

'The Cold War goes on' from the Corriere della Sera (28 March 1950)

Caption: On 28 March 1950, the Italian daily newspaper Corriere della Sera comments on the Cold War tensions between the United States and the USSR and expresses its concern at the Soviet expansion policy.

Source: Corriere della Sera. 28.03.1950, n° 74; anno 75. Milano: Corriere della Sera. "La guerra fredda continua", auteur:Guerriero, Augusto , p. 1.

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The Cold War goes on

A few days ago, in an important speech, Secretary of State Dean Acheson set out American policy vis-à-vis Russia with the utmost clarity. He challenged Russia to demonstrate its desire for peace with deeds. In addition, he proposed a seven-point programme. If Russia accepted it, the peaceful ‘co-existence’ of the Western world and the Soviet and Sovietised world would become possible and the ‘Cold War’ would come to an end.

Russia will not accept it and the Cold War will go on. And it is more than likely, in fact it is a certainty, that, in proposing his programme, Mr Acheson was under not the slightest illusion that Russia would accept it. The programme is extremely reasonable and a Power that was not pursuing a policy of expansion would not have hesitated to accept it. For years, however, Russia has been pursuing just such a policy of expansion or, to call it by another name, world revolution. It is not possible, indeed it is inconceivable, that it will abandon that policy because it is asked to do so by the American Secretary of State. A few days earlier, Mr Acheson had said — repeating, perhaps unknowingly, an opinion expressed by Lord Palmerston a century ago — that the Russians own no argument but force. A speech is not a show of force.

The speech was therefore more for American and international public opinion than for the Soviet Government. The American Government needs to demonstrate to its people that it is making every effort to put an end to the current international tension and that if, despite its efforts, the tension continues or becomes even worse, the blame will lie not with itself but with the Soviet Government. Once it is fully convinced of this, the American people will be more willing to accept the burdens and sacrifices that the Cold War brings and will lend more wholehearted support to its Government’s policy. The Secretary of State needed to make two things clear: that he wants peace and, at the same time, that he is not an appeaser, that is to say he does not want peace at any cost and under any conditions. He is being attacked on two fronts. On the one hand, there are people in America who believe that it would be enough to have one or two face-to-face discussions with the Russians to resolve the present difficulties and bring peace to the world. President Truman himself used to be of this naïve and superficial opinion, with the result that he once came up with the idea of sending Chief Justice Frederick Vinson to Moscow. He has recently said that he has not dismissed the idea completely. Whence the criticism: why not try this? On the other hand, there are people who are accusing Mr Acheson of wanting to appease Russia; this accusation is linked to the attacks that have been made on him for his friendship with Alger Hiss and for his comment — which was undoubtedly ill-judged and inappropriate — on the judgment that branded his friend a perjurer and a traitor to his country. The speech, or rather the two speeches, largely achieved these two aims, at least in the eyes of reasonable Americans. Mr Acheson has shown one group that there is no point in proposing face-to-face talks with the Soviet Government, since it refuses to discuss a programme that would mean an end to its policy of expansion. That is to say, it intends to continue with that policy. At the same time, Mr Acheson has shown the other critics that he will not make peace — real peace — with Russia unless Russia renounces its policy of expansion.

Mr Acheson needed to demonstrate to international public opinion that America intends to perform and is capable of performing the function of leader of the free world that its power, its wealth, its history and, as the romantics say, its destiny require it to assume. In the last few days, Walter Lippmann has levelled this criticism: ‘What we see is that Mr Acheson does not have anything new to propose to the Russians or anything new to propose to the American people or to our allies. And so the diplomatic situation has frozen in Washington, while the real situation in Europe and in Asia is deteriorating. The State Department has, for the moment, put aside ideas which evoke strength, which offer hope, which inspire confidence ... As a consequence of the freeze in Washington, it is transpiring that the leadership which we held by virtue of our ideas and our power is rapidly disintegrating.’ The speeches by Mr Acheson are therefore a major effort to steer American policy away from these shallow waters, to help it to recover the leadership it was losing, and to restore confidence in American policy among the American people and the people of the allied countries.

However, these are merely the first stages in the implementation of that ‘total diplomacy’ of which Mr Acheson has himself spoken. The second phase should consist in the initiation and announcement of a programme to strengthen the non-Soviet world. In other words, for the time being, the Secretary of State has

done no more than block the Soviet Government; in the second stage, he must take action, or rather he must announce what action he intends to take to halt Soviet expansion.

This will be the most difficult phase. Until now, although it has been fertile with grand initiatives, the only result of American policy has been to slow down and impede the Soviet advance, but it has failed to halt it. The 'Truman Doctrine', the Marshall Plan, the Atlantic Pact, the military assistance programme, the appropriations for military expenditure and all the rest can lend support to the non-Soviet world, but cannot strengthen it definitively; they can counterbalance or neutralise the forces of erosion and destruction, but not eliminate them. (Nor could the democracies eliminate them completely unless they turned to totalitarianism, in a more or less veiled form.)

If what the Secretary of State has said is true, that the Soviets understand only one argument, that of superior force, the task of American policy in the immediate future will be to take an initiative showing the Soviets and the world that superiority of strength still lies on its side and that — an even more important point — it is determined to exercise its strength, provided it is necessary. The first part of this test will be more difficult for Mr Acheson than for his predecessors because two events have taken place in this last year which have noticeably affected — but not upset — the 'balance of power': the end of the American atomic monopoly and the conquest of China by Communism. The second part of the test will be difficult or quite impossible for Mr Acheson, as it was for his predecessors, because the American people do not want to wage war and, if the American people do not want to do so, the President cannot. Therefore, the Soviets regard the warnings, cautions and threats of the State Department as pure bluff and ignore them. Democracies react to bullying only when they have their backs to the wall and sometimes this is too late. The expansion of Soviet power is taking place in the limbo between the situation as it stands and the time when the American people are about to realise they have their backs to the wall.

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