

pay any price and bear any burden to ensure the survival and success of liberty had ended in an agony of assassinations, urban riots, and ugly demonstrations. The Sixties marked the end of our innocence; this was certain. What remained to be determined was whether we could learn from this knowledge or consume our substance in rebelling against the reality of our maturity.

The turmoil of the 1960s was all the more unsettling to Americans because it came at the end of an extraordinary period of American accomplishment. We had built alliances that preserved the peace and fostered the growth of the industrial democracies of North America, Western Europe, and Japan. We had helped create international economic institutions that had nourished global prosperity for a generation. We had promoted decolonization and pioneered in development assistance for the new nations. In a planet shrunk by communications and technology, in a world either devastated by war or struggling in the first steps of nationhood, the United States had every reason to take pride in its global contribution—its energy, idealism, and enduring accomplishment.

The fact remained that at the end of twenty years of exertion America was not at peace with itself. The consensus that had sustained our postwar foreign policy had evaporated. The men and women who had sustained our international commitments and achievements were demoralized by what they considered their failure in Vietnam. Too many of our young were in rebellion against the successes of their fathers, attacking what they claimed to be the overextension of our commitments and mocking the values that had animated the achievements. A new isolationism was growing. Whereas in the 1920s we had withdrawn from the world because we thought we were too good for it, the insidious theme of the late 1960s was that we should withdraw from the world because we were too evil for it.

Not surprisingly, American self-doubt proved contagious; it is hard for foreign nations to have more faith in a country than it has in itself. European intellectuals began to argue that the Cold War was caused by American as well as by Soviet policies; they urged their governments to break out of the vicious circle by peace initiatives of their own. Many European leaders, catering to this mood, became fervent advocates of détente, playing the role of a "bridge" between East and West—visiting Moscow, exploring ties with Peking, urging disarmament and East-West trade.

These protestations were all very well until the United States, in the late Sixties, began to take them to heart and adopt the policy implicit in them. Suddenly European statesmen reversed course. Now they were fearful of a US-Soviet condominium, a "Super-Yalta" in which American and Soviet leaders would settle global issues over the heads of European governments. In the year that saw the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, the United States was accused by many of its allies of being at one and the same time too bellicose in Southeast Asia and too accommodating in its dealings with the Soviet Union. This ambivalence gnawed at the unity of the Alliance. Unnerved by events in Czechoslovakia, pressed by public opinion toward conciliation, impelled by conviction to strengthen security, the Western Alliance was becalmed like a ship dead in the water.