are Americans who want a World Federation, a superstate not dominated by Anglo-American power, but genuinely worldwide and federal. They also are few, and probably at the moment unimportant. It is possible that they frighten the ordinary American by wanting to hurry him along too much, and thereby make him more receptive to isolationist hopes. There are finally Americans, millions of them, who want peace and no empire, no Anglo-American hegemony, who want the United Nations to “work,” but hope it will work more or less automatically. They are, in short, isolationists with a thin veneer of internationalism. That veneer may not stand much rubbing in the day-to-day melee of international politics at the intensity of the last few months. The underlying isolationism is already, in the opinion of some observers, beginning to show through.

This large group—it is probably a numerical majority of Americans—does not want Anglo-American, or even straight American, hegemony. Right now it doesn't want even Mr. Churchill's proffered alliance. But, as the last two wars have shown, it will accept foreign war, and fight well in such a war. The danger is that we shall be gradually forced or maneuvered (and not by any one wicked man or group) into a position where we have to fight

again—for the right, of course. The tragedy lies precisely therein, that it may well be for the right, once more.

None of these forces working against the drive for Anglo-American hegemony seem sure to prevail. The lesser ones, like the Communists and the World Federationists, are likely to cancel one another. The real force is that of the great majority, peace-loving, once isolationist, and in a sense, dreadfully passive. Fear of this majority may give pause now and then to warmongering politicians. But such fear is almost as likely to stand in the way of political approval for obviously needed economic measures to restore the multilateral international trade without which there is no chance whatever of peace. The problem remains how to realize the desire of the great majority of the human race for peace. Of that desire in 1946 there can be no doubt. One might have doubted amid the martial music of August 1914. But in 1939 no bands played—not even in Germany.

Certainly the words and actions of leading groups in the United States and in Britain within the next few years should decide how far and how quickly we are to go on the road toward an Anglo-American bloc. So, too, of course, will the acts of Russian leaders. But to the extent that we and the British really are stabler, politically more mature, culturally better rounded, than the Russians, we ought to display this maturity in the form of greater patience and greater wisdom. There isn't much hope for the world if we are all equally unreasonable, equally neurotic. If the British and the Americans can cooperate within the United Nations to allay Russian fears and restrain Russian impatience, well and good; such cooperation need not necessarily lead to a bloc, to an alliance avowed or unavowed. In fact, such Anglo-American cooperation would seem to be indispensable to the working of the United Nations.

But concrete decisions which lead toward an alliance—an alliance for aggression—are often separated by but a hair's breadth from decisions which lead to effective and unaggressive collaboration. At the time, it is most difficult for the observer to tell which

way a given decision will lead. But one has the uncomfortable impression that over the last twelve months the mass of the decisions taken by our statesmen has built up toward an Anglo-American alliance, and has cut a deeper gulf between Russia and the West.

It would be nice if we could accept some such simple formula as: work with the means given by the charter of the United Nations, without regard to old-fashioned national power politics; don't even think about alliances, blocs, ententes, spheres of influence, and all the other horrible apparatus of horse-and-buggy days. We cannot accept any such formula, for it is an unreal one. In simplest terms—unduly simple, but necessarily so—the United States in the next few months will either come closer to Britain, or closer to Russia. There will in the actual process be all sorts of variations, regressions, subtleties. But there will be a main direction, a trend. If we go a great deal further from Russia we shall probably come correspondingly closer to Britain, so close as perhaps to have attained in practice the alliance Churchill wants.

The price of coming closer to Russia is almost certainly what fashionable commentators call "appeasement." The parallel with the unhappy days of Chamberlain and Daladier has already proved to be a godsend for the skilled—and even for the unskilled—propagandist. But the point is that so far this parallel can only be called a form of exhortation, propaganda, moralizing; as a valid generalization from the facts it has not been tested, and cannot in the present unhealthy state of the world be so tested.

We really have to experiment. Maybe Russian fears can be allayed without our giving up anything physically or morally ours. Maybe the Russians really think, for instance, that we are in China for the same reasons Portugal, Britain, France, Germany, Japan, and Russia have been in China these many years. If so, the only final way by which we could persuade them otherwise would be for us to plan to get out of China, or at least to remove our soldiers and our more obviously intriguing diplo-

matists. This would, of course, be an extremely difficult experiment, and one that would be resisted by many sincere American internationalists.

The road to war via an Anglo-American alliance is so clear that one need hardly speak of experimenting in that direction. Appeasement of Russia—let us not be afraid of the bad word—may be impossible, and may also be a road to war. But, despite what the new crop of warmongers is saying, it would not be the old road. That old road has always been the formation of opposing coalitions, precariously balanced. The firmer the coalitions, the nearer—usually—is war. Therein lies the grave danger of an Anglo-American alliance.

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